

The Power in Partnerships

By Scott Apsey, Vice President, Practice Leader at Kelly Educational Staffing

Districts across the country are facing a variety of stressors that have arisen from a lack of resources and support. But with outside help, districts can return to the crucial task of ensuring the best learning environments for students.

Successful organizations specialize in a specific industry or offering, and partner with other companies to complement vital areas. For example, a business may hire an accounting firm to handle financial tasks they don't have time or resources to complete otherwise.

Strategic partners are a practical way to ensure the success of any organization across any industry. It's common for corporate entities to form partnerships in the business world, and innovative school districts are taking a cue from the business community to identify creative solutions through valuable partnerships. One such district, Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, needed an all-encompassing solution to the teacher shortage. Through our valuable partnership, the district relies on Kelly Educational Staffing (KES) to provide a seamless process for placing substitute teachers in classrooms.

If schools remain focused on their core mission of educating students and adopt the philosophy of partnering with outside organizations for expertise and support in other areas, couldn't they reap the same benefits that businesses do? The answer is a resounding yes.

Why partner?

When a district seeks out a partnership, its administrators are using innovative thinking to identify solutions to gaps they couldn't otherwise address as efficiently or effectively as desired. There are numerous benefits for both districts and businesses when considering a joint partnership.

Schools today are asked to do more with less. With the support of an experienced business partner, there's less pressure on teachers, principals and other faculty members, alleviating many of the common operational stressors schools encounter all too often. Through partnerships, districts gain access to a variety of resources that contribute to the success of students and staff, and the relief of common administrative burdens. Sponsorship opportunities, strengthening community ties and valuable learning experiences for students are just a handful of positive byproducts of these relationships.

Seeking out a partnership shouldn't be a taxing decision. Here are some tips to ensure your partnerships are successful:

- **Choose a business that provides a sense of wholeness.** Prior to committing to a partnership, consider what is missing within your district, and how a partner could bridge the gap. This means evaluating the areas that are putting extra stress on resources and staff and finding unique solutions. If a school doesn't have the resources for a full-scale IT team, partner with a firm that provides these services. If a school is overspending time and budget on sourcing substitute teachers to fill absences, a staffing agency can do the heavy lifting, allowing the school to focus on student achievement.

- **Find shared values.** Like any relationship, it's a requirement that each party holds similar values in order to operate effectively. Compare mission statements, values and culture to identify if a partnership is the right fit. Seek out partners who are invested in the community and have good intentions. Dena Collins, general manager of personnel services at Hillsborough County Public Schools shares that it's important for her district to have "strong relationships with organizations who care about staff and students, and bring both immediate and long-term value." By sourcing out these similarities from the start of a relationship, it can be determined if a partnership will be equally beneficial for each party.
- **Identify complementary skills, traits and resources.** Working with a partner should alleviate much of the stress that a district typically undergoes, and can contribute to helping in areas that would otherwise drain budgets. Having a connection with an outside partner increases the district's knowledge base by providing valuable insights, giving more significance to decisions.
- **Develop community ties.** Building local relationships is important and brings value to the community. A partnership establishes trust and recognition with community members, increasing public opinion. When businesses are present and active within the school community, they draw prospective future staff and build goodwill locally.
- **Measure success.** To know if a partnership is working, establish success markers, expectations and communication preferences early in the relationship. For Dena, success at Hillsborough County Public Schools includes tapping into partner experts who ensure that "teaching and learning continues without interruption." Positive partners showcase a culture of continuous improvement, and bring insight and solutions to the table.

Successful partnerships not only relieve the burdens that many districts face – they also provide added benefits. Partnerships are an inventive option for schools, especially those that need additional resources and support. If we're serious about supporting the needs of all students, we need to take action through unique solutions.

Scott Apsey is vice president and practice leader at Kelly Educational Staffing, where he provides leadership to operational areas and grows district partnerships through management of centralized operations.

