



How Your Church Can Establish a “Hands-On” Partnership with a Public School

A CASE STUDY:

East Heights United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas, wanted to make a difference in the lives of school children growing up in poverty. East Heights’ members value education and understand the difference it makes in a child’s life. Church members also understand God calls them to share their gifts, talents and resources.

In 2005, a group of volunteers met with the church’s Mission Director to discuss creating a ministry partnership with Jefferson Elementary School. The volunteers liked to tutor and knew their skills would be needed and welcomed at the school. While Jefferson is only a few blocks south of East Heights, they are in vastly different neighborhoods. East Heights UMC is in an established, upscale area and Jefferson school is in a neighborhood that is home to the working poor. Most Jefferson families rent their homes and many of the adults are Spanish-speaking. To start the partnership, church staff connected with Communities in Schools (CIS), a community-based organization that helps kids succeed in school and life, and shared the desire for the partnership. The CIS coordinator at Jefferson was excited to learn about this vision and a weekly tutoring program began right away. The CIS coordinator provides training and ongoing support. Church members and

the staff and families at Jefferson School consider the partnership a “mutual blessing” because everyone feels blessed by the connection.

The partnership has expanded and now includes:

- **School Supplies and Backpack Drive:** 97 percent of Jefferson families live in poverty and are unable to purchase items their children need to succeed in school.
- **Support for teachers and staff:** Church members “adopt” them and pray for them, provide inexpensive, necessary school supplies and surprise them with appreciation gifts.
- **Landscaping:** Work days are held to clean up, plant and make improvements.
- **Mentoring:** Church members serve as “lunch buddies” who meet weekly with students to listen, share and play games. Six fifth-grade girls meet monthly to make jewelry with two church members who enjoy crafts. Two women teach knitting.
- **Art Show:** Jefferson students presented an art show at the church’s Living Nativity and Christmas light tour in December 2013.

IF YOUR CHURCH WOULD LIKE TO CREATE A PARTNERSHIP WITH A SCHOOL, a good place to start is by contacting Communities in Schools. To learn more, you can go to the website for Communities in Schools Mid-America at www.cismidamerica.org . You also can contact the school principal and share your church’s plan for a partnership. Volunteers can expect to undergo a background check and training in boundary awareness.

East Heights has found a variety of ways to be involved that draw on the varied skills, gifts and resources of its membership:

- The school supplies drive works well for people with busy work schedules.
- Saturday landscaping projects are ideal for families with children who want to be involved.

Think of creative ways to serve:

- A Sunday school class “skipped school” one morning and raked leaves at Jefferson.
- Share a hobby. Do you like crafts? You can start a lunchtime or afterschool craft group. Maybe you like basketball or baseball and could get a game going after school.

Wichita
9440 E Boston Suite 110
Wichita, KS 67207
800.745.2350
Fax: 316.684.0044

Topeka
4201 SW 15th St.
P.O. Box 4187
Topeka, KS 66604
877.972.9111
Fax: 785.272.9135

Lincoln
3333 Landmark Cir.
Lincoln, NE 68504
800.435.6107
Fax: 402.464.6203