
Business-School Partnerships: Future Media Center Funding Sources

by Pattie Allen

Books ... online subscription services ... CD-ROM applications ... telecommunications ... reference materials ... automation ... computer technology! The list of requirements school media coordinators must address daily continually lengthens.

Major issues involved are not whether such materials are justified or if public school students should have access to such materials. The year of accountability for all school programs has dawned. *The North Carolina Standard Course of Study* has forced school media services to support student learning. Educators, including media coordinators, are mandated by the public and the state of North Carolina to develop students who possess the ability to access and synthesize information — thus becoming life-long learners.

The major issue has become how to fund such acquisitions on a yearly basis with continually decreasing school budget allotments. Schools with small student populations, schools in rural areas, and school systems located in poor economic regions of North Carolina are impacted more strongly by this dilemma than their larger school counterparts.

However, one fact remains true: students throughout North Carolina deserve equal access to media services and technology regardless of the location and size of their school environments. As site-based decision making takes root and struggles for funding increase, the responsibility of providing information access for all public school students is passed primarily to the school media coordinator. Public school personnel in diverse curricular areas are attempting to meet mandated competencies with restricted funding empowerment, while also expecting media services to be in place as needed to support their own specific North Carolina Standard Course of Study.

How can media coordinators meet these expectations? How can funding be generated at levels which promote successful media programs and materials? One solution is the creation of partnerships between individual school media programs and local businesses. The process is direct and mutually beneficial to both participants.

The West Edgecombe media program and a Hardee's restaurant piloted such an effort during the 1993-1994 school year. The restaurant, located in Rocky Mount on Raleigh Road and managed by Charles Richardson, created certificates for use by stu-

dents, teachers, families, and other community members. For each certificate redeemed at the local restaurant for an eight-piece chicken dinner, the restaurant donated one dollar to the school's media and technology program.

This project was part of the Hardee's "Rise and Shine for Community Service" program. The program was created to encourage, recognize, and reward community service efforts by students across the United States. All Hardee's restaurants have an opportunity to create partnerships with schools. Both the local restaurant and the school benefit in that incentives help schools generate funds for special needs, and also increase traffic to the restaurants. Furthermore, the corporate business world becomes aware of the goals of school programs and the level of funding actually available to promote such goals. Additionally, the community becomes actively involved in an effort that strengthens communication among schools, homes, and businesses.

An alliance between school media programs and businesses is limited only by the creative imaginations of those persons involved. In some instances the business may choose to donate money to the media program without any special project activity on the part of the school and community. However, the project activity does tend to link all people involved and build communication bridges among the school, home, and business environments.

The process for developing such a partnership is relatively simple. One key idea to remember is that businesses work on the premise of goals, needs to achieve goals, and outcome accountability. A concept often echoed in a business environment is Total Quality Management, otherwise known as TQM.

The first step is the development of goals and objectives for the media program. A broad set of goals is already in place for North Carolina public school media programs — the Information Skills and Computer Skills curricula. Though these skills are not intended to be taught in isolation by school media personnel, school media coordinators should actively oversee their inclusion into daily classroom curricula. Media coordinators should assess strengths and weaknesses of the programs constantly and accept responsibility for providing necessary materials to enhance achievement of the goals. These goals, objectives, and strategies should be written for documentation and

shared with anyone in positions that may be able to offer support. Local school administrators, school faculties, school system administrative personnel, and parents should be aware of the total media program.

After developing of goals and strategies, careful examination of existing programs and available materials should occur. Objective scrutiny can lead to the realization of the most effective materials necessary to bring the goals to fruition.

A major component in the process is the selection of the business to approach. Businesses having a vested interest in the particular school make excellent choices for selection. To identify them, media personnel should survey students and the community. Business enterprises that employ parents of the school's students or that are frequented by the school community are strong candidates to consider. Hardee's was an effective choice since Rocky Mount is the home of the corporate offices, a favorite restaurant of the West Edgecombe community, and the employer of many West Edgecombe parents.

The most difficult aspect of the corporate partnership is the initial contact of the business by the school. The West Edgecombe media coordinator never directly approached any Hardee's official. A parent who was employed by the company and also who understood the need of funding for the media program, arranged the project. Parents and community members may be the school's most qualified and effective ambassadors. If such a parent is not available, the alternate course is a direct one—call the business (probably the public affairs office) and request a meeting. The media coordinator should always keep in mind TQM and be ready to present written documentation of goals, objectives, and strategies as well as to corroborate the existing needs and the outcomes that will result. These outcomes will not only benefit the school; businesses will profit directly as well, since the student population they are assisting today will become the work force they employ tomorrow.

Origination of project details may not be within the local school's control. Some businesses may choose to support the program by making a single financial contribution without requiring any participation on the part of the school and community. Other businesses however, may appreciate the opportunity to become directly involved with the school. As the project guidelines and activities are outlined, carefully examine the participation expected by the school to ensure that the activities are plausible. Expectations that require more than the school can provide will result in unsuccessful outcomes.

After collaboration on project details, procedures publicizing the event must be detailed thoroughly. As with any campaign, lack of public knowledge can become the major detriment of the campaign. The community cannot support an unknown program. Various methods and media should be used in publicizing the partnership. Hardee's Foods Systems, Inc. printed certificates to be redeemed at the restaurant upon the purchase of an eight-piece box of chicken. The certificates, along with a letter, were distributed by teachers, parents, and administrators. Flyers were designed by the school's art department, and announcements were made over the school's public address system. Promotion of the project also occurred during parent-teacher meetings. An interesting side note occurred during the project. One classroom teacher was loyal in distributing certificates throughout the community and beyond. One Sunday evening a fellow church member approached the teacher and presented a fifty dollar donation to the project. She explained she could not eat fried chicken for dietary reasons, but wanted to support the project for the students.

At the conclusion of the project all components should be carefully evaluated. What actions were strengths? Which compo-

nents weakened the program? Public awareness was perceived as a possible weakness in the West Edgecombe/Hardee's alliance. In spite of the many efforts to publicize, contacts that impact the total and larger community were overlooked. Notices through local newspapers, radio stations, cable television networks, and telephone hot lines might have encouraged and alerted community members who otherwise remained untouched.

Cooperative efforts between media programs and corporations are a concept of the future with infinite benefits to all participants. A collaborative effort that will generate funding sources to assist ailing school media center budgets can occur successfully by following six basic steps:

- (1) develop media program goals.
- (2) assess strategies to accomplish the goals.
- (3) select an appropriate business.
- (4) cooperatively develop the project.
- (5) publicize.
- (6) evaluate.

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