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Viewpoint

The journey has just begun

By Philip T. West and Robert Shoop

Educational public relations owes its origin to the marketplace, where free and liberal exchanges of information are customary among a diverse citizenry. This is essential to the democratic way of life. Exemplifying this same citizenry, the schools' publics, to whom the schools belong, have both a right and a responsibility to know what is happening in them. Without a formalized public relations program, however, information emanating from the schools is often disparate, seldom enlightening, and occasionally elusive.

Unfortunately, schools, in their zeal to educate youngsters sometimes, quite unintentionally, overlook the importance of sharing with their publics the magnitude of their task. In turn, an uninformed and non-understanding public is rarely supportive of its schools.

Today, the schools are besieged by problems, among them taxpayer revolts, dwindling tax dollars, desegregation and busing, and declining enrollments and test scores. All of them demand by necessity a close relationship between the schools and their various publics to resolve.

While educational public relations may not be a panacea for the ills of the schools, it is surely a significant step in the right direction. A true adversary of hucksterism

or hype, educational public relations is an honest, intelligent, and organized way of not only informing but also involving the schools' publics in educational matters that concern them—opportunities and problems. It is listening as well as telling, with the promise that responsible feedback will bring about desired change and, in so doing, better meet the needs, interests and aspirations of a given community. It is, also, including in this two-way communication process not only parents but every member of the community, each of whom is encouraged, by virtue of this participatory process, to partake fully of services offered by the schools. In this sense, educational public relations, like its ally community education, is a strong advocate of the notion of education as lifelong learning.

Too, educational public relations is conducive to effective administrative-staff-student relationships. Open lines of communication enhance both learning and morale. In-service for administrators and staff in the importance of public relations heightens their awareness and appreciation of the contribution each member of the school family is able to make in promoting the success of the educational enterprise.

In an era characterized by choice, consumerism, and competition for the taxpayer's dollar, educational public relations is quick to point out the availability and kinds of educational benefits and services a community may derive from its schools. Through the media, press, television, and radio, an array of school publications, and a network of satisfied clients, educational public relations tells the school story often and well.

Finally, with the expansion and increased sophistication of educational public relations has evolved a new and dynamic role for the educational public relations specialist. Standing on the shoulders of the school publicist of a yesteryear, this person, as a full-fledged member of an administrative team, council, or cabinet, is called upon to perform a long and impressive list of duties and to share in the decision-making process. And the future promises not fewer but more demanding roles and responsibilities for the educational public relations specialist, whose forte, communication, permeates every facet of life.

Educational public relations has traveled a long way since its inception. However, measured by the distance it may be expected yet to go, the journey has only just begun. All school systems, large and small—rural, suburban, and urban—need some kind of formalized public relations program and a full or part-time person or staff to carry it out properly. And all colleges and universities and administrator and teacher associations, through coursework, seminars, and conferences, must address this nationwide need. Until these needs are recognized and acknowledged, educational public relations will not have completed its journey.

School public relations has a vital role to play

Communicating needs: School finance campaigns

By Beverly Gifford

Public schools are in a period of transition. Part of the cause is a breakdown of public confidence in all governmental institutions—a general mood of pessimism throughout America toward anything that smacks of bureaucracy.

Another part stems from an aging public with fewer children in the public schools, together with a declining birthrate that is producing a glut of boarded-up school buildings with "For Rent" and "For Sale" signs. The result is a growing number of people who do not see themselves as having a vested interest in the schools.

Spiraling inflation, high taxes, and fewer educational dollars have also contributed to the instability of the public schools. The dwindling dollar has, in turn, precipitated a considerable demand for educator accountability, thereby exacerbating the original confidence dilemma.

In such a context school public relations has a vital role to play. Nowhere is this more true than in those states where voters have direct control over school budgets. Voters in 22 states must approve tax levies for schools. In five states the school budget comes up for a vote every year. These are the states where the taxpayer revolt against schools reached its peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

To gain badly needed support, an increasing number of school districts are using industry-tested marketing strategies in their budget and finance campaigns. This interest in marketing may be seen in a booklet issued by the

Macomb Intermediate School District in Mount Clemens, Michigan, a service organization offering assistance to 21 school districts. In a 10-step consumer approach the booklet stresses, among other things, user identification, background, importance, opinions, and barriers.¹

Using a similar approach, the Columbus (Ohio) Public School District has followed a long-range, systematic process to identify and communicate school needs. In the fall of 1978, a status report titled "Choices for the 80's" was sent to every household in the district. This status report attempted to outline every issue facing the schools that had been expressed by different segments of the community.

Reactions to the status report were secured through seven community meetings held in senior high schools, a printed response form in the status report, and telephone calls and letters. A total of 1,600 citizens participated in the seven community meetings.

Phase II of the "Choices for the 80's" project featured distribution of 8,000 copies of a workbook to school and community leaders. The workbook included proposed solutions to issues, problems, or concerns in 26 areas of school operation. Each problem had a series of alternative solutions or "Choices," along with cost data so that participants could see how their "Choices" affected the amount of additional millage needed.

It became a kind of educational game as people ranked their choices and tallied the cost of their highest priorities. For example, the choices in the area of reading ranged from "A"—eliminating all 86 reading teachers at an annual savings of \$1.7 million or .55 mills—up to Choice "C"—adding 87 reading teachers at an additional cost of \$3.3 million annually or an increase of 1.07 mills.

Over 4,000 people completed the workbooks. Phase III of "Choices for the 80's" was the compilation of all the responses into an 8.3 mill levy package which was placed before the voters in a special election in March 1979. That levy, like three previous attempts, failed, but the momentum of the communication effort has been kept alive.

An analysis of voter attitudes about the Columbus Public Schools reveals three important clues to levy failures: (1) People who oppose levies tend to feel that schools are not adequately addressing traditional values and basic skills instruction. (2) Levy opponents tend to assume that schools would actually be improved by the defeat of levies, since that would force reduction of waste. (3) More than 70% of the voters do not have children in the public schools. They base their opinions on national media reports, primarily negative, about trends in education.²

The irony of the existence of these attitudes is that most school districts are doing a better job than ever before. The Columbus district has shown gains in tests scores in elementary math and reading, has essentially escaped the kinds of discipline problems faced by many urban school systems, and has managed the district back to a position of solvency through school closings, program cuts, and staff reductions totaling \$28 million.

It is clear that school districts need to do a better job of communicating, not only with that segment of the public which controls the levers in the voting booth, but with many other important publics.

Columbus Superintendent Joseph L. Davis has taken a series of steps to deal with public lack of understanding, one of which was a "See For Yourself" project to involve non-parents of the community. His thinking was that if nearly three-fourths of the voting public had no direct con-

Beverly Gifford is special assistant to the superintendent, Columbus Public Schools, Columbus, Ohio.

tact with the Columbus schools, there was no better way to change their negative impressions than to get them inside the schools to see for themselves. Davis set a goal for principals to recruit 50,000 non-parent visitors during the 1980-1981 school year.

Principals and school staff members have found hundreds of ways to bring non-parents into their buildings. For example:

- A health clinic was set up in an empty classroom for conducting blood pressure checks, glaucoma tests, etc. While there, every visitor got a guided tour or visited a classroom.

- Real estate companies brought their agents to school-sponsored breakfasts and tours of the buildings.

- A neighborhood Flea Market was staged in one school gym. The school sold tablets to the sellers and filled the gym several times with buyers.

- Grandparents' Days

- Special Programs for Senior Citizens

One of the best opportunities came on election day. With many precinct polling places located in school buildings, voting booths were moved into libraries. In the heart of the building, Student council members were on hand to offer tours. Display booths were set up and refreshments were offered by PTA members. Thousands of voters took time to look around, to see for themselves.

A log book was kept at each school for visitors to sign. That gave staff members a mailing list for follow-up contacts and names to add to school newsletter mailing lists.

Next, Davis took advantage of the services of Citizens Research, Incorporated—an independent governmental watchdog group—to deal with the district's credibility problems in the area of budgeting and money management. Findings by CRI study teams—that the schools were very well managed, that they had cut as much as was possible, and that there were no surplus funds—were widely publicized.

Perhaps the most frequently held misconception about school money management relates to declining enrollment. The one question heard most often—from politicians, business leaders and taxpayers: "If you have fewer pupils to educate and fewer teachers to pay and less buildings to operate, why do you need more money?" This is a question that absolutely must be addressed.

At the same time that immediate steps were being taken to communicate school needs, Davis persuaded the local Chamber of Commerce to convene a team of public relations experts from the private sector to develop a long-range communications plan for the Columbus schools. Working with staff members from the district's communications department, the team proposed a three-year plan that placed heavy emphasis on internal communications.

The three-year communications plan established four goals and corresponding objectives for each. In summary form the plan is as follows:

GOAL 1: To improve employee morale and attitudes about working for the Columbus Public Schools.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess employee attitudes and opinions of their work climate.
2. To increase the awareness of the importance of communications planning to the organization.
3. To develop a communications plan for each building and unit.

4. To provide district-level help for building and unit staff members to carry out their plans.
5. To improve the interpersonal management skills of principals and supervisors.
6. To make staff more knowledgeable about existing policies and practices as well as current developments and future plans.
7. To provide district-level channels for obtaining ideas, comments, and criticisms.

GOAL 2: To strengthen student and parent support of the schools.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the information needs of parents.
2. To incorporate into the building or unit communication plan programs for improving student morale and school pride.
3. To incorporate into the building or unit communication plan programs for improving communications between the school and parents.
4. To develop special strategies for communicating with discontinuous areas. (The district is operating under a court-ordered desegregation plan.)
5. To provide district-level help for building and unit staff members to carry out their plans.
6. To expand volunteerism by parents.
7. To develop district-level channels for communicating existing programs and policies to parents, as well as news about the district.
8. To provide district-level channels for obtaining accurate parent feedback.

GOAL 3: To strengthen the support of schools by business, civic, legislative, labor and religious groups.

OBJECTIVES

1. To maintain the existing methods and develop new ones for gaining business and labor involvement in vocational education programs.
2. To increase the involvement of businesses in the programs of individual school buildings or specific programs.
3. To develop channels for communicating to organizations information about existing policies and practices, as well as current developments and future plans.
4. To seek advice and periodic reviews of the district's financial and management practices by independent, business-oriented agencies.
5. To work with city, county, and state officials to produce the most accurate financial facts possible.

GOAL 4: To strengthen general public support of the schools.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess community needs and concerns.
2. To develop district- and building-level marketing strategies and projects promoting the Columbus Public Schools, with special emphasis on the district's success in teaching reading, writing and mathematics.
3. To develop programs to make non-parents more informed about the schools.

4. To develop methods of keeping community opinion leaders accurately informed.
5. To establish district-level channels for gaining input from the general public.
6. To emphasize adult education.
7. To seek ways of gaining state and national recognition for the Columbus Public Schools.
8. To expand volunteerism by non-parents.

If school finance campaigns are to succeed, they must be integrated with a carefully planned, on-going communication effort. People want hard evidence that schools are cutting back—just as individuals are being forced to do in their household budgets. Once people are

convinced that schools are doing a good job as stewards of their hard-earned tax dollars, there is growing evidence that voters are ready to support increases needed for basic programs.

Footnotes

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2. Hugh Clark, "Analysis of Voting Trends in School Levies" (Columbus, Ohio: Decision Research Corporation, 1978), p. 66.

Do a good job and make
sure people know about it

Educational public relations: An historical perspective

By John H. Wherry

The history of educational public relations—indeed the history of any kind of public relations—has its roots in surprisingly recent times as a formal profession. But the fact is that the public relations function has been carried out by governments and other social institutions since the earliest days of civilization.

Let's Define Our Terms

Edward L. Bernays, one of the early pioneers in the public relations profession, wrote the first book on the subject, **Crystallizing Public Opinion**, published in 1923. In that book Bernays, in describing the function of professional public relations and its practitioner, the Counsel on Public Relations, points out that good public relations depends on socially responsible action based on the realization that the public and private interest coincides. That good public relations depends not only on words, but also on action deserving public support and education of the public to acquaint it with such action is made abundantly clear by him.¹

Simply stated, public relations is doing a good job and making sure that people know about it.

Public Relations in Early Civilizations

While the practice of professional public relations

John H. Wherry is executive director of the National School Public Relations Association.

dates only from the early 1920s, it is clear that the work of adjustment and persuasion has been going on for many centuries as organizations and individuals have worked to develop the public support necessary in order to function.

In his 1952 book, **Public Relations**, Bernays interprets the ancient concept of the divinity of kings as a public relations move, claiming that the Pharaoh of Egypt, the monarch of Babylonia, and the King of Kings of Persia were called gods so that they might maintain their power through the force of acceptance of religious beliefs in their strength. Similarly, the Greek Olympic games served a public relations purpose by developing a national spirit of unity among the Greeks as protection against the Barbarians.²

Scott Cutlip and Alan Center in the 1964 edition of their book **Effective Public Relations** point to the Latin **vox populi vox Dei**—"the voice of the people is the voice of God"—as an example that the importance of public opinion was well established even during Roman times.³

Little is known about the growth of public relations during the Dark Ages, but it was most likely stifled like everything else. Indicating that public relations did not re-emerge until the Renaissance of the 15th century, Bernays says:

Above all the Renaissance freed the human mind to think for itself, to investigate and to persuade. These developments required and brought about free discussion. In turn, free discussion brought about a reliance of people and movements on new public understanding and relationships.⁴

Renaissance thinkers such as Machiavelli recognized public opinion as an important force. Machiavelli's essay, **The Prince**, might actually be thought of as a public relations textbook to show rulers how to mold public opinion.

About the same time the church also discovered that public opinion was important and could be modified, as may be witnessed by the emergence of the term propaganda and the establishment of a committee for the propagation of the faith during the Counter Reformation. Later, in 1792, the first propaganda ministry in history was formed in France by the National Assembly to flood France with propaganda and drum up support for the Revolution. Napoleon was adept at public relations, using bulletins, proclamations, parades, and censorship to influence the public.⁵

Authors agree that public relations played an important part in American life from the earliest times. The fact that the colonies had access to printing presses made public relations activities an important part of the clashes between the colonists and British authorities. However, the epitome of such activities is, perhaps, best viewed within the context of the Declaration of Independence, where Thomas Jefferson says:

When forced, therefore, to resort to arms for redress, **an appeal to the tribunal of the world was deemed proper for our justification.** This was the object of the Declaration of Independence not to find out new principles or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but also to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves and the independent stand we

are compelled to take neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion.⁶ (Emphasis added.)

Later in our history, the efforts of Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison in bringing about national acceptance of the Constitution are described as an extraordinary public relations job by Cutlip and Center, in their 1964 volume, **Effective Public Relations**.⁷

Gradually through the political campaign methods of the 1800s, the press agency of show business, and the "public be damned" era of the early 1900s came the beginnings of a new profession—public relations counsel. Probably among the first to have a public relations department was the Westinghouse Company. This department was used to promote and defend its alternating current system of electricity in competition with the direct current system of the Edison Electric Company.⁸

Cutlip and Center trace the activities of the public relations counsel from the early 1900s to the present day through five general periods of development.

1. 1900-1917—The era of muckraking journalism, which was countered by defensive publicity.
2. 1917-1919—World War I with its great promotion of war bonds.
3. 1919-1933—The application of promotional activities learned during the War to political campaigns and charitable organizations.
4. 1933-45—activities generated by the Depression and World War II.
5. 1945-present—A time of tremendous expansion of public relations, especially in business.⁹

Need for Educational Public Relations

Any educator today can quickly point out the beating the institution of public education has taken from the media, from influential leaders, and from the general public about the perceived poor job of education being carried out today. In recent months **Newsweek** ran a series of three issues featuring a series "Why Public Schools Are Flunking."¹⁰ In April 1981 **The New Republic** published eight articles in a single week about education stating that, "We are doing so because the topic, American Education, is so important and because American education, particularly public education, is in such a bad state."¹¹ To these can be added many other examples of attacks by the TV networks, prominent national newspapers, and local newspapers.

Diane Ravitch, in the above cited issue of **The New Republic**, quotes educational philosopher Boyd Bode from another issue of this publication as saying:

To the casual observer, American Education, is a confusing and not altogether edifying spectacle. It is productive of endless fads and panaceas; it is pretentiously scientific, and at the same time pathetically conventional; it is scornful of the past, yet painfully inarticulate when it speaks of the future.¹²

Typical, we might say, of Bode's criticism. But the fascinating fact is that Ravitch quotes Boyd from a 1930 issue of **The New Republic**. Looking over that long span of

time, Ravitch comments, "Since then, American schools have lurched from crisis to crisis and their internal confusion and aimlessness remains intact."¹³ It is not only clear that educational public relations is desperately needed today, but also that the need is one of long standing.

The Development of Educational Public Relations

Exact records do not exist, but it is possible to trace the relatively slow development of educational public relations to the present day from its earliest beginnings, just a few years after Bernays first coined the term "public relations counsel" in his 1923 book, **Crystallizing Public Opinion**.¹⁴

In the same year, 1923, Harland C. Hines and Robinson G. Jones published a book called **Public School Publicity**.¹⁵ In 1927 Arthur B. Moehlman published **Public School Relations**.¹⁶ Another work, **Public Relations for The Public Schools** was published by J. Flint Waller in 1933.¹⁷ While it was clear, then, that there was some activity in the field of educational public relations, progress was slow.

In 1938 Moehlman revised and expanded his 1927 **Public School Relations** into a new volume called **Social Interpretation**. Looking back at his earlier book and the slow early progress, Moehlman says:

In 1927 the public schools were still riding the prosperity wave. Money came easily and the need for institutional interpretation appeared to be just another academic idea. Whenever a need became urgent, an emotional high pressure campaign, following both the best and worst practices of the business world, quickly brought the needed authority for much unwise borrowing and for desirable increases in teachers' salaries.¹⁸

The National School Public Relations Association traces its origin to July 4, 1935, when a handful of specialists in school public relations attending the annual convention of the National Education Association in Denver decided to create an organization of their own. During the 1935-36 school year, the new organization, known tentatively as **The National Association for Educational Publicity**, enrolled 23 members. Reflecting the influence of the fledgling public relations profession, the name of the organization was changed in 1936 to the **School Public Relations Association**. Records indicate that the organization grew slowly for a decade.

In 1945 the Association published its first handbook. Entitled **Today's Techniques**, it featured successful practices in school public relations throughout the nation.¹⁹ In 1950 the Association became a full fledged department of the National Education Association, and its name was changed to the **National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)**. At that time, perhaps 200-300 school public relations practitioners could be identified throughout the nation.

To serve the growing numbers of practitioners and even wider spreading interest among teachers and administrators, the Association began publishing newsletters, handbooks, and special reports on public relations techniques and timely topics in educational news.

In the mid-1950s NSPRA began its series of annual national seminars, attracting 75 leaders in school PR for the first seminar in New York City in 1954. By 1969 NSPRA membership included 664 individual members, and more

activities and publications were developed to serve the growing demands from members and other educators.

In 1970 NSPRA adopted a Code of Ethics for Educational Public Relations and, shortly thereafter, Standards for Public Relations Programs and for Public Relations Professionals.

At the present time, NSPRA membership includes approximately 1,500 individual members, a majority of whom are full-time school public relations practitioners in the nation's elementary and secondary schools. A good guess would be that there are between 2500-3000 full- or part-time school PR practitioners altogether in the United States.

In the entire field of public relations an estimated 30,000-50,000 people are currently employed in this country. The field of public relations, including educational public relations, could be described as entering early adolescence with all the identity problems that brings.

In 1923 Bernays addressed this problem, when he said:

There is not even any one name by which the new profession is characterized by others. To some the term public relations counsel is known by the term 'propagandist'. Others still call him press agent or publicity man. . . . Many organizations simply do not bother about an individual name and assign to an existing officer the duties of the public relations counsel. One bank's vice president is its recognized public relations counsel. Some dismiss the subject or condemn the entire profession generally and all its members individually.²⁰

In 1979, while speaking to participants at NSPRA's national seminar in Portland, Oregon, he addressed it again:

Mr. Wherry tells me you are called by 11 different terms . . . you are directors of communications, directors of public information, directors of school community relations, special projects coordinators, special assistants to the superintendent, public affairs directors, publications administrators, administrative assistants, communication editors, information specialists, and occasionally as directors of public relations.²¹

Clearly confusion about the role persists even to the present day.

Increased Public Relations Professionalism

For some years now the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) has operated an accreditation program and now requires that all active PRSA members pass the accrediting examinations. In 1976 NSPRA began a voluntary accreditation program in an effort to raise the status of its members in the very credential conscious world of education. Recently a special Task Force on The Status and Role of Public Relations published its report and recommendations sponsored by 11 major public relations associations after a year's study. This report will serve as the basis for continued discussion and development as the entire public relations profession increases its sophistication.

Present Observations

It is clear that the profession of school public

relations is alive and well today. NSPRA membership enjoys a steady growth. Demand for information about public relations techniques is high. Few school public relations positions are facing the budget axe today even though it was common practice in the 1960s to eliminate the entire public relations department in a time of financial crisis.

More and more school districts as well as community colleges and institutions of higher education are coming to understand that just as they retain legal counsel to represent the agency in a court of law, so must they also employ public relations counsel to represent them in the larger and much more influential court of public opinion. It is clear that the public will no longer tolerate even any hints that its educational leaders may be refusing to provide pertinent educational information in the guise of "saving taxpayers money." Survey after survey indicates that the public will willingly support educational expenditures to keep reasonably informed about schools.

Increasingly during the past several years NSPRA has come to play a more central role in coordinating the public relations activities of national education associations. The Educational Leaders Consortium and the Forum of Educational Organization Leaders, both national groups including most major education associations, have worked cooperatively with NSPRA in the development of plans for building public confidence—activities ranging from coordinated individual efforts by the involved groups to the development of public service announcements for radio and TV broadcast during the National Football League games. Current NSPRA activities include work toward reorganization of a national level Citizens Committee for Public Education in America and a parallel effort to convene interested education groups several times each year to coordinate efforts in the area of building public confidence in education and to improve public relations techniques.

The View From Here into the Future

Educational public relations is here to stay. Its role has never been more important in helping the public understand the problems, needs, and accomplishments of its educational system. The professionalism of school public relations practitioners is increasing rapidly even as the number of practitioners steadily increases.

Public relations existed from the earliest days of society and it flourishes today. Rapid changes in the field may be expected in the next few years as significant new directions for public education are considered by society and as rapid technological changes vastly alter our means of communicating with one another. There will always be the need for schools to work for the best interests of society and to use the tools of communications and persuasion to build public support . . . to do a good job and to make sure people know about it.

Footnotes

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3. Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, *Effective Public Relations*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 17.
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**If nobody knows except
parents there won't be
public support**

The role of the educational public relations director

By Joanie L. Flatt

Do good, and tell about it. That's what public schools in America have to do. It's the answer to many of education's woes. And there is no one better qualified to help us "do good and tell about it" than the public relations professional.

Increasing numbers of educators are learning what business took an equally long time admitting—public relations must be an integral part of the management team in all our institutions if we are to survive, let alone succeed, in public education as we know it today.

The public no longer blindly follows its institutions. Intimate knowledge of the workings of public schools is demanded by those whose tax dollars support education. And the public also demands accountability. "What are you doing with my tax dollars, and how well are you doing it?" taxpayers want to know.

A professional public relations director can work with a school district, state department of education, or education association to meet the public's information needs. It's the role of public relations to anticipate what the public wants from its institutions and then advise

management of appropriate steps to take in order to solicit public support and public involvement.

At a time when public confidence in education remains at a low ebb, critics are pounding on the school-house doors, tuition tax credits and vouchers loom on the horizon, and tax cutting proponents are threatening the very lifeblood of education, the public relations director must be recruited as part of the educational management team.

Public relations—does that mean we need someone who used to be the neighborhood weekly newspaper reporter? Someone who can sit in a former closet, outfitted with a telephone and a typewriter, pounding the keys for hours each day, churning out news releases about the district? Or perhaps the secretary who had such a flair for writing and a nice voice on the telephone. Should we make her the public relations director? She can write the newsletter for us (we know she's good at grammar and punctuation) and calm irate telephone callers with her soothing voice.

Is that what we mean by a public relations director? Let's hope not. What education needs today is trained public relations professionals, as skilled in their area of specialization as superintendents or business managers are in their roles.

Public relations is a management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance. To do this, the public relations practitioner follows a four-step process: analyze, plan, communicate, and evaluate. The failure to include any one of these four important steps can result in failure for any comprehensive communications program.

Public relations is not a panacea. It's not a cover up. It's not the savior of education. And it can't be 100 percent successful in putting out fires.

It is a planned, systematic program of year-round communications. The use of public relations techniques can help you identify problems when they are mere smoldering coals rather than raging infernos capturing front page headlines and the lead story on the 10 o'clock news.

The Executive Board of the National School Public Relations Association recently adopted a position statement in which the role of public relations in education is clearly outlined:

The practice of public relations is essential to serving the public interest. The public relations function is responsible for developing and maintaining programs of information and involvement which enable the public to understand, support and participate in its institutions. In addition, that function includes assessing and influencing public opinion, providing feedback from the public to decision-makers and helping to shape policies and procedures in the public interest.

The person hired to manage this function is obviously a member of the cabinet, the executive council, or whatever a district may call the superintendent's management group.

In education there are only two positions in any school system which are "on call" to every segment of the community. These two positions must be concerned with every aspect of the district, including educational and support functions. The people in these positions must be

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sensitive to the wants and needs of all employee groups and all the various publics and sub-publics in the community.

These two positions are the superintendent of schools and the public relations director. And they should function together as well as the intricate, dependent parts that make up a fine Swiss watch. They must be a team. The superintendent must be able to depend on the public relations director for advice, counsel, clear thinking, and quick action. The public relations director must anticipate what the superintendent will need to know and how he or she would express the district's position on various issues.

Superintendents are often expected to be all things to all people. They're also supposed to have a touch of magic about them, enabling them to be several places at one time. The superintendent who works with a professional public relations person can be confident that the district is well-represented on those occasions when the superintendent cannot serve as spokesperson.

America's highest paid superintendent understands the importance of public relations. When Ruth Love accepted the position as superintendent in Chicago, she insisted that she be allowed to bring three of her own people with her from Oakland. One of the three was her public relations director.²

The responsibilities that fall to the public relations department require that the administrator in charge be able to wear several hats. In the course of a year, the public relations director may have to assume several roles.

MARKETING EXECUTIVE—If we're going to compete with private schools for students, and other government-supported institutions for tax dollars, we're going to have to market the public schools much as business and industry market their products and services.

ADVERTISING MANAGER—We will have to advertise our services and successes. We can no longer depend on the news media to assume total responsibility for taking the school story to the public, more than 70 percent of whom do not have children in public schools.

RESEARCH ANALYST—Where are we now? Where are we going? What does the public expect of us?

OMBUDSMAN—It's often easier for staff members and the general public to turn to someone in educational administration who is not an educator, but a professional communicator. The public relations director must be a person who can bring various factions together to work for the common goals and objectives of education.

PUBLICIST—Not the "hiya baby, hiya sweetie" type of Barnum and Bailey days. But someone who knows the best way to get the school story to the public through the print, radio, and television channels of the news media.

NEW PRODUCT CONSULTANT—Thinking of introducing a new reading program? An innovative approach to discipline problems? It's the public relations director who must work with you to introduce these new things to your various publics in order to maximize their acceptance and, hence, their effectiveness.

QUALITY CONTROL TECHNICIAN—Along with the superintendent and the rest of the cabinet, the public relations director needs to be part of the process which determines how well the system is functioning. Evaluation is the final link in the four-step process of public relations.

WRITER—It almost goes without saying that the public relations director must know how to write. That means writing in plain, simple language, not educationese. And it

means the ability to write in several different styles, including hard news style, feature writing, TV or radio news-writing, publications writing for specialized audiences, and speechwriting, to name a few.

EDITOR—As important as the ability to write is the ability to edit. Freelance writers are easy to find, but editors with sharp eyes and pencils are worth their weight in gold.

DISTRICT SPOKESPERSON—Who can speak for the superintendent if he or she is in a meeting, out of town, or busy with another assignment when an irate citizen or a reporter on deadline calls the district office? The public relations director better be prepared to assume this role.

GRAPHICS SPECIALIST—You don't need someone who is a graphic artist sitting in your public relations director's chair. But you better have someone who understands the fundamentals of graphic design if you're going to produce publications that communicate without costing you an arm and a leg.

HUMAN RELATIONS SPECIALIST—This is the role assumed by the public relations director when sitting with the PTA officers or the ringleaders of the local youth street gang as they work together to find acceptable solutions to common community problems.

SOOTHSAYER—This is more than futurism. This is the ability to see things in perspective, projecting into the future and advising the superintendent that if A, B, and C are implemented, D will surely follow.

HISTORIAN—Some office in the district needs to keep track of what goes on and organize it in a logical fashion so there will be a record for those who follow.

COMPLAINT DESK—What number is listed in the telephone book that the general public will instinctively call when they want to tell the schools they blew it? In many cities, it's listed as the public relations, community relations, or communications office. In communities where this is an established part of the district's management, you'll find that those letters regularly sent to board members and the superintendent from irate citizens will include a copy for the director of public relations.

CRISIS MANAGER—A fire erupts on the high school campus. There's a stabbing incident between two students. A little girl is molested on the way home from school. The teachers hit the picket line as they strike for higher salaries. Whose office serves as the crisis center in such incidents? Who communicates the facts to the news media, staff, parents, and general public in such a situation? Who develops an on-the-spot communications plan designed to free the principal to run the school and get things back to normal as quickly as possible while minimizing the amount of misinformation and rumors that circulate? The public relations director.

FUND RAISER—Whether it's the passage of a bond election or the raising of \$20,000 to send your high school band to the Rose Parade, someone in management has to be skilled in fund-raising and election planning techniques. School districts with a public relations professional on board have someone with this knowledge and training.

TEACHER—Most university programs that prepare teachers and administrators for their future roles do not include required training in communications or public relations. The public relations director in your school district must be responsible for training staff in these areas. The training can range from how to conduct a successful parent-teacher conference to producing school

newsletters or the public relations responsibilities of the school bus driver. The school district that truly understands the role of public relations will provide training for all new employees, detailing for these staff members their public relations responsibilities in their new jobs.

FINALLY, THE RIGHT HAND OF THE SUPERINTENDENT AND THE CONSCIENCE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM—These are roles played by all members of the superintendent's cabinet, but the public relations director has an awesome role to fulfill if he or she diligently adheres to the Code of Ethics of the National School Public Relations Association, which requires that members "be guided constantly by pursuit of the public interest through truth, accuracy, good taste and fairness."³

The job description for someone who is going to handle all these duties needs to be broad enough to allow some flexibility but specific enough to set the parameters for a comprehensive communications office. The responsibilities of the public relations director should be communicated, not just to the person filling the position, but to all members of middle and top management. They, in turn, can help tell other staff members what the public relations department is there to do.

A typical job description for a public relations director might include the following:

- Serves as information liaison between the total school system and the community at large.
- Sets annual objectives for and evaluates the district's community relations program, including budget planning for meeting these objectives.
- Serves as liaison person between the district and the news media and supervises the distribution of all news releases; arranges for news conferences as required.
- Cooperates with district administrators and other staff members, as appropriate, in publicizing and promoting performances, exhibitions, displays, dedications, or special programs sponsored by the schools.
- Provides professional public relations consulting services and assistance when requested by administrators, board of education, schools, parents, student, and staff groups.
- Provides professional assistance in the development of various publications (brochures, newsletters, information bulletins) for schools and departments.
- Prior to final publication, reviews and edits all publications that will be disseminated to the general public.
- Recommends innovative avenues for external and internal communications.
- Provides in-service training as required on various subjects relative to community or public relations.
- Solicits feedback through formal and informal means on activities, products, and purposes of the community relations program and the school district.
- Develops and maintains accurate records regarding the district's public relations program.
- Attends and reports on all pre-meetings, regular, special, and study sessions of the board of education.

- Supervises and maintains activities for the Gold Card Club for senior citizens in the school district.
- Plans and coordinates Education Week and Grandparents Week on an annual basis.
- Provides news items to appropriate administrators, thus assisting them to be well informed on various developments related to their fields.
- Supervises the writing, publishing, and distribution of the monthly community newsletter.
- Expedites responses to all inquiries and complaints received by the department from citizens, news media, and school personnel.
- Serves as the district spokesperson to the news media, including newspapers, magazines, radio, and television.
- Performs other tasks as assigned by the superintendent.

What kind of person has the qualifications to fulfill that job description? Probably not someone without training or experience in the field. Most school districts can ill afford to provide on-the-job training to someone without at least basic public relations skills.

A bachelor's degree in public relations, mass communications, or a related field is a start. But don't ignore those experienced public relations people who may not have a degree in one of these areas.

Experience or training in planning, implementing, evaluating, budgeting, and personnel management are essential. In a large school system, it takes more than one person to run the public relations department. Even in a small district, the public relations director will need a fulltime secretary to help with the workload.

The National School Public Relations Association and the Public Relations Society of America both have accreditation programs which attest to the professional qualifications of those who successfully pass the exams. In both associations the failure rate each year for those seeking accreditation runs between 40 percent and 50 percent. Someone who has earned accreditation must successfully complete a lengthy written exam, as well as an oral exam conducted by accredited colleagues.

"Plastics" might have been the wave of the future for Graduate Dustin Hoffman. But public relations is the key to the future of public education in America. No matter how well our students are doing, if nobody but parents, representing less than 30 percent of the households, knows about it, we will not have the public support we need to survive. So do good. Then tell everyone you can about it, through a planned, on-going program of public relations in your schools.

Footnotes

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2. Interview with Dr. Ruth Love, Superintendent, Chicago Public Schools. American Association of School Administrator's Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, February 15, 1981.
3. National School Public Relations Association. **1980-1981 NSPRA Membership Directory**, Arlington, Virginia, p. 51.

Administrators realize much effort must focus on face-to-face communication

Establishing a PR program

By Don Bagin

Which of the following are important in a school district's public relations program:

- a. the way secretaries answer phones
- b. signs that greet visitors in buildings
- c. effective parent-teacher conferences
- d. memos from principals
- e. newsletters
- f. news releases
- g. surveys to determine how staff and community members feel about the schools
- h. pats on the back for staff and students who do a good job
- i. none of the above
- j. e and f only
- k. all of the above

Not too many years ago many school officials would have chosen "j." Administrators and board members often equated public relations efforts with getting good school news in the newspaper and publishing a district newsletter for students' parents.

But much has changed for the better in recognizing what's important in establishing an effective public relations program. Many administrators are realizing that much of the public relations effort must focus on face-to-face communication rather than the printed word. Therefore, the correct answer is "k," all of the above.

Many school officials are now effectively using ideas listed in the question above. Some of the ideas are working well; others probably aren't. The first step in establishing an effective public relations program is:

1. Determine which public relations efforts are working now and encourage more staff members to implement those ideas. This can be done in a variety of ways.

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One practical, low cost technique was developed by the National School Public Relations Association. Called the building level workshop, this program involves everyone working in a school building. The staff meets for anywhere from 90 minutes to three hours and identifies the various school audiences. In groups of four to six, staff members select an audience: students, colleagues, parents, taxpayers without children in school, etc. They, then, list as many ways as practical to communicate effectively with their chosen audience.

Each table leader reports the group's best ideas to the entire staff. After the meeting the ideas are typed and reproduced for all who attended the meeting. This approach involves all staff in suggesting ways they can do a better job of public relations. It clearly points out that the responsibility belongs to everyone and that public relations is, indeed, significantly more than a series of news releases and newsletters.

2. Make a commitment at the top to implement a solid public relations program. Too frequently top level administrators fail to commit time and resources to public relations. They, on the other hand, point to problems that occur because of a poor or almost non-existent public relations program. In most instances this lack of commitment occurs because administrators have had very little practical training in school public relations. As a result many gloss over such responsibilities. Yet if the leadership does not clearly communicate to its staff that public relations is a priority, the staff can be hardly expected to treat it as one.

Here are some specific first steps a school leader can take to establish an on-going public relations program.

a. Have a written board policy adopted to communicate that public relations efforts will be an integral part of the district's operation. Sample policies can be obtained from the National School Public Relations Association, the National School Boards Association, or from your state school board association. Here is one you might consider. It comes from an article on school board public relations policies.

A Sample Policy

To illustrate how the recommended statements might be used by officials in a school district in the development of a PR policy, the following model has been constructed.

The Board of Education of the Oakpark Public School System believes that the public must have confidence in its schools and that mutual trust between community and school is essential. Community attitudes and expectations are, therefore, important for boards and administrators to know, for support is achieved through effective two-way communication systems between school and community. Citizen participation imparts direction and meaning to the school program and keeping the press (media) informed enhances school-community relations, as an informed staff is a productive one. An open school climate is conducive to effective administrative, staff, student and parent relationships, and open board meetings further enhance good school-press (media) relations.

Given these values, the Oakpark Board sets the following goals to be achieved:

1. To establish a two-way communication system between the school and its various publics (a) to interpret board and administrative action, (b) to eliminate rumor and misunderstanding, and (c) to develop a good working relationship with the media;
2. To disseminate information to certificated and noncertificated personnel;
3. To provide in-service in school public relations to teachers, administrators and board members;
4. To interpret the school's curriculum, along with its budget, to the school's publics; and
5. To report student achievement to parents and the public.

To accomplish these goals, the Oakpark School Board authorizes the employment of a full-time school public relations director, whose responsibility is to see that the school district's public relations activities are carried out by both the central office and individual schools, in which school principals are charged with the responsibility of carrying out their own PR activities with the aid of the school public relations director.

To assist the school public relations director, a school public relations committee will be created by the board. This committee will consist of board members, administrators, staff, students and parents. This committee, under the direction of the school public relations director, will develop strategies to attain district-wide school public relations goals and specific procedures for an ongoing assessment of the school district's public relations program. The school public relations director reports directly to the superintendent of schools.¹

b. Insist that all administrators and supervisors be evaluated yearly on their public relations undertakings. If each management person is expected to establish goals and objectives, insist that an area of public relations be included as one of the goals. This will communicate that the district is getting serious about public relations.

c. Devote at least five minutes to public relations at every cabinet or staff meeting. Ask a different administrator to share a five-minute report on a public relations idea that's working. A one-page handout explaining the idea should be distributed to all who attend. This lets all know that public relations is a continuing effort.

d. Lead by example. Keep employees informed; praise those who do something special; use language that's free of jargon and generally let people know that this is a district that is doing a good job and is getting better. If it's not, all the public relations efforts in the world won't help.

e. Make better communications the system's theme for the year. Start with a motivating keynote speech on the public relations role of every employee. This topic cuts across all disciplines and all job levels. It appeals to custodians as well as secretaries. Why? Because all play a vital role in how their schools are perceived.

f. Sell the board and community on the need to commit resources to public relations. Although some public relations strategies and techniques can be implemented at almost no cost, others will require money. When administrators look at the three biggest crises they encountered in the previous year, they can usually trace two of them to a communications breakdown. Usually the breakdowns caused education to suffer.

For years many administrators and boards hid the costs of public relations efforts in the budget. However, it's time to get serious about public relations. In an era that promises challenges to public schools via tax credits or vouchers, much more must be done to improve the quality and image of public schools. Solid communications and public relations efforts will help accomplish that goal.

With a tight budget, it's always difficult to add money for a new commitment. Therefore, it's sound practice to involve the students, staff, and community in a study of communications and public relations needs and efforts. An advisory committee and a survey will enable school officials to know the thinking and recommendations of the community regarding the public relations need. Responding to community needs, the board can then more easily commit funds for public relations.

Once the community sees the benefits of a district's public relations commitment, it will generally support this budget item. In 1979, the Bensalem, Pennsylvania School Board announced it was abolishing the full-time public relations position. At the next board meeting more than 400 taxpayers waving dollar bills protested the decision.

They explained that they didn't mind paying less than a dollar per taxpayer (for the PR budget) to be informed about the \$14 million school budget. Representatives of the taxpayers' group, the senior citizens, and other organizations that saw the benefits of a socially responsible public relations program spoke for the program. It was reestablished.

After a commitment is made to establish the position, one of the first steps should be to determine the position title and description. Although public relations is gaining more acceptance in the corporate sector, many taxpayers still think of public relations as a deodorant used to cover up a bad smell caused by a problem. If your community believes that public relations is, indeed, the practice of social responsibility by the schools, use the term "public relations" in the title. If not, consider communications director or some other title. Information services director is too one-way oriented. Community relations director leaves out the staff, a key audience. The title should communicate that the person holds a responsible position in the district and is not merely a news release writer and a newsletter preparer. Many districts are calling the person, "administrative assistant to the superintendent."

The job description should evolve from the study that determined the need for the position. Excellent samples are available from the National School Public Relations Association and the National School Boards Association.

The person should report directly to the superintendent if the job is to be done right. Although this may bother other management team members, the communications person must enjoy the confidence of the chief executive in every facet of the school's operation. Clearly, the staff position carries no line power.

Picking the Right Person

The most important decision regarding the program centers on selecting the proper person for the job. Here are some practical tips:

- Be sure that you are comfortable with the person and that other staff members—from top aide to custodian—are comfortable, too. This person will be representing the schools in a variety of ways. Solid judgment and a pleasant personality are important. This is not to be confused with the back-slapping, glad-hander that many will perceive as phony.

- Be certain that the person writes very well in a style that non-educators will understand. A person with a master's degree in English may write excellent poetry but could be a disaster when asked to prepare news releases. Give the finalists for the job a writing test, and ask someone who knows journalistic style to evaluate the writing.

- Be comfortable with the person's ability to represent the district with the media and with school groups. Often this person will be called on to handle controversial issues. Will you trust the person's judgment? (Of course it's unfair to expect this trust relationship to build overnight, but during the interview and when checking references, pursue the judgment factor.)

- Ask to see samples of the person's publication ability. Undoubtedly the job will entail preparing newsletters, announcements, programs, brochures, etc. All things being equal, you might as well hire someone who is good at layout and design.

- Feel that the person understands administration. If the candidate does not understand how administrators work, the adjustment period could be prolonged. Gaining the acceptance of other staff members will be the major challenge facing the PR person. Do you feel this person can do it?

- Choose an idea person. In the interview, did he or she suggest ideas that might work for you? It makes sense to pick someone who will bring practical ideas to the position.

- Select someone capable of implementing two-way communications techniques that will involve the community in the schools and will let management know the community pulse. This will help avoid those surprises that often shorten a superintendent's tenure.

- Consider only candidates who communicate that they get the job done. Some candidates will want hours that run from 8:30 to 4:30. This just won't work for this position.

- Consider using the placement services of the National School Public Relations Association and of the three colleges that prepare students to assume school public relations responsibilities. (A list is given later.)

Some Sources That Will Help

During the past 10 years many sources have been developed to help school officials start or improve a public relations program. These include books, tapes, and other audio visual materials along with increased leadership from state and national organizations.

Among the books that can help are:

- **School Communications Ideas That Work.** This is a practical, no-footnotes, how-to-do-it book that explains the basics of almost all key school PR areas. Communicaid Inc., P.O. Box 233D, Woodstown, N.J. 08098. \$8.95

- **Building Public Confidence in Your Schools.** Another how-to-do-it book loaded with ideas that work. National School Public Relations Association, Dept. SC, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, VA 22209. \$13.95

- **How To Start and Improve a School's PR Program.** This includes the basics of how to get started. National School Boards Association, 1055 Jefferson St., N.W., Washington, DC 20007. \$5.00

- **The School PR Almanac.** A collection of in-depth how-to-do-it articles that explain step by step how to implement ideas. The Educational Communications Center, Dept. BG, P.O. Box 657, Camp Hill, PA 17011. \$8.95

- **The School and Community Relations.** A college text that offers theory and practical ideas, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632. \$18.95

Other Materials

- **Journal of Educational Communications.** Magazine that focuses on school public relations. Educational Communications Center, Dept. BG, P.O. Box 657, Camp Hill, PA 17011. \$18.00/year.

- **Basic School Public Relations Kit.** Includes special topic books and materials designed for school administrators who want to improve their PR program. National School Public Relations Association, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, VA 22209. \$96.00.

- **School PR Tape Library.** A 1981 collection of six cassettes, this library offers in-depth help from national experts on a variety of key school PR topics. Educational Communications Center, Dept. BG, P.O. Box 657, Camp Hill, PA 17011. \$39.95.

- **Your Public Is Listening.** A filmstrip that shows the public relations role of each school employee. Carlock/Langden, Inc., 4122 Main St., Dallas, Texas 75226. \$69.00.

Organizations, Graduate Programs

The National School Public Relations Association, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, VA 22209. Provides a wide variety of publications, materials, workshops, and leadership in the field of school public relations. Most states have local chapters that conduct workshops and share ideas.

Educational Press Association. Provides services, workshops, and newsletters for editors of educational publications. Glassboro State College, Glassboro, N.J. 08028.

The following schools offer a graduate degree in school public relations:

Glassboro State College, Glassboro, N.J. 08028
Contact: Dr. Don Bagin, Communications Department.

Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115
Contact: Dr. David Carr, Educational Administration Department.

Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843
Contact: Dr. Philip West, Educational Administration Department.

Footnotes

1. Philip T. West. "The Basics of a Written PR Policy." *Journal of Educational Communications*, 4 (March 1981) 25.

To produce and disseminate information is only half the responsibility

Developing two-way communication

By Robert J. Shoop and G. Kent Stewart

Public education, like society and most of its other institutions, is experiencing painful and profound crises and confusion. The educational system in the United States is in trouble. Americans are questioning the content of the curriculum, the methodologies being employed, the cost of public education, and the competence of both graduates and those who teach. The students demonstrate their displeasure by measuring record highs of truancy, drop out rates, and school vandalism. Parents express their criticism by taking their children out of the public schools and by openly questioning educators' abilities to teach. Communities express their dissatisfaction by rejecting bond elections and tax proposals and by passing propositions that limit school expenditures. And legislatures voice their criticism by proposing changes in every operational aspect of the school system.

A gulf is developing between the schools and the communities that they were created to serve. As this gulf widens alienation grows and discontent spreads. Many schools have become islands set apart from their community. Many teachers experience frustration in knowing that much of what they accomplish during the school day may be undone by the many forces that affect the child in the larger community. Many teachers have come to believe that their task of education is hopeless. It is not uncommon to hear such comments from teachers as, "I can't do anything with him, the situation in his home is impossible" or "How can they expect me to teach this child how to read when both of his parents are illiterate and there is not a book in the home?" Many teachers are very much aware that what happens during the school day is only one part of the child's education. The child's at-

titudes toward education are constantly being affected by his parents and his peers.

In addition to the frustrations that teachers feel regarding the child's total environment, many teachers are also concerned about the difficult task of attempting to communicate with the parents of their students. A common teacher complaint is, "The only parents that we see are the parents of 'good' students and we only see them once a year at the school open house. Even then there is seldom any real communication."

These feelings of frustration exist to some degree in all schools. Many teachers feel they are fighting a losing battle. This feeling leads to depression and a loss of job satisfaction. However, it is not only the teachers and school administrators who are concerned about the widening moat between the school and the community. Many parents share this frustration and confusion with the current state of education. These concerns often take expression in open hostility toward the schools and the teachers who work there. A growing number of parents are articulating their frustration with the schools their children attend and for which they pay taxes to support.

It is not possible to attend any meeting of parents without hearing such comments as, "The students don't want to go to school in the morning"; "My daughter is in the ninth grade, and her teacher told me she is reading on the fourth grade level. What do those teachers do all day?"; "My child is going to graduate from high school this spring, and he isn't prepared to do anything. What's wrong with those schools?"

At no time in the history of our nation has there been more attention focused on the matter of public education. It is clear from the comments of teachers, administrators, and parents that many people are dissatisfied with public education. Poll results indicate that although the public trusts the schools more than most other public institutions, this trust is declining.

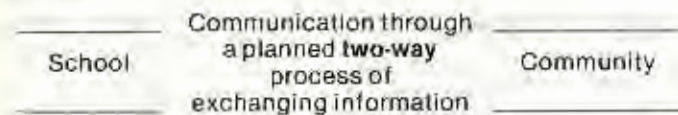
Although many creative efforts are being made by individual teachers, administrators, and parents to improve public education, most people agree that more needs to be done.

Many teachers believe that schools are surrounded by indifference and opposition. Many educators believe that it is up to them to determine if these surrounding communities will overflow and drown education or be tapped so they may nourish and strengthen the schools. Educators cannot continue to take the task of education as their sole responsibility; they must actively draw upon the various resources of their communities and join hands with their communities in the cooperative effort of education.

Over a period of time, education has become a specialized activity. In order to rejoin the people with their schools, conscious effort must be made to involve the community in the life of the school. Educators must strive to find ways to take the public more into their confidence regarding the educative process. However, these efforts must be more than window dressing. Educators must involve the people not simply to make them feel important or even to provide them with the opportunity to give their opinions, but because decisions will be better if they are made as the result of the efforts of all those who are concerned. The philosophy that underlies all of these efforts at creating two-way lines of communication is that of synergy, the belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; or stated more directly, we are smarter together than we are alone.

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In order to stop the trend toward greater alienation and bring the school and the community into a renewed partnership, school communications must embrace the concept of a planned two-way process of communication. The key word is **two-way** as illustrated by the following model.

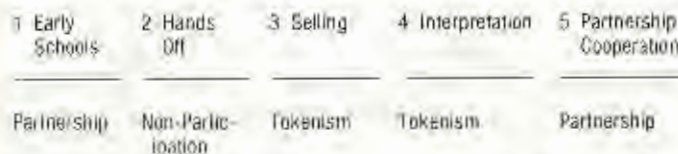


Two-Way Communication Model

School public relations, or school communications, have evolved through several developmental stages. In early years schools were the center of the community, and the school was a common ground where the community was directly involved in all of the educational decision making. As the schools evolved and became larger, they began to shun relationships with the community. The professional educator replaced the citizen at the locus of control. The lay citizens were considered ill informed and unsophisticated in the means and methods of education. Little or no communication existed between the community and the school.

In the 1930s the schools entered the selling era. Patterned after the advertising campaigns of big business, public relations developed. The use of short, intensive campaigns designed to gain public support emerged. Limited long range plans were made. The school saw public relations as interpreting what they were doing to the citizens.

With the advent of integration and citizen involvement in the 1960s the citizens began to demand a greater voice in education. The schools and the communities began to form uneasy partnerships. The following model illustrates this historical overview.



In many ways we are getting back to an earlier philosophy, namely that the educative process is the responsibility of the TOTAL community, lay citizens as well as the professional educators. In the two-way communication model both the school and the community has power—the power to send as well as to receive information. This model involves transmitting and receiving information about goals and strategies, successes and failures, and facts and opinions concerning all components of the educational process.

Using this model as an ideal, even a cursory review of randomly selected school systems reveals that considerable information is being transmitted into the community from the schools, but only limited information is being fed back to the schools from the communities.

Although some very important information is received informally, only limited formal effort is being made to solicit information from the community. In most communities only one-half of the goal of public relations is even attempted. If the public schools hope to survive and thrive in these difficult times of public alienation, they

must begin efforts to strengthen their programs of two-way communication.

As noted earlier, considerable information is being transmitted from the school to the community. But two very important questions must be answered. First, are the materials transmitted to the public being understood and assimilated? Secondly, are the real concerns of the public being brought to the attention of the professional educators?

It is critically important that these two questions be answered in the affirmative before any communication efforts can hope to be effective. The remainder of this article will describe and discuss a variety of strategies that can be used to obtain information from the public about their schools and their school system.

The Advisory Committee. The theory behind the creation of a citizen advisory committee suggests that a group of lay people representing a cross section of the community can reflect needs and express opinions representative of the whole community. The advice of the committee is generally presented to the board of education; however many school principals use advisory committees for policy-making and problem solving in an individual school.

Another type of advisory committee is more accurately termed a study committee. The essential difference between the lay advisory committee and the study committee is the makeup of their memberships. While the lay committee consists of only lay people within the school community, the study committee usually includes school personnel and students in addition to citizens in general.

Either organizational option can be quite effective. The keys to success are in the selection of members, the charge under which they operate, and the leadership or resource help provided by the school system. Regardless of the purpose of the lay advisory committee or study committee, each is a very effective way to obtain vital information from the community. At the same time each promotes within the citizenry a high esprit de corps and provides a feeling of ownership, involvement, and even responsibility for the success of the communities' schools.

Forums and Conferences. Forums, conferences, and even community seminars are suitable means for obtaining open and frank exchanges of views and ideas about topics of current interest to citizens in general and to parents, teachers, and students. In all three settings—forum, conference, or seminar—one or more speakers are invited to express their viewpoints; then respond to questions from either a reaction panel or from the audience or both.

While the forum/conference option is quite effective as a means for obtaining feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction about schools, the results should not be taken as being a statistically accurate reflection of community sentiment on a given subject. Nonetheless, it does serve as a way for school officials to obtain public input on issues of current interest and to help involved and other interested citizens broaden their knowledge of schools by being more aware of school problems and needs.

As is true for advisory committees, it is important that school officials provide the leadership and resource help necessary to assure success of any forum, conference, or community seminar. Also, it is a good idea to publish the

proceedings of the activity. This provides a permanent record and serves as a way to bring the meeting highlights to the awareness of the total community.

Mailout Questionnaire. The mailout questionnaire is the most sophisticated option available to school administrators for obtaining public opinion on a given issue. By using statistically accepted procedures for developing a mailing list, designing a questionnaire, and analyzing results, an accurate portrayal of public opinion can be obtained. From this kind of flow of information from the public about its schools, the officials can then respond in timely and appropriate fashion to the public will.

Because of its accuracy and timeliness for gathering information about schools, the mailout and questionnaire is gaining in popularity. Caution should be taken to be sure that proper statistical procedures are followed in each step of the survey. However, there is ample material and professional help available to insure success in using this option as a way to obtain the public's opinion about their schools.

Direct Interviews. A strategy that is similar to the questionnaire mailout is the direct interview. This option requires that a trained interviewer personally interview a predetermined number of people using a carefully developed set of questions as an interview guide.

This provides an excellent way to obtain information from the general public or from a specific group concerning the schools. The essential disadvantage of the interview option is the necessity for using only trained interviewers. To provide the training is time-consuming and to conduct the interviews also requires a commitment to time and cost.

The Telephone Interview. The telephone interview has the same principal disadvantage as the direct interview—cost. However, this is offset largely by the speed with which telephone interviewers can call a relatively large number of citizens.

This option also has the advantage of having several citizens involved as callers. The required training can be provided in minimum time; and virtually all the calls can be made in one or two sessions. However, it must be kept in mind that the brevity of calls and the factor of surprise at being called both contribute to receiving information which may not really reflect the thoughtful judgment of respondents.

Home Visitations. The process of building a bridge between the school and the community is not just a process of involving the citizen in the life of the school; it is also involving the teacher in the life of the community. Many professionals spend their whole careers trying to serve a clientele about whom they might have only a passing knowledge. One very obvious method for the teacher to learn more about the children in his/her classroom is for him/her to visit the home of the child. Not only will a home visit provide important information about the student, it will also enhance the relationship between the teacher, the student, and the parents.

Community Education Programs. Community Education is a process aimed at developing a closer relationship between the school and the community through developing a sense of community. It is a concept that seeks to activate the total educative community. It views education as a cooperative effort between the school and the total community. The concept is not new, but it remains unknown to many educators. In many communities after the dismissal bell rings at the end of the school day or school year, the school buildings often fall

into an unnatural state—doors lock, padlocks go on playground gates, and the life of the school stops. But life goes on in the communities.

The concept of community education has become a strong bridge between the school and the community. This bridge is a two-way street. By involving parents and teachers and administrators and students in the mutual quest for education, the school becomes an integral part of the community and responds to the needs and desires of the community. The schools are opened in the evenings on weekends and during the summer months. Enrichment programs, adult education, recreation programs, remedial activities, and parent involvement activities become a normal part of the educational process. Mutual trust and respect develops between all participants in this process. As community members begin to work cooperatively with the professional educators, they gain a deeper understanding of the problems facing education. As professional educators work with parents, they gain a deeper respect for the many strengths and resources that parents have to contribute to the educational process. The teachers and citizens both begin to see themselves as stockholders in their community and their schools. They each begin to realize that the dividends of success will only come if they both work together.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY

Zest for obtaining information from the community must be tempered with knowledge of the community. It is a temptation to feed a variety of information into the community and to design ways to assure that information flows back to the schools from the community. Yet, to do these things in absence of hard data about the community can be harmful to the success of the public relations/communications effort.

A thorough understanding of the community can be obtained by doing a rather complete community profile study. Such studies can be conducted by school personnel or by consultants. There is ample justification for these kinds of studies to be done by the communications officer, especially when he or she is new to a community. It is an excellent means for becoming acquainted quickly and, at the same time, for assembling information vital to the design and success of the overall public relations and communications thrust.

Such initial effort at community understanding should include attention to the following:

1. Demographic characteristics of the population—age distribution, sex, church affiliation, racial/ethnic composition, education level, and occupational classifications.
2. Geographic setting and historical background including observed customs and traditions.
3. Various community groups including social, service, professional, political, and fraternal organizations.
4. Industrial and commercial profile showing types of production, service, distribution outlets.
5. Employment opportunities within the commercial, governmental, or industrial sectors of the community including projected human resource needs and economic conditions.
6. Channels of communication—newspaper, radio, and television.
7. History of social tensions, previous community ef-

forts, such as school building bond referenda and similar activity affecting public attitudes toward schools.

8. It is also important to be mindful of individuals and groups known to hold positions of power and influence within the community.

Once such a community profile is assembled, it should be updated annually in order to keep abreast of any changes which would impact on the school public relations and communications effort.

SUMMARY

In order to maintain the principle of school public relations/communication as a two-way street, it is important, first, to understand the community thoroughly and, then, to maintain continuous effort at obtaining feedback and similar information from the general population. To produce and disseminate information accomplishes only half the communication's responsibility. The other

half is to be aware of community thinking toward school programs and issues and to involve the citizens into the life of the school. This will result in a two-way communications system that leads to a community that is supportive of its schools.

Suggested Reading

For more complete discussion of material contained in the article, four principal sources of information (books) are cited below.

1. Bagin, Don; Grazian, Frank; and Harrison, Charles. **School Communications Ideas That Work**. Communicaid Incorporated, Woodstown, New Jersey 1972.
2. Kindred, Leslie; Bagin, Don; and Gallagher, Donald. **The School And Community Relations**. Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. 1976.
3. Mayer, Frank. **Public Relations For School Personnel**. Pendarl Publishing Company. Midland, Michigan. 1974.
4. Shoop, Robert. **The Teacher and the Community: A Case Study Approach**, Collegiate Publishing Company, San Diego, California, 1980.

Practical ways to work with newspapers, radio, and television

Mobilizing the media

By Albert E. Holliday

"The best public relations starts in the classroom" is a cliché, a trite expression, a phrase that has little relevance in the 1980s for most school districts in the U.S. and Canada. Why? Because citizens usually don't know about 80 percent to 90 percent of the positives occurring daily in their schools.

That citizens and even parents don't know is largely the fault of school officials and educators. They continue to rely on traditional student-parent contact and local word of mouth communication to get the school message across. But these are not effective anymore, thanks in large measure to medical technology because:

- People now live much longer than they did 20 years ago. One result is that in all communities senior citizens comprise a large bloc of voters.

- Not as many children are being born. The number of households with school-aged children has shrunk considerably in recent years.

The result of these two factors is that, in most communities, the number of non-parent households is larger than those with school-aged children. Adults in those homes do not have regular contact with educators or students or schools, once the main vehicle of information in a community.

This is an important matter because the number one source of information about schools now for non-parents, according to Ned Hubbell (a pollster headquartered in Port Huron, Michigan) is the media—newspapers and radio and television stations.¹

Here again school officials are in difficulty as they are usually passive in relations with the media. They only respond when asked and, as the media is often oriented mainly to crisis situations, they are usually called on to comment or supply information on problem issues, such as increases in budgets, closing of buildings because of declining enrollment, staff furloughing, declining test scores, federal aid cuts, etc.

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Such matters are worthy of concern, but not as exclusive news for the attention of that very large non-parent block in your community. If schools are to enjoy public support at a level educators and boards believe is justified, they must make a substantial effort to work closely with their local media.

(One aside: I have worked with several hundred administrative and teacher groups in communication in-service training sessions. In almost every session I hear two comments: (1) "Why is it the media just reports the 'bad' on page one?" and (2) "We'd be pleased to provide reporters with the 'good news' if they'd only call." But the media have limited staff, and reporters do not have time to make 20 calls a day asking, "Do you have any good news to report today?" Reporters must cover crisis situations; and if an issue is of importance, it will be carried on page one. However, editors and radio and TV news directors will usually be quite responsive to educators who provide them with solid news and interesting feature material. They are in the people business as much as educators are and will cooperate anytime when mutual interests can be furthered.)

Let's see what might happen in a community when educational officials decide to mount an aggressive communication program using staff volunteers to work with the public media.

Wonder City, mid-America, is a community of 25,000 residents, with 4,000 students enrolled in public schools. The Wonder City public school system has one high school with 1,200 students, two 6-8 middle schools with 600 students each, and five K-5 neighborhood elementary schools with about 400 each. (One Catholic high school has 600 students and one K-8 Catholic elementary school has 500 students.) Each elementary and middle school has an active PTA; the high school's PTS association meets infrequently with a few people present. The staff numbers 15 administrators, 200 teachers and certified staff, and 180 supporting service staff. The nine-member school board is elected at large.

The Problem

In recent years, community support of local schools in Wonder City has decreased. Several millages (operation budgets) have been turned down by voters. A few incidents involving fights and drugs at the high school received quite a bit of attention from the media. An editorial in the local paper took the teachers' association to task for its stance on wages and benefits during the last bargaining period. To save money, the board cut out a quarterly newsletter to citizens and asked PTA officials to boost their school newsletter production to fill the gap. (The district has no PR policy, and no one person is assigned to the task of school-community relations.) One elementary school had to be closed because of declining enrollment, and citizens and parents in the area broke into two warring camps—one to "save money" and the other to "preserve our neighborhood school."

Gains in many areas (improvements in achievement scores, an effective management team operation for administrators, an excellent report on the high school by the regional accreditation agency, energy conservation efforts that have cut the district's fuel consumption by 40 percent, etc.) have been recorded recently. But educational officials have general agreement on one matter—the public doesn't seem to know of the successes and achievements of students, the staff and the board. As

as a result, the public has an overall attitude that schools in Wonder City are only so-so.

The Media

Wonder City has one daily, the **Evening News** Monday through Saturday. The **County Gazette** comes out each Thursday. Two shopping guides (each with some news and public service material) are issued free each week. The **Metro Times** is published weekdays and Sundays in the state capital 40 miles away and enjoys a modest circulation in Wonder City. (The **Times** features an outstate section with coverage of nearby communities three times a week.)

Two AM and one FM stations serve the city. WROC is the one kids listen to. WCIV is middle-of-the-road and has the best news department. WHUM-FM is the all-music, easy-listening station for adults.

One independent TV station is headquartered nearby Wonder City; three commercial network stations and a public TV station broadcast from Metro. Wonder City is served by a cable TV company; the 50 percent of the local households on the cable can get the local independent, the three networks, and the public stations plus seven others—one all sports, one religious, one with times set aside for local programming) and four from nearby cities. People not on the cable can pick up the independent, the four from Metro, and several of the city stations.

The Solution

A few administrators, one board member and several teachers attended a workshop on educational communication in late August sponsored by the state School Public Relations Association and came home fired up to mount an aggressive school-community relations program to combat Wonder City's problem.

They drafted a communication plan for the district, but the board turned down the request for employment of a PR specialist and funding for a monthly community newsletter, citing insufficient funds. The board did grant some released time for four teachers and one administrator who showed a great interest in this area to stimulate news media coverage of the district, with full cooperation of the board and administration.

The five who agreed to give it a try included Helen, a special education specialist in the central office; Peter, a guidance counselor; Maureen, a secondary English teacher; Angelo, a middle school social studies teacher; and Nancy, a 4th grade teacher.

In September, they met and decided to accomplish these goals:

1. To write and issue at least four news releases on timely subjects each week.
2. To place two to three photos in newspapers each week.
3. To stimulate one feature story in newspapers each week.
4. To stimulate one filmed feature on a TV station each week.
5. To produce a weekly radio show on WCIV.
6. To place material of interest to young people on WROC.
7. To place one or two public service announcements on WHUM each week.
8. To produce a weekly program on schools on the cable TV network.

The Operation

The five each planned to spend five hours each week on the media assignment. They began by writing a memo to all staff members indicating their plans and asking for ideas and contributions. They drafted an outline of story and news release possibilities for the first three months and divided the media among them so each had prime contact responsibility for one. (Helen, the **Evening News**; Peter, the **County Gazette** and the **Metro Times**; Maureen, the radio stations; Angelo, the television stations; Nancy, the cable company.) They made appointments with their editors and news directors and spent up to an hour with each learning how best to work with them. They gained valuable information about deadlines, style, writing tips, and how to handle feature ideas and photos.

In follow-up discussions, they compared notes and could see that each medium was different in its approach to news and features. Radio stations prefer short items for news broadcasts. Television stations, as they cover such a large area, would be able to use only hard news or unusual features. The metro paper's local correspondent would be the main contact for important school news and an occasional feature. The cable company's owners were receptive to a request for a weekly half-hour interview program.

The media most receptive to the five were the **News** and the **Gazette**. Their staff members had usually covered board meetings and wrote about hard news, such as a bus accident, appointment of a new principal, closing of an elementary school, etc. As Ed, the **News** editor, told Helen, "We don't have a large staff and can't cover everything ourselves. But we're in the people business, too, and will do all we can to cooperate."

The five received a media in-service program in the first months of their assignment, and over a year's time they learned:

- Their fellow staff members were quick to suggest stories and slow to furnish information in writing, and even then the information was usually incomplete. If a story had possibilities, one of the five had to do the research and check to be sure it would be complete, in the proper style, and on time.

- Working with the daily **News** and the weekly **Gazette** was often a delicate matter. The **Gazette** editor didn't like the **News** to have an important announcement on Monday when his paper didn't come out until Thursday. News releases without time references had to be planned carefully so each paper got an equal break.

- Editors dislike their rivals having the same photos. The five found ways to vary the placement and inclusion of people so each paper had its "own" photo.

- Instant process prints are a no-no. Photos have to be well-composed, in focus with people's eyes open, and close-up. Peter worked with several high school students interested in photography, and they were soon able to take and process (in the school's darkroom) excellent prints for newspaper use.

- There is a big difference in news value between Mrs. Reilly's 3rd grade students' tour of the post office and the superintendent's plans to institute an energy reduction plan to cut fuel costs by 40 percent. Some well-meaning ideas for releases have to be turned down. (However, an effort should be made to use all items suggested by staff members. Items such as Mrs. Reilly's field trip can be included, for example, in the biweekly staff newsletter.)

- Editors and news directors like local tie-ins to big

stories on the state or national level. For example, when a national study was issued with a report that young people are flabby, Angelo did a tie-in release with photos on the middle school's "fitness with fun" program.

- TV stations work best from advances—announcements sent two or three days ahead of an unusual activity or event. When an item has interest for a TV station, the scheduling of traveling crews is easier when the news director has time to plan.

- Staff members don't all read the same newspapers and often miss seeing a big story. To keep them informed (and let them know the five were getting results), Nancy arranged for copies of news releases and printed stories to be regularly posted on main bulletin boards in each building.

- Time is precious, and the goals of the five could not be achieved with only 25 combined hours a week. The plans for the weekly radio and cable TV shows were postponed. (The times these shows were to be broadcast and the expected very modest audiences at these times indicated that the efforts necessary to plan and do these shows were far out of balance in terms of time to do releases and features for newspapers.)

- The youth-oriented station, WROC, did not have much of a local news department. They did like having young people on the air, so Maureen and the news director trained 10 high school students to be reporters. They taped 15- and 30-second news briefs for broadcast in the late afternoon and early evening.

- The adult stations, WCIV and WHUM, were pleased to have short items for news broadcasts. And they used a number of public service announcements during each broadcast day.

The Follow-up

In June, the five wound up their year's efforts by presenting four scrapbooks of clippings from newspapers and a report of how many stories were used on radio and television stations to the board and the superintendent. Comments of citizens and parents to board members during the year were quite positive about "all those interesting programs we have in our schools." The five staff members reported that their plan to spend five hours a week each was shortlived as it usually took them another five hours each after school and on weekends to keep up.

The five agreed that their initial plans were unrealistic in terms of the time they had available. Ideas for special columns in the shopping guides and a spotlight series in

the **News** were dropped, as were the plans for the television shows. They were not able to do five releases each week. Some weeks they only issued one or two. They found that staff members provided many items at the beginning and end of semesters—these had to be spaced out so that they didn't glut the media with too many at one time.

Secretarial services proved to be a problem. They could have kept one person busy 20 hours a week with typing, checking facts, reproducing releases, mailing, maintaining files and labels, etc. And they found they needed one office, with a phone, to work from to keep things in order.

The board reconsidered the superintendent's recommendations of last year in light of this year's activities, and agreed to appoint Peter to a new position of full-time communication specialist and assigned him one half-time secretary. He was the one of the five who found the assignment of most interest. And the board authorized him to attend a five-day seminar on communications at state university in the summer. The other four "retired," pleased with their efforts but tired from the long hours they had spent.

While the team generated hundreds of column inches of newspaper coverage, not all residents subscribed to all newspapers and saw or heard all the broadcasts. So the board agreed to direct Peter to perform the job of issuing a quarterly newsletter to all households as well as to continue to issue news and feature releases and maintain good relations with the news media.

You will note that division of labor is necessary in such a program. Certain people will have to take the responsibility to attend to various aspects of the program, and one person should have the job of coordinating all. Not all aspects of this case history will apply to you, but a small committee of staff members can take this case history and adapt it to meet your needs and situation. You may not experience the most successful ending as the case history group did, but you will learn the most effective methods of working with newspapers and radio and television stations.

Footnotes

- 1 Ned S. Hubbell, "12 Tips for Better School Communications," *Information Legislative Service*, 17, July 29, 1979, pp. 12-14.

The road is bright and promising

The PR director and the future

By Philip T. West

The traditional role of the educational public relations director is changing. Once viewed predominantly as a school publicist, preoccupied with preparing and disseminating press releases and staff and community newsletters and establishing media contacts,¹ this director now stands on the threshold of choosing from a variety of information-related roles, some of which have become far more imminent than others.

Indeed, in identifying critical tasks for educational public relations directors, participants in a 1977 Delphi study ranked as a top priority for a subsequent 20-year period the development of considerable skill not only in communications, but also in technology, the social sciences, marketing, and politics,² clearly suggesting alternative roles of educational public relations directors. Other top priorities in the study targeted important management and community roles for educational public relations directors,³ who, in the nearby future, may also have an important role to play in collective negotiations, at the bargaining table and in associated activities.

While proffered areas of expertise and desired role expectations might in themselves be vague signals of what is to come, the trends that have recently taken on national significance are not. Foremost among these trends is the emergence of an information society, wrought by advanced technology and a communications revolution sweeping school and community. Another is a renewed interest in grass roots ideologies and lay participation, best mirrored in the growth of the community education movement. Still another is a decline of public confidence in societal institutions, most recently the school where the hue

and cry is "back to the basics." Financial constraints at local, state, and federal levels have also become a reality with which most school leaders must increasingly contend, as have strikes, shutdowns, and conflict stemming from widespread collective bargaining activities in the public schools.

Taken together, expertise, expectations, and trends point to specific future alternative roles for educational public relations directors in the following areas: Information Management and Techno-Relations; Community Relations; Consumer Relations; Employee Relations; and Governmental Relations.

Information Management and Techno-Relations

The quest of educational public relations directors to achieve administrative status has continued with fervor over the years. For example, administrative team membership, or its equivalent, was, in 1971, 63.5 percent, or about 20 percent more than in 1967.⁴ In 1979 this number was increased to 78 percent, or about an additional 25 percent.⁵ With the advent of increasingly sophisticated information technology in the public schools, this administrative team membership may be expected not only to continue its rise but increase sharply in the complexity of its administrative responsibilities.

Today computers are being used by many schools to conduct much of their daily business, in such areas as attendance keeping, payroll budgeting, and word processing. Mostly to help students understand computer concepts, computers are also being used today in 50 percent and 14 percent, respectively, of all secondary and elementary schools.⁶ Too, personal computers are on the rise, with an estimated 300,000 already in homes⁷ and with expectations that decreasing cost will accelerate this rise.⁸ What is, perhaps, most promising to computer users is the speculation that by the late 1980s a set of books may be stored on a single microchip and an entire library in a space that approximates paperback book size.⁹

Adding to this technological revolution is interactive cable television linking school to other educational institutions, as in Spokane, Washington;¹⁰ school to public library, city hall, university, and home, as in Irvine, California;¹¹ and home subscriber to data bank and television programming, as in Columbus, Ohio.¹² Further technological embellishments include instructional TV-networking, satellites, satellite dishes, video discs, video recorders, televised text, large TV screen projection, and, in the very near future, video phones and electronic mail.¹³ Anticipated sales of large screen three-tube projectors have been set at 300,000 to 500,000 a year from 1983 to 1985.¹⁴ Concurrently, TV screens will become flat and by 1986 assume wall sized proportions.¹⁵

Amidst this technological maze of electronic gadgetry will stand a manager, or director, of information systems,¹⁶ a member of the top management echelon, who will supervise the dissemination, retrieval, and storage of incredible amounts of instructional and decision-making data, who will be responsible for interactively linking by computer, cable, and satellite school to community and community to home, and who may even run the educational facility of tomorrow, when electronics will be the key to education.

The role of the information manager also presupposes techno-relations skills in addition to computer and media expertise. Derived from new communication strategies and principles, these skills enable the information

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manager to relate to his audience in an optimally contrived human sense. A working knowledge of the effects of structuring, timing, color, sound, and large screen projection, coupled with insights gained from the science of kinesics, all contribute to the creation of this contrived rendition of traditional modes of human relations, as does the implication of flexible space and the absence of distance.¹⁷

Community Relations

Currently educational public relations directors have much contact with their respective communities. In a recent survey that polled male and female educational public relations directors about their duties and responsibilities, 72 percent of the males and 82 percent of the females reported such contact; and 65 percent of both groups reported dealing with citizen complaints. Both were also producers of community publications, with 82 percent of both groups reporting this responsibility.¹⁸ Twenty-two percent of the males and 16 percent of the females indicated the rapport they had with their communities as one of their position strengths. In a listing of over 15 strengths, this item tied for second place with males and was ranked third by females.¹⁹

The literature is also replete with suggestions for educational public relations directors to increase their effectiveness in working with lay advisory groups, presumably on the assumption that it is part of their job to do so. Parallel to this thrust are the efforts of community educators to achieve an even greater rapport with the citizenry, whose support and participation as teachers or students they consider vital to the success of their undertaking. Aside from this emphasis on widespread community involvement, community educators are much akin to educational public relations directors. They conduct surveys, information sessions, and in-service. They cultivate media contacts and prepare press releases, work with PTAs and PTOs and other school groups, and prepare a variety of publications, sometimes hand-in-hand with the educational public relations director. In fact, because of these many similarities, it is quite likely that these positions will someday merge.

Forces are already at work that seem to be precipitating a much larger role for both community educators and educational public relations directors. Dwindling energy resources, inflationary transportation costs, and advanced technology have raised the possibility of taking the job to the home.²⁰ The anticipated result is the strengthening of the family and an increase in community participation.²¹ And with this futuristic shift will also come an increase in community education activity and the appearance of the community relations specialist, who will be a composite of educational public relations and community education director. In the meantime the incursion of community education into the K-12 curriculum and into the home through telecommunications and the intensified involvement of educational public relations in community affairs, electronic polling, and educational programming will begin to meld the two roles into the community relations specialist, an individual whose purpose it is to know best the needs, interests, and aspirations of the community.

Consumer Relations

The decline in the public's confidence in its schools, while reflected in a number of ways, among them de-

mands for increased educational accountability, competency testing of teachers and administrators, taxpayer revolts, and a back-to-basics movement, is, perhaps, best revealed in renewed public interest in the educational voucher and voucher derivatives, such as the Magnet School concept, where educational consumerism prevails.

Attaining varying degrees of intellectual prominence in educational circles in the late 1960s and early 1970s and executed in a limited fashion in California in the Alum Rock Public Schools during the 1970s, the voucher recently captured the public limelight in two states, Michigan in 1978 and California in 1979 and early 1980. While the voucher proponents experienced defeats, Michiganders at the polls and Californians because of a lack of signatures to get the voucher to the ballot box, they have, owing to the tenor of the times, considerable justification for believing that victory is in the not-to-distant future.

Educational accountability, so much a concern of educators and the general public these days, is built in to the voucher, as are administrative, teacher, and pupil performance standards. For in an unregulated voucher system, where public and private schools compete for their clientele, if students do not achieve academically, parental options might dictate the withdrawal of students in numbers sufficient to put administrators and teachers out of jobs and schools out of business. Often criticized as more faddish than useful, innovations, too, will be subjected to consumer standards, with only the most successful enjoying any degree of longevity.

Two-way communication networks, generally viewed as conducive to the establishment of sound school-community relationships, will become critical in a voucher setting. Consumerism will precipitate the need for a continuous flow of information from school to client. In fact, the school that is devoid of a well-organized consumer relations program is unlikely to survive. This information flow will create a new bond between the school and its clientele, thereby accomplishing an unsurpassed level of school-community relations. Parents, as consumers, will need to know and understand each school's offerings and how well these offerings will advance their educational expectations for their children. They will want to know what they can get for their school dollar, and the school that is most receptive to their needs and interests will be among those that enjoy a happy and prosperous educational enterprise.

Today schools are assured continuity by a guaranteed clientele, who have little or no choice as to where they go or as to what they might wish to pursue academically should offerings be limited. By the same token, schools must accept clients that have little desire to be within their portals. In the future, however, with the advent of the voucher, or a proliferation of magnet schools, students and parents will be afforded the opportunity of choosing educational settings, and this choice will be dependent largely upon the counseling of a consumer relations specialist housed in a particular school or school district, in a state or national regulatory office or in a detached and private setting. As educational alternatives multiply, so will the number of consumer relations specialists who market or assess their worth.

Some educational public relations directors are already looking to marketing as a way of combating declining public confidence in the schools, believing that public ownership of schools is by no means an indication

of either public support or satisfaction. Should this interest in marketing principles and practices spread and crystalize, it is quite likely that the advent of the consumer relations specialist may well precede voucher implementation, with the voucher serving merely as a reinforcing agent.

Employee Relations

Educational public relations, often viewed as an application of communications and human relations principles and strategies, has much in common with employee relations, where both concepts are also of considerable importance. In recent years collective bargaining has become a major concern of many school personnel specialists, who sometimes work in close relationship with educational public relations directors because of their mutual interest in the flow of information from the school to its internal and external publics.

Collective bargaining requires a steady flow of communications; more important, however, community support and teacher and student morale demand it. Bilateralism that maximizes cooperation and minimizes adversarial relationships is dependent upon ease of information access. But bargaining characterized by conflict and impasse feeds and flourishes on a lack of information, rumor, and misinformation. Information is also critical during and after a strike, the former, to keep parents informed about instructional continuity or school closings, and the latter, to repair the breach caused by administrative and staff contractual conflicts.

Currently there are arguments for and against including the educational public relations director at the bargaining table, the strongest of which, coming from both superintendents and educational public relations directors involved in a recent study, is that educational public relations directors lack both the necessary preparation and experience.²² Both superintendents and educational public relations directors do, however, see somewhat of a role for educational public relations directors in support of the chief negotiator during collective negotiations, with superintendents and educational public relations directors ranking in importance such support, ninth and seventeenth, respectively, on a list of 22 statements. Where both groups were in most agreement was on the statement that educational public relations directors were to establish credibility with the media during the negotiating process.²³

Of rather obvious importance is that educational public relations directors holding membership on administrative teams saw for themselves a stronger role in collective negotiations than those who did not hold administrative team membership. Finally, while superintendents appear reluctant to earmark a role for educational public relations directors on the negotiating team, they do seem to see an important role in communications for them while negotiations are ongoing and upon conclusion of a strike.²⁴

As collective negotiations continue to develop within the public school sector, educational public relations directors may be expected to assume additional responsibilities in the total negotiating process. In time these responsibilities will coalesce to form an employee relations role for them. But only those with adequate preparation and experience will be the ones who are identified with this new specialization.

Governmental Relations

According to the previously cited Delphi study, another top priority task for information specialists during the next 20 years is the development of communication strategies to secure community legislative support for financial funding.²⁵ In view of recent trends the identification of this task, and its anticipated criticality, is hardly surprising. Escalating school costs, rising property taxes, inflationary prices, and an incredibly shrinking dollar have prompted both school staff and program cutbacks. Declining enrollments have contributed no less to this awesome dilemma, as enrollments and programmatic needs rarely coincide. In the ensuing years institutions of all kinds that seek local, state, or federal support will find themselves competing for funding, the school being only one of many competitors for fewer and fewer dollars.

California's Proposition 13 and Massachusetts' Proposition 2½ merely signal a future educators will soon face nationwide. This bleak future of limited financial resources and heavy competition will prompt the rise of the governmental relations specialist. Well-grounded in the politics of education and school financing and adept in communicating school financial needs to a variety of groups, chiefly among them state and national legislators, this person will be, first and foremost, a professional lobbyist, contracted by a single school or a consortium of schools. For example, lobbyist activity may be expected to intensify at the state level with the establishment of block grants at the federal level for state funding to local education agencies.

In addition, this person would be expected to have competency in writing proposals for governmental grants, along with a knowledge of alternative sources, such as private foundations, from which grants may also be secured. In brief, the role of governmental relations specialist will be to translate school needs through oral and written communication into financial funding.

Conclusion

The future that awaits the educational public relations director is bright and promising. Technology, life-long education, choice, collective negotiations, and limited school funding are acting as determinants in shaping five distinct specializations: information management and techno-relations, community relations, consumer relations, employee relations, and governmental relations. Each of these specializations requires both preparation and commitment, and all have the potential to transform the traditional school publicist into a member of top management within the educational sector.

Footnotes

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Take your temperature with an effective thermometer

How healthy is your communication?

By William J. Banach

Maybe it's time to take the temperature of your communication program. Why? You may be working feverishly, slaving extra hours, wearing out the printing press . . . and doing the wrong things.

Conversely, your communication program may be very casual, with plenty of personal contact and no publications in sight. And you may have the perfect communication program.

Analysis—taking the temperature—is the first step in planning any communication program. Yet it is the most frequently ignored. Perhaps that's why so many public relations efforts don't make a difference.

One reason professionals haven't taken the time to analyze is lack of training. Very few communication people have had the good fortune to learn from someone who stressed ". . . knowing where you're going before you launch off."

A second reason is lack of an effective thermometer. Until recently, there has been no research-based method for conducting a communication audit. Public relations programs have been largely based on what others have done. We see what we consider a good idea, and we make it a part of our communication program. Yet, we don't take time to evaluate whether the idea is a productive and appropriate one for our situation.

Planning Communication: Key Considerations

There are several key factors to consider in planning school district communication. Two of these factors are the **environment** of the school district and the **community** which is a part of the environment.

These two factors—perhaps more than others—greatly influence the type of communication program needed in your school district. They also should be a consideration in the design of your management system.

Contingency theory provides a starting point for planning both communication and management systems. The basic axiom of this theory maintains that the structure and processes of a system (e.g., a school system) are a reflection of the environment around the system.

The more your school district's environment is changeable, the more your district must have processes for adapting to the changes. If your environment is stable, you must structure the school district and have processes which insure consistency, continuity, and control.

Two other contingency theory axioms deserve attention when planning communication:

1. There is more **total** communication in a system which must adapt often and quickly to changing environmental demands . . . and there is less **total** communication in a system which needs to adapt more slowly and less often.
2. There tends to be more reliance on informal communication (such as small group meetings and one-to-one contacts) in a system which must adapt often and quickly to changing environmental demands.

Auditing Your Communication

Following are two audit instruments from the Banach-Stech Communication Audit System.¹ The first measures the degree to which you must consider your environment in planning communication. The second relates to the nature of the community in which your school district is located.

Complete these audits. Then use the interpretative information which follows to assess whether your environment and community are appropriately accommodated in your communication program.

The Environmental Audit

Every organization is surrounded by other organizations, a community and, perhaps, competitors. These represent the environment. Read each question below and determine the extent to which it holds true for your organization and its environment. Then circle the number on the continuum scale which, in your opinion, provides the most appropriate rating.

William J. Banach, president-elect of the National School Public Relations Association, is administrative assistant, Communication and Management Training, Macomb Intermediate School District.

A. To what extent does your school district have to take information about the community, region, and/or state into account when making plans and decisions?
to no extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 to a great extent

B. To what extent does your school district seem to face rapid changes in the factors which affect or influence plans and decisions?
to no extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 to a great extent

C. To what extent are the changes which do occur relatively unpredictable and unknown ahead of time?
to no extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 to a great extent

D. To what extent is information about the community, region, and/or state hard to find and use in making plans and decisions?
to no extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 to a great extent

E. To what extent are the factors which influence plans and decisions uncontrollable by the school district and its personnel?
to no extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 to a great extent

F. To what extent is it difficult to assess the effectiveness of plans or decisions before they are implemented?
to no extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 to a great extent

Environmental Audit
Total Score
(Add numbers circled)

The Community Audit

The nature of your community affects school district functioning. It also affects communication patterns. The following rating scales focus on the nature of the community within which your school district functions.

Rate the extent to which you believe each statement applies to your school district and its surrounding community.

Citizens are fairly homogeneous in educational background, values, income, occupation, and other demographic variables	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Citizens are highly diverse in educational background, values, income, occupation, and other demographic variables
The population of the community is fairly stable and not changing much	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	The population of the community is changing rapidly
There is almost no conflict among segments of the community on educational matters	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	There is a fairly high level of conflict among segments of the community on educational matters
The citizens and parents are relatively apathetic and uninterested in the school district and its programs	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	The citizens and parents are highly involved and interested in the school district and its program
		Community Audit Total Score (Add numbers circled)

Your Schools and the Environment

Divide the total score for your environmental audit by 8. Enter the resulting number on the grid below.

Your environment is simple and stable	1 2 3 4 +	Your environment is complex and dynamic
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The environment of a school district can range from stable and simple to complex and dynamic. Research has shown that in a stable and simple environment, a school district (or any organization) can use more formal, structured, and centralized communication methods. Conversely, in a complex and dynamic environment, communication should be more informal, unstructured and decentralized.

When the school district environment is complex and dynamic, more information has to be gathered, changes are rapid and unpredictable, information is hard to find, the school district lacks control over some factors, and effectiveness of decisions cannot be guaranteed ahead of time. An informal communication system is needed.

Ratings toward 2 above indicate a need for a consistent and controlled management system. Communication should be formal and semiformal.

Ratings toward 4+ indicate a need for an adaptable, flexible and open management system. Communication should be semiformal and informal.

Your Schools and the Community

Divide the total score for your community audit by 5. Enter the resulting number on the grid below.

Your community is homogeneous, stable,
and not highly involved in school district
operations

___1___2___3___4+___

Your community is diverse,
unstable, and involved in school
district operations

The community is part of the total environment, but a most important part. The community audit assesses the nature of this important environment. Four aspects of the community (diversity, change, conflict, and involvement) influence communication within the district and also between the district and the community.

Ratings toward 2 above indicate a need for a consistent and controlled management system. Communication should be formal and semiformal.

Ratings toward 4+ indicate a need for an adaptable, flexible, and open management system. Communication should be semiformal and informal.

A Model for Planning Communication

As you've seen, there are factors (such as the environment and the community) which should be considered in your communication planning. Of course, the question is, do you have the right communication system for your situation. As a general guideline, the model for the Banach-Stech Communication Audit appears below. It will help you determine whether your communication program should be formal or informal... or a combination of the two.

If You Have...

a homogeneous community
a simple, stable environment
a slow rate of change
little management teamwork
a basic educational program

You Ought to Have...

a management system which is
consistent and controlled

This Requires...

less overall communication,
including lower levels of com-
munication with employees,
parents, and other citizens and
between departments, work units,
and school buildings. Formal
communication techniques are
appropriate.

If You Have...

a diverse community
a dynamic, complex environment
a rapid rate of change
an integrated management team
a diverse educational program

You Ought to Have...

a management system which is
adaptable, flexible and open

This Requires...

higher levels of overall communi-
cation, including higher levels
of formal and semiformal com-
munications with employees, higher
levels of formal and informal
communication with parents, and
other citizens and higher levels
of informal and semiformal com-
munication between departments,
units, and school buildings.

No one ever said communication was easy. But taking a research-based look at the factors which affect communication can keep your PR program on target and healthy.

Footnotes

1. The Banach-Stech Communication Audit, copyright 1981 by Banach-Stech Associates, Utica, MI 48087.

Book Reviews

Almanac is practical PR guide for educators

By Jerry Rodriguez

The Public Relations Almanac for Educators, Vol. 1 (Camp Hill Pennsylvania: Educational Communication Center, 1980), 139 pp., 8.95 paper.

As they enter the decade of the 1980s, educators are faced with public relations problems different from those of previous decades. News magazines and television programs have recently carried the message that the public schools are failing and that citizens have lost confidence in their educational institutions. Opinion polls support the claim that the public's attitudes about their schools have changed for the worse over the past decade. Publications are needed that will help school administrators and board members regain public approval and support for their schools. **The Public Relations Almanac for Educators**, with its emphasis on an array of effective PR practices, may be one such publication that can offer this kind of help.

A collection of 18 articles previously published in the **Journal of Educational Communication**, the **Almanac** is a practical "how-to" guide for educators interested in improving school PR. Contributing authors have a variety of backgrounds in school PR. Among them are a past and present president (as well as a president elect) of the National School Public Relations Association and authors of school PR texts. The content of the articles is timely and diverse, ranging from the general, how to conduct the traditional school survey, to the particular, how to communicate with minority publics.

The book is divided into eight chapters: Chapter 1—Planning and Management; Chapter 2—Internal Communication; Chapter 3—External Communication; Chapter 4—The Media; Chapter 5—Tax Referenda and Budget

Preparation; Chapter 6—Audio-Visuals; Chapter 7—Evaluation; and Chapter 8—PR Tips. Since the book is a collection of published journal articles, chapter titles and divisions do not always blend perfectly with the content, the result of which is a certain measure of inconsistency that tends to characterize such collections. The use of pictures, clip art, summary blurbs, and shaded-boxed layout provided a format which made this book easy to read. A publication class at Shippensburg (PA) State College did an excellent job of preparing the design, layout, and mechanics for the book.

One of the most informative articles is "Get Good Vibes from a Versatile House Organ" by Barbara Ondrasik. In it, the author offers many practical ideas, from a variety of sources, about publishing a staff newsletter.

Another very useful article is "Effective Communication and Efficient Management Go Hand-in-hand," by Nick Goble and Albert Holliday. The authors provide a 10-question quiz for management and staff members, which can be used to plan the school district's communication program.

A credibility gap, lack of representation, language, and media selection are four problems associated with communicating with minority publics, according to E.K. Waters and Reginald Young in their article, "Communicating with Minority Publics Takes Extra Effort." The authors suggest six techniques designed to structure effective communication with minority publics. Among the suggestions are messages that are designed to convey this attitude: "You are a part of us. We want you involved. We are anxious to help. And we have a problem and need your help" (p. 51).

In her timely article "Women on the Management Team," Frances Powell lists a number of adjustments in traditional attitudes that women **must** make before they can earn acceptance by the other members of the management team. Among her suggestions are: "Play the role properly. . . . Never become emotional with tears. . . . Never talk about your personal feelings with your peers. . . . Don't overemphasize the aspects of your sex in your dress. . . . Don't view job rejections as defeats" (pp 18-19).

For educators dependent on tax referendums for financial support of their school districts, the article "Plan Well, and Pass That Next Tax Referendum" by William Banach and Cass Franks is **must** reading. The authors detail an eight-step strategy to follow in every financial election. They also offer 100 questions to be posed to the planning group **before** final plans for the bond issue election are presented to the school board. The responses to these questions will assist in identifying "what has to be done, by whom, how and when" (p. 72.)

With increased interest in the public's attitudes toward their schools and the importance of conducting valid surveys, Don Gallagher's article, "Learn Citizens' Opinions through Surveys," provides school districts with valuable information on how to conduct their own public opinion polls. He also lists the advantages and limitations of four survey methods: personal interviews, telephone interviews, drop off/pick-up questionnaires, and mailed questionnaires.

Though only a few articles have been discussed in this review, what has been gleaned from the text should give ample indication of the usefulness and timeliness of the **Almanac**. Moreover, since the field of school-community relations has within it such a sparse body of significant literature, the **Almanac** should be welcomed for its contribution.

Jerry Rodriguez, an assistant professor of education at Indiana University in Fort Wayne, Indiana, teaches a course in school-community relations.

Everything (in short) you've always wanted to know about school PR

By Veda M. Williams

Building Public Confidence for YOUR Schools: A Source Book of Proven PR Practices. (Arlington Virginia: National School Public Relations Association, 1978), 224 pp., 13.95 paper.

As a sourcebook, **Building Public Confidence for YOUR Schools**, meets the test of the adage, loosely quoted, "... a little bit of all things for all people." It is a book for public school administrators, for public school practitioners of school public relations, and for students of school PR.

For the school district planning to start a school PR program, the book offers a number of typical school board policies covering public relations strategies in that school. It also provides a number of job descriptions for the school public relations director. Samples of board policies and job descriptions are found in an appendix at the back of the book. A study of them will provide many directions any school district might wish to explore when setting up a new school PR program.

For the school district with an existing program of public information and communications, the book contains 13 chapters of tightly-written and neatly-condensed materials. These chapters summarize virtually every topic approached by a school public relations department—private school, public school, parochial school, or college or university. For the experienced communicator, this book is an excellent review of the day-to-day strategies and techniques used by educators everywhere.

For the student of school public relations, the book outlines topic after topic covered in college courses, in summer seminars, and in special workshops. Beyond the textbook, it would provide a primary source of materials for the student in school PR.

With respect to the state of the practice of school

public relations in the 1970s and 1980s, **Building Public Confidence for YOUR Schools** is the "bible" of current practices.

Briefly, the chapters cover:

- **Chapter 1—Overview.** Communications needs in the schools are many in today's America. Federal, state, and local funding of public education demands an expanded interest in education on the part of many public groups.

- **Chapter 2—Public Relations.** This chapter justifies the growing fields of public relations, in general, and of school public relations, in particular.

- **Chapter 3—Public Opinion Polling.** Lest the reader be fooled, public opinion polling is not so easily accomplished as this chapter indicates. Nevertheless, condensed suggestions provide basic guidelines to the PR process.

- **Chapter 4—Where Do You Start?** Starting a new program in school PR should be infinitely easier with this chapter as a pacesetter to the why's and wherefore's, where the money comes from, what are sources of additional help and information, getting community help, and internal audiences to satisfy.

- **Chapter 5—Key Audiences.** In any community, there are a variety of key communicators—from parents and senior citizens, to teachers and business supporters. This chapter covers how to reach them, what you may want to say to them, and what means you can use to communicate with them. A checklist on "Crisis Planning" is succinctly written and should not be overlooked. School people often find themselves in the position of putting out brush fires during the high winds of public controversy.

- **Chapter 6—Tools of Communications.** Written, oral, and audio-visual forms of communications are described thoroughly. Writing skills are included.

- **Chapter 7—Working with the Media.** There's nothing like first-hand experience, human to human, to learn about working with the media; however, some basics are carefully studied in this brief treatise.

- **Chapter 8—Handling the Basics.** Working with advisory committees and school-level councils are a step above the basics in school PR, but the various techniques and theories are well-covered in this chapter, along with suggestions for evaluation forms for assessing the worth and work of such groups. School board PR, budgets, bond issues, and tax levies also are studied. Don't miss the 12-month planning calendar for bond issues and tax levies! Some districts plan 18-months to two years ahead of need, stretching out items shown in the 12-month planning calendar described here.

- **Chapter 9—Dealing with Special Problems.** This chapter doesn't try to reinvent the wheel regarding strategies for dealing with special problems like discipline, violence, vandalism, declining enrollments, releasing test scores, public involvement in education, strikes, or desegregation; it does codify some of the answers to dealing with them. It's quick and easy reading.

- **Chapter 10—At the Building Level.** Building level communications is "where it all begins," and this chapter "tells it all" about key communicators; citizen advisory committees; communicating with parents, teachers, staff, students, and citizens in the community; school publications; and, school techniques for dealing with test scores, annual reports, and working with the media.

- **Chapter 11—Small Schools.** Small school or large,

this chapter is a jewel in the crown of public relations strategies. It's two pages long, but the ideas can work throughout an educator's career, anywhere.

- **Chapter 12—Evaluating Your Efforts.** Many ideas here may be used for annual evaluations of school PR efforts and then extended into the next year as an outline for planning.

- **Chapter 13—Conclusion.** One page of justifications will inspire most school PR hopefuls and current practitioners to "get on with it."

For any school district, or for any school wishing to improve its school image, as well as for any educator or future educator interested in school public relations and communications, this book, **Building Public Confidence for YOUR Schools**, should be a must on the reference shelf. Particularly is this true for the school or person facing a tight budget with limited monies for professional books. After starting with this volume, practitioners may add at need and at current interest other books with more expansive descriptions of the topics.