



Excerpt From

School-Community Partnerships: A Guide



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Building and Maintaining School-Community Partnerships

Efforts to establish effective school-community partnerships require much more than implementing demonstrations at a few sites. Policies and processes are needed to ensure such partnerships are developed and institutionalized to meet the needs of all youngsters, families, schools, and neighborhoods. This involves what often is called diffusion, replication, roll out, or scale-up.

Much more is involved than implementing demonstration projects

For the most part, researchers and reformers interested in school-community initiatives have paid little attention to the complexities of large-scale diffusion. Furthermore, leadership training has given short shrift to the topic of scale-up. Thus, it is not surprising that proposed systemic changes are not accompanied with the resources necessary to accomplish the prescribed changes throughout a county or even a school-district in an effective manner. Common deficiencies include inadequate strategies for creating motivational readiness among a critical mass of stakeholders, assignment of change agents with relatively little specific training in facilitating large-scale systemic change, and scheduling unrealistically short time frames for building capacity to accomplish desired institutional changes.

In reading the following, think about major school-community partnerships designed to evolve a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach. The intent is to create a cohesive set of well-coordinated, and where feasible integrated, programs and services. Such an approach evolves by building a *continuum of programs/services* -- from primary prevention to treatment of chronic problems -- using a *continuum of interveners, advocates, and sources of support* (e.g., peers, parents, volunteers, nonprofessional staff, professionals-in-training, professional staff, specialists). Building such a component requires blending resources. Thus, the emphasis throughout is on *collaboration* -- cooperation, coordination, and, where viable, integration -- among all school and community resources.



Successful systemic change begins with a model that addresses the complexities of scale-up

In pursuing major systemic restructuring, a complex set of interventions is required. These must be guided by a sophisticated scale-up model that addresses substantive organizational changes at multiple levels. A scale-up model is a tool for systemic change. It addresses the question "How do we get from here to there?" Such a model is used to implement a vision of organizational aims and is oriented toward results.

The vision for *getting from here to there* requires its own framework of steps, the essence of which involves establishing mechanisms to address key phases, tasks, and processes for systemic change. As described in Appendix E, these include creating an infrastructure and operational mechanisms for

- *creating readiness*: enhancing the climate/culture for change;
- *initial implementation*: adapting and phasing-in a prototype with well-designed guidance and support;
- *institutionalization*: ensuring the infrastructure maintains and enhances productive changes;
- *ongoing evolution*: creative renewal.

In the following discussion, we take as given that key mechanisms for implementing systemic changes, as outlined in Appendix E, have been established. These mechanisms are essential when school-community partnerships are to be established on a large-scale.

The real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise lies not in developing new ideas but in escaping old ones.

John Maynard Keynes

Major system change is not easy, but the alternative is to maintain a very unsatisfactory status quo.

Conceiving school-community partnerships from localities outward

The focus is first on what is needed at the school-neighborhood level . . .

. . . then on ways several school-neighborhood partners can work together and, finally, on what system-wide resources can do to support local collaborations

From a decentralized perspective and to maintain the focus on evolving a comprehensive continuum of programs/services that plays out in an effective manner in *every locality*, it is a good idea to conceive the process from localities outward. That is, first the focus is on mechanisms at the school-neighborhood level. Then, based on analyses of what is needed to facilitate and enhance efforts at a locality, mechanisms are conceived that enable several school-neighborhood collaborations to work together to increase efficiency and effectiveness and achieve economies of scale. Then, system-wide mechanisms can be (re)designed to provide support for what each locality is trying to develop.

An infrastructure of organizational and operational mechanisms at all levels are required for oversight, leadership, resource development, and ongoing support. Such mechanisms provide ways to (a) arrive at decisions about resource allocation, (b) maximize systematic and integrated planning, implementation, maintenance, and evaluation of enabling activity, (c) outreach to create formal working relationships with community resources to bring some to a school and establish special linkages with others, and (d) upgrade and modernize the component to reflect the best intervention thinking and use of technology. At each level, these tasks require that staff adopt some new roles and functions and that parents, students, and other representatives from the community enhance their involvement. They also call for redeployment of existing resources, as well as finding new ones.

Awareness of the myriad political and bureaucratic difficulties involved in making major institutional changes, especially with limited financial resources, leads to the caution that the type of large-scale restructuring described below is not a straight-forward sequential process. Rather, the changes emerge in overlapping and spiraling phases. Nevertheless, it helps to have an overview of steps involved (see Table 4).

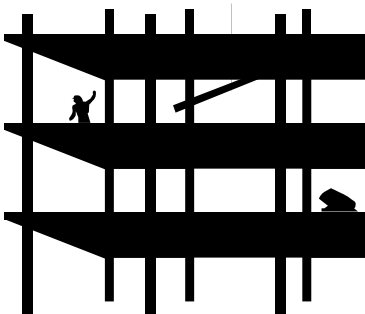


Table 4

**An Overview of Steps in Moving School-Community Partnerships
from Projects to Wide-Spread Practice**

Currently, there is no large-scale, systemic initiative in L.A. County focused on enhancing school-community partnerships aimed at developing a comprehensive continuum of programs and services for children and their families. The following outline applies the phases for systemic change (discussed in Appendix E) to the problem of establishing a large-scale initiative for school-community partnerships. Clearly, such an initiative requires major systemic restructuring at all levels. At each level, a critical mass of key stakeholders and their leadership must understand and commit to restructuring plans. The commitment must be reflected in policy statements and creation of an infrastructure that ensures necessary leadership and resources and on-going capacity building. Such an infrastructure must include a variety of mechanisms for reviewing, analyzing, and redeploying the various funding sources that underwrite current programs and services.

As a guide for planning, implementation, and evaluation, the process is conceived in terms of four phases covering fourteen major steps:

Phase 1: Creating Readiness

Build interest and consensus for enhancing school-community partnerships as a key strategy in developing a comprehensive, multifaceted continuum of programs and services

Introduce basic ideas to relevant groups of stakeholders (e.g., those involved with schools, agencies, community based organizations)

Establish a policy framework -- the leadership groups at each level should establish a policy commitment to enhancing school-community partnerships as a key strategy in developing a comprehensive, multifaceted continuum of programs and services

Identify leaders for this initiative at all systemic levels to carry responsibility and accountability for ensuring that policy commitments are carried out in a substantive manner

Phase 2: Initial Implementation

Establish a system-wide steering group, local steering groups, and an infrastructure to guide the process of change; provide all individuals involved in guiding the change process with leadership and change agent training

Formulate specific plans for starting-up and phasing in the large-scale initiative

Table 4 (cont.)

- Establish and train resource-oriented groups at each level -- beginning with resource-oriented teams at each locality, then Resource Coordinating Councils for working across a group of localities and for interfacing with Service Area Planning Councils, and finally system-wide bodies
- Reorganize and cluster programmatic activity into a relatively delimited number of areas that are staffed in a cross disciplinary manner (e.g., delineate a delimited set of programs and services for facilitating healthy development and productive learning and for addressing barriers to development and learning -- spanning concerns for problem prevention, early intervention, and treatment)
- Create mechanisms for effective communication, sharing, and problem solving to ensure the initiative is implemented effectively and is highly visible to all stakeholders
- Use Resource Coordinating Councils, Service Planning Area Councils, and system-wide resource coordinating groups to identify additional school district and community resources that might be redeployed to fill program/service gaps;
- Establish a system for quality improvement

Phase 3: Institutionalization

- Develop plans for maintaining the large-scale initiative for school-community partnerships (e.g., strategies for demonstrating results and institutionalizing the necessary leadership and infrastructure)
- Develop strategies for maintaining momentum and progress (e.g., ongoing advocacy and capacity building -- paying special attention to the problem of turnover and newcomers; systems for quality assurance and regular data reporting; ongoing formative evaluations to refine infrastructure and programs)

Phase 4: Ongoing Evolution

- Develop a plan to generate creative renewal (e.g., continue to expand support for school-community partnerships, enhance leadership training, celebrate accomplishments, add innovations)

School-neighborhood level mechanisms

Policymakers and administrators must ensure the necessary infrastructure is put in place for

- *weaving existing activity together*
- *evolving programs*
- *reaching out to enhance resources*

Mechansims include:

- *a resource-oriented team*

- *local program teams*

An effective school-community partnership must coalesce at the local level. Thus, a school and its surrounding community are a reasonable focal point around which to build a multi-level organizational plan. Moreover, primary emphasis on this level meshes nicely with contemporary restructuring views that stress increased school-based and neighborhood control.

If the essential programs are to play out effectively at a locality, policy makers and administrators must ensure that the necessary infrastructure is put in place. From a local perspective, there are three overlapping challenges in moving from piecemeal approaches to an integrated approach. One involves weaving existing activity together. A second entails evolving programs so they are more effective. The third challenge is to reach out to other resources in ways that expand the partnership. Such outreach encompasses forming collaborations with other schools, establishing formal linkages with community resources, and reaching out to more volunteers, professionals-in-training, and community resources.

Meeting the above challenges requires development of well-conceived mechanisms that are appropriately sanctioned and endowed by governance bodies. Based on lessons learned, one good starting place is to establish a resource-oriented team (e.g., a Resource Coordinating Team) at a specific school. Properly constituted, a resource team leads and steers efforts to maintain and improve a multifaceted and integrated approach (see Appendix F). This includes developing local partnerships. Such a team helps reduce fragmentation and enhances cost-efficacy by analyzing, planning, coordinating, integrating, monitoring, evaluating, and strengthening ongoing efforts.

To ensure programmatic activity is well-planned, implemented, evaluated, maintained, and evolved, the resource/steering team, in turn, helps establish and coordinate local program teams. In forming such teams, identifying and deploying enough committed and able personnel may be difficult. Initially, a couple of motivated and competent individuals can lead the way in a particular program area -- with others recruited over time as necessary and/or interested. Some "teams" might even consist of one individual. In some instances, one team can address more than one programmatic area. Many localities, of course, are unable to simultaneously develop many new program areas. Such localities must establish priorities and plans for how to develop and phase in new programs. The initial emphasis should be on meeting the locality's most pressing needs, such as enhancing services assistance, responding to crises, and pursuing ways to prevent garden variety learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

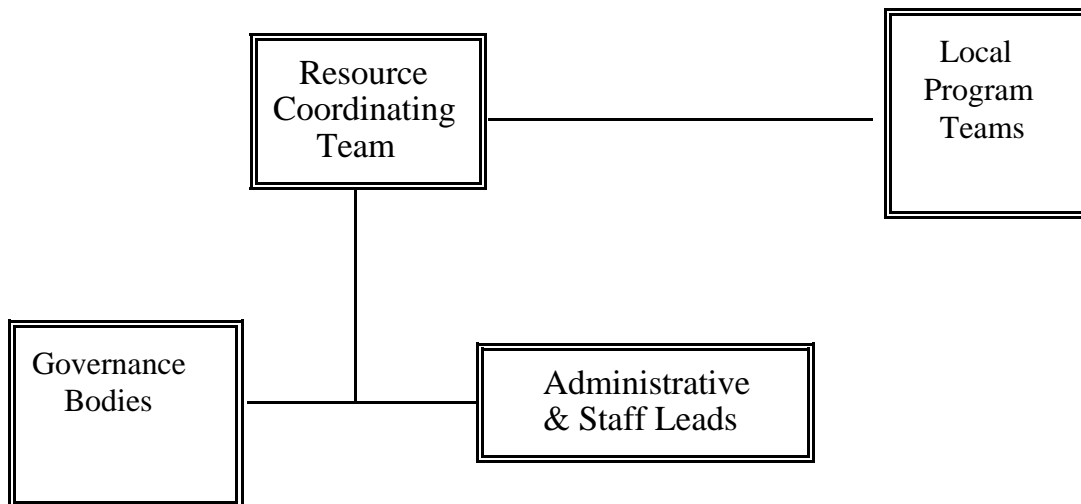
• *administrative leads*

Most schools and agencies do not have an administrator whose job definition includes the leadership role and functions necessary to accomplish the above objectives. This is not a role for which most principals or agency heads have time. Thus, it is imperative to establish a policy and restructure jobs to ensure there are *site administrative leads* whose job encompasses this responsibility. Such persons must sit on the resource team (described above) and then represent and advocate the team's recommendations whenever governance and administrative bodies meet -- especially at meetings when decisions are made regarding programs and operations (e.g., use of space, time, budget, and personnel).

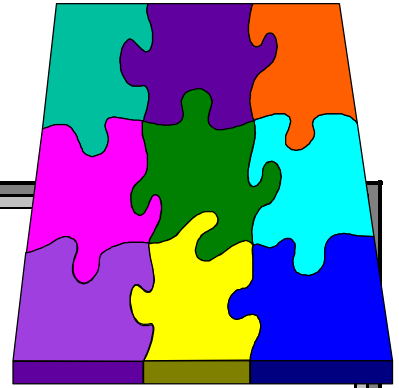
• *staff leads*

Finally, *staff leads* can be identified from the cadre of line staff who have interest and expertise with respect to school-community partnerships. If a locality has a center facility (e.g., Family or Parent Resource Center or a Health Center), the center's coordinator would be one logical choice for this role. Staff leads also must sit on the above described resource team and be ready to advocate at key times for the team's recommendations at meetings with administrative and governance bodies.

Besides facilitating the development of a potent approach for developing school-community partnerships, administrative and staff leads play key roles in daily implementation, monitoring, and problem solving related to such efforts.



As will be evident on the following pages, conceptualization of the necessary local level infrastructure helps clarify what supportive mechanisms should be developed to enable several school-neighborhood collaborations to work together and what is needed to at system-wide levels to support localities



Lessons Learned

from the New Jersey School Based Youth Services Program

The New Jersey School Based Youth Services Program, approaching community-school connections from the community side of the equation, reports the following eight factors as most affecting the strength of their school-community partnerships.

- (1) The welcome by the school administration, especially the provision of adequate space and liaison personnel.
- (2) The ability of the Managing Agency to provide support and supervision.
- (3) The strength of the Community Board, Advisory Board and connections to community agencies.
- (4) The strength, flexibility and competence of staff who interact with youth and school personnel.
- (5) The strength of parent support for the program.
- (6) The ability and willingness of staff and the managing agency to write grant proposals for special efforts.
- (7) Maximizing the use of state technical assistance.
- (8) Self evaluation and use of all evaluation.

Mechanisms for several localities to work together

Neighboring localities have common concerns and may have programmatic activity that can use the same resources. By sharing, they can eliminate redundancy and reduce costs. Some school districts already pull together clusters of schools to combine and integrate personnel and programs. These are sometimes called complexes or families.

Resource Coordinating Councils

A multi-locality *Resource Coordinating Council* provides a mechanism to help ensure cohesive and equitable deployment of resources and also can enhance the pooling of resources to reduce costs. Such councils can be particularly useful for integrating neighborhood efforts and those of high schools and their feeder middle and elementary schools. (This clearly is important in connecting with those families who have youngsters attending more than one level of schooling in the same cluster.) With respect to linking with community resources, multi-locality teams are especially attractive to community agencies who often don't have the time or personnel to link with individual schools. To these ends, 1 to 2 representatives from each local resource team can be chosen to form a council and meet at least once a month and more frequently as necessary. Such a mechanism helps (a) coordinate and integrate programs serving multiple schools and neighborhoods, (b) identify and meet common needs with respect to guidelines and staff development, and (c) create linkages and collaborations among schools and agencies. More generally, the council provides a useful mechanism for leadership, communication, maintenance, quality improvement, and ongoing development of a comprehensive continuum of programs and services. Natural starting points for councils are the sharing of needs assessment, resource mapping, analyses, and recommendations for reform and restructuring. Specific areas of initial focus may be on such matters as addressing community-school violence and developing prevention programs and safe school and neighborhood plans.

Service Planning Area Councils

Representatives from Resource Coordinating Councils would be invaluable members of Service Planning Area Councils. They would bring information about specific schools and clusters of schools and local neighborhoods and would do so in ways that reflect the importance of school-community partnerships.

Board of Education Standing Committee

Matters related to comprehensive approaches best achieved through school-community partnerships appear regularly on the agenda of local school boards. The problem is that each item tends to be handled in an ad hoc manner, without sufficient attention to the "Big Picture." One result is that the administrative structure in the school district is not organized in ways that coalesce its various functions (programs, services) for addressing barriers and promoting healthy development. The piecemeal structure reflects the marginalized status of such functions and both creates and maintains the fragmented policies and practices that characterize efforts to address barriers. Boards of Education need a standing committee that deals in depth and consistently with these functions so they are addressed in more cohesive and effective ways (see Appendix G). Such a committee can help ensure policy and practice are formulated in a cohesive way based on a big picture perspective of how all the various resources and functions relate to each other.

System-wide mechanisms

Local and multi-site mechanisms are not sufficient. System-wide policy guidance, leadership, and assistance are required. With respect to establishing a comprehensive continuum of programs and services, a system-wide *policy* commitment represents a necessary foundation.

Mechanisms that seem essential are:

- *a system-wide leader*

Then, system-wide mechanisms must be established. Development of such mechanisms should reflect a clear conception of how each supports local activity. Several system-wide mechanisms seem essential for coherent oversight and leadership in developing, maintaining, and enhancing comprehensive approaches involving school-community partnerships. One is a *system-wide leader* with responsibility and accountability for the system-wide vision and strategic planning related to (a) developing school-community collaborations to evolve comprehensive approaches and (b) ensuring coordination and integration of activity among localities and system-wide. The leader's functions also encompass evaluation, including determination of the equity in program delivery, quality improvement reviews of all mechanisms and procedures, and ascertaining results.

- *a system-wide leadership group*
- *a system-wide resource coordinating body*

Two other recommended mechanisms at this level are a *system-wide leadership group* and a *resource coordinating body*. The former can provide expertise and leadership for the ongoing evolution of the initiative; the latter can provide guidance for operational coordination and integration across the system. The composition for these will have some overlap. The system-wide resource coordinating body should include representatives of multi-locality councils and Service Planning Area Councils. The leadership group should include (a) key administrative and line staff with relevant expertise and vision, (b) staff who can represent the perspectives of the various stakeholders, and (c) others whose expertise (e.g., public health, mental health, social services, recreation, juvenile justice, post secondary institutions) make them invaluable contributors to the tasks at hand.

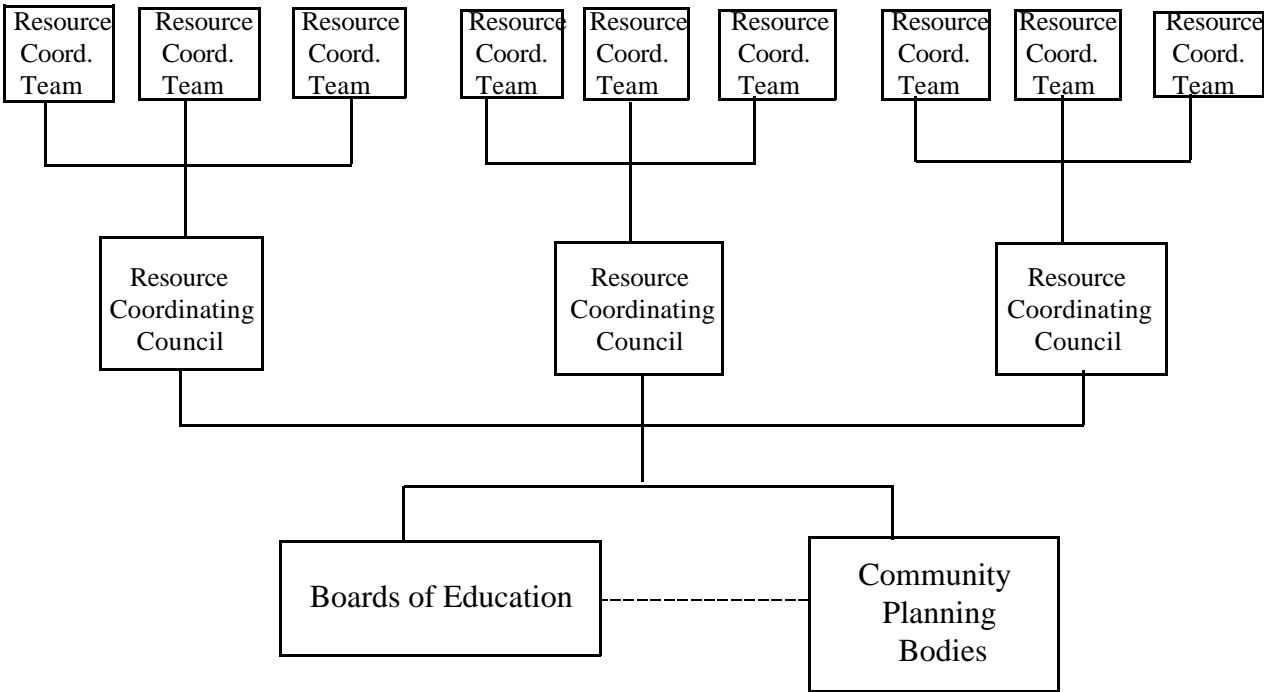
- *Organization Facilitators*

A cadre of *Organization Facilitators* provide a change agent mechanism that can assist in the development and maintenance of resource-oriented teams and councils. Such personnel also can help organize basic "interdisciplinary and cross training" to create the trust, knowledge, skills, and the attitudes essential for the kind of working relationships required if the mechanisms described above are to operate successfully. Through such training, each profession has the opportunity to clarify roles, activities, strengths, and accomplishments, and learn how to link with each other.

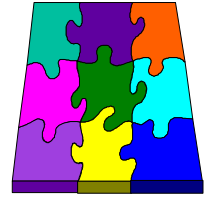
- *Boards of education & community planning bodies*

Ultimately, it is Boards of Education and community governance and planning bodies that must ensure an enduring policy commitment, resources, and planning for comprehensive and cohesive approaches encompassing school-community partnerships. This calls for formal connections between community planning bodies and boards of education with respect to analyzing the current state of the art, developing policy, and ensuring effective implementation.

Figure 2. Connecting key mechanisms.



Lessons Learned



The following ideas were circulated by the Human Interaction Research Institute* at a conference on the care and feeding of community partnerships. They were derived from a review of the research literature on the effectiveness of partnerships.

(1) Factors Influencing the Success of Partnerships

■ **Environmental Characteristics**

- >there is a history of collaboration or cooperation in the community
- >the partnership is seen as a leader in the community
- >the overall political/social climate is favorable to the goals of the partnership

■ **Membership Characteristics**

- >there is mutual respect, understanding and trust among, the partners
- >there is an appropriate cross-section of members from the community at large
- >partners all see collaboration as in their self-interest
- >there is a reasonable ability to compromise in operating the partnership

■ **Process/Structure Characteristics**

- >partners share a stake in both process and outcome
- >there are multiple layers of decision-making in the partnership
- >there is a reasonable amount of flexibility in how the partnership operates
- >there are clear roles and policy guidelines are developed
- >there is a willingness to adapt the structure and goals of the partnership as needed

■ **Communication Characteristics**

- >there is open and frequent communication among the partners
- >the partners have established informal and formal communication links

■ **Purpose Characteristics**

- >there are concrete, attainable goals and objectives for the partnership
- >there is an overall shared vision of what the partnership aims to do
- >there is a well-defined, unique purpose against other goals of community groups

■ **Resource Characteristics**

- >there are sufficient funds to operate the partnership
- >there is a skilled convener to bring the partners together

(2) Challenges of Partnerships

- Distrust of the partnership process itself among certain elements of the partnering organizations or within the host community
- "Bad history" from previous partnerships in the same community
- Becoming more concerned with perpetuation of the partnership rather than with the issues it was formed to address
- Being the product of a top-down rather than bottom-up creation
- Difficulties in recruiting staff able to work in the complex environment of a coalition
- Difficulties in maintaining viability when a leader or founding partner leaves (regardless of the reason for the departure)

(3) Learnings About Multicultural Aspects of Partnerships

- Strategies for handling cultural stereotypes within the partnership's own leadership are planned and implemented
- Partners develop and share a basic vision rather than merely looking for an exchange of opportunities among different racial/ethnic groups
- There are efforts to build social capital in the community - going beyond specific issue-oriented work

(4) Sustaining Partnerships

The likelihood of partnerships continuing over time is increased by:

- Implementing strategic methods for *conflict resolution* within the partnership, including an open acknowledgment that conflict is both inevitable and healthy in a body of this sort, so it will always have to be dealt with
- Implementing "advance strategies" for dealing with *leadership burnout* and *transition* - again, acknowledging that such shifts are a normal, healthy part of a partnership's life cycle
- Developing and implementing approaches to *long-term resource acquisition* - maintaining the flow of needed fiscal and human resources into the partnership. Funders can help partnerships by earmarking funds for capacity development, or for a planning grant to start up the partnership with attention to these longer-term issues.

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