

## Why partnerships between businesses and school districts create regional economic growth

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Dr. Dana T. Bedden, Superintendent of Schools, Irving Independent School District

Dr. Dana T. Bedden is a high-energy educator with more than 18 years of experience in educational administration and leadership. Described as a creative and effective leader, he has demonstrated skills in standards-based education, human resource management, fiscal management and school-community partnerships.

Bedden began his tenure as the Superintendent of Schools for the 34,275-student Irving Independent School District in 2010. Before coming to Irving ISD, Bedden had served as a teacher, athletics director, community and athletic resource administrator, assistant principal, high school principal, regional superintendent and superintendent of schools in Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania and Georgia.

He has been the recipient of several awards and recognitions including the 2009 Dr. Cleveland Sellers Community Service Award and nominee for Georgia Superintendent of the Year. Bedden received his secondary education from Pinellas County Schools in Florida, earned his Bachelor of Science in Exercise & Sport Science from the University of Florida, Master of Education in Educational Administration from Pennsylvania State University, and his Doctorate in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies from Virginia Tech.

*Smart Business* learned more from Bedden about the involvement of a successful school district in economic development.

### **How are public school systems and a city's economic development program closely linked?**

A relationship between a school district and a city's economic development program is key to ensure the success of the city. In our city, the Irving Economic Development Partnership, a partnership between the City of Irving and the [Greater Irving-Las Colinas Chamber of Commerce](#), helps the city grow in infrastructure, business, quality of life and quality of work force. As the city grows, the community often looks to the local public schools to be the bellwether of many of these initiatives. Likewise, the city's Economic Development Partnership program makes recruitment and retention of top teaching and administrative talent easier, and helps students understand the rewards that come with educational achievement.

Simply stated, positive economic development and school improvement are mutually beneficial and become self-perpetuating; as schools improve, it becomes easier for a city to increase development and as development increases, it becomes easier for schools to improve.

### **What are the benefits of having a school district involved in economic development?**

When a school district is directly involved in economic development, it has a seat at the table in helping the community develop the vision and goals to be achieved. Having a direct role in economic development also allows schools to provide a firsthand account of a district's strengths and abilities in supporting community improvement. Quality education is economic development. Business executives often look at the quality of schools when determining where they are going to relocate. Additionally, being an active participant in economic development enables the school district to hear firsthand the needs of the city and business community. That information is useful when schools are trying to connect instruction for real world application and preparation for the work force.

### **In what ways is a good relationship between the school district and the city government beneficial?**

Irving ISD is very fortunate to have a partnership with the City of Irving that is growing and evolving with the changing needs of our students. Our city partners with IISD in various ways, including but not limited to: hosting a citywide school supply drive, mentoring students, participating in career days with speakers, hiring interns in various departments and having Teen Court as an alternative for students in the court system. The City and IISD are now looking for ways to partner that will improve the delivery of services, which will hopefully reduce costs for our taxpayers.

### **What benefits do corporations have if they are involved in the school district?**

If education is one of their fields of interest, getting involved with a local school district will assist them in meeting their community involvement goals to impact youth. By investing time in students, companies are playing a significant role in preparing their future work force, as well. Corporate involvement also provides employees first-hand information about the success and challenges their schools face. Getting employees involved helps reinforce a corporate culture of service to the community, which in turn builds employee morale. By building our students, companies are essentially strengthening our entire community and developing the future work force.

### **In what ways does a partnership with the community impact your students?**

Irving ISD partners with many organizations in the community that provide a variety of support and services. Our partners help provide tutors that work with students, who help them understand and master subject areas that they are struggling with. Caring adults from partner groups mentor students who need someone to assist them with social behavioral development. Additionally, for our secondary students, the Greater Irving-Las Colinas Chamber of Commerce and their investors help by opening the doors to their businesses and providing career exploration activities, internships and job shadowing experiences to broaden the students' horizons.

Partnering with the community has helped successfully create Future Leaders of Irving, a program that educates and helps develop our local youth to become future business and civic leaders. Students participate in multiple sessions with topics on government, transportation and infrastructure, non-profit agencies and the private sector. Irving ISD has many great partners who donate books, school supplies, school uniforms and a variety of instructional resources, and implement incentives that recognize student achievement.

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