

School–Community Relations

[2022]

The teaching profession believes that parents and the business community are essential partners in public education. The Association supports partnerships that are founded in mutually respectful ways; that support student learning; and that do not exploit schools, staff, or students and their families commercially. In addition, the Association supports community schools and calls upon the Government of Alberta to adequately fund them so that all students can grow into healthy and productive citizens who contribute to the good of society. Where partnerships between educators and parents and between education and business are formed, the principles that guide the establishment of these educational partnerships are outlined as follows.

Parents and teachers working together is a powerful way to help students succeed. The teaching profession affirms that effective parent–teacher relationships will be formed with mutual respect, honesty, openness and trust. Further, both parents and teachers must commit to a collaborative approach, one underpinned by effective communication strategies, accountability and clearly established goals.

Another avenue for parents and teachers to work together is through involvement in school councils. The Association supports the establishment of school councils that involve parents and that are enabled through guidelines developed by school authorities that outline the role of school councils as advisory and collaborative bodies. Finally, the Association supports the establishment of educational policy that is the product of collaboration between teachers and the input of school councils.

The teaching profession believes that the interests of the business community are advanced when public education establishes a foundation of learning that prepares 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 many businesses do not share the last 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 both enter the partnership. Second, partnerships should not in any way compromise the goals of public education. Third, the participation of teachers and students in partnerships must be voluntary. Fourth, neither students nor their families should be exploited because of an education–business partnership. Finally, business partners must not promote specific products, determine curricula or influence educational policies.

Education–business partnerships should operate under the following guidelines. Partnerships should be based on sound educational principles and should recognize and respect the ethics and

core values of all partners. Partnerships should recognize that the school is a collegial environment and that partnerships must meet an identified educational purpose, not a commercial motive. Before a partnership is established, there should be a full discussion involving the participating school staff, parent representatives and prospective partners, and if a partnership is established, it should be regularly and systematically evaluated. Teachers are in the best position to make decisions about school resources, program methodologies and other pedagogical issues, and prospective partners need to recognize this. The integrity of public education must be protected through a transparent decision-making process that includes public participation.

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 should not be established to compensate for inadequate provincial funding but, rather, should complement the education system. In no way should partnerships reduce the obligation of corporations to pay their share of taxes to support public education.

The 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 or 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 should be 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 in partnerships between schools, parents and businesses that are mutually beneficial and grounded in educational considerations. To that end, parents and teachers have a responsibility to work together to help students in a respectful fashion, school councils hold a consultative role in terms of shaping educational policy at schools, and educators and businesses should work together in a manner that improves the education system for the betterment of society.