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## Calling on Social Capital Creating Impactful Partnerships

*Editor's Note: Although Catholic schools continue to respond to COVID-19 issues with optimism, creativity, and enduring commitment to mission and ministry, the ongoing challenges, particularly as they relate to marketing and enrollment, remain. Partnerships with others can be one of those strategic differentiators that distinguishes a school, and these external organizations often see such relationships as important options for increasing awareness and engagement.*

*We are grateful to Sr. Carol Cimino, SSJ, longtime CSM consultant and Superintendent Emeritus, Diocese of Buffalo, for sharing her ideas on the importance of partnerships and social capital with this CSML.*

If it can be said that CSM founder Richard Burke had a mantra, it was this: People don't give to causes; people give to people. Consider all the cultivating of donors that is done in order to secure a major gift to the school. The donor considers that he/she is not giving to an institution but to living, breathing human beings. It is in the cultivation of *relationships* that, when the connection is made, the donor considers that his/her gift is a natural outcome of the relationship.

Although the cultivation of potential donors is important, schools today are realizing that the cultivation of partnerships is equally vital and may be even more powerful. The dollar gift may not be as important as the social capital that the forging of community partnerships may yield.

Today, schools are not only establishing partnerships with individuals, organizations, businesses, educational institutions, and service groups; they are formalizing those relationships with covenants and broadly communicating these alliances.



## How Does It Work?

*Diocese of Buffalo, New York*

When we began our STREAM program in the Diocese of Buffalo, we partnered with the Darwin Martin House. This gem is a beautiful example of the genius of Frank Lloyd Wright. After a \$52 million restoration, the Darwin Martin House is a real treasure, and it has garnered significant awareness in the Buffalo area. The Catholic Schools Office collaborated with them to provide architectural training to our students as part of the STREAM initiative. The partnership resulted in their hosting our STREAM teachers annually, providing behind-the-scenes tours of the buildings and grounds, and inviting students to explore the art and science of architecture.

Every school and diocese has a collection of community resources, open to the public, but also offering expertise in a variety of areas. While they are looking for their niche in order to attract donors, they have the onus of creating a real need for whatever they offer, since their mission is to serve the community. Within five years of launching our social capital initiative, we now have over thirty partners.

Many schools cannot afford extensive field trips or in-depth experiences. Forging these ventures is a win for all involved: schools to raise the profile of non-profits, while encouraging those non-profits to offer their expertise to supplement our curricula and provide a real-world experience to students. Furthermore, their part of the partnership invites them to have an investment in Catholic schools as they learn of the success that our students experience.

*St. Mary's Grade School, Salina, Kansas*

St. Mary's Grade School really ran with the idea of partnering. I observed the Salina Police Department running an exercise for students. They had set up a crime scene for the students to "find the perpetrator," using real forensic science. The officer with whom I talked told me that she never knew anything about Catholic schools, but was looking to do more with St. Mary's.



*Our Lady of Lourdes School, Dunedin, Florida*

Our Lady hosts a "Heroes' Day" every year on November 11. They invite first responders, including the Coast Guard, to come to a student-led Mass, followed by breakfast with the students. The school has forged a partnership with these people and their agencies, so that they visit the school regularly. These first responders are there to conduct safety checks, instruct students, and attend various events. Imagine how tuned in the students of this school were to the realities of first responders when COVID descended.

## When You Say Partnerships...

Partnerships have different shapes, forms, and purposes:

Schools that partner with community organizations such as the zoo, museums, and historical places take advantage of docents and collections, while the organizations increase and enhance their visibility in the region.

Schools that affiliate with colleges and universities benefit from their facilities and instructors, while using the institution's name and reputation as cachet. An elementary school in Brooklyn has partnered with St. Francis University in Brooklyn.

Schools that associate with businesses reap the knowledge, research, and expertise of employees, while the businesses can justify their place as contributors to the community. Students at Immaculate Conception School in East Aurora, New York, have competed and won in national rocketry competitions with the help of Moog, Inc.

*Perhaps school partnerships will turn out to be just as beneficial as outright donations in the long run.*

Partnerships can be as simple as a Dad with finance expertise offering occasional classes on budgeting and investing to extensive, long-term commitments that involve staff, resources, programs, involvement, attendance, and more. Often these partnerships are enjoyed with...

- ▶ Catholic parishes without schools and churches of other denominations in the area;
- ▶ Alumni offering ongoing internships or single-day introductions to a variety of fields;
- ▶ Neighborhood businesses sponsoring grades, classes, contests;
- ▶ Local politicians who visit classrooms throughout the year;
- ▶ Civic Partners Day walkathon to library, police, fire, hospital, and social service locations;
- ▶ New restaurants, retail, and businesses hosting meetings, forums, etc.;
- ▶ Environmental groups sponsoring related school clubs and field trips, clean-up days;
- ▶ Science museums supporting faculty with distance learning experiences and the creation of DIY experiments that can take place outside the lab;
- ▶ International organizations that allow students to travel the world with them from the safety of their computers.



### Mutual Advantages

There are advantages for both parties within the arrangement. For the schools, creating and nurturing partnerships:

- ▶ Enhances the school’s visibility and presence in the community;
- ▶ Brings in resources and expertise otherwise unavailable to students;
- ▶ Makes career opportunities visible to students;
- ▶ Provides instances where students can get out into the community for reality-based learning;
- ▶ Allows for mentoring of students in selected fields of study;
- ▶ Exposes students and parents to hitherto unknown assets present in the area;
- ▶ Increases the pool of potential volunteers, advocates, board members, and donors;
- ▶ Opens the door to further personal and professional involvement of outsiders, which influences word of mouth, awareness, enrollment, and fundraising;
- ▶ Positions the school as a key player in the community.

*For the organizations and businesses:*

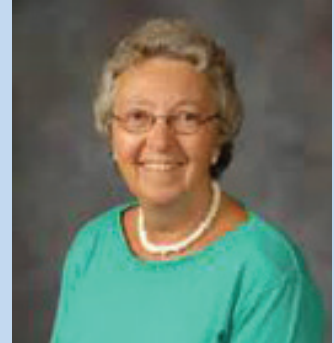
- ▶ Their presence and usefulness to the community is made visible;
- ▶ Their commitment to improving the local community is met;
- ▶ They can cultivate future employees, members, clients, and customers;
- ▶ They have an opportunity to align with a successful educational institution and learn more about Catholic education;
- ▶ Their personnel can be known by young people, thus putting a face on their organizations and businesses;
- ▶ Their organizational goals can be met;
- ▶ Parents who are employed there can be more involved in their children’s education.

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<b>CSM SERVICES</b>	<b>Strategy</b>		<b>Planning</b>		<b>Leadership</b>	
	School Assessments Program Audits Enrollment Marketing Mission Clarification	Advancement Alumni Capital Campaigns Feasibility Studies	Enrollment Technology Annual Fund Development Marketing	Communication Social Media Plans Strategic Planning Financial	Governance Administrative Structure Search Board Training/ Development Professional Mentoring	Workshops and Webinars Retreat Facilitation Keynote Presentations Individual Seminars and Series

# PARTNERSHIPS

## About the author ...



### Sister Carol Cimino, SSJ, Ed.D.

Sister Carol Cimino is a Sister of Saint Joseph of Rochester, New York. In June 2018, she retired as the Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Buffalo, New York, where she oversaw 50 elementary and high schools. Sister Carol has served in a variety of positions in Catholic education, as teacher, principal, development director, and consultant. A revered, national speaker and the author of several articles, pamphlets, and books, Sister Carol is proudest of the fact that she is still the only religious woman to have been a three-day champion on "Jeopardy!"

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### Creating Partnerships

Schools should have a goal/purpose in mind when approaching a potential partner. If a parent is involved professionally with the business or organization, be sure to use that parent as a liaison, someone who can open the door for school officials to meet with key persons in the organization.

A formal letter or covenant should be prepared to ritualize and formalize the partnership. The covenant should not only outline specifically what obligations will be met by each of the participants but also articulate the benefits.

This is a golden opportunity for great publicity and promotion. The formalization of such a partnership is a cause for celebration, and shines a spotlight on both entities, thus encouraging other organizations, colleges, and businesses to seek such relationships. Heralding each new collaboration gives the school a stream of announcements, all showcasing innovation and opportunity for the students and new responses to the ever-present inquiry "What's special about your school?"

The most important part is the continued exploration, on both sides, of the myriad activities, projects, and resources that can be brought into play to enhance the educational experience of students. The partnership is a living reality that needs to be nurtured and grown.

### In Conclusion...

The old adage goes: It's not WHAT you know; it's WHOM you know. Perhaps school partnerships will turn out to be just as beneficial as outright donations in the long run.

Thirty-some years ago, when the national study on education, called *A Nation at Risk* (1983), was published, Catholic schools were cited as being especially effective, not due solely to the quality of the instruction, but through the social capital generated by these schools. Instructional effectiveness coupled with the contributions and support of the community made, and today make, our schools outstanding. The cultivation of partnerships continues this proud tradition.



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