



FeatherVine

School Outreach

Church & School Partnerships Starter Kit



Our Church and School Partnership Framework

Since 2017, FeatherVine has been supporting local congregations establishing partnerships with schools in their community. These partnerships now exist in more than 12 different schools districts and are benefiting more than 40 different schools. The results continue to be deeply encouraging and the approach appears to be sustainable based upon what we have seen taking place over the last 6 years. What is especially encouraging is that this is not a “cookie-cutter” approach but rather each unique partnership between a school and supporting congregation has unique expressions of support while still fitting within the larger framework.

The FeatherVine Framework is built upon these four core principles –

- 1. Pray** – It is easy for those looking at establishing a school partnership to begin thinking about what *they* are going to do. Time and again we have seen the most amazing things that have happened on campus have clearly been the result of doors God has opened that the church would have no way of knowing. A healthy church and school partnership begins with prayer and prayer continues to undergird the growth of the relationship and health of the partnership.
- 2. Start Simple** – The goal of our initial interactions is to show appreciation for the school and that you care about their flourishing. We are not looking to establish the relationship around the schools needs or the church’s capacity to help. We want to show ourselves to be a “caring (loving) neighbor” and see how the relationship can grow over time.
- 3. Prioritize being a Consistent Presence** – “Shock and Awe” support offered sporadically doesn’t establish relationship or build trust nearly as effectively as being a consistent presence, taking initiative to meet needs in a “low maintenance” and “high awareness” pattern of behavior. It is stunning the impact that a leaving a \$15 basketball net for the hoop on the playground and a note of encouragement can have for a principal. Generally speaking, a church partnering with a school in their community should be present on campus, even if just for a quick relational drop by, at least one time per month.
- 4. Move at the Speed of Trust** – Inevitably circumstances will arise that will highlight the importance of this partnership. We want to build trust so that when opportunity arises, action can be taken. This framework is a patient one. It moves incrementally and recognizes that we will have years to mature into our most meaningful work together with our school partners. One important way to build trust is to *Under Promise and Over Deliver* – Once a relationship has been established and the

school community is beginning to count upon you, it is always best to be very clear about how you can help and to follow through with the commitments that you made. We are not looking to be known for our good intentions, but rather for our competent and reliable service.

How do we find the right school to partner with?

Some further considerations when seeking a church and school partnership. If you do not already have a relationship with a school or some other reason for partnering with a middle school or high school, we would suggest your first partnership be with the elementary school located closest to the church. We envision all schools in a community will eventually have partnering churches, but we prioritize elementary schools. We do this because elementary schools have...

- Most neighborhood-based enrollment
- Most parental involvement
- Most years of attendance (7 years)
- Least bureaucracy
- Least funding

How do we start a partnership with a school?

Additionally, you don't need to make a phone call to formalize the partnership as you are getting started. Rather, we recommend starting with simple engagement before formalizing the partnership. Often bringing a dozen donuts to the front desk with a note of encouragement for several months in a row has been a very effective way to nurture a healthy relationship. Almost always, this pattern of behavior will cause the principal to reach out to the church. When the relationship begins with the school calling the church rather than the church calling the school, it tends to set the framework for "moving at the speed of trust" more securely.

What types of things can we do to help a school?

There are a vast number of ways to help a school. However, these categories cover many of those expressions for helping.

- Teacher support (example - food for the teacher's lounge/ supplies for the classroom/ notes of encouragement)
- Campus beautification or facility improvement projects
- Student clubs/ After-School activities
- Coaching school sports

- Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) support
- On campus volunteering (“yard duty”/ teachers assistant/etc.)
- Help with special events, field trips, etc.
- Providing resources through the school for families in need
- Establish ongoing prayer for the school, staff, students, and volunteers
- Mentoring programs
- Bible Release Time programs

Historically, we have found that starting with simple ways to support the teachers is a great entry point for establishing the relationship. Once trust begins to be built, the opportunities naturally expand into the other categories of supporting the school community.

See the sample year of outreach
to a local elementary school on the following pages:



School Outreach Planning Ideas

Simple ways to
build relationships
with schools and
change lives

Overview

Below is a sample year of outreach to a local elementary school. These are just a few ideas; you can consider what needs your school has and what gifts, abilities, and resources your volunteers and connected partners have to serve.

August	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bring donuts or muffins on the first day or first Monday of school for the teachers & administrators. "We are grateful for you and hope that this is an amazing year for the school."• Bring pizza for the opening PTO meeting with a similar message.• If the opportunity for a conversation with the principal or site administrator arises, explain your desire to be a resource and the intention for being supportive and encouraging in an on-going way.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ We value what you are doing.◦ We are interested in building a relationship and being supportive.◦ We want to be a consistent encouragement and a resource where needs may arise, large or small.<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ For example, we have some school supplies ready for students in need if that need arises.▪ We have our limitations, but we are trained to come alongside people in difficult circumstances (death in the family, challenging community events).◦ We see this as a long-term relationship as we are "neighbors," so we are not feeling any pressure to force anything. Please give us feedback if anything we want to do will not actually be helpful.• Ask for a brief conversation with the head of the PTO explaining the desire to be a resource and the intention for being supportive and encouraging. [See above & tailor to PTO]
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contribute towards making a school field trip a little more special or offer to provide treats or prizes for a school rally.

October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do a special parking lot clean up.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do a special recess or lunch time activity for students, for example arranging to have a service dog(s) present on the playground for the students to interact with.
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give gift cards for teachers and PTO leaders thanking them for their service.
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide some new schools supplies for teachers as they start the new semester. Do the doughnuts and pizza thing again.
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring campus beautification project – could be as simple as scattering garden seeds in designated areas.
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide new kick balls, basketballs, hula hoops, and jump ropes for playground use.
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer special food treat (ice cream cones) and perhaps an activity for the entire school if there is a week (day) of perfect attendance.
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide “summer learning kits” for at risk students (or all students in the school or a particular grade as the budget allows – for example – providing 6 simple grade level books to read to protect against “learning loss” in the summer). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Write cards of acknowledgment for schoolteachers during teacher appreciation week.
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate a neighborhood connection meeting between the site administrator and local businesses and neighborhood leaders to discuss support of the school and community relationship.
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan a summer campus beautification project.