

Rotary District 5450
Guidelines for School Partnerships
(Formerly known as Adopt-a-School)
District 5450 Conference
April 28-30, 2006

The role of the District Literacy and Education Task Force is to support clubs in their overall initiatives to support literacy and education, both in our local communities and internationally.

This document is designed to be a simple guideline and thought-starter as your club considers partnering with a school in your community. Though it mentions examples of issues and opportunities for service that you might want to consider, it is not meant to be either inclusive or limiting. As your club identifies opportunities to serve, your members will be ever more creative in finding solutions that are appropriate for your community.

All great Rotary initiatives have a champion – a member of a Rotary Club who is emotionally committed to head up a project or program. Thus a very important step to a successful Rotary Club/School Partnership is to identify a lead Rotarian or two who will be its champion(s).

Many of the clubs in our district have active literacy and education projects. The concept behind school partnerships is to expand these projects to comprehensively address needs identified by schools which can be met by your club. The most successful partnerships require collaboration between a Rotary club and school leadership in which the school identifies its high priorities and the Rotary club determines which of these priorities it can most effectively address.

Our request is that you keep your District Literacy and Education Task Force informed about what you are doing so that we are able to improve future drafts of this document and share experiences of clubs in the district.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CLUB

Here are some key questions the champion needs your club to answer.

Are the members of your club willing to take on the long-term commitment of partnering with a school?

If so, what human and financial resources is the club able to commit?

Are they more interested in working on a school level or on an individual student level?

What school characteristics would the majority of club members find most compelling:

- Grade level – elementary, middle, or high school
- Students who are at-risk, low performing, average, or gifted and talented
- School location
- Other

What project characteristic would the majority of club members find most compelling?

- Academic: examples might be tutoring, reading aloud, offer one-on-one student mentoring, partnering with Junior Achievement;
- Social: examples might be field trips, invite students and teachers to your club meetings, hold a career day, sponsor a holiday party;
- Physical: examples might be to improve the landscaping, paint classrooms, provide classroom furniture or playground equipment;
- Recognition: examples might be scholarships, outstanding teacher award, outstanding student award;
- Fund raising: examples might be support of the schools fundraising programs, write grants.

DEFINE YOUR MISSION, BELIEFS and PLAN

Define your club's mission i.e. "to establish a long-term support relationship with (name of school)."

Define your club's beliefs i.e. "We want to have a direct impact on reading and writing skills. Our contributions can create a better learning environment, plus provide positive resources to the teachers and staff of (name of school) with the long-term impact being to help teachers achieve more success with their students."

Define your club's plan i.e. "to provide resources, both financial and human, to the students, faculty and staff of the school with the objective of improving student performance in this much challenged school. We will focus on three main areas for the school: academic, social and physical plant."

FINDING THE SCHOOL

How to select a school.

Is the club already involved with a school in some way? If so, is this the school that the club wishes to focus on to expand ways in which the club supports the school's needs? If so, then meeting with the school principal to identify needs will suggest the scope of a possible partnership and the necessary resources.

If the club is not involved with a school, undoubtedly there will be members of the club who would express a preference for a school that they know has needs. Given the number of schools with needs it is unlikely the club will go wrong in its selection.

Alternatively, the School District Office should be able to help you identify an appropriate school once the criteria for how you will select a school and what your club wants to do are defined.

How to make an initial contact.

Once the school is identified, the champion(s) should introduce the Rotary club to the school principal/officials. It is most likely that schools will not jump into a major partnership without some previous experience of the club or of Rotary. After selecting a school to target we suggest some small steps, such as providing books or tutors, to establish a relationship.

How to introduce the willingness of the club to partner with the school.

Working closely with the school principal, who will have a clear idea of the critical needs of the school, develop a wish list of areas or issues that need to be addressed and that will fit with the club's desires and resources. If there are current efforts underway, consider how your club can support already existing plans. What can you do that others in the community or school district are not doing? While it is imperative that you first understand what the school needs and wants, it is sometimes helpful to have a list of possibilities in your mind and heart that are within your club's time and financial resources for the school to consider.

TAKE ACTION

Identify the champion(s)

Develop a plan to address the school's needs

Define the task. It is imperative that support be provided to the school in a way that adds to the effectiveness of the school program and children's learning and does not detract from other essential elements of the school's program.

TAKE ACTION continued

Consider whether the project has a hands-on component as well as a financial component so that your club members can choose how they want to participate.

Set measurable goals. This is easiest to do when the program has a direct and measurable impact.

Define timelines - taking into consideration the school calendar.

Determine funding

Solicit the help of club members, community resources, businesses, and if appropriate the Interact or Rotaract Club that your club sponsors.

Establish a standing committee in your club to guide and oversee the Rotary/School Partnership.

Consider how this committee can collaborate with other standing committees such as Service Projects Committee, etc.

Consider finding volunteers from members' spouses, friends, churches, or other members of the community.

PARTNERSHIP IDEAS – keep in mind that you want to have a powerful impact.

Academic – direct support to student and teacher

- Tutor individual students
- Support the classroom teacher
- Mentor individual students
- Provide reading buddies
- Assign spelling coaches
- Support participation in Rotary youth activities
- Provide opportunity to attend RYLA
- Provide opportunity for international exchanges
- Provide scholarships
- Fund faculty training – to strengthen classroom instruction or to implement a new program
- Increase attendance
- Augment the on-going school program with incentives to the students for perfect attendance.
- Internship Assignment – seek a graduate student intern each year to help organize and maintain communication for the activities of the School/Rotary Partnership.
- Offer Junior Achievement taught by Rotarians.

PARTNERSHIP IDEAS

Academic continued

- Host a read-a-thon
- Spelling Bees
- Scholastic Bowls
- Teacher recognition
- Adult Literacy for parents
- Speech Contests
- Career Days
- Family Assistance

Social ideas – establish a relationship

(You might need to start with social activities to establish a relationship so that you can go on to have an impact on the academics.)

- Deliver goods for Christmas dinners to needy school families
- Sponsor a holiday party
- Invite students to your Rotary meetings – assign hosts with well defined tasks
- Provide orientation prior to an occasion with Rotarians (be it a luncheon/theatre/company visit, etc.) on appropriate etiquette, attire, and interactions with adults at the event.
- Host evening dinners or weekend pancake breakfasts over the school year to improve parent-teacher interface.
- Provide mentors to students who are interested in a given profession/job – e.g. architect, nurse, doctor, police officer, construction, etc.
- Organize small groups to visit companies to learn about their fields of interest – e.g. visit a newspaper, hospital, doctor’s office, radio station, etc.
- Establish a program using the Four Way Test in a way that develops reading and writing skills.

Facilities

- Hands-on projects to physically construct needed improvements to the school facility
 - Greenhouse for science classes
 - Benches and tables for outside eating
 - Library shelves
 - Science Labs
- Landscaping improvements
- Find space within the school where Rotarians/teachers/students can work together to develop and execute activities.
- Provide school supplies, books or computers

Community Service

- In high schools – start an Interact Club to support the school’s service requirements.
- Mentor student community service requirements.