

- **Have at least two staff members at your school who are dedicated and willing participants**

Our findings have indicated that the most successful Sister School partnerships are those that have at least one teacher *and* the principal of the school devoted and willing to make the partnership work.

These are teachers and principals who value the benefits of cultural exchange in the classroom, and realize the importance of international studies for their students' future success.

Indeed, Sister School's success depends on the willingness and enthusiasm of the educators who are employing the program. A Sister School partnership is only as successful as the teachers decide to make them. Remember! Enthusiasm is contagious! Students will gain more from their Sister School experience if their teachers are excited and motivated to participate and make it work!

- **Teacher to Teacher Communication is Key**

While it is important for principals to support and nurture their Sister School program at their school, teacher to teacher communication is vital in sustaining partnerships. This is where the emphasis should be in keeping communication consistent; at the teacher level. Teachers will need to develop a relationship with their Sister School correspondent. Teachers should realize in advance, that they will need to communicate often in order to select projects and design their Sister School curriculum.

While e-mails will be the main form of communication for most teacher to teacher contact, phone numbers and other contact information should be exchanged at the beginning of the partnership. A record of correspondence will also help to strengthen future contact and exchanges.

- **Organize your school's schedules**

The single greatest problem between Sister Schools is lack of communication and failure to keep in contact.

In being partnered with a school from another part of the world, teachers will have to communicate in advance what months they will have off for summer break, holiday vacations, time differences, etc.

Remember to let your Sister School know when you will be out for summer break. Check in with your fellow Sister Schools teachers before the school year starts to prepare for future projects.

This will help avoid confusion and frustration for either side in attempts to communicate over long distances.

- **Schedule check-in times with one another**

A weekly e-mail to update each other on the progress of each school's projects will ensure a successful and sustainable partnership. Teachers should let one another know the best time for them to send e-mails back and forth.

Consistent communication is vital to maintain an active and productive Sister Schools partnership!

- **Create Timelines for Sister School Projects**

The goal for teachers in starting any Sister School project should be to start and complete the project in a timely manner so that students receive the full benefits from such an exchange. Nothing will be more frustrating or counter-productive to a student's learning than an incomplete project!

Teachers should communicate before starting a class project, and create timelines for certain steps in the project: scheduled check-in times throughout the project, a completion date, and any intermediate steps along the way.

- **Be Realistic**

Don't promise what you can't deliver. Be honest and realistic in your intentions with your Sister School. Both teachers should be able and willing to provide the same level of commitment and time to any agreed upon projects. If one teacher devotes more effort and time to a project than the other, the partnership may not be as rewarding for the students and schools that are involved as it could be.

- **Be Creative**

Don't limit your interactions to text books and pen-pals. Asking students what interests them may be a great way for coming up with new ideas for Sister School projects, year after year.

- **Commitment to Completing Projects**

No matter how minimally your schools are involved, or how basic the project, Sister Schools should be committed to completing the projects they collaborate on. Support your Sister Schools as much as you can.

- **Foresee communication barriers**

Make sure that both schools have reliable access to the internet. This will be the most efficient form of communication for most partnerships. Although it is possible to have a partnership without online interaction, it is not recommended for convenience sake.

Also, workout any language barriers between teachers and schools before you begin any projects. It is most important that the teachers can communicate well in order for projects to be conducted effectively for the students.

- **Prepare for cultural differences and sensitivities**

Be aware and prepared for any cultural differences between you and your Sister School. This shouldn't hinder or censor your communication with them, but in fact, it should do the opposite. Being open and honest with your school about any cultural sensitivity will avoid confusion or misinterpretation.

- **The Classroom Level vs. the School Level**

In realizing the need for dedicated individuals to run the program, schools need to decide whether their partnership will be based on a classroom to classroom basis, or as a whole school.

Our advice is to pair up classrooms. This creates a more intimate and valuable learning experience for students. It also matches up students based on their age and developmental capabilities.

Also, remember to utilize any interest-based clubs or classes at your school. Language classes, cultural clubs, or International Baccalaureate programs are excellent candidates for employing international exchange projects! Keep in mind, that a willing and dedicated teacher is imperative to creating a successful Sister School partnership.

- **In case of staff turnover...**

Sister School partnerships often end when a staff member such as a teacher or principal, leaves a school. If this staff member was a driving force behind the partnership, the Sister School program will usually leave with them.

Ways to maintain a Sister School program include:

- Have at least two school staff members aware and involved with the Sister School program; such as a teacher *and* a school principal.
- Make sure both staff members have the contact information for their Sister School.

- Have the teacher or principal keep a record of correspondence and projects completed between Sister Schools, so that this information may be passed on to any new staff in order to continue the partnership.
- Be sure to inform and explain the nature of the Sister School program to the new staff member. You can also have them contact Sister Cities International for any help they may need in their efforts to continue the program.

- **Make your Sister School Visible in your Class**

Enthusiasm is contagious! Share your Sister School with your students by hanging up pictures of their school and country in your class. Display art from their region, and projects your schools have participated in together.

You can also have your class do presentations on their Sister Schools to share with the rest of your school. Make the partnership visible and accessible to your school!

- **Be Pro-Active with your Partnership**

Sister Schools are only as successful as the teachers and schools running the program make them. Haven't heard from your fellow Sister Schools teacher? E-mail them, call them, and find out if there are any problems that need to be addressed. If there is still a failure to communicate, call your Sister Schools Coordinator or Sister Cities International.

Also, take on more involved projects and more complex curriculum as your partnership strengthens and grows. There are so many different opportunities and lessons to be learned by collaborating with your Sister School.

Take advantage of this unique educational opportunity! Your students will be sure to gain new insights and perspectives from their international peers.

- **Keeping Multiple Contacts for Sister Schools**

Make sure there are several staff members at your Sister City who have contact information for your Sister School, and who are aware of the partnership. This will help in the event of staff turnover.

- **Celebrate your Sister Schools and their Accomplishments!**

Announce projects and other events between your Sister Schools in the school's newspaper and Sister City publications. Sister Cities International may highlight the partnership in our newsletters and "Best Practices" as well.

And please remember to let us know how your partnership is going! We are always eager to hear from our members.