

# **CREATING CAMP-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS**

**A GUIDEBOOK TO SUCCESS**

***American Camping Association®***

## CREATING CAMP-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

When camps first began to offer school programs years ago, most of them were simply seeking ways to extend their revenue opportunities into the “shoulder seasons.” For some camps, the extra cash flow was essential to get them through the winter.

Today, educational partnerships are much more than an alternate strategy for increasing camp revenues. The role of camps in education and youth development has changed. Camps across America have embraced the critical role they play in helping young people learn and grow. They are developing innovative programs that help reduce summer learning loss, bolster academic enrichment and student socialization, provide opportunities for leadership development, and ensure that our young people achieve their full potential.

Hardly a day goes by when I don’t find myself in a conversation with a camp director, foundation grants officer, or school official that the subject of camp-school partnerships doesn’t come up. Educators are increasingly appreciative of the role of camps in the nation’s educational process. They recognize what camps have to offer translates into development assets that help kids do better in the classroom. They view camps as alternative learning models that can and should be a part of the educational reform process underway in this country.

As camp leaders, we owe it to ourselves and to the families we serve to embrace this new and exciting direction for our organizations. The good news is that camp-school partnerships don’t require significant changes in what we do. In most cases, it’s simply a matter of refocusing and repackaging what we have been doing for decades.

This Guidebook will help you decide if camp-school partnerships make sense for your organization. It contains examples and lessons learned from camp directors who have been doing this successfully for a long time. It will show you how to get started and help you achieve successful partnerships that benefit you, the schools, and the children you serve.

Camp-school partnerships represent a tremendous opportunity for camps to re-establish themselves as an integral part of America’s educational reform movement. As always, ACA stands ready to assist you in this important initiative. Please contact your local section leader or ACA headquarters for assistance at any time.

Good luck!

Peg Smith  
Executive Director  
American Camping Association

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## THE CHANGING ROLE OF CAMPS

*“There’s a lot of overlap between what’s happening in education and in camping today.”*

Fred Miller  
The Chatham Group, Inc.  
Massachusetts

In New York, better than 10,000 young people spend up to a month of their summer vacation in a special camping program to help them retain what they learned during the school year. In Arkansas, a local camp works with school districts to provide an alternative classroom experience five days a week for 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders who haven’t succeeded in a traditional setting. In St. Louis, more than 6,000 students from 53 schools study environmental education at camp between September and May. In Maine, the local United Way administers a grant that guarantees every elementary school child in three separate towns an opportunity to attend summer camp because of its value to the overall learning process.

No longer viewed simply as places for children to “decompress” and have fun during the summer months, camps are now embracing a new paradigm. They are assuming a greater role in year-round education and youth development, recognizing that the same “fun” activities and programs they have traditionally offered can be packaged as highly effective alternative learning models. As education officials search for solutions to summer learning loss and ways to provide character education and social development, camps are uniquely positioned to fill the gaps with proven, effective programming.

The driving force behind this new paradigm is often self-preservation. Because education officials tend to focus on more familiar approaches to expanding learning opportunities, such as extended school years, year-round school, and mandatory summer school, they often overlook the educational value of camps. These pose a direct threat to camps’ historic base because they result in students having less time to spend at summer camp. Teachers also have fewer opportunities to serve as summer camp counselors. Families have less time together and thus may be more reluctant to send their children off to camp for weeks at a time.

Instead of sitting idly by and watching their “customers” being pulled in a different direction, camps are redefining their roles — and their images — to become an integral part of this reform movement. They are positioning themselves as “summer school options” where young people can find opportunities for learning to come alive. They are tailoring their programs to match the academic standards of local school districts and demonstrating how experiential “outdoor” education can be a powerful addition to a school’s curriculum. They continue to provide opportunities for leadership development, socialization, and self-esteem building, while translating those efforts into development assets that allow children to perform better in the classroom.

Camps that will be successful in the future will be those that view their programs as viable options in a child’s educational and social development. They will work with schools, offering programs and activities that not only complement the school-year curriculum, but extend the learning process year-round.

## **A RETURN ON YOUR INVESTMENT**

The investment camps are making in developing and maintaining camp-school partnerships appears to be paying off in impressive ways.

- New York City's summer Break-Aways program receives funding from the state and private sources to send 10,000 students to 100 camps each summer.
- Florida's sheriffs have created a camp-based alternate classroom program that has expanded to 22 counties across the state.
- Camp Chewonki's (ME) educational camping approach attracts students from as far away as Dallas, TX.
- In Arizona, low-income families band together to hold car washes and bake sales to ensure that their children can attend school camp. Summer attendance from that same school district has also risen there, with 43% of kids now returning in summer, a 400% increase.
- Indiana's Camp Tecumseh serves 13,000 students during the school year, more than three times the number that attend summer camp there.
- In Los Angeles, children start raising money for their 5<sup>th</sup> grade school camp in the first grade.
- The Prep-for-Prep program in New England, the Houston (TX) outdoor education program, and the Libra Foundation initiative in Maine all provide opportunities for children to attend camp as an integral part of their education.

Best of all, camp directors report that, while school camps are a lot of work, they do not require camps to change their basic missions. In fact, they stress that camps should be careful not to stray from their missions, both to maintain their integrity and to ensure the quality of their work. What is needed instead, they say, is a fresh look at what camps can offer, a commitment to study and apply the current literature on youth development, and the flexibility to structure their programs to meet students' and educators' needs.

## **BENEFITS APLENTY**

The benefits of camp-school partnerships for camps include:

- A revitalized image of camping among educators and in the community at large.
- Greater revenue streams during the summer and in non-peak times.
- A regular source of business.
- Greater opportunities for long-term growth and stability.
- Opportunities for staff development and enrichment.
- A built-in recruitment tool to increase the number of summer campers.
- Greater diversity among the children camps serve.
- Increased credibility stemming from camps' relationship with local boards of education.

For schools and school districts, camp represents a powerful way to reach many children in a short time across multiple fields of learning. Consequently, the benefits can be just as significant:

- Access for all students to academic enrichment programs that are both intellectually stimulating and fun.
- The ability to provide students with the experience of discovery.
- Innovative opportunities to make learning come alive for students.

- A chance to get kids out of their comfort zones so they will become more open to learning and retain more of what they learn.
- A classroom culture that is civil, oriented to teamwork, and focused on the task at hand.
- Ultimately, improved long-term academic achievement by participating students.

For students and their families, the benefits of camp-school partnerships mean increased opportunities for learning in unique and diverse settings.

- Camp programs offered during school vacation periods help decrease the typical “learning loss” associated with these periods.<sup>1</sup>
- Children who attend camping programs have demonstrated improvements in both “hard” and “soft” educational skills.<sup>2</sup>
- Math and reading scores can be improved through participation in a wide range of camp activities, including journal writing, map reading, and orienteering.
- Children have fun and thereby develop a greater love of learning.
- School-year camps provide children with a safe and low-cost exposure to camping.

## **HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK**

The American Camping Association has developed this guidebook to help you determine if camp-school partnerships are an appropriate strategy for your camp. The following pages provide a series of examples of successful programs that approach camp-school partnerships in different ways. Camp directors and their staffs have provided insights, tips, and lessons learned to help you get started, avoid mistakes, and get your creative juices flowing in such areas as researching your market position, targeting potential partners, understanding educators’ needs and concerns, building curricula, and maintaining effective partnerships. Suggestions on monitoring and evaluating success and funding your partnership’s programs are also included. Where appropriate, we have provided checklists and other “how to” guides to keep you on track as you build your program.

This guidebook also contains a resource section at the end that you will find useful in accessing additional information and contacting camps that have undergone similar transformations. ACA section leaders and headquarters staff are also available to assist member camps with developing camp-school partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on studies conducted by the Break-Aways Program in New York.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Miller, The Chatham Group, Inc.

## CASE STUDIES

Camp-school partnerships exist all around the country in many forms. The following six examples are typical approaches that camps employ in working with schools to meet the needs of students.

### **REDUCING SUMMER LEARNING LOSS: THE BREAK-AWAYS PROGRAM** (New York)

Begun in the summer of 1998 with 20 camps and 1,500 children, the Break-Aways Partnerships for Year-Round Learning program in New York City quickly became a model for school-camp partnerships focused on educational reform. Within four years, the program had grown to include more than 10,000 students attending 100 camps throughout the New York region.

Break-Aways was conceived by the former chancellor of public schools in New York City, who wanted to reduce the summer learning loss that students experience during summer vacations. Remembering the positive experiences he had at camp as a child, the chancellor organized an effort to send at-risk kids to summer camp, funded by private donations raised by the board of education and administered by ACA-New York Section. Participating camps were selected through a competitive process and were given three-year contracts to work with individual schools throughout the city.

The Break-Aways model requires students to attend camp for 21-28 days during the summer. A minimum of 20 students and one teacher attend from each participating school. Each day's activities include an equivalent of three hours of literacy education integrated into the camp program. Most camps also work with the schools to incorporate some school-year programs, including after-school activities, winter vacation programs, or school camps. As a result, participating students maintain regular and consistent approaches to learning that have been shown to increase retention and improve test scores.

Although more research needs to be done to measure the outcomes of Break-Aways program, early indications are that participating children appear to score higher on standardized tests than those who did not attend camp. Campers also tend to demonstrate higher levels of emotional and social development and leadership skills. In addition, teachers who have participated in Break-Aways programs have been able to apply many of the experiential education techniques they learned at camp to their classrooms.

### **THE ALTERNATIVE CLASSROOM: CAMP PFEIFFER** (Little Rock, AR)

A true educational partnership is underway in Arkansas, where Camp Pfeiffer is providing an Alternative Classroom Experience for 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from two local school districts. The students are chosen for the five-week residential camping program by their teachers based on their need for more intense work in academics, behavioral, or self-esteem issues. Each school district has a different referral process, although the camp strives to achieve gender and racial balance.

Because students spend all of their time at camp, they have more opportunity to study and gain experiences that stimulate learning, leadership, and citizenship. In addition to the academic curriculum taught by certified teachers employed by the camp, students also participate in team exercises, low ropes courses, and environmental education programs.

The Alternative Classroom Experience originated when Camp Pfeiffer's director approached local schools about ways the camp might play a larger role in their students' development. Seed money was provided by the Rockefeller Foundation, supplemented with school funds and grants from other local, state, and federal agencies. Ten full-time Americorps volunteers also assist as counselors and instructors.

The success of the program is measured through student's academic achievement, reductions in discipline referrals and detention rates, and performances on standardized tests. Students are followed through the 7<sup>th</sup> grade to provide longitudinal feedback on the program's outcomes. Follow-up interviews are also done with teachers, parents, and cabin counselors to determine the progress students have made while at camp. To date, participating students have achieved a one-grade-level improvement in both math and reading test scores.

### **THE PREP FOR PREP SUMMER COMPONENT: CAMP PEMIGEWASSETT ET AL) (Hanover, NH)**

For nearly a decade, a number of New England camps have been involved with Prep for Prep, an innovative and highly successful program in New York City that selects high potential minority students and provides them with full scholarships to the region's finest college prep schools. Students are selected for the program in the fifth grade and spend the next two summers taking intensive enrichment programs to prepare them for the rigors of the prep school curriculum. Once they began the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, however, their summers were open.

In 1993, the director of New Hampshire's Camp Pemigewassett teamed with leaders of nine other camps and the Prep for Prep staff to initiate a summer camping program for these students. Participating camps provide full scholarships for children to attend either 3.5-week or 7-week summer programs. The scholarships are funded by each camp through fund raising and other activities. Nearly 300 students have attended 22 camps in the program's first nine years.

"The Prep for Prep summer camping program is viewed by everyone as part of the students' year-round education," notes Rob Grabill, director of Camp "Pemi." "At the same time, camp is camp. It's not school. We have different teaching opportunities than the schools, but the outcomes we seek are consistent. We help students acquire social skills, the ability to work in groups or independently, and an appreciation for diversity." Grabill adds that the success rate of the camping program is 99 percent.

One other benefit of the program has been that many of the students choose to return as counselors. This provides each camp with a pool of qualified, minority role models for younger campers. "These students could have their pick of summer internships at corporations, yet they often prefer to come back to camp," Grabill says. "They can learn just as much here as counselors and they become tremendous ambassadors for camping in the process."

Grabill adds that other regions of the country likely have programs similar to Prep for Prep. "There are lots of programs that are trying to give kids an opportunity for year-round education," he says. "Why not connect them with camps?"

## **CAMP-DRIVEN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION SCHOOL CAMPS: CAMP CHEWONKI (Maine)**

Camps play different roles in the development and teaching of camp curricula. In some cases, the camp already has qualified instructors on staff. Its ability to provide some or all of the curriculum development and instruction can be a significant plus in building partnerships with schools. Providing students with qualified instructors and programs that support state standards of learning will make life easier for teachers and often lead to strong, long-lasting partnerships.

Camp Chewonki, a year round educational organization in Maine, has been involved in school partnerships since 1970. Chewonki offers day programs, week-long residential programs, and teacher programs to more than 60 schools through its environmental education center. Its focus is on 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, although programs are available for other grades as well.

Unlike some other camps, Chewonki focuses entirely on environmental education in its school camp partnerships. “We tell schools what we do best, then work with them to create a program that meets their needs,” explains Dick Thomas, Chewonki’s camp director. Customization of Chewonki’s basic environmental education program often focuses on adding literacy skills through journal writing or de-emphasizing the natural history subject matter to better correspond with the class’ current studies. Camp staff work closely with teachers before, during, and after the program to ensure that it supports the students’ overall learning path.

Chewonki also reaches out to schools and other community groups with hour-long natural history presentations, delivered by camp staff for a fee. This type of outreach helps defray some of the costs of the school camping programs, which do not always break even. “We view school camps as good publicity, good community service, and an important part of our mission,” says Thomas.

## **MEETING SCHOOLS’ CURRICULUM NEEDS: CAMP TECUMSEH’S PIONEER HERITAGE PROGRAM (Indiana)**

For more than 25 years, Camp Tecumseh in Brookston, Indiana has partnered with nearby school districts to provide a variety of outdoor education programs. Much of its growth has come from those same school districts wanting even more opportunities for their students. In response, Camp Tecumseh developed the Pioneer Heritage Program that teaches Indiana history to 4<sup>th</sup> graders and westward movement to 5<sup>th</sup> graders.

In order to maximize the flexibility of programs like Pioneer Heritage, Camp Tecumseh created “Discovery Blocks” which correspond to different components of the state’s learning standards. Teachers are able to mix and match these Discovery Blocks to create a curriculum tailored to the needs of each class.

David Wright credits the quality of his staff and facilities, competitive pricing, and proven programs as the reasons Tecumseh’s school partnerships have succeeded. “Teachers know the quality of what we have to offer and can plan accordingly,” he explains. “We know what schools are looking for and continue to enhance our curriculum to meet those needs.”

## **URBAN CAMPING PROGRAMS: THE PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH** (St. Louis, MO)

What do you do when a school district simply lacks the resources to send its students to camp? In the case of Kiwanis Camp Wyman in St. Louis, you take camp to the school.

Having worked with students from the St. Louis Public Schools in its summer programs, Wyman staff understood the benefits they could offer to these young, urban youth. Yet, neither the school district nor the parents could afford most traditional residential camping options. Instead, Wyman teamed with an elementary school near downtown St. Louis to bring a variety of after-school and summer camping experiences directly into the neighborhood. The program is called the St. Louis Partnership for Children and Youth.

Partnering with several other social service providers, and supported by the Coca-Cola Foundation, among others, Wyman staff established programs targeting children ages six to 17. After-School Adventures teach math and science skills to students in elementary grades. Teen programs help eighth graders make the transition to high school. Summer day camps in the neighborhood provide youth with safe places to go and constructive activities to occupy their time. Children who achieve outstanding attendance records and improve academically are often rewarded with donated prizes and scholarships to attend residential camping programs at Wyman's facilities in suburban St. Louis County.

"We learned early on that some school districts simply can't afford to send their kids to us," explains Dave Hilliard, president of the Wyman Center. "Unfortunately, these are often the kids that need our services the most. So, we created Camp Caravan, a kind of camp on wheels, to bring our programs into the city. The Partnership for Children and Youth represents the continuing growth of that concept, one that has met with considerable success."

## **SCHOOL-DRIVEN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION SCHOOL CAMPS: TRIANGLE YMCA RANCH** (Tucson, AZ)

In Tucson, Arizona, the Triangle YMCA camp is successfully making its facilities available for local school programs, and discovering that this strategy can be an excellent recruitment tool for its summer programs.

The Amphitheater School District in Tucson, Arizona began sending students to school camps at the Triangle YMCA Ranch in 1980. Today, 14 different elementary schools participate in the program, sending 120 to 200 students per school for three-day programs. The school camp programs have proven beneficial to the Triangle Ranch in several ways. Summer recruitment efforts have been bolstered as many students who attend school camp choose to return for summer programs. Attendance in summer programs from the nearby Amphitheater schools has risen from only 12% in 1980 to 43% of Triangle's summer enrollment today. In addition, the school programs keep the Ranch's facilities in use, generating much-needed income in the camp's "off season."

Many camp directors believe that this type of partnership, popularly known as "three hots and a cot," is the easiest way to get started working with schools. The schools handle all aspects of the

camping curriculum, including developing and teaching the activities, providing transportation, nurses, and food service, and lining up parents to be counselors. Camp personnel are responsible for facility maintenance, housekeeping, and overall safety (camp staff also supervise the high ropes course during leadership programs). The program is typically done on a shoestring basis, with parent and student groups raising the necessary funds through bake sales and car washes throughout the year.

Camp staff report that safety and liability are two of the most important issues involved in the partnership arrangements. The camp provides a safety manual and workshop for all teachers and volunteers prior to each school year, and insists that the schools provide a written contract and proof of insurance coverage.

## GETTING STARTED

*“The question camps need to ask is, ‘how can we help schools achieve their goals and performance standards in an environment that is stressing test scores?’”*

Fred Miller  
The Chatham Group, Inc.  
Massachusetts

Okay, you’ve read the case studies. You’ve talked to other camp directors. You’ve pored over your financial records and pondered the pros and cons of pursuing camp-school partnerships. Now you’re ready to get started, to hit the ground running. So what do you do first?

STOP! Before you do anything else, you need to consider the following six questions.

### SIX QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING ELSE

#### ***1. Why are you doing this?***

Camp directors who have been involved in successful camp-school partnerships say the first thing you need to do is to understand exactly why you want to get into this business. Is it to boost summer camp attendance? If so, can you link it to extended school strategies that might bring access to local or state funding (such as Break-Aways was able to achieve in New York)? Is it to generate cash flow during the off season? Then you’ll want to make sure that the school camp is structured in a way that doesn’t add even more cost to your operations. Is this part of an overall redirection of your camp to play a larger role in local education and youth development efforts? In that case, you will need to consider a wide range of issues, from staff development to facility enhancements, as well as the impact on your own time.

By defining exactly what you hope to achieve through camp-school partnerships, you will be better prepared to identify appropriate partners, negotiate more effectively, and realize success that much sooner.

#### ***2. Is the proposed partnership consistent with your mission?***

Often a camp may be approached by a school or other potential partner with a “great idea” that appears to have lots of potential for generating revenue, increasing the number of campers, or using your facilities during idle periods. Unfortunately, many camps react to these ideas by jumping in with both feet, without ever asking if the proposed “great idea” is consistent with their mission.

“Don’t remake your camp to be something you aren’t,” says Cori Welbes of the Florida Sheriff’s Ranches. “You need to be true to your mission.” If you specialize in environmental education programs, for example, do you have the right staff and background to take on programs built around an anti-drug and alcohol message, even if a school has a desperate need for this type of programming? If your program is sports-oriented, don’t try to become a performing arts camp just because this type of experience doesn’t already exist. If your programs are designed for 10-year-olds, don’t assume that you can or should expand to serve teens or other ages.

Camps that remain true to their mission usually find that there is a market for their services, especially since they can more easily develop a reputation for quality and consistency when they remained focused.

### **3. *How will this impact your other programs?***

Even in partnership programs where the school does most of the planning and teaching, school camps will still have a significant impact on your operations. Before you get started, be sure to analyze how school partnerships will impact your overall program. Do you have the capacity to do this? Will this require significant program changes or merely some “tweaking” of what you already do? Will it require more staff or will you have to divert staff from other programs? Will you still have time to plan, recruit for, and market your other programs? Will the additional wear and tear on your facilities make your camp less attractive to others or require increased maintenance funds that may have been earmarked for other purposes? Does your prospective school partner have unique regulations on such things as alarm systems, fire exits, or staff-to-student ratios that will require you to spend additional funds to achieve compliance?

### **4. *How well do you know your potential partners?***

Take the time to get to know your potential partners. Are the schools you are considering the right partners for you? Do they understand and appreciate your role in the educational process? What are their objectives and priorities? How much effort will it take for you to nurture this relationships?

Do you have an advocate in the school? Schools get approached by hundreds, even thousands, of people and organizations every year who are trying to sell them something. Consequently, they tend to be skeptical and guarded when you first call on them. The best way to get your foot in the door is to have an advocate working for you inside the school system. It may be a teacher, a parent, an administrator, or even an alumnus. Whoever your champion is, he or she is critical to your efforts to build and maintain a strong, successful partnership.

Another common mistake is to assume that a potential school partner is just like you. After all, you both work with kids, you share common goals, and you recognize the benefits a partnership can bring to both of you. But do you truly understand how the school district does business? Are you dealing with the decision makers? Do you know when the school board meets and how they make decisions? Are you focused on the right issues? Have you looked at the partnership from the school’s perspective to understand what they hope to get out of it? Do you know how they perceive you? What are their assumptions, expectations, and concerns? “Dig deep for hidden agendas,” suggests Cori Welbes of the Florida Sheriff’s Ranches. The more you know about each other, the stronger the partnership will be.

### **5. *How well do you know yourself?***

Do you understand your camp’s strengths and weaknesses? Are your views shared by others? What do former campers, parents, and others say about your organization, its staff, and its facilities? What is your reputation in the community?

Understanding what you have to offer potential partners is an essential part of your preparation for creating camp-school partnerships. Take a good look at your facilities. Are they modern, clean, and attractive? Is your camp’s location convenient for your potential partners?

Do you already have a curriculum in place or will you need to develop new programs? How about your staff? Is your current team large enough to do the job? Are they capable of planning and running the partnership's programs? Do they have the proper credentials? Will they need additional training? Are they equipped to help with marketing, outreach, and other support functions? Can you deliver the curriculum at a price that is acceptable to schools while still making it worth your while?

How about your management style? What type of manager are you? Will your style work in a partnership relationship? Are you comfortable sharing authority and responsibility? Do you have the time it will take to manage this partnership? Are you personally committed to making this work?

**6. *Are you committed to this for the long-term?***

"It's just as hard to plan a school camp for a week as it is to plan for three months of summer," notes Wyman Center's Dave Hilliard. If you plan to invest in school camp partnerships, it's best to consider it a long-term investment, one that is more likely to pay off down the road.

## **RESEARCHING YOUR COMPETITIVE POSITION**

Camps that have created successful partnerships understand that schools shop around constantly, looking for the best programs at the best price. It is essential, therefore, that camps take the time to research their competitive position initially, and continue to evaluate their positioning in the market place as time goes on. Don't just limit this research to other camps, however. Your competition in the educational market can include schools themselves, museums, specialized learning centers, and other hybrid organizations. Be sure you know what's out there and how you compare to each of them.

Gathering information on how others perceive your camp and its programs can be as simple as asking teachers, parents, and others in the community for feedback. Listen carefully and ask questions. Challenge your own assumptions about your camp to see if others agree. Ask them for an honest assessment of how your camp stacks up against others in your area. What do you do well? Where do you need improvement?

Your research should also focus on the needs of potential school partners. Schedule a meeting with the assistant superintendent for curriculum and ask about their needs. Have they considered how camping programs can positively impact student performance in math, science, social studies, or service learning? Do they value experiential education? What are their constraints in terms of budget, staff, and transportation? How willing are they to partner with you in fund raising, evaluation, and other joint efforts?

A goal of your research should also be to find a believer within the school system. Look for someone who understands the value of camping programs and is prepared to advocate for you inside the school. You may want to have that person spend a few days at camp so he or she can better understand your approach and its benefits.

Remember, the time you spend researching your competitive position will save you time and money down the road. Solid research will allow you to tailor your marketing and your curriculum to meet the needs of your school partners. It will help you identify and address issues before they become barriers. And, it will make your entire operation more effective and successful.

## UNDERSTANDING EDUCATORS' NEEDS AND CONCERNS

*"Camps need to understand the educational process and the needs of schools."*

Linda Harris  
Resource Stewardship Program  
Tennessee Valley Authority

There are plenty of potential roadblocks that you may encounter as you begin to develop camp-school partnerships. Teachers may be concerned about having to raise money or having to "camp out" with their students for several days. Some educators may not understand or value experiential educational experiences, thinking they take too much time or because they just don't like working outside. Maybe a teacher had a bad camping experience herself as a young girl. "Nothing will kill a program faster than a teacher who doesn't want to do this," advises Dave Hilliard.

Educators have a host of other issues and concerns that must be addressed, ranging from program quality to outcomes, time constraints, liability management, and keeping parents happy. Schools and camps have very different cultures. You may find that many teachers are mentally stuck in the classroom. The school has rules about the way things are supposed to happen, and teachers tend to follow these rules religiously. Understanding these rules, as well as teachers' concerns, will help you present your program in a way that addresses them fully and paves the way to a successful partnership.

### LEARNING TO SPEAK EDUCATOR-ESE

One of the biggest problems camps face is the fact that they speak a different language than do schools. "Camps are already doing ninety percent of what they need to do, but they call it by different names," explains Adam Weiss, one of the founders of New York's Break-Aways program. For example, camps talk about activities, while schools speak of curriculum. The terms may be synonymous, yet teachers often look on "activities" as something less than what they themselves offer. Similarly, camps may tend to talk about "fun" experiences and building self-esteem, while schools are more concerned with developing academic skills and outcomes. Even though your activities can contribute to improved student performance, unless you explain them in terms the school understands, your ability to "sell" your program will be much harder.

That's not to say that educators don't recognize the potential benefits that camps can bring to their students. In fact, many educators see camps as experts in this arena more so than camps often see themselves. The challenge, therefore, is to get both sides speaking the same language, so that communication and partnership will flow more easily.

The following table lists some of the typical terms used by camps in the marketing and program materials, compared to terms that the educational community prefers to use.

#### **What Camps Say**

Activities or programs  
Fun  
Outdoor education  
Season

#### **What Educators Prefer**

Curricular experiences  
Enrichment  
Developing analytical and observational skills  
Semester

Hands-on	Experiential
Counselors	Teachers, naturalists, or instructors
Building self esteem	Affecting student outcomes
Coping skills	Academic skills
Natural sciences	Natural sciences
Ecosystems	Ecosystems
Program leader	Curriculum specialist
Results	Outcomes
Program guidelines	Standards of learning

### **TIME, TIME, WHO’S GOT ANY TIME?**

One of the biggest obstacles to overcome in building partnerships with schools is the lack of time that teachers and school administrators have to devote to this effort. Camp directors repeatedly cite this as a major concern that can prevent a partnership from getting underway, or can impact the quality of a school camp program once it is established.

The time issue can take many forms:

- Teachers may need to revise existing curricula.
- Parents may need to be recruited as chaperones or cabin counselors.
- Transportation will need to be arranged
- Substitute teachers may need to be lined up.
- Liability waivers, insurance forms, and permission slips must be obtained.
- Pre- and post-camp activities and lessons plans may need to be developed.
- Presentations need to be made to superintendents, school boards, and parents.
- Fund raising and grant seeking efforts will need to be planned and coordinated.
- Arrangements must be made for children who cannot or will not participate in school camp.
- Meetings must be held with camp staff and others to ensure that all the details are ironed out.

Simply put, a camp-school partnership is likely to be a lot of work for a teacher, principal, or others at the school. Camp directors report that principals are notorious for not returning telephone calls in a timely manner; not because they don’t want to, but because they don’t have the time or the support staff to help them. Despite their limited availability, make sure you have buy-in from the principal. You will need it to make the partnership work. Consequently, you may need to invest more of your time to visit the school in person and be visible, especially in the early planning stages of a partnership.

### **ADDRESSING A WIDE RANGE OF CONCERNS**

As you work with school personnel, you will discover that individuals at different levels of the school have different needs and priorities. It is your job to identify each person’s needs and address them fully and completely.

<b>School Audience</b>	<b>Chief Needs and Concerns</b>	<b>How to Address These Issues</b>
Teachers	Lack of understanding of experiential education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide examples tied to school’s learning objectives.</li> <li>• Use testimonials from other</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>programs.</li> <li>• Provide educational research materials (articles, books, etc.)</li> </ul>
	Concern about teaching outdoors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggest a pre-camp workshop to allow teacher to experience it firsthand.</li> <li>• Provide a camp staff person to team with the teacher to deliver the curriculum.</li> </ul>
	Need to get support from the school's administration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear, comprehensive proposal that addresses all known issues.</li> <li>• Offer to make joint presentations.</li> <li>• Offer to connect teacher with others who have been successful in selling school camp programs.</li> </ul>
	Summer school pays more.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize change of venue and ability for teacher to acquire new experiential education techniques that can be applied in the classroom.</li> </ul>
Principals	No time to deal with a new program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize limited time principal needs to spend.</li> </ul>
	Cost is too high. Substitute teachers will be needed. Transportation will be expensive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss fund raising options and strategies to share some or all of the cost with parents and others.</li> <li>• Assist in identifying local foundations and corporations that may help fund the program.</li> </ul>
	Program is a "luxury."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress how curriculum is tied to state standards of learning.</li> <li>• Use testimonials from other programs.</li> <li>• Look for outside funding sources.</li> <li>• Gather data comparing the cost of camp vs. the cost of summer school.</li> </ul>
School Board	Concerns over liability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare statistics citing relative safety of camping programs.</li> <li>• Document everything in a written contract.</li> <li>• Emphasize availability of nursing staff.</li> <li>• Stress adherence to school district</li> </ul>

		rules and regulations.
	Program is a “luxury.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress how curriculum is tied to state standards of learning.</li> <li>• Line up teachers and parents to advocate for the program.</li> <li>• Look for outside funding sources.</li> <li>• Gather data comparing the cost of camp vs. the cost of summer school.</li> </ul>
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School camp safety, cleanliness, range of activities, supervision, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make presentation on school camp details to reassure parents.</li> <li>• Provide telephone number they can call with questions.</li> <li>• Use teacher to help deliver information to parents since she is known and trusted.</li> <li>• Hold a Parents’ Camp Sampler Day so parents can be campers for a day and get a taste of what their children will experience.</li> </ul>

### **WHO’S GOT THE LIABILITY?**

Schools want to avoid lawsuits, so they are always concerned about liability. Therefore, you must be prepared to address this issue up front. It is likely to be the first question a school board will ask and one of the primary reasons your proposed school camp will need to be approved by the school board.

In virtually every case, the answer to “Who’s got the liability?” is that you both do. Liability is typically shared, with both the school and the camp potentially liable just as they would be under any existing program. Because of this, there are a number of things which camps should do to ensure that the liability issue has been adequately addressed:

- Sell the safety of your program. Prepare data that compares safety rates at camp versus those at the school.
- Hold one or more meetings on the subjects of safety and liability and include all agreements in your contracts.
- If possible, hold a training workshop for teachers, parents, and other school personnel to help ensure they are prepared to handle any safety issues surrounding the outdoor programs.
- Document everything.
- Keep your own records of attendance for all campers (especially day campers).
- Require a medical form from every student (you can use a school’s existing form) and make sure you have a copy of it on-site at camp.
- Get a copy of the school’s release (permission) form signed by the parents.
- Get a written copy of the school’s rules and regulations and make sure all of your staff read and understand them.

- Develop a matrix comparing your own policies, procedures, and decision trees to those of your school partner in order to identify where any gaps or conflicts may exist. This will also help you focus your planning discussions to ensure that all liability-related issues are adequately addressed up front.
- If you run into a difficult discipline problem, always call the school first (you may not always have a school representative on site since smaller districts can't always afford one).
- Always give the school a "heads up" to any issue arising at camp and enlist their support and input on how the issue will be handled.
- When in doubt, defer to the school's policies, procedures, and decisions, unless they will place you in jeopardy.

#### **FOUR THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER FORGET...**

1. The partnership you're proposing doesn't make a teacher's life easier; rather it often makes it harder.
2. Lousy food and dirty facilities are a sure way to end a partnership quickly.
3. Remember that these are the school's students, not just your campers.
4. Be patient and flexible.

#### **AND FIVE MORE YOU SHOULD WRITE DOWN AND KEEP IN A SAFE PLACE**

5. Many teachers are not prepared to teach in the outdoors and may be uncomfortable with the idea. Make camp fun for the teacher as well as for the students and you will help him/her become a better educator.
6. Make sure the responsibility chain is clearly defined and understood.
7. Parents are a key component of any and all collaborations.
8. Constant and consistent revision is necessary for the longevity of your program.
9. Have a formal, written agreement with each school that spells out what the camp will do, what the school will do, how children will be supervised, how classes will be taught, who is responsible for transportation, and who is responsible for teacher and nurses' salaries. Make sure you can nullify any contract within 30 days.

## MARKETING YOUR PROGRAM

*“Camps don’t have to do anything different, just articulate well.”*

Adam Weiss  
Break-Aways Program  
New York

Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door. Build a solid camp-school partnership and the word will get out just as quickly.

Marketing your camp to educators is not the same as recruiting campers for your summer programs. Creating a partnership is much more of a face-to-face sales process, building relationships that you hope will last a long time. The good news is that once you have established yourself in this field, the marketing gets easier as word-of-mouth tends to take over. It is important, therefore, that your initial efforts yield positive results that boost your reputation for quality and reliability — two qualities that educators want more than anything else.

### PREPARING YOUR PITCH

In preparing your initial sales presentation, keep in mind the four “P’s” of marketing: product, price, packaging, and promotion.

- Product:** Talk about how your camping programs will help boost test scores and other student outcomes. The quality of your program and its connection to the school’s standards of learning are the most important aspects of your marketing message. Take the time to study your state’s standards, then revise or update your programs to ensure that they are focused on activities that will lead to improved academic success. Keep your programs flexible enough to adapt to individual school needs or preferences, but be sure that you have a basic curriculum that everyone can build upon. Educators know quality learning opportunities when they see them, so make sure yours meet their expectations.
- Price:** Virtually every school district is cash-strapped, so cost is a major issue for any program. Your challenge is to price your program at a level that meets your own financial objectives without being unrealistic for the school and/or its parents. One camp director suggests you focus on value rather than price, demonstrating how you can deliver curriculum at a price that may be less than the average daily cost per student in the classroom. It also helps to investigate other funding options that may exist, such as local foundations or state grant programs, so that you can offer your new partners assistance to get them started.
- Packaging:** How you package your presentation will depend on your audience. Some audiences, such as teachers, may be unimpressed by slick brochures and slide shows, preferring instead to see the actual materials their students might use or handwritten evaluations by their peers who have gone through a similar program. They will likely not have time to wade through stacks of materials either, so it is best to keep your information concise and to the point. On the other hand, you may want to “dazzle” superintendents and school boards with glossy materials and more sophisticated presentations, as they want to be assured that they are

partnering with a quality organization. Parents probably need some of both — substance and style — so that they will feel good about the camp while gathering enough information to allay any concerns they may have. Be sure to sell the value of the school camping experience. Make it sound fun, but be sure to convey the educational value that runs through the curriculum.

**Promotion:** Most camps that have successfully launched camp-school partnerships have done little or no promotion as most of us might define it. In fact, there appears to be little reason to promote school camps outside of a small circle of educators and parents. Some established camps do send a mailing to schools within a 100-mile radius each year in order to maintain some awareness of the camp's programs among educators. Others publish teacher manuals, parents' packets, or other promotional materials that can be distributed to target audiences. In most cases, however, these promotional materials are secondary to the personal, one-on-one sales pitch that you will need to give to teachers, principals, and other decision makers at targeted schools.

### **IDENTIFYING PROSPECTIVE PARTNERS**

What's the best way to identify teachers and schools that may be interested in developing partnerships with you? Camp directors suggest you start close to home, both literally and figuratively.

Begin by listing all of the elementary schools, both public and private, within a certain radius of your camp; say 50 miles. Then circulate that list to your staff, board members, friends, neighbors, donors, and any others who may be in a position to assist you. Ask them to identify anyone they know at those schools. It doesn't have to be a teacher or principal; sometimes a secretary or other staff member can help get you to the right person.

In many cases, it may be a parent who becomes your initial contact at a school. Many camps have relied on satisfied parents from summer programs to help them establish contact with their child's school. Other camp directors suggest that you focus on guidance counselors or assistant administrators in charge of curriculum, as they are most likely to recognize the benefits of your proposed partnership.

Whoever your contact may be, ultimately your goal is to present your program to the classroom teachers. After all, they are likely to become your customers once the partnership is established. As Ken Voorhis of the Great Smokey Mountains Institute notes, getting these teachers on board is crucial to your success. "If the teacher isn't fired up, the program won't fly."

One target group that is often overlooked is home schoolers. In many cases, parents who home school their children tend to be very receptive to experiential learning programs and recognize their benefits. You can check with your local or state home school association for a list of home schoolers and perhaps even schedule a presentation at one of their meetings. Coordinating the logistics of a program for home schoolers may be slightly more difficult, but the potential audience is growing larger every year.

Another target group might be "special needs" students who are not progressing acceptably in a formal school setting. Experiential learning, such as camp programs typically offer, can often be an effective tool for reaching these students.

It is also important to understand that cultural differences exist and to factor these into your marketing pitch. For example, think about the foods you serve at camp and whether they are appropriate for all ethnic groups. Look at your recruitment and marketing materials to see if they reflect the diversity you are seeking in your campers. Do you have versions in Spanish or other languages, if appropriate? Recognize that different ethnic groups may have different views on the value of camping and that you will need to tailor your presentations to address their concerns.

### **TIMING CAN BE EVERYTHING**

When you make your initial contact can be as important as what you have to say. When seeking an appointment with educators, keep in mind these simple rules:

- Start your efforts at least a year ahead of when the school camp will take place, but be aware that most educators aren't looking more than two to three months down the road.
- Avoid busy times, such as start of school year, exam periods, or school holidays.
- Don't expect teachers to call you back between 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Be available for them to call you back before or after school hours.

### **A FURTHER WORD ABOUT PRICING**

The price you set for your program will be a function of several factors:

- What you think your school partners can pay.
- The ability of the school to pass on costs to parents as a field trip expense.
- How much preparation, training, and time will be involved on the part of your staff.
- The additional services and/or programs that may be required of you by the school.
- The projected cost of the wear and tear on your facility.
- The cost of staff time that could be spent on other responsibilities.
- The potential for schools, students, and parent organizations to raise funds to supplement school funds.
- Opportunities to garner support from local corporations and foundations.

Successful camps almost always charge full rates for their school camp programs, arguing that their programs have significant value that should not be discounted. Many camps also add a percentage for overhead — typically from 15% to 100% of the program's base cost — depending on the school's ability to pay. If schools balk at the price, camp directors recommend negotiating on what program elements can be deleted or modified, rather than reducing the proposed rate.

It's important to recognize that schools will have additional costs associated with school camps that do not get paid to you. In some cases, these costs can add up to 25% or more of the total cost of the program for schools. These costs include:

- Extra pay for teachers who work longer hours while at camp.
- Salaries for substitute teachers who may be needed to supervise students left behind at school.
- Salaries for the school personnel who attend camp as chaperones or assistants.
- Transportation costs to get students to and from camp.
- Nursing and insurance rider costs.
- Extra pay for teachers and others to attend pre-camp workshops and training sessions.

Should you ever sell your school camp program below cost? Some camp directors say it's necessary in order to get the cash flow they need to get through the winter months. Others, such as Chewonki in Maine, view school camps as good public relations and a community service. They quickly add, however, that camps that do not have other sources of income to offset these loss leaders will not stay in business for long.

Whatever you decide to charge, keep in mind that schools are not usually able to deal with cost increases beyond basic inflation. Therefore, do not underestimate how much your program will cost, because it will be difficult to adjust the cost in future years.

## BUILDING YOUR CURRICULUM

*“Our business boomed when we decided to offer program staff and program supervision.”*

Dave Hilliard  
Wyman Center  
St. Louis, MO

Since the content and quality of your school camp program is so important, you will probably spend much of your planning time building your curriculum. The good news is that you may not have to make as many changes as you might imagine. “Half of what camps regularly do can foster literary skills,” notes Adam Weiss, one of the founders of the successful Break-Aways program in New York. “Singing songs, writing journals or the camp newspaper, and performing skits are all examples of how camps can help young people strengthen their literacy skills.” Other camp activities also lend themselves to academic learning. Upstate New York’s Camp Fiver is working to weave both literacy and math skill building throughout its programs. Prior to playing soccer, for instance, the campers are required to measure the length and width of the field and calculate its square footage. The camp has also developed a learning library with hundreds of books and a computer lab with 10 computers. Learning center activities typically include learning about the components of a story, writing a story or book, research on the Internet, and playing educational computer games.

Here are a few important things to consider as you develop your own program’s curriculum:

- Learning standards:** The number one rule in curriculum design is to make sure that your program links to and supports your state’s standards of learning. Schools are focused on these standards and their performance is measured by how well their students achieve against these standards. Call your state’s department of education or check their website to get a copy of these standards, then sit down with your staff or other education specialists to determine how your programs and activities can be structured to support the learning process. The Resources section at the end of this Guidebook also contains some links and ideas to get you started.
- Program choice:** It is also a good idea to give teachers lots of choices. While most camps report that teachers prefer to set curricula to help them plan, they also like to have enough flexibility to allow them to choose particular activities based on their own interests, where their students are at, or to cover their own weak spots. Consider providing your partners with a menu of activities and options so they can select a curriculum that meets their needs.
- Literacy:** Literacy lies at the heart of the educational reform movement. Children who read and write frequently learn better, retain more, and achieve at higher levels. Educators, therefore, are looking for innovative ways to help children improve their literacy skills. Consequently, you should make reading a part of every program. It doesn’t have to be boring; children can keep written journals, read log books and maps, write songs and perform in skits. You’ll be surprised how many activities that you currently offer have a literacy component to them. The key is to package these elements

and present them as an opportunity for schools to boost literacy in a fun and innovative way.

**Program Length:** The length of your school camp program may vary, depending on your goals, student needs, and available budgets. Break-Aways requires a 21-day or 28-day experience as the minimum period needed to overcome summer learning loss. Camps involved in New England's Prep for Prep program typically run 3-1/2 or 7-week summer programs. Most school-year camps run for 2, 3, or 5 days, including overnight stays. Occasionally a school that is located near your facility may opt for a day camp only; some even schedule one day a month for several months. Other models include month-long alternative schools such as Arkansas' Camp Pfeiffer and The Chewonki Foundation's Maine Coast Semester, which offers students a chance to attend school in a naturalistic setting on the beautiful Maine coast.

**Pre-work:** Work with your school partners to develop lesson plans they can use to help their students prepare for the activities they will do at camp. Examples include the basics of orienteering, metric conversion, measuring the length of each student's pace, and reading topographical maps.

**Classroom Visits:** In some situations, especially where a teacher has little experience with experiential education, it may be a good idea for one of your camp staff to visit the classroom prior to school camp, answer questions, and perhaps even teach a session.

**Post work:** It's also a good idea to build some post-camp lesson plans into your curriculum design, to help teachers tie the camp experience back into the class work.

### **WHAT TYPE OF PROGRAM?**

School camps come in many sizes and shapes. You will need to decide, based on the research you do into local student needs and school constraints, exactly what type of programs and curricula you will offer. Many programs focus on students in grades 4-6, while others target middle school and even high school ages. Some of the options include:

- Summer literacy programs, usually interwoven with regular camping activities, to address summer learning loss and educational enrichment goals.
- Environmental education programs, which are the most common and popular school-year camping programs.
- Leadership development programs, usually geared for middle school and high school ages.
- Natural history programs.
- Natural resource conservation programs.
- Programs focused on behavioral issues, conflict resolution, or self-esteem.
- Challenge courses.
- After-school math and science adventure programs.
- Winter vacation programs.

You may also want to develop teacher enrichment programs as part of your partnership activities. There is no reason that school teachers and administrators can also benefit from programs at your camp, ranging from learning how to use the experience of discovery as a learning tool to developing teamwork among the school's faculty.

### **THE ROLE OF THE CAMP IN CURRICULUM**

How much “ownership” you have with your school camp program will be a function of your mission, your staff resources, and the type of partnership you develop. Camps in the Break-Aways program serve as alternatives for summer school, incorporating educational curricula into their regular camping programs. At the other extreme, some camps approach school partnerships simply as an opportunity to rent out their facilities and thus do not get involved in curriculum design and teaching in any great way. In between, others may offer specific educational programs that schools can purchase and use with little or no customization needed or work with schools to create unique programs that address unmet student needs.

In order to decide what role you should play in school camp curriculum, first examine your own organization and decide the time, resources, and expertise you have to offer. Then talk to your school partners to learn as much as you can about their expectations and assumptions. Do they want to “own” curriculum design? Do they have confidence in the ability of camp staff to teach their students? How do they feel about teaching outdoors? Do they have the time and the expertise to develop an experience-based program? How much choice and flexibility are they looking for? Once you know what schools are held accountable for and what teachers' expectations are, you can then tailor your program to respond to those requirements.

Other roles that camps typically play in the curriculum building process include:

- Developing program manuals for teachers.
- Conducting pre-camp training workshops.
- Holding meetings at school with teachers and chaperones.
- Meeting with students and parents to let them know what to expect and how to prepare for the school camp experience.

### **THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN CURRICULUM**

Most schools seem to expect that camps will offer some form of prepared curricular activities, provided there is some room for customization of the program. The classroom teacher, a guidance counselor, and the administrator in charge of curriculum are the usual school personnel involved in the development of the school camp curriculum. Get to know these people so that you can understand their working styles. Are they hands-on managers who want to examine every detail? Or do they prefer to set objectives and standards and let you be creative within those guidelines? Don't hesitate to ask them up front how they want to work with you; you may be pleasantly surprised to learn that they already have a high level of respect for you as an educator and someone who can benefit their students.

In addition, schools may accept responsibility for teaching some or all of this curriculum on site at school camp. Schools typically provide adult supervision in a 1:10 ratio at camp. Usually the classroom teacher is supported by volunteers — parents, alumni, or other school staff — who will probably need some basic training in safety and the basics of outdoor education.

Schools should also play an important role in the evaluation process following school camp. Talk to your partners about how they plan to evaluate the success of the program and how you can build an evaluative component into your program. Set the expectations up front that the program will not end when the buses leave camp, but will continue throughout a post-camp measurement period. This will also help you lay the groundwork for an ongoing relationship with the school.

### **PRE-PACKAGED VS. CUSTOMIZED CURRICULA**

Most camps already have summer programs in place that can be easily adapted for school camp programs. Many of the “fun” activities you conduct with summer campers can be repackaged into a curriculum that addresses the school’s learning standards. When starting to build your partnerships, this may be a good place to start.

Pre-packaged curricula are also available through a variety of sources. A program such as Sunship Earth, an environmental education program for elementary school children, is widely used in school camp programs across the country. It has been pre-tested as well, so you can be sure that it meets a variety of educational standards. Sunship Earth may prove to be an academic stretch for students in some schools, while it may turn out to be repetitive and much less challenging for others. You will need to decide how much customization is needed based on your analysis of your school partner’s needs. Check with the bookstore at ACA headquarters to learn more about Sunship Earth and other pre-packaged programs that are available.

### **STAFFING AND OTHER ISSUES**

Building your curriculum also involves a number of other issues related to staffing, policies and procedures. These include:

- Training for teachers and volunteers from the school on safety and camp procedures.
- Training for camp staff on school policies and procedures.
- Gender equity issues with which schools are grappling (i.e., providing equal program opportunities for all students).
- Religious issues, such as providing special meals or allowing students time to observe religious customs while at camp.
- Requirements for security and background checks on staff and volunteers.
- Medical issues and plans to handle crises.
- Provision of nursing services.
- Rain dates and preparing substitute indoor activities.

## **BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP**

*“Camps have to realize they’re already educating kids and need to get over their inferiority complex.”*

Corey Frimmer  
ACA-New York Section  
Break-Aways Program  
New York

Building a successful partnership takes, time, patience, and flexibility. Doing it right the first time, however, can continue to pay rewards in terms of the ongoing relationship and boost to your camp’s business. The keys to building a solid partnership involve common sense guidelines, including listening and communicating well, staying flexible, focusing on quality, gathering feedback, paying attention to details, and a willingness to share both the responsibility and the credit with your partners.

### **RECOGNIZING WHO YOUR “BUYER” IS**

Your partnership efforts will only be successful if you are dealing with the right people. Who are they? The list will vary from school to school, but generally it will include not only the classroom teacher, but also the principal, perhaps the superintendent, and usually the school board. It is imperative that you discover how each school district operates. *What is the chain of command?* Is it a top-down hierarchy where all decisions and ideas flow from the board and/or the superintendent? Or is it a bottom-up organization where teachers and principals have a great deal of freedom to run their own show? Knowing this will help you focus on selling your program to the right people and making sure you have identified their needs.

In all cases, make sure you can identify who the “economic buyer” really is. This is a term borrowed from the business world that indicates the person or persons who have the final say on purchasing your program. The economic buyer is not always the person you think it is. Some of the administrators with whom you may deal may imply that they have the authority to move ahead with the partnership, only to reveal later that they still need approval from others. Discovering this fact too late may limit your ability to sell those decision makers on the merits of your program. It is best to ask who the economic buyer is up front, so you can include him or her in your ongoing communications.

### **WHEN TO SELL AND WHEN TO LISTEN**

You should always be in a sales mode, but good salespersons know that it’s often more important to listen than to talk. Take the time to listen carefully to what your partners are saying. Discover what their needs are before you start trying to address them.

### **COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION**

Strong partnerships are those that are based on open and clear communications. Successful partners know that issues left unresolved, assumptions that are never verified, and communications that are less than timely will quickly erode the confidence that each side has in the other. Communication is the most important aspect of building trust among partners. You should discuss how you will handle communications as part of your partnership planning process. How often will you talk? What are each side’s expectations for receiving information will be delivered? How long

will certain deliverables take? What constraints does each side face? How quickly should you expect phone calls to be returned? What is the approval process for the program's curriculum? How long will it take documents to be reviewed and/or approved?

The more visible you can be with your partners, especially early in the planning stages, the better your relationship will be. Try to find the time to visit the school often, check in with the teachers and principals, and make their jobs as easy as possible. It will pay off in the long run.

### **QUALITY, QUALITY, QUALITY**

As previously noted, ensuring the quality of your program is probably the most important thing you can do. Have a strong mission and stick to it. Take the time to review all aspects of your operations to see where you can improve. Invite others into your camp to assess your strengths and weaknesses as outsiders see them. Then share your improvement efforts with your potential partners. If they see that you are committed to ensuring quality, their comfort levels will be high and your relationship will be strengthened.

Some camps wonder if they need to be accredited in order for schools to work with them. Accreditation in most cases is not a decision factor for schools, although it is a comfort factor. Accreditation is one way you can demonstrate that you are meeting high standards for quality. As such, it helps make the school's decision process easier.

### **GATHERING FEEDBACK**

In order to maintain the quality of your programs, you will need to gather feedback from teachers, administrators, and, ideally, parents and students as well. Most school camp programs include some form of written evaluation at the end of the session. These are typically completed by teachers and volunteers and focus on logistical issues such as food service, housekeeping, and other comfort factors. Camps also may survey partners to gauge how well the program met the learning needs of students. More research and evaluation is needed on outcomes and the long-term effect of school camps (see the section in this guidebook on evaluation), but any feedback you can gather will help you build and maintain an effective program.

### **PAYING ATTENTION TO DETAIL**

One camp director explains that, "you sell to the decision makers on educational and socialization outcomes, but you keep the business based not only on outcomes, but on how hassle-free you make it for the teachers." In other words, pay attention to details. Partnerships require special kinds of teachers because it takes a lot of work on their part. If they have confidence that all of the I's will be dotted and the T's crossed, they will trust you on the bigger issues as well.

One place to pay special attention to detail is in the written contract you develop for the partnership. Make sure it addresses all of the things that could arise: safety issues, inappropriate students, timely payment of fees, resolution of disputes, and violation of contract terms, among others. Both sides will appreciate the time you take to address these issues up front, especially should they ever become actual problems.

Finally, be sure you spend time on the care and nurturing of your advocates, whoever they may be. After all, they are a major reason your partnership got established. They can continue to be a source of support, new ideas, and opportunities for program expansion. Look for ways to say thank you, to recognize their contributions, and to make sure they get the proper credit.

### **FIVE REASONS WHY PARTNERSHIPS FAIL**

1. Camp people don't think of themselves as educators. Therefore, they don't ask the right questions, focus on the right issues, or speak the right language. Most important, they fail to demonstrate how their camping program relates to the school's improvement goals.
2. Camps get frustrated with the policies, procedures, process, and red tape of large, bureaucratic schools districts.
3. Unforeseen budget cuts can undermine a partnership, especially if you have put all of your eggs in one basket.
4. The partners don't approach it as a true partnership. One side thinks it owns the program rather than sharing responsibility and credit.
5. Camps fail to build and nurture relationships with key educational leaders.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATING SUCCESS

*“It’s hard to quantify the value of a unique experience.”*

Dick Thomas  
The Chewonki Foundation  
Maine

As you plan your camp-school partnership’s programs, be sure that you and your partners set specific, measurable objectives and agree on a process for monitoring and evaluating your program’s success. Solid program measurements will give you the information you need to make improvements, sell your program to other school districts, and attract additional funding.

### DEFINING A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

What does a successful program look like? Every partnership will have a different set of expectations and objectives, but most focus on these five areas:

**Academic Outcomes:** Has the program enhanced student learning, motivated them to seek more knowledge, and resulted in better scores on standardized tests. (Note: while this is everyone’s number one objective, very few programs have the time or resources to adequately track these outcomes over time.)

**Other Student Outcomes:** School camp programs can also produce other student outcomes that can be measured. These include improvements in self-esteem and self-awareness, improvements in anger management, increased attendance at school, a greater degree of personal goal setting, and a reduction in student referrals/disciplines.

**Teacher Satisfaction:** Was the school camp a positive experience for the teacher? Did he or she learn? Was the process easy or burdensome? Was there adequate communication between the camp and the teacher? Was the camp staff qualified and supportive? Is he or she ready to come back next year?

**Parent Satisfaction:** Do parents feel like this is a good addition to the school’s curriculum? Are they satisfied with the information they received?

**Facilities Review:** Is everyone involved satisfied with the camp’s facilities? Are the camp’s facilities, food, staff, and support services up to their expectations? Did they find the camp clean and safe? Was the overall experience comfortable and enjoyable?

Not every partnership will be able to gather all of this information. But the more feedback you can get, the better.

### SAMPLE MEASUREMENT TOOLS

Because schools tend to be protective of their enrollment lists, most camps have to rely on the teachers to determine the extent of the evaluation to be done. “Teachers are the lifeline of

evaluation,” notes Chewonki’s Dick Thomas. Chewonki staff write an individual, informal evaluation for each child that attends school camp, providing them with positive and constructive feedback. The staff also meet with teachers to review the program, schedule changes, and link what the students have experienced back to the classroom curriculum. “School teachers welcome the evaluation and follow-up,” adds Thomas, “but they have limited time to do much.” Because evaluations can be an important tool in building return visits, however, they should be an essential part of your partnership’s program.

Most camps rely on a simple survey form that is completed by teachers and other school staff at the conclusion of each session. These surveys typically focus on teacher satisfaction and facilities reviews. Some teachers will forward a survey to parents to help gather feedback from them and their children. Still others may agree to conduct pre-and post-camp evaluations to measure academic improvements and other positive outcomes. Keep in mind, however, that such evaluations require time and effort on the teacher’s part and may have to be approved by others in the school’s administration. Try to develop a process, therefore, that minimizes the time required to implement this evaluative research and that will produce answers that both you and the school can use to further your causes.

Camps should also plan to do self-evaluations after each program. Survey your staff to identify what worked well and where improvements are needed. Look for trends in school evaluations about your food service, staff, or housekeeping. Devote a staff meeting to a discussion of how school camp can be improved next time.

## **MEASURING OUTCOMES**

The true value of camp’s role in the educational process has yet to be adequately demonstrated, primarily because too little has been done to measure the long-term academic outcomes associated with school camp programs. There is a great need for camps to undertake long-term, longitudinal studies that measure students’ learning retention and improvements in academic performance. “The camp industry is data deficient,” says The Chatham Group’s Fred Miller. “We need to know much more about who is coming to camp and what they are learning.”

The value of solid research can be seen in New York’s Break-Aways program, which has used initial indicators of academic improvement among its campers to garner state funding for the program. Wyman Center’s St. Louis Partnership for Children and Youth has also invested heavily in tracking and measuring outcomes as a strategy for attracting and retaining public and private funding. Other programs around the country are also working to do more long-term research to support these findings.

Even in situations where partnerships are unable to manage or fund larger research efforts, evaluation of outcomes can be done. Camps can conduct annual reviews with school principals and superintendents to discuss academic achievement outcomes. Simple follow-up surveys can be done quickly in classrooms or sent home to parents every few months to help measure retention among students. Camps can also ask parents to volunteer to participate in a longitudinal study as part of the initial school camp presentation.

Those who are involved in camp-school partnerships inherently know that these type of educational opportunities are effective and valuable additions to any school's curriculum. But ultimately, camps and schools need to be able to demonstrate in quantifiable terms the effectiveness of school camps. The political reality is that school boards that are strapped for funds want concrete results. Partnerships that can produce them will have a much greater chance of long-term success than those that do not.

## **SAMPLE TIMELINE FOR SUMMER PROGRAMS**

March	Obtain state standards of learning. Conduct competitive analysis of the market place. Identify and initiate contact with partners. Identify and reserve spaces in summer camping programs for the following summer (15 months out).
April	Meet with schools to discuss learning objectives and areas for partnership, including student recruitment, curriculum design and funding strategies.
May/June/July	Work with school to develop grant requests as needed. Conduct evaluations of current camp session.
August-Sept.	Begin planning for next year's session. Do self-analysis of camp's strengths and weaknesses. Continue planing efforts with school. Meet with teacher to finalize curriculum.
Oct.-Jan.	Develop basic curriculum. Make presentation to superintendent. Finalize proposed partnership arrangements. Gain school board approval.
February	Finalize written contract. Make presentation to parents and students.
March	Place students for summer sessions.
April-May	Hire and train staff.
June	Begin summer camping sessions.
Ongoing	Conduct follow-up evaluation if possible.

## **SAMPLE TIMELINE FOR SCHOOL-YEAR PROGRAMS**

September	Make decision to pursue camp-school partnerships. Do self-analysis of camp's strengths and weaknesses. Obtain state standards of learning.
October	Develop basic curriculum. Set goals for the partnership. Identify schools to target and contacts at each. Conduct competitive analysis of the market place.
November	Make initial contact with schools. Develop and present proposal to teacher and principal.
December	Make presentation to superintendent. Finalize proposed partnership arrangements.
January	Make presentation to school board.
February	Gain school board approval. Finalize written contract.
March	Meet with teacher(s) to map out implementation timeline. Meet with parents to discuss school camp and fund raising.
April	Work with school to develop grant requests as needed.
May/June/July	Continue planning efforts with teachers and parents.
August	Meet with parents to discuss school camp and fund raising. Meet with teacher to finalize curriculum.
September	Train camp staff as needed. Conduct training workshops for teachers, parents, and other school personnel. Visit classroom to prepare students for camping experience.
October	School camp. Evaluations after camp session.
November	Begin planning for next year's session.
Ongoing	Conduct follow-up evaluation if possible.

## **FUNDING YOUR PARTNERSHIP'S PROGRAMS**

Sending 100 or more students to school camp can be an expensive proposition for most schools. Funding, therefore, becomes a major consideration for any camp-school partnership.

### **TAPPING INTO SCHOOL RESOURCES FOR SUMMER PROGRAMS**

Accessing school district resources to pay for students to attend camp during non-school times can be one of the biggest challenges you face. It does not have to be an impossible task, however. Several programs around the country have had considerable success in demonstrating the value of their programs as part of the year-round educational process. The key is to show not only how you can help students meet academic standards, but how you can also do it at a cost that is highly competitive with the more traditional curriculum costs.

Perhaps the most successful example of this is New York's Break-Aways program. It has tracked learning outcomes of students in its program and used those to convince the New York State legislature to approve state funding for the program. This has allowed Break-Aways to expand to more than 10,000 campers in only four years.

Break-Aways estimates that a day at summer camp costs the state/school system on average about \$294 per student, compared to \$531 per student for more traditional summer school programs. This amounts to a 81% savings for the school system. Break-Aways analyzes such costs as teacher salaries, administrative staff, facilities costs, and transportation to arrive at its numbers. When added to the positive outcomes research that Break-Aways is able to validate, the case for summer camp as a cost-effective alternative to traditional summer school is made.

### **FUNDING SCHOOL-YEAR PROGRAMS**

More often than not, schools treat camp the same way they would a field trip. The costs of the camp are passed on, in whole or in part, to the parents of the students. Parents have the option of declining permission for their children to attend camp. This increases the cost for the school, which has to provide a substitute teacher for those children left behind. In addition, schools are not allowed to ask children who qualify for the federal free-lunch program to pay for field trips. The school must therefore find other sources of funds to allow these students to attend camp on an equal basis.

Some of the most common fund raising strategies for school camps are the bake sale or car wash sponsored by the school's parent teacher organization (PTO). In schools where camp is an accepted part of the curriculum, this fund raising becomes a regular, and oftentimes, anticipated activity for parents and students. Many educators feel that the students will also appreciate the camp experience more if they have helped raise money to attend.

What can camps do to help? Helping produce flyers and other promotional materials is one way you can assist your partners in fund raising. Contributing baked goods to bake sales is another. Most important, find out what role the classroom teacher is expected to play in the fund raising effort. If he or she has to bear the lion's share of the workload, perhaps you can offer to help with planning, recruiting other volunteers, or managing some of the logistics.

Another source of funds that you may want to suggest is the state's school lunch program. In school districts where there is a large population of low-income families, the school likely is

receiving state funds to help defray the cost of lunches for these students. In Arizona, the Amphitheater School District has received permission from the state to use part of these funds to pay for food service for the children while at camp. Similar arrangements may be possible in your state as well.

### **OTHER SOURCES OF FUNDS**

A wide range of other funding sources is also available in your area. Accessing these funds may take more time on your and your partners' parts. But the rewards can be well worth the effort.

- A. Check with your state's department of education and its department of natural resources to see if they have any grant programs to which you might apply. These departments are often looking for innovative approaches to educational reform.
- B. Local foundations and corporations are a good source of funds, especially to pay for underprivileged children to attend camp.
- C. Many community foundations regularly contribute funds to send poor children to camp during the summer.
- D. National and regional foundations like to fund both educational and environmentally focused programs as well, especially if they believe your program can become a model for others in your region or across the country.
- E. Individuals are also a source of funds that many overlook. Think about appealing to school alumni, local merchants, and others who may have school or community interests. Ask them to help sponsor the class trip to camp.

To help you get started, contact the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to obtain their directory of potential grant sources. You can also use the National Foundation Directory, a copy of which can probably be found in your local library. Or ask one of your board members if one of their community affairs staff can give you a hand identifying prospective funders.

### **FINDING THE FUNDER'S HOT BUTTONS**

Innovative educational programs that produce results are a high priority with most corporations and foundations these days. The same suggestions that pertained to packaging your program for schools also apply to funders. Stress educational reform, speak their language, and focus on outcomes and you will get results.

Funders also like to focus their grants in areas where they can help underprivileged children. Look for ways to carve out a piece of your program that will let them direct their funds to this need.

It is usually best to apply for grants in the school's name rather than your own. Applying in tandem as a partnership is also a good strategy, since many funders today stress the importance of collaboration in their giving priorities. This approach makes it easier for you to sell the educational aspects of your request. It also may give you more credibility with funders who may be more familiar with the school systems than with your camp. If your camp is a for-profit organization, applying through the school may be necessary, as many funders only give to nonprofit organizations.

Is it realistic to expect that your partnership will be funded? Absolutely. One camp recently completed a \$4 million campaign to raise money for expansion and operating costs. Ninety eight percent of the \$4 million came from individuals!

### **FINAL CHECKLIST...**

- We have read this guidebook from cover to cover.
- We have studied our camp and know its strengths and weaknesses.
- We have asked outsiders to evaluate our camp.
- We have developed a basic curriculum for the programs we plan to offer.
- We have identified staff weaknesses and plan to train them to lead school camp curricula.
- We have clear goals for our camp in this partnership.
- We have examined the potential impact school camp will have on our other programs and responsibilities and are comfortable with moving ahead.
- We have identified the schools we wish to target.
- We have done a competitive analysis of the market place to understand who our competition is and how we can compete with them.
- We have a copy of the state's educational standards and have tied our curriculum to them.
- We have reviewed relevant literature of educational reform and have modified our materials to ensure that it speaks "educator-ese."
- We have developed a timeline for contacting prospective schools at appropriate times.
- We have identified contacts at these schools to help us make initial approaches.
- We have developed a proposal to give to teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards.
- We have worked with our school contacts to develop a promotional/informational plan to reach all of the appropriate school audiences.
- We have anticipated the questions we will get and are prepared to respond to them.
- We have a solid grasp of our potential partners' needs and expectations.
- We have priced our programs at a level that is fair for our partners and ourselves.
- We have discussed liability issues with our partners and have reached agreement on how all operational matters will be written into the contract.
- We have planned one or more training workshops for teachers, parents, and other school personnel to help ensure they are prepared to handle any safety issues surrounding the outdoor programs.
- We have obtained copies of the school's rules and regulations and all of our staff are familiar with them.
- We have developed a "Plan B" for school camp activities in the event of rain.
- We have included parents in our communications and planning whenever possible.
- We have a formal, written agreement with each school that spells out what we will do, what the school will do, how children will be supervised, how classes will be taught, who is responsible for transportation, and who is responsible for teacher and nurses' salaries.
- We have built an evaluation component into our partnership agreement.
- We have worked with the school to identify and pursue potential sources of funding.
- We have nurtured and thanked our school partners and our advocates at every opportunity.
- We have documented everything.

### **AND A FINAL THOUGHT**

Creating camp-school partnerships is not easy. There is a lot of work involved and a lot of frustration too. This guidebook will help you avoid many of the roadblocks, but expect to find a

few more along the way. However, by setting clear goals, staying true to your mission, and remembering that, as Camp Tecumseh's Dave Wright points out, "We're in this for the development of kids," you will find it all worthwhile. Good luck!

## **RESOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Information Sites on Educational Standards:**

#### National Standards

National Science Education Standards — <http://books.nap.edu/html/nses/html/index.html>

U.S. Department of Education site — <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Standards/>

A publication aimed at teachers — <http://www.ed.gov/G2K/teachers/index.html>

#### State Standards

Central site with links to all state departments of education —

<http://www.ed.gov/Programs/bastmp/SEA.htm>

A comprehensive collection of website links prepared by the Putnam Valley, NY Schools, with standards by state, as well as other resources —

<http://putnamvalleyschools.org/Standards.html#USGovernment>

### **General Information about Camp-School Partnerships**

American Camping Association

5000 State Road 67 North

Martinsville, In 46151-7902

800-428-2267

[www.ACAcamps.org](http://www.ACAcamps.org)

#### ACA Bookstore

800-428-CAMP

e-mail: [bookstore@ACAcamps.org](mailto:bookstore@ACAcamps.org)

### **Sources of Information on Corporate and Private Foundation Grantmakers**

Foundation Finder — <http://lnp.fdncenter.org/finder>

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