



Caring for Kids Partnership Best Practices

Caring for Kids partnerships have demonstrated their love and care for the children, families and school staff throughout the Kansas City community in numerous ways. The following are some of the initiatives partners have carried out to help meet the needs of their school(s). Check out the Caring for Kids blog at <http://www.caringforkidskc.org/blog> for more details on projects that have been completed.

To encourage current volunteers and mobilize new volunteers, communicate with your organization about what is taking place at the school with photos, short stories, or videos. Photos and stories can be shared on bulletin boards or on a TV monitor at the organization's entrance or in a workroom. Churches can share the outcome of events with their congregations through slide shows, videos and personal stories. This not only helps others to see how they can engage and how donations are being used, but it also shows appreciation for all involved.



ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Engage volunteers at the school:

1. Become a reading or math mentor who assists during the school day, usually one-on-one or with a small group of three or less. Some schools follow a set curriculum, while others look for reading buddies.
2. Provide classroom or library assistance. Several schools have Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students) programs or a volunteer can assist individually in the classroom. Tasks will vary and the volunteer may be called on to help with general tasks and/or assist a full classroom of students with their work.
3. Be a lunch buddy who sits with one or two students regularly once a week or bimonthly and gets to know the students, encouraging and affirming them.
4. Become a morning or afternoon greeter as students enter or leave the school.
5. Assist as an after-school mentor who helps with tutoring and/or special activities.
6. Speak at Career Day or in a classroom to discuss specific skills, such as money management, leadership, etc.
7. Support PTA or other school activities.



8. Host a field trip to your business or church. Businesses can show students their facility and describe some of the different types of jobs involved and what qualities are needed to do their jobs well. Some churches have hosted Movie Days, carnivals or other activities for fun and social interaction.
9. Help students with student-led assemblies. Coach them on speaking and leadership skills or provide snacks or giveaways. Several organizations provide bicycles or other incentive items as rewards that are given for perfect attendance or positive behavior.

Engage volunteers who wish to help, but can't serve directly at the school during the day:

1. Create a mailbox program where volunteers correspond with students by written letters. This is a fun way to help students with their handwriting and letter writing skills and also lets the volunteer get to know and encourage students even if unable to see them personally.
2. Facetime with students. The volunteer can read a story to the student, and/or the student can practice reading to the volunteer, using iPads available in the classroom.



Additional ways to assist with academic and social support:

1. Provide healthy snacks to be used during testing.
2. Provide books, headphones, earbuds, etc. for the classroom. (See Supply Support for more ideas.)



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

1. Collaborate with partners and school staff to host a health and safety awareness event for families and students to attend together. Events can include resource information as well as some simple health exams, such as vision or blood pressure checks, fingerprinting for child ID program, etc. Provide games, music, food, or inflatables as budget or donations allow.
2. Collaborate to provide family engagement events such as Reading Nights, Math or Science Nights, Fun Runs or Walks, Arts and Crafts Nights, Game Nights, Cook-outs, etc. Several schools have focused on Dads Nights to encourage more fathers/male role models to engage with their kids at school.
3. Contribute clothing for a clothing closet, school uniforms if needed, shoes, etc.
4. Provide a food pantry at the school or invite families to visit a food pantry available at your church or organization.
5. Help pack Harvesters' BackSnacks and/or provide additional snacks during holidays or summer break.
6. Donate food or gift items for families at Thanksgiving or Christmas. Many partners provide turkey baskets with non-perishables, gift cards, or gifts for students and family members.
7. Have a hat and glove or coat drive to provide students with warm winter wear.



Family Engagement & Support



STAFF APPRECIATION AND SUPPORT



1. Show appreciation for the school staff through meals or snacks during parent-teacher conferences, periodic snacks in the lounge, gifts for the classroom or gift cards to honor a teacher of the month selected by the school, or at an end-of-the-year appreciation.
2. Provide small classroom incentives for teachers to award students for positive behavior or attendance.
3. Offer translation services at parent-teacher conferences.
4. Write notes or cards of encouragement to the staff.
5. Check out Pinterest for many staff appreciation ideas and printables.



SUPPLY SUPPORT

1. Collect school supplies and/or backpacks. These are often collected over the summer and distributed at the beginning of the school year. Often schools continue to need a supply of school items that can replenish student or classroom items or be given to new students in need.
2. Get a wish list of needed items for the classroom from the staff. Classrooms often need additional books, a rocking chair, special student seating, ear buds, etc. This is a great way to bless the staff and classrooms at the beginning of the school year or at Christmas.
3. Provide art supplies, MakerSpace items for the library, or medical and hygiene supplies for the nurse's office. Often, schools need additional underwear and clothing for the nurse's office for younger students who have an accident.



FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

1. Not all schools will have a need for facility improvements, but many appreciate landscaping or maintenance of garden areas. Consider building a bench, adding a rock path, or simply trimming back trees and bushes. Some schools create community garden areas to help students learn about planting and harvesting vegetables.
2. Paint classrooms or hallways to give a fresh facelift to the school. Large painting projects require district approval and may require additional recruitment of volunteers at other schools in the district. Caring for Kids can help facilitate a "Project Shine."
3. Paint the school mascot on a hallway or in a cafeteria or gymnasium to promote school spirit.
4. Playground improvements can include new equipment, adding mulch or rubber mulch, repainting lines on blacktop surfaces for games or maps, and so much more!
5. Several partnerships have renovated staff lounges, painting walls and providing new countertops, tables and chairs, and appliances.

