Building School-Community Partnerships: Collaboration for Student Success,
Mavis G. Sanders
Corwin Press, 2006

“This book is written to serve as a resource for educational leaders who seek to establish school-community partnerships to achieve goals for their schools and the students, families, and communities they serve.” This text provides a panorama of school-community interaction by addressing theory, research, and practice in the field. Readers beware – this book does not focus on parental involvement and family engagement.

Sanders affirms that school-community partnerships need to have clearly identified parameters. The partnerships can be short-term or long term; they can be focused on students or families or the community or the school. The partnerships can be with businesses, colleges and universities, organizations that provide internships for youth, service agencies and professionals, and faith-based institutions. “Partnerships for partnerships’ sake will not help a school achieve and maintain excellence.” The key to success is advanced planning and open, ongoing communication.

Just saying it’s so doesn’t make it so. Although school-community partnerships provide a variety of benefits to the school, students, families, and broader community, these partnerships are frequently hindered by obstacles: insufficient participation, insufficient time, difficulty identifying and recruiting community partners, inadequate leadership, lack of funding to develop and maintain the partnership program, lack of timely communication and linguistic diversity. These challenges can be overcome when the school-community partnership articulates a shared vision, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and maintains open communication.

Sanders describes the ingredients that most frequently produce successful community partnerships: a high-functioning school, a student-centered environment, an effective partnership team, strong principal leadership, and external support from state and district offices. “Reputations for excellence are built one success at a time.” Schools that have these components in place can move forward more aggressively. Sanders recommends that schools lacking these key components should begin with smaller, short-term partnerships. Build upon their successes. Learn from their disappointments. Strengthen their skills and resolve, and then implement more challenging partnerships.

In the concluding three chapters Sanders provides descriptive case studies, a large variety of handouts, and other resources to stimulate and forge community partnerships. As the planning progresses it is critical the school and community partners start with the end in mind. This will pave the way for success and the outcome will be cause for celebration. This book is an excellent resource for schools wanting to know how to initiate community partnerships.

Review, Skip Forsyth, 04/09/2014