

## Theme: Leading Community Partnership for School Transformation

**Dr. Ivy Sakar**

Principal

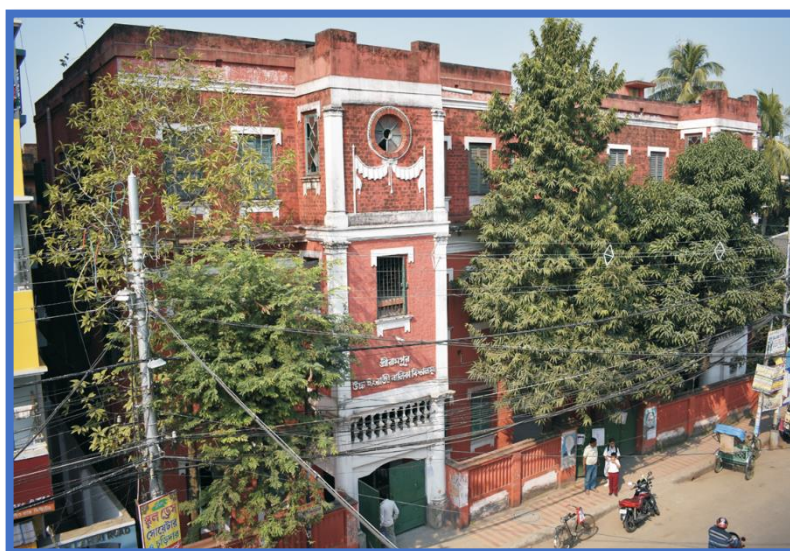
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**Coming together is a beginning; Keeping together is progress; Working together is success.**

**- Henry Ford**



### **Title of the Case Study**

Beyond Academic Arena- A School leading, learning and leveraging through Community Involvement.

### **Introduction**

This case study explores how an urban Higher Secondary School with traditional heritage of nearly 150 years has been able to build successful bridges with the community as a part of its school programme with an aim to involve the potential community partners for transforming the school into an institution catering to the all-round development of its students. The school has a reputation for academic excellence but was facing challenges like low community engagement. Yet in the recent years, Dr Ivy Sarkar, the Headmistress of Serampore Girls' High School located at Serampore, Hooghly, West Bengal, has been endeavouring to inculcate 21st century behavioural skills into the students through her community programmes and make them global contributive citizens.

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## Objectives

- To increase community engagement.
- To build strong relationship with parents and guardians for creating appropriate pathways for students.
- To enrich and expand the school activity through School Community Partnership.
- To foster students' wellbeing by upgrading their parents and guardians.
- To build family economic resilience.

## Methodology and Tools of the Study

A cross sectional study of the recent development in the school with respect to community involvement has been made by using tools like questionnaire surveys, interviews etc and the findings are quite satisfactory.

## Findings

"An active engaged community has an enormous role to play in supporting the school's mission"-

- Melaville,1998, p.6

Keeping Melaville's words in mind, Serampore Girls' High School undertakes several outreaches communities' programmes to prepare students for an increased and interconnected world.

Serampore Girls' High School, a state-run Government sponsored School, has taken initiative to upgrade the parents through free of cost Spoken English courses after school hours. The Headmistress Dr Ivy Sarkar along with Sutapa Dutta (A.T), serve as trainers to the guardians. Mothers attending spoken English classes are trying to speak in English with their daughters at home which by turn motivate students to attain perfection. "Our school runs both a vernacular medium as well as an English medium. It is seen that often parents of English medium attending parent teacher meetings are unable to understand what is being said and are unable to communicate properly. So, we thought of these special English Classes for parents. Initially we have started the classes for mothers but there is an increased demand from the fathers and Bengali Medium guardians too", said the Headmistress.

Community engagement is also ensured through participation of the parents in different social and cultural programs of the school. This strengthens relationship with parents and paves pathways for overall development of the students.

The interact club of the participation of the parent's school under the active supervision and mentorship of the headmistress has been undertaking various social initiatives to solve the community at large. With an aim to conduct activities related to social responsibility, the interactors of SGHS'



Interact Club undertook a drive to distribute blankets and winter garments to the poverty-stricken people of slum areas in Serampore. The objective of this initiative was to reduce the sufferings of the economically and socially backward people who are compelled to endure agony due to cold waves of harsh winters. The Interact Club undertook this project under the supervision of Dr Ivy Sarkar, the Headmistress of Serampore Girls' High School along with Smt. Rakhi Som, the *Distribution of blankets and winter garments to the underprivileged* teacher-coordinator of the school's Interact Club. The beneficiaries, after receiving the blankets and winter garments, expressed satisfaction and extended their heartfelt thanks to the interactors. The initiative of SGHS' Interact Club to provide blankets to the destitutes and pullovers to the impoverished children endeavours to bring rays of hope and happiness in their lives by providing them relief and protection from severe cold. Through this activity, the interactors were able to foster self-discovery, understand how to interact socially and explore significance of working for the social betterment of the society. Engagement in such philanthropic activities in school life will help them confront challenges, crises and adversities in life; broaden their vision and instill in them a sense of greater social responsibility.

International Nelson Mandela Day has been celebrated by the students of Serampore Girls' High School in a befitting manner with the vision of serving mankind. In 2009 United Nations declared this Day as Nelson Mandela Day to honour the service and legacy of this great philanthropist who dismantled apartheid and advocated freedom, peace, tolerance and equality. He had to suffer 27 long years of imprisonment, but nothing could deter his spirit or service. He received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1993 and became the First Black President of South Africa in 1994. Mandela envisioned a unified society free of oppression and poverty. The theme of 2024 Nelson Mandela International Day was 'Combating poverty and inequality is in our hands'. The Day is also known as "67 minutes Mandela Day", thereby urging people across the world to spend 67 minutes doing something good to people (one minute for each year of Nelson Mandela's service towards the world to end racial discrimination, poverty and inequality). The Headmistress of the School Dr Ivy Sarkar said "With this universal message in mind, today the Interact Club of our school devoted 67 minutes and distributed 300 grams of Biscuit Packets to each of 67 children from the slums. Class 11 students volunteered this service today, by turn, during their free periods". Such community activities in school curriculum instill values of social responsibility among students.

### ***Distribution of Biscuits on Nelson Mandela Day***

Another initiative undertaken by the students of SGHS was to spread awareness amongst the local people about Dengue Prevention. The objective of this initiative was to help the impoverished locals by distributing mosquito-nets, the fund for which was donated by Smt. Sujata Banerjee on the eve of her superannuation. This assignment was undertaken under the supervision of Dr. Ivy Sarkar, the head of *Mosquito nets distribution* the institution. Mobilization meetings and surveys were carried out in the nearby slum area prior to the distribution of the long-lasting mosquito nets. This was not just a regular charity work done by the school but it planted the idea of social conscience amongst the students through these voluntary efforts which can benefit the locals by so many means. Post mosquito net distribution follow up visits have started showing signs of increased net use among the community members.

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Inspired by the activities of the school, Tiasa Mondal, a student of class XII donated her entire savings for the last five years amounting to Rs 9000/- to the school for Community Programmes. Tiasa appeared for her HS examination in 2024 and she expressed that she felt the pangs and misery of the underprivileged during the pandemic. Tiasa Mondal, the school captain in 2023 made a huge impact on other students by such a benevolent move. **Ahana Das**, an MP candidate of the school felt so inspired that she bought a blanket for her housemaid and books and stationery for the two grandchildren of her maid entirely from her savings. It is obvious that a chain of good and benevolent deeds has started in SGHS and a sense of social responsibility is evident among the students. The school involved the Street children and the children from the slum areas on the children's Day program of the school. The aim of the school was to spread love and connectedness and to be a ray of radiant, unadulterated happiness to those little children and celebrate the occasion together. "Each child is a unique blessing" -keeping this saying in mind, the students of SGHS organized a *SGHS' students celebrating Children's Day with street children* fun-filled children's day taking together the impoverished children and trying to fill this special day in their lives with memorable events like quiz competitions, joyful games and cultural programme. The Guide Teacher arranged for a Cake and the cake cutting ceremony by the little children along with the students of the school, at the onset of the programme set the ball of festivity rolling. Satabhisha Das of IX A briefed the tiny tots from the nearby slums about the significance of the day and it was followed by a round of quiz based on Jawaharlal Nehru and Children's Day, made the day remarkable for the school. Various activities, fun games, and cultural competitions were arranged and many prizes were away to inspire the little hearts. Around 30 children were given a gift packet of learning materials and a food packet each. The Children's Day programme by Serampore Girls' High School was marked with great resplendence and fiesta.



In recent years the school join hands with rotary club of Calcutta with a view to serve the community at large. The students engaged themselves in “Swachhata Abhijan”, cleanliness of Ganga and also volunteered in the wheelchair distribution program for the children with *Wheelchair distribution program* special needs. Serampore Girls’ High School undertook several community programmes and drives and participated in various rallies to spread social awareness on different issues.

### ***Swachhata Abhijan and Cleaning of Ganga Ghats***

Keeping the words of Gandhiji in mind- “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others”, students of class xi participated in several social projects like Water Sustainability, Bio- Diversity and Waste Management conducted by Wipro Earthian Sustainable Programme under CEE. The school has been awarded State and National Level awards.

The school works with the community, through the community and for the community. The school conducts Street Drama on various social issues as street drama is a powerful medium to spread social awareness.

The Students of Serampore Girls' High School also surveyed local areas to understand problems related to water availability, interviewed many family members, arranged talks with the municipality chairman and concerned authorities to explore possibilities of rainwater harvesting in different houses to *Muddy water* establish water sustainability in the area.

### ***Students of Serampore Girls in the Water Treatment Plant***

The students of the school guided by teachers endeavoured to solve the muddy water problem in the locality by actively participating with the community members. The students also visited the Water Treatment Plant located at Serampore, interviewed the officer-in-charge of the Plant and the Water Treatment officer, talked to various councilors to find out the causes of such muddy water problems and sought to find out the remedial measures and solutions for the same.

With a view to establish family economic resilience and help empower students by stabilizing their family’s financial condition the school extended financial assistance to the needy parents and students from the fund donated by late Lina Ghosh and late Shipra Bose. The school authority hopes to continue with this practice even in the coming days.

### ***Extending financial support to the needy parent for her ward's education***

In the school's mission to embark on a journey for creating healthy collaborative engagement of the community, the guardians are felicitated by the school for their different achievements. Proshun Moulik and Mousumi Moulik, the parents of Srija Moulik were felicitated for their social services during the Pandemic. Abhrendu Ghosh, father of Anushka Ghosh was felicitated for his outstanding achievement in sports. Palash Baran Dey, father of Paulomi Dey was felicitated for his outstanding contribution in the department of Central Bureau of Investigation. Sumanta Karmi,

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father of Sayantika Karimi received appreciation from school for assisting the school in social media Management. Dona Bhattacharya, mother of Aaratrika Chakraborty, was awarded by School for her creative pursuits. Such awards can motivate students to work harder and strive for excellence, knowing that their parents' efforts are valued and recognized. Awards can lead to increased parental engagement in school activities, events, and decision-making processes. Awarding parents have helped strengthen the bond between families and schools, leading to a more supportive and collaborative learning environment.

Serampore Girls' High School has been adopting a leading role in introducing any state initiative for the benefit of the community. The school has been pioneering many pilot projects of the State be it in the field of "Kanyashree" Scheme or successful implementation of Holistic Progress Report Cards in the State of West Bengal.

Our School is committed to work and know about the community, work with the community and work for the community. In an endeavour to study the role of community in the Evolution of our school with a glorious heritage of nearly 150 years, the school has started a self-financed project to trace the development of the school since 1879.

The Managing committee has adopted resolution to this effect and four teachers along with the Headmistress of the school Dr Ivy Sarkar, who is the Project Head too have dedicatedly engaged themselves in this historical research. The Education Dept of West Bengal has also been intimated vide written communication. This research will focus on the evolution of our school since its inception, the nomenclature at different times, socio-economic condition, Danish and French influence, conditions and attitude about women education, condition of schooling system in the pre- independence and post-independence period. As primary source we have many official documents, *Unearthing facts from old official documents*.

*Our team member interviewing Bela Sanyal (92) questionnaire.* Many interesting facts have already been unearthed and it also throws a floodlight on the immense role of the then community in shaping the school.

Notice books to students and teachers, School Managing Committee Meeting Resolution Registers etc. and as Secondary sources we are collecting data from aged ex-students and ex- teachers through standardized School community partnership model of the school has been successfully leveraging the resources and activities of the community partners. Educated parent community is coming forward and extending their supportive hand to the school to bring out the best from the students. Parents are seen to come forward to give special coaching classes to the students of the school.

## **Conclusion**

Community programs and community support are essential for schools, offering numerous benefits that enhance the educational experience. Here are some key usefulness of community programs and community support for schools:

## **Benefits for Students**

1. Increased resources: Community programs provide additional resources, such as
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tutoring, mentorship, and extracurricular activities, that supplement school offerings.

2. Real-world learning: Community partnerships offer opportunities for hands-on learning, internships, and job shadowing, preparing students for the workforce.
3. Social-emotional support: Community programs provide emotional support, counseling, and mental health services, promoting students' well-being and resilience.

### **Benefits for Schools**

1. Enhanced reputation: Community programs and partnerships enhance a school's reputation, demonstrating its commitment to community engagement and student success.
2. Increased funding: Community partnerships can attract funding, grants, and donations, supporting school initiatives and programs.
3. Improved teacher morale: Community support and recognition can boost teacher morale, motivation, and job satisfaction.

### **Benefits for Communities**

1. Economic growth: Community programs and partnerships can contribute to local economic growth, as schools and businesses collaborate to develop a skilled workforce.
2. Social cohesion: Community programs foster social connections, promoting a sense of community and social responsibility among residents.
3. Improved quality of life: Community programs and partnerships can improve the overall quality of life for community members, providing access to resources, services, and opportunities.

By fostering community programs and support, schools can create a collaborative environment that benefits students, teachers, and the broader community.

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