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Most Web development programs now contain an option for creating, conducting, and tabulating these types of polls. A school district can compose a survey and post it on the Web or send e-mails and ask (by phone, e-mail, mail, etc.) a select universe to visit a certain Web address or reply to an e-mail to complete the questionnaire. Or the district can post the survey on a public page—their home page, for example—and just ask all visitors to fill it out. This latter type, though unscientific, is typical of the polls often promoted by TV news shows (“Visit our Web site to give us your opinion on the question of the day.”). When respondents select themselves, the results are always unscientific.

The options of school communicators seeking to use online survey techniques continue to grow. A number of vendors, such as SurveyMonkey and Constant Contact, offer online surveying services and support. Online survey options are available in online storage and sharing services, such as Google Drive. Some vendors, such as K12 Insight, offer online survey services and support specifically for school systems.

Sampling in online polling can be both scientific and unscientific. Results are sometimes representative of the population from which the sample was taken. In the out-call, Web site, and e-mail methods, a representative sample is difficult but possible to get. This can be done by a panel of respondents preselected by chance. E-mail addresses of a large population, such as an entire school district, virtually do not exist. As a result, e-mail surveys often are best used to query distinct populations easily reached by e-mail, such as staff members, parent groups, community organizations, business associations, and so on.

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A plan for crisis management training of all staff.

- Designation of specific management and reporting responsibilities of each staff member during a crisis.
- An outline of aftermath services for staff and students affected by trauma that addresses who will provide such services.
- An emergency intervention checklist to be widely distributed to employees and other appropriate persons for use in the event of a crisis.

The superintendent shall appoint a district-wide emergency management coordinator who shall work with the superintendent to develop the Crisis Management Plan, recruit and supervise a District and building level emergency response teams, coordinate in-service programs for teams and all staff members, serve as a liaison between central office and staff, and serve as a liaison between the district and local emergency agencies.

The coordinator shall be responsible for providing copies of current plans developed under this policy to local emergency agencies on a regular basis. (Reprinted with permission from Bloomington Public Schools.)

Advantage of Written Policies

Every board of education should have a carefully formulated statement of policy covering school and community relations. The policy should be in agreement with state school laws, the philosophy of the institution, and the traditions and opinions of people in the community. It should consist of a plan of action in which the purposes and general means for their attainment are described in written form or else in a statement in which the decision to act and the rationale for it are spelled out clearly.

Purpose is the crucial element in a policy statement because it tells why the policy has been developed and sets the goal to be accomplished. In this respect, the school–community relations policy should emphasize the development and continuance of a strong partnership between the school and the community. By bringing individuals and groups into a dynamic team, ideas can be exchanged, problems examined, practices reviewed, and decisions reached that will enrich the quality and increase popular support of public education.

Practical experience has shown that a number of advantages may be gained when a school system formulates and adopts a policy having the characteristics just described. These advantages are as follows:

- Policy facilitates the orientation of new board members regarding relations between the school and the community.
- Policy facilitates a similar orientation for new employees, both professional and nonprofessional, in the school system.
- Policy acquaints the public with the position of the school and encourages citizen involvement in educational affairs.
- Policy provides a reasonable guarantee that there will be consistency and continuity in the decisions that are made under it.
- Policy informs superintendents what they may expect from the board and what the board may expect from them.
- Policy creates the need for developing a detailed program in order to implement it.
- Policy provides a legal reason for the allocation of funds and facilities in order to make the policy work.
- Policy establishes an essential division between policymaking and policy administration.

The policy should be printed, with copies available for all members of the staff and for any resident of the community.

Policy Styles

For the most part, four styles are followed in the makeup of a policy statement: (1) Provisions of the policy statement may be set down in broad, flexible language and the details of its administration left to the discretion of the superintendent and his or her staff; (2) the policy statement may include the rationale or purposes for the decision and the aspects, parameters, or limits within which the program is to be designed; (3) rules and regulations or procedures may be attached to the policy statement and thereby become an integral part of it; or (4) the policy may take the form of a resolution on which the board will take legal action.

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Policy Development

The development of a school–community relations policy starts with a determination of the end to be served by the policy. This means simply asking why the policy is necessary. The answer to this question may be nothing more than a vague feeling of concern about the nature of the interaction between the school and the community, or it may arise quite naturally from the pressures of outside groups who are seeking change in the school program. The need for a policy might also be indicated by the complaints of parents, the defeat of a bond issue or millage proposal, or the treatment of the schools in the press. No matter how it arises, there must be first an understanding and determination of the reason or reasons why a policy should be developed.

Once the need for a policy has been reviewed with the board of education and the board has authorized the superintendent to work out the details and present them in writing, the door is open for establishing this task as a cooperative undertaking. Under the leadership of the superintendent or a member of his or her immediate staff, invitations can be extended to a cross-section of individuals who have an interest in the proposed policy or who will be affected by it later. They can be asked to serve on a committee for developing the policy, knowing that their recommendations will be subject to board of education acceptance, rejection, or modification.

The members of such a committee might consist of representatives of the board of education, administrators, teachers, parents, and other community residents. The committee should be large enough to produce a rich reservoir of pertinent ideas and information and small enough to permit a suitable arrangement for getting the job done. Not only should the committee have well-balanced representation, but it should also be made up of individuals who are seriously and constructively concerned with the promotion of public education.

The work of the committee calls for the gathering of information, ideas, and opinions about the needs and conditions to be met under the policy. It also calls for the determination of an appropriate rationale or statement of purposes as well as a decision to act that is in keeping with the rationale or purposes. The committee may decide to outline the general means for implementing the policy decision or to define the essential elements constituting the framework for a detailed program in school–community relations. In whatever way the committee handles the content and style of the policy statement, the results should be expressed in writing and transmitted by the superintendent to the board of education for review and decision.

Distribution

After a policy statement has been adopted by the board of education, it should be made available on the school district's Web site. It also might be printed in an attractive leaflet or flyer for distribution to key internal and external audiences. Copies should go to all employees of the school system, to parents of all students in the system, and to a selected cross-section of people in the community. In this way, the nature of the policy has a good chance of becoming common knowledge among the special publics in the community relations program.

Appraisal

In addition to the legislating of a policy in school and community relations, the board of education has a responsibility for appraising its effectiveness. It should require periodic reports from the superintendent in order to determine, first, whether the policy is being carried out as intended and, if so, whether the results are satisfactory. In accordance with the findings on these points, the board can decide to continue, amend, or repeal the policy.

Goals and Strategies

With a sound school–community relations policy approved by the board of education, a school district dedicated to effective communication programming moves on to determining goals sought and to selecting strategies to be employed in trying to reach them. Some districts are mandated by law to develop a strategic plan for a given period of time, perhaps five years. Part of this plan should cover internal and external communications and community relations. Moreover, community members should be on committees involved in developing a school district’s strategic plan. This approach is considered the conventional approach to planning.

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The Conventional Approach

The use of the conventional approach in program planning involves a number of important considerations and a logical sequence of procedures.

Program Goals

Goals are expected results, such as what an organization wants its public to know, feel, or do about itself. Not only do they reflect the viewpoint of the policy statement, but they also reaffirm the position taken in the stated philosophy and expected results of the school system.

Bagin and Gallagher give an example of program goals found in various school systems:

1. To develop intelligent public understanding of the school in all aspects of its operation
2. To determine how the public feels about the school and what it wishes the school to accomplish
3. To secure adequate financial support for a sound educational program
4. To help citizens feel a more direct responsibility for the quality of education the school provides
5. To earn the goodwill, respect, and confidence of the public in professional personnel and services of the institution
6. To bring about public realization of the need for change and what must be done to facilitate essential progress
7. To involve citizens in the work of the school and the solving of educational problems
8. To promote a genuine spirit of cooperation between the school and community in sharing leadership for the improvement of community life¹

Using Community Data

At this point in the conventional planning process, attention should be directed at the findings of the sociological inventory, the analysis of the power structure, and the measurements of prevailing opinions and beliefs of various special publics regarding the schools and the educational program. These findings and their interpretation make it possible to block out areas in need of new and of continued treatment. For example, the data might show what additional information people would like to have about certain aspects of administration, special services, or instructional practices. They might indicate the channels through which communication can be carried on more successfully with given publics. Certainly, they can help to delineate areas of most concern to taxpayers and to parents. Long-term and short-term goals can be readily identified and the need for priorities established. It is likewise possible that the data may disclose what values people in the community hold, who makes certain kinds of decisions, and what the educational expectations of citizens are. Data that serve to identify these and other matters of concern are invaluable in working out an efficient and effective school–community relations program.

It is advisable to put in precise written style all of the needs, problems, gaps, and so forth that the data reveal. The more precisely the objectives are stated, the better will be the decisions made subsequently about strategies and the means to be used for dealing with them.

Modifying the Goals

The findings may also indicate that some of the stated goals are unrealistic and for practical reasons should be modified. For example, if apathy and ignorance are dominant characteristics of the population in regard to the school system and its educational policies, this condition will have to be changed before a working partnership can be established with the community. The findings may instead show that it would be more desirable to focus attention on the need for guidance, remedial reading, or corrective physical education than try to interpret the work of the board and the administrators to the public. By relating the findings to the goals, it is possible to determine what modifications, if any, should be made before strategies and means are considered.

At the same time, a distinction should be made between long- and short-term goals. Long-term goals are those that require continued effort over a period of time, perhaps several years, before they can be achieved. Such a goal might be gaining acceptance and understanding of an innovative

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program some months before a transition from the old to the new takes place. Short-term goals, on the other hand, are those calling for immediate action, such as apprising parents of the necessity for changing the bus schedule at the beginning of the next month, or conducting a three-month campaign for an increase in the tax rate. Short-term goals can be reached and disposed of in a relatively brief period.

Strategies and Means

After the goals have been defined and accepted, thought should be given to the strategies to be followed for achieving them. Those who are doing the planning need not only to identify what has to be done but also to select the best possible way of doing it. For example, perhaps the broad line of action should be that of improving face-to-face relationships between school personnel and lay citizens in order to step up the dissemination of school information and correct some of the current misunderstandings about educational policies and practices. The implementation of this strategy would then call for a fairly long-range and continuous effort employing such techniques as internal publications, simulated parent–teacher conferences, interpretation of pupil records, and establishment of parent advisory committees.

If the goal is one of securing additional financial support in order to bring the educational program in line with the times, alternative strategies may be considered, such as working through community leaders, working through a special citizen advisory committee, making the problem exclusively that of the parent–teacher association, or singling out special publics for continuing exposure to the importance of additional support in terms of pupil and community welfare. The alternative selected or the combination of strategies to be used would dictate the techniques or means that offer the most promise of reaching the goal.

The strategies and means available are influenced by the nature of the audience, the availability of funds and facilities, and the competence of personnel. For instance, an annual report in tabloid newspaper form might be good strategy in one community where the appeal of this kind of format is high, and poor strategy in another area where the appeal is low. If there is not enough money to make a broadside attack on a problem of hostile attitudes toward administrative personnel and distrust of the board of education, it may be necessary to tailor the activities to available resources or abandon the project entirely. Furthermore, school systems do not always have individuals with the knowledge and experience required to use sophisticated devices and equipment for communicating ideas and information to selected audiences. All of these considerations play a vital part in the determination of the strategies and means that are to be employed.

Variations of the Conventional Approach

Public relations planners have further refined the conventional approach by giving added detail to the process. Anthony Fulginiti, an authority in public relations planning, divides it into two main sections: conceptualization and operationalization.² He further divides these sections into specific areas. For example, under conceptualization he includes goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics. Operationalization includes tasks, activities, agents, cost, and time.

Fulginiti's first step in planning is situation analysis, which he divides into three parts: Learning, Thinking, and Planning. Tucked into all three of these activities is the need to conceptualize a challenge and to operationalize activities to meet that challenge.

In the Learning stage, the school public relations counselor learns as much as possible about the issues through three specific activities:

- **Recording the issues history.** Use this history as a benchmark to improve the situation, to avoid pitfalls, and to make certain everyone's collective impression of the issues is the same.
- **Collecting additional issues data.** Time and activity change the facts of issues. Counselors use files, records, databases, e-mails, reports, and similar sources. At times, it might be necessary to conduct additional research to update the issues.
- **Describing the issues as they actually exist.** This is the all-important "real state" analysis, in which the counselor specifically describes and draws the starting line for the project.

In the real state analysis, the planner would interview members of the school district's top administrative team to gain their insights about their

Planning Checklist

Good planning is nothing more than a way of determining where to go and how to get there in the most efficient and effective manner possible. However, sometimes a yardstick is needed to measure the plan before it is finalized and put into action. In this way discrepancies may be discovered, omissions noted, and other weaknesses brought to the surface. Such a yardstick is the checklist suggested here. Although this checklist is quite comprehensive, it does not include the principles of communication; they are given in **Chapter 6** . Aside from these principles, the

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checklist summarizes the points made in the discussion thus far of the planning process:

- Program planning represents a process for implementing a legally adopted policy in school–community relations.
- The larger goals and specific objectives of the program are consistent with the philosophy of the school system and the laws of the state.
- The larger goals and specific objectives are stated in measurable terms to the extent possible.
- The strategies selected for attaining the objectives call for the involvement of members of various special publics when such involvement is feasible.
- A distinction is made in the plan between short- and long-term objectives.
- The objectives of the school–community relations program reflect an assessment of need or the gap discovered between what is and what should be.
- The program is planned and tailored to the nature of the school and the community with which it is identified.
- The communication channels selected for disseminating various kinds of information are appropriate for the audiences involved.
- The program calls for a continuing audit of the results it produces.
- Each individual having responsibility in the program knows exactly what he or she is trying to accomplish.
- The plan includes guides for resolving issues of emotional and intellectual concern to members of the community.
- Provision is made in the plan for long-range in-service education of the staff to the extent needed.
- Program strategies and activities are adapted to available human resources, funds, and facilities.

One Expert's Point of View: Effective Public Relations Planning Contributes to Communication, School and Student Success

School communication leader Susan Hardy Brooks sees school communication planning as critical to both program and personal success. Hardy Brooks has counseled executives and organizations on a range of leadership, strategic planning, management, marketing, public relations, and communications issues for more than 30 years. As Assistant Vice-President at Schnake Turnbo Frank PR, a regional PR and management consulting firm with offices in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, she provides strategic counsel to several education clients as well as clients in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. She specializes in strategic planning, branding, process improvement, and market research.

What is the role of school public relations planning in the ultimate success of students, the schools that serve them, and the administrators who lead them?

Effective communication is crucial to the success of any endeavor. In order for students, schools, and administrators to succeed, a plan for communicating effectively needs to be in place. Without a school public relations plan, there are countless opportunities for communication to break down between administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the taxpayers that support the schools. Most school districts would never consider running a school without a curriculum plan. I believe a communications plan is equally important for the ultimate success of students, schools, and administrators.

What are the connections between sound strategic planning and sound public relations planning?

There is a strong and necessary connection between the two. It is always important for the public relations plan to be developed to support the overall strategic planning goals and initiatives of the school district. Most school districts

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today have strategic plans that guide the overall priorities of the district. If a public relations plan is built without consideration of the district's goals, it is difficult to place much credibility or importance on the work of the public relations staff. Process is another strong connection between strategic planning and public relations planning. Although there are a variety of approaches to planning, most include the basic steps of research, analysis, plan development—including goals, tactics, responsibilities—and evaluation or measurement. A good public relations plan has all of these elements.

Questions

1. You are a school administrator. A school board member says to you, "There's no need for a written policy on school–community relations. We have good relations with the citizens of the community." What points would you make to show the importance of a written policy on school communication?

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Why is a formal communication plan important to a school–community relations program, its effectiveness, and accountability for communication results?

3. Explain the importance of having the communications director as part of the district's leadership team. What should a communications director be expected to contribute as a member of the leadership team?