
Maryland Secondary Schools Principals' Association, MD

**Business-School Partnerships Empower
Improvements in Education**

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*Editor's Note: The following article is shared more for
its irony than the cogency of its view.*

WASHINGTON--Robert J. Kemmery, Executive Director, Student Support Services, Baltimore County Public Schools, told the Senate Agriculture Committee that business-school partnerships enhance student achievement and pride in the public schools. He also told the Committee that local educators, working closely with parents, should develop policies that govern partnerships between local businesses and schools.

"Business-school partnerships, including one with a local soft drink company, at Eastern Technical High school where I was principal in 1991, were essential in empowering a school and community to revitalize and reinvent itself, said Kemmery. "At that time, Eastern Tech was rated unsatisfactory in many areas of the Maryland State Department of Education's School Report Card."

Due in part to its outreach to the business community, Eastern Tech was named a Maryland Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in 1997 and a United States Department of Education New American High School in 1999. The school now serves as a national demonstration site for systemic school reform. As a result its business partnerships, the school has a Lockheed Martin Applied Physics Lab, a Verizon Distance Learning and Telecommunications Showcase, and many curricular and co-curricular activities sponsored by Mid-Atlantic Coca-Cola, the Baltimore Orioles, Associated Builders and Contractors, Baltimore Gas and Electric, Black and Decker US, Inc., Comcast Cable Communications, GE, Middle River Aircraft Systems, the Engineering Society of Baltimore, and over one hundred other business partners.

"The sale of foods and beverages at school seems to garner more scrutiny than other business partnerships," said Kemmery. "In my experience, the best way to foster partnerships is for the local community, not the Congress, to make the final decisions about vending machines in their schools. That allows the local school community to make the decision about what kind of products -- water, teas, juices, sports drinks, diet and regular sodas -- should be offered for sale. Most importantly, the local community makes the decision about which educational activities benefit from the revenues."

Eastern Tech averages about \$30,000 annually in revenue from its partnership with a local soft drink company. The revenue has helped support drama productions and a wide variety of interscholastic sports. It has been used to purchase computers, train faculty and staff and to pay activity fees for economically disadvantaged students.

"Parental involvement and beverage choice are essential for successfully managing business-school partnerships," said Kemmery. "Educators are under tremendous pressure to improve the quality of education at the very time when financial resources are diminishing. To meet the needs of our students, we have to find ways to work with and involve businesses and corporations. Soft drink partnerships are one of the most successful models, if managed appropriately.

"The partnership key is establishing an ongoing, collaborative relationship among the parents of the students, the school administration, and the business community. It is important to establish a culture of partnerships in which the school and business communities work together to best serve the needs of students," Kemmery concluded.

The Baltimore County Public School system is the 23rd largest in the nation.