

PENETRATING THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CAMPUS

How can my church reach students in our area?

At a time when many Christians advocate abandoning the public schools, some churches have found the public school to be an amazing opportunity to minister. Randy Fields, pastor of New Covenant Baptist Church in Grass Valley, has a history of creative ministry that has forged a strong relationship with several campuses. New Covenant is a small congregation, under 100, but in 2008 they baptized 20 people, many as a result of their relationship with a public high school across the street. Read Pastor Fields' story below. At the end you'll find suggestions for starting your own ministry to public schools.

It was nearly five years ago that God would begin the journey for us as a congregation to partner with the local high school near our church. This happened to be an alternative education school. We had been praying for God to open the door for us to get into our community and make a difference and He did.

After meeting with the principal, we discovered a need that we believed our church could meet. We began to provide a weekly home-cooked meal for the students. The meal was well received and soon had the blessing of the school and the district as well. Each week, we would greet students with a warm smile and, as opportunities arose, would spend time just talking with them.

The next door God opened for us was the opportunity to begin a prayer time each week at the school for teachers and administrators who wanted to participate. As a result we began to see students give their lives to Christ, and many of their families as well.

We were given the opportunity to expand our ministry by leading student focus groups that would help to bring change within the school. From those focus groups we started a weekly open gym time. This provided an even greater opportunity to mingle with students one to one. Next, we coached and started some sports teams the school had not had

in many years. During each new opportunity for ministry God continued to draw students to Him and we had the privilege of introducing many of them to faith in Christ.

In our fourth year, the principal asked me to become a part-time staff member to create a mentoring/tutoring program out of a media lab center that was yet to be created. Our prayers as a body have consistently been for God to take us deeper into the school and "do immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:30-21]. We have experienced God's faithfulness and then some.

We have seen several benefits over the last four years.

- As a church, it caused us to take the gospel into our "Jerusalem."
- We were able to be the hands and feet of Jesus to our community and not just sit comfortably within the walls of the church. Being able to see the impact of the gospel on a daily basis was something that was only a dream for many of us prior to this ministry.
- We baptize new believers almost weekly. Many are a direct result of our ministry at the school.
- Believers who had never been outspoken about their faith now have the opportunity to live it out and to share it.
- This ministry has provided an opportunity for people of all ages to minister. Too many times we think that you have to be young to work with teenagers. We can testify to the fact that it just isn't true.
- We have seen God bring the families of many of these students to faith in Christ.
- We see them growing in their relationship to Christ.
- It has given our church a very positive name in our community. It is advertising money can't buy.



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- It has given our people the confidence to take steps of faith, and something to rejoice in on a weekly basis.

I believe this type of ministry is possible for any church of any size. I also believe it is possible whether it is in a rural, city or inner-city setting. Here are some principles to help guide you:

1. **Pray – Pray – Pray!** We have not because we don't ask (James 4:2). As you identify the schools in your community, pray and ask God to open the doors on the campuses. If God opens the door, step through it. Don't wait just for the one to open that you think is where you need to be. God may surprise you.
2. **Discover the needs of the campus.** Too many times we do more harm than good in trying to get on a school campus. We demand our rights and end up closing the door. If you will just look for needs and offer to meet them, God will be faithful and open the door for you.
3. **Be consistent.** I believe consistency makes the biggest difference to those at the school. Your trust has to be earned and the only way for that to happen is for you to be there no matter what. Whatever the need you discover or whatever opportunity is given to you – go after it with everything you have and be faithful to the opportunity God provides.

4. **Be flexible.** Over the course of the years, I can tell you that without flexibility ministry on a school campus won't happen. Schedules change, leadership changes, and every time they do, we simply adjust.
5. **Claim the promises of God.** God promises that His Word will not return void (Isaiah 55:11). If we are faithful to do our part, God is faithful to do His. All we are responsible for is to plant the seeds and be patient for Him to do the rest.

Idea Incubators for Starting a Public School Ministry

- Prayer-walk the school grounds.
- Volunteer to tutor, man crosswalks, watch the yard or help in a classroom.
- Provide lunch or refreshments and coffee for teachers.
- Take prayer requests from administrators.
- Have a teacher appreciation or sports appreciation day at your church.
- Collect art supplies for classrooms.
- Raise money for the school (e.g. recycling, garage sales, etc.)
- Hold a work day on the campus.
- Conduct after-school programs.
- Be a resource for parents and teachers for counseling.
- If you have other ideas that have worked for you, let us know at dwatts@csbc.com

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