

# Your Community, Your Classroom

MSM Conference, January 6, 2018

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## Getting Started:

- Keep in mind that support from your HOS is key to developing successful partnerships within the community.
- Determine what partnership(s) would compliment your program. Reach out to organization and, if possible, propose a partnership that is mutually beneficial.
- Make sure a representative from your school meets with prospective partners so they understand your school and needs. In the case of volunteers coming to your school, be prepared to have them observe at your school and set up regular meeting times to mentor and give and receive feedback.
- You will want to make sure your classroom team is on board, even if others in the school are not yet ready to take the leap! Eventually other teachers will observe what you are doing and they, too, may want to participate.
- The students themselves take no convincing, as children view new opportunities with eager and open minds! Parents will also become excited to see all of the wonderful learning experiences their children are engaging in.
- Be sure to highlight what you are doing with newsletters, photos and word of mouth. Posting on Twitter and Facebook, as well as your school's website, are also excellent ways to share the benefits of community partnerships.
- Regularly evaluate partnerships with your team and HOS. What works well, what could be better, etc. Provide and ask for feedback from your partnership organization.

## Explore Resources Within Walking Distance:

*These partnerships are the easiest to integrate into your curriculum because you can make use of them on a regular basis.*

- town hall
- grocery stores
- library
- restaurants
- sports centers
- parks, walking trails, open spaces
- local businesses
- high schools
- colleges
- farms
- garden centers
- animal clinics
- dentist offices
- Historic sites, homes, monuments
- churches, buildings of architectural interest
- other preschools, elementary schools
- pet stores
- museums
- community theaters
- concert hall

## Consider Programs Offered Through Broader Community:

There are programs that your school can participate in free of charge. Here are two our school has participated in and found particularly beneficial:

- The national giant cabbage growing contest, sponsored by Bonnie Plants, is geared for third grade students throughout the country. A winner is chosen from each state and receives a \$1,000.00 college scholarship. Visit [www.bonniecabbageprogram.com](http://www.bonniecabbageprogram.com) for details. Although only third grade students can participate in the actual competition, Bonnie Plants will provide enough cabbage plants for all to grow.
- Journey North has a program for students to gather data about tulip bulbs. The bulbs are planted in the fall and the children record data as the bulbs emerge in the spring. The results are then sent to Journey North and used to study climate change around the world. Google Journey North to learn about this and other programs they offer for school-age children. Check out their projects at: <http://learner.org/jnorth/>

### **Invite Volunteers, Partners to Your School:**

- Local high-schoolers are often looking for volunteer hours. Contact the High School HOS and propose a partnership where you will mentor students in exchange for volunteer hours.
- Area college students are also a great resource. Don't be limited to education majors; those working in the STEM fields have a lot to offer, particularly for after school programs, STEAM Faires and summer programs.
- Parents love to get involved in their children's school! Tap into your parent talent pool throughout the year to enhance your classroom curriculum. Some parents may be willing to help you develop an aspect of your curriculum. For instance, a chef who develops a kitchen chemistry program as an afterschool offering.
- Local businesses may be willing to support programs at your school. It is good advertising for them, and many are genuinely interested in community outreach. For example, a garden center may be enlisted to help get a gardening or microgreen project going at your school. Many will also donate the materials.
- Work with groups that already have existing programs to tailor a series of classes to meet your school's needs. Crocodile River Music, an African music and arts program based in Worcester, is an example of one such group that offers flexible programs to meet your school's interests. Go to [www.crocodilerivermusic.com](http://www.crocodilerivermusic.com) for more information and ask for Zach Combs, founder of CRM.

### **Share Resources:**

- Particularly if you are a small school, you may be operating on a very limited budget. Pair with another small school to share teachers and resources. For instance, your after school teachers will be appreciative if you help them connect with other schools where they can do programs. Other schools will likewise reciprocate, sending talented teachers to enhance your program.
- If you are hosting an event, invite your partner school(s). Teachers and Heads of School also benefit when they have a larger pool of professionals to collaborate with when planning curriculum and programs. Spread the knowledge, spread the excitement!

### **Final Observations:**

- When children have the opportunity to venture outside of their classroom they are learning important life skills.
- They have opportunities to practice grace and courtesy as they interact with new people, and they become ambassadors of their school.
- There is pride in learning to navigate in real life situations, from crossing a busy street, to reading to toddlers at a local preschool, to ordering lunch at a neighborhood restaurant.
- The hands-on learning that is taking place in the classroom is made more relevant as students apply their knowledge to real-life situations.
- Additionally, venturing outside the four walls of the classroom has the benefit of the unexpected.
- Children become keen observers and notice both natural beauty and man-made wonders in their neighborhood. There are many rich learning opportunities waiting for children to experience within their community. To quote Maria Montessori, *“The education of even a small child, therefore, does not aim at preparing him for school but for life.”*
- The local community becomes aware of your school and they promote your school.
- Community Partners invest in your school. They spend time, bring new materials and talk about your school in their network.

What opportunities are waiting for you? Good luck as you venture out into your own community.

Please feel free to reach out with questions, feedback, discoveries to [jperkins@thetecschoools.com](mailto:jperkins@thetecschoools.com). I also invite you to visit our school at 73 Lancaster Street, Worcester, and check out our website to view current events at [www.thetecschoools.com](http://www.thetecschoools.com).