

Discerning a Vision for Supporting a Local School Outline

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Everything Flows from Your Church's Mission

- Vital congregations connect people with God and engage their communities.
- But an outwardly focused mission does not provide the specific actions needed at any particular time.

Determine the Needs

- Learn about schools in your area. Study basic demographics and statistics. Drive or walk around the neighborhood.
- Introduce yourself to the principal, head of school, or chief administrator. Because they have tremendous influence within a school, it is critical that they know who you are, what you are doing, and that you want to help.
- Make an appointment for a group from your church to visit your local school to observe and learn what is happening. The United Church of Christ website has a specific resource to guide people through discernment based on a school visit.
 - <http://www.ucc.org/justice/public-education/pdfs/Experiencing-Public-Schools.pdf>
- Hold conversations with teachers, social workers, guidance counselors, athletic directors, and the school nurse to get a sense of the most pressing needs within the school and among students and their families.
- Go in without an agenda or preset ideas about what is needed. Ask simply, "How can we help?" Be willing to listen.
- But not all needs are appropriate for a particular church to attempt to meet.

Identify Your Church's Key Strengths

- What are the passions of your congregation? Where is energy and life?
- What assets does your church bring?
 - Financial capacity
 - Availability of people. When and how often can people serve?
 - Leadership capacity
 - Physical facilities
- What are things your church does really well?
- What strengths does the community associate with your church?
- What comparable mission efforts have you attempted that went well?
- Now you are ready to see where your church's mission, the needs around you, and your distinctive capabilities come together.

Consider Possible Directions for Your Vision

- Supply Student Needs
- Help Students Succeed
- Support Teachers
- Advocate

Things to Keep in Mind

- Partnering with other churches or non-profits may be an option for you.
- Start small.
- Be sure to fulfill your commitments. Do what you said you would do.
- Commit for the long-haul to develop successful and long lasting institutional partnerships that can make systemic differences.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Learn from the experience of others.
- Put child safety first. Learn and comply with your school's volunteer guidelines and security protocols as well as congregational or denominational policies regarding child safety.
- Prepare volunteers with adequate training.
- Cultivate an attitude of servanthood.
- Be sensitive regarding church/state boundaries. While you do not need to hide that you are from the church, it is never appropriate to pray or proselytize in a public school setting. Witness through actions.

