

BOOK REVIEW

Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships**by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies****The New Press, New York, 2007. 338 pages. \$25.**

By Carrie Makarewicz

Over the past decade, we have witnessed a steadily growing interest in schools on the part of planners. In the 1930s, school districts were separated from City governments in order to shield public education from patronage hiring and the ups and downs of city finances. While well-intentioned, the separation has not been entirely beneficial for schools or cities. Recognizing the problems created through isolated decision making, schools and cities have started working together on some issues, namely transportation and facility locations. But coordinated work on other issues, such as community development, social service provision, and affordable family housing, is much less common. I had hoped this book might provide examples and recommendations for planners interested in partnering with schools on issues beyond transportation and land use.

In *Beyond the Bake Sale*, the authors present a guidebook with detailed directions on how and when schools should build relationships – and ultimately partnerships, with parents, community members, and community groups. As the title suggests, these partnerships are not for the benefit of raising money, and the authors further stipulate that partnerships should not involve schools in non-educational activities. The goal for partnering, and all other school activities, is to improve student achievement.

The first chapter builds the case for partnerships by summarizing the voluminous research on the importance of parental involvement to student outcomes: individual outcomes in school and adult life are both improved when parents are “actively involved in their education at home and school”. The rest of the book is written as a how-to guide. Chapters provide surveys, assessment tools, checklists, small case studies, anecdotes, and other instructions for moving a school along the continuum from those that do not build or seek partnerships - “Fortress Schools” and “Come-if-We-Call Schools,” - to those that do - “Open-Door Schools,” and the authors’ ideal, “Partnership Schools.” Most

chapters also summarize or reference the extensive academic research supporting the recommended approaches. The final chapter is a detailed and extensive list of local and national organizations, foundations, public programs, online resources, and research on school partnerships.

The guide, unfortunately, is not only not directed to planners or community developers, it ignores them completely - planners and city government are not mentioned at all. School staff and parents are the primary audience, and mention of "community" groups is almost entirely in reference to education-oriented non-profit organizations. Still, planners interested in improving city-school relationships may use the book to identify resources on forming school partnerships in their local area or nationally, and more importantly, to gain an understanding of the education community's comfort zone for working with entities that are not directly involved in education. Planners may also learn from the successful outreach techniques used by schools to involve and welcome parents—especially schools in neighborhoods with lower income families or where multiple languages are spoken. These strategies could be useful models for obtaining more meaningful community participation in planning processes. Most of the case studies are in large urban school districts, including Boston, Chicago, San Diego, Washington, D.C., and Alexandria, VA, among others, so planners will be familiar with the types of organizations that partnered with the schools and the neighborhood characteristics that presented challenges or opportunities.

As a planner, I will not comment on this book's contribution to the education literature, but I will express disappointment in the authors' narrow definition of community, and that government agencies and community development corporations were not listed as potential community partners or resources. Nonetheless, the book is accessible for readers without education expertise, and it provides a thorough overview of a current topic in school reform, school partnerships with the community and parents. It also touches on other current trends within education and school reform. For planners interested in improving the link between schools and community—though not necessarily schools and city government, this book, including the case studies and extensive list of references, is a good place to begin.