

Corporate Presence in Schools

[2000, revised 2010]

The teaching profession believes that the interests of the business community are advanced when public education establishes a foundation of learning that enables individuals to function effectively in work, further learning and life. In this respect, public education helps to prepare active, caring citizens of a democratic society; citizens who meet their full potential. A more traditional view might argue that business typically has had three goals in education: providing market access to a captive audience of students, inspiring students' ideological allegiance to a free-market world view on issues of public concern, and using schools as training centres to produce the workforce required by business. While most businesses do not share the latter view, it is important to establish standards for education–business partnerships and sponsorships and to develop guidelines for partnerships.

Several factors are essential in establishing ethical standards for education–business partnerships and sponsorships. First, the expectations of each partner must be clearly defined before entering the partnership. Second, partnerships should not in any way compromise the goals of public education. Third, the participation of teachers in partnerships must be voluntary. Fourth, neither students nor their families should be exploited as a result of an education–business partnership. Finally, business partners must not promote specific products, determine curricula or influence education policies.

Education–business partnerships should operate under the following guidelines: Partnerships are based on sound educational principles and recognize and respect the ethics and core values of all partners. Partnerships recognize that the school is a collegial environment and that partnerships must meet an identified educational purpose, not a commercial motive. Before establishing a partnership, there is a full discussion involving the participating school staff, parent representatives and prospective partners and, if a partnership is established, it is regularly and systematically evaluated. Professional educators are in the best position to make decisions about school resources, program methodologies and other pedagogical issues, and prospective partners need to recognize this. Student and teacher involvement in partnerships must remain voluntary. The integrity of public education must be protected through a transparent decision-making process that includes public participation in partnership decisions. Partnerships should not be undertaken for the purpose of monetary gain, to exploit students or their families, to place restrictions on the academic freedom of the school, or for the right to influence curriculum or educational policy. In addition, partnerships must not promote exclusive or restrictive arrangements between schools and participating business partners. Partnerships are not established to compensate for inadequate provincial funding but rather should complement the education system. In no way do partnerships reduce the obligation of corporations to pay their share of taxes to support public education.

The Alberta Teachers' Association believes that, in principle, schools should be free of business for profit and should be advertising-free zones. Commercial enterprise in schools must be consistent with educational values and must not infringe on the individual's freedom of choice, freedom of expression or the academic freedom of the school community. Commercial enterprise must not exploit students as a captive audience, and curriculum materials produced by commercial enterprise must be subjected to rigorous evaluation, with specific attention to accuracy and completeness, commercialism, bias and stereotyping. Corporate money for scholarships or awards is given only to recognize educational achievement, sporting contributions, community leadership or citizenship. Donations or endowments for athletic or pedagogical purposes should be consistent with educational values, and acknowledgements should be made only in appropriate ways.

In summation, the Association believes that there are appropriate roles for business in education, the most important of which is to pay their share of taxes to support public education. In addition, education–business partnerships should work to improve the education system in society's interest.