

The Board of Education

Board members must constantly remember that the schools are owned by the people: taxpayers. The community expects the children sent to the schools to learn effectively, and the community members pay the bills to keep the schools running. In most districts, people elect representatives to govern the schools they own. They should, therefore, be kept informed on a regular basis about how money is being spent and how effective the education being provided is.

How people feel, what they believe, and how they act toward the school, its officers, proposals, and programs can be summed up in the term *public opinion*. Public opinion is that intangible but powerful force in American life that influences all that is

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done in public affairs. A school board must know something about the nature of public opinion in order to run a good school system. If it fails to do what the public wants, sharp criticism follows. If it moves too far ahead of public opinion, it invites opposition. If board members confuse their own interests with those of the public, they often stir up resentment and conflict.

Every school board constantly faces the task of trying to satisfy all the people and groups in the community. This can never be done. Nonetheless, the board can be better prepared for reactions of various constituencies if it constantly measures public opinion and anticipates those reactions. Board members must recognize that the board is always subject to criticism by diverse elements of the population.

Many people see the schools personified in the board members themselves. Because the board is the governing body, the public often judges the school system on the manner in which the board conducts itself. Therefore, in its relations with the public, a board has a number of important responsibilities.

Policy

The first thing that must be done before a program can be built is for a board to adopt a community relations policy. It is essential that this be put into writing and made available to the public and the profession; it puts a board on record as wanting to make education a collaboration between the school and the community. A policy is the basis for the superintendent and his or her staff to work out the details of the program for the board's approval. The policy statement can be short and somewhat simple. It should say what should be done and reasons for doing it. A clear-cut statement of this kind reduces the chances of misunderstanding, puts up a restraint against impulsive action, and serves as a guide in decision making. (**Chapter 4** provides details on community relations policy development.)

Modeling Communication Externally

The board of education sets a better tone for the system when it consults with interested citizens and representatives of community groups on problems facing the schools. Interested citizens have much to contribute to the solution of problems facing a board. Although a board can gain much from hearing the views of citizens, it is in no way bound by them. Moreover, those whose opinions are sought usually become strong and loyal supporters of the system. Good ideas and suggestions can also be obtained from groups that have interests in recreation, safety, health, library services, correction of physical handicaps in children, citizenship training, and the like. Consulting these people makes them partners in the job of education and helps to build many bridges of goodwill and understanding.

In daily contacts with people, the individual board members are both listeners and ambassadors of the school system. They have wonderful opportunities at family gatherings, through church activities, in fraternal orders, and in everyday business to talk constructively about the needs of the schools, the work of the teachers, and the hopes for the future. Through what they say and the way they say it, they can build a desire in people for better education for children (see **Figure 5.1**).

Modeling Communication Internally

The attitudes and actions of the school board affect the attitudes and actions of employees in the school system. The board should take an interest in the welfare of staff members and meet their needs before they become demands. It should recognize the outstanding work of employees, who want recognition for jobs well done. Recognition makes them feel more important, more willing to work harder, and more loyal to the school system. Recognition can be given through letters of commendation, newspaper publicity, periodic banquets, release from teaching for special assignments, and so forth.

The board of education sets a better tone for the system when it consults with employees on problems facing the schools. Employees like to be consulted. They appreciate knowing that interest is taken in their ideas and that they are important to the school system. Personnel studies in industry have shown that production increases when workers are taken into the confidence of management and

Figure 5.1 School–Community Relations and the School Board.

Source: Reprinted with permission from Raising the Bar for School PR: New Standards for the School Publication Profession, a publication of the National School Public Relations Association (www.nspr.org), 15948 Derwood Road, Rockville, MD 20855.

The following criteria (developed by the National School Public Relations Association) should be evident in any organization that is working to develop and achieve a strategic and comprehensive public relations program.

Governing Board: The governing board of the organization understands and models its policy-setting responsibilities on actions that are in the best interests of students and their learning.

- The board has adopted and ensures periodic review of a mission, goals, and objectives that have been developed with stakeholder involvement.
- The board has a code of conduct that includes modeling respect, civility, and integrity.
- Board members work with the superintendent and staff in relationships that are built on mutual trust and respect.
- The board understands and practices its role of setting clear policy direction and helps build a culture that supports the staff in its role in implementing and administering those policies.
- The board seeks input from organization stakeholders before developing policy and clearly communicates its actions and the reasons for them.

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feel that they have some part in decisions that are made. Those districts that have a history of consulting with employees on workload, sick leave, retirement, supply and equipment needs, discipline, curriculum revision, hiring of personnel, and so forth have found staff morale high, an improved educational program, and fewer and less severe confrontations with employees. With this relationship of staff to administration, everybody is better able to get down to the business of educating the children of a community.

The board should also invite teachers to give presentations on their work at public board meetings. In other words, it should show a real interest in the work being done by employees.

Relationship to Parents

Board members often receive complaints about the school from parents. The manner in which they handle these complaints has a great deal to do with the effectiveness of the school administration. Some board members attempt to answer a complaint themselves without directing it to the appropriate administrator, or they may bypass the superintendent and go directly to the teacher or principal involved. Both of these approaches should be avoided. When a complaint is received from a parent, a board member should always ask if the parent has contacted the principal of the school or the superintendent.

It is wise for each board to develop and adopt a policy on how complaints are to be handled in a school system. Once adopted, this policy should be distributed to all parents and publicized in newspapers and at parent-teacher meetings. In this way parents will know to whom to complain, and board members will understand their role in handling complaints.

Relationship with the Administration

The separation of responsibility between the school board and the administration is not always recognized by the board. Some members have the mistaken belief that it is their duty to actually administer the schools. Some boards spend time dealing with administrative details that should be the responsibility of the superintendent. When boards attempt to manage the schools, they fail to give the necessary attention to their major responsibility: seeing that the schools are run properly.

Some boards consider themselves a group of administrators, with the professional staff as its servants. This is a very poor attitude, and it results in a lack of cooperation with the administrative staff when the closest cooperative consideration of issues and problems by the board and the superintendent and his or her staff is necessary. The board and the administration must work in separate areas cooperatively if a school system is to function properly.

The Superintendent's Role

Current conditions in community life have added new meaning to the superintendent's role as the leader in building constructive bridges between the school as a social institution and the people who own and support it. Traditionally, the superintendent's role has centered on such activities as working with the parent-teacher association, establishing rapport with civic groups, becoming involved in community improvement projects, encouraging lay participation on school study committees, supervising the preparation and publication of news stories and literature concerning various phases of the educational program, handling the more serious complaints and criticisms of school policies and practices, and trying generally to bring the school and community into a closer and more harmonious relationship. Although these are desirable activities that have a place in any school-community relations program, they are not broad enough in concept to prepare for problems arising from the growth and expansion of the educational enterprise and the changes occurring in social, political, and economic life.

In both large and small school systems, the superintendent is faced today with strong demands from organized groups often advocating for special interests. Among other things, such groups want a larger and more decisive voice in policy determination, including such matters as more functional curricular offerings, improved food services for undernourished children, better racial representation among administrative and instructional personnel, expansion of special services in child and family welfare, lower costs for education, accountability for the educational outcomes produced in students, and increased community use of school facilities. Lined up opposite each demand are powerful and influential groups maintaining a diametrically different position.

Under such circumstances superintendents become mediating agents in matters relating to public education. They must try to reconcile individual and social values, negotiate conflicts between lay and professional interests, and divert the influence of powerful groups into constructive channels. This role calls for a high level of social insight and considerable skill in dealing with people. In reality, superintendents are cast by circumstances into the role of educational diplomats and must spend much of their time dealing with individuals and groups whose influence and power help to shape the quality of educational opportunity in the community.

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While carrying out their role as educational diplomats, superintendents must likewise attend to the responsibilities of the office on the more formalized aspects of the school–community relations program. In this regard they are central to developing and putting into practice the several strategies and activities called for in the program. Even though they delegate a substantial part of their responsibility to members of their administrative team, nevertheless they set the tone of the program, stimulate the effort that goes into it, and make the critical decisions it requires. *Unless they show dynamic leadership in pointing the way and setting the pace, it is doubtful the program will be successful.*

As program leaders, they have certain functions to discharge. Their all-pervasive function as heads of their school systems is that of maintaining, facilitating, and improving the educational opportunity for all children and youth in their districts. Correlative to that end are their functions in community relations, decision making, communicating, influencing, coordinating, and evaluating.

Translated into specific types of action, these functions fall into such performance patterns as the following:

- Developing a basic policy for encouraging and expanding constructive relationships between the school and the community
- Assuming initiative in the planning of processes and procedures for keeping the board, staff, and public well informed on school matters
- Helping all personnel connected with the school system become sensitive to the meaning and importance of their contacts in the community
- Ensuring the establishment and maintenance of open communication channels within the school system and between the system and the public
- Developing the structure and working relationships essential to the discharge of community relations responsibilities by administrative staff members and others
- Working with key groups and influential individuals in the community on significant educational policies and problems
- Seeing that key groups and influential individuals are supplied with facts and information that will challenge them to act on behalf of education
- Taking leadership in providing the opportunities required for districtwide involvement of citizens in programs for educational improvement
- Putting board and staff members in contact with groups and individuals whom they are most likely to influence on behalf of better education and with whom a two-way system of communication may be developed

- Seeing that the evaluative aspects of the school–community relations program are carried out and that findings and their interpretations are submitted for review by the board of education
- Bringing together members of the administrative system and utilizing their experience, knowledge, perceptions, and skills in decision making with regard to various facets of the school–community relations program.

These performance patterns vary among superintendents depending largely on district size and outside pressures. In smaller districts that lack specialized personnel, a superintendent may assume almost total responsibility for technical aspects of the program. He or she may prepare news releases, pamphlets, parent newsletters, radio scripts, details of open-house events, and direction of bond and millage campaigns, among others. Though the acceptance of such responsibilities is commendable, usually the more important aspects of community relations are either overlooked or disregarded. These include the development of basic policy, goal definition, and balanced program execution. In larger districts, outside pressures sometimes build to a point where the superintendent delegates his or her principal administrative tasks to a deputy and devotes his or her time almost exclusively to the demands of the situation.

The Administrative Team

The superintendency has become complicated enough that those who hold the position depend on the services of specialists in meeting their leadership responsibilities. In fact, the superintendency may be

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viewed today as more of a team arrangement than a single position. However, there are no standard patterns concerning the composition of the team. It varies with the interests and special abilities of the superintendent, competencies of his or her staff, and community pressures on the school system.

In large school systems the team may consist of the superintendent, deputy superintendent, associate superintendents, and district superintendents, with heads of divisions and principals being invited to meetings from time to time. The larger administrative staff, including principals, may be organized into a number of smaller groups for discussion of problems and exchange of ideas on a scheduled basis. In other districts, the team may be made up of the superintendent; directors of instruction, student personnel services, business management, staff personnel, research, planning, and school–community relations; and a representative sampling of school principals.

The team performs two important functions. First, it provides a superintendent with information and ideas that enable him or her to keep the school and community program in proper perspective and to generalize about the larger aspects of it. Second, it brings the expertise of members to bear on the development of program details and operational procedures.

In addition to their role as perceptive generalists, superintendents may serve on the team as specialists in one or more administrative task areas. It is common to find superintendents wearing the cloak of building specialists, business specialists, community relations specialists, or instructional specialists. In some instances they retain the same specialties they had prior to becoming heads of their school systems. Occasionally, they are forced to assume a specialist's role because of the system's size or the lack of qualified personnel. However, as team members they usually pursue a specialty that is appropriate to their training and experience.

Director of School–Community Relations

Directors of school–community relations are members of the administrative team in many school systems. They are members because of the strategic position they hold and the nature of their assignment. This will be evident in the discussion that follows regarding their status at present and the qualifications required for fulfilling their role successfully.

Title of Position

Directors of school–community relations have a variety of position titles. The titles used most frequently are director, specialist, coordinator, or manager of communications; director, specialist, officer, or coordinator of public information; director of community relations; and public relations director. In addition to these titles, there is a smattering of additional titles, such as publication specialist or coordinator, director of public affairs, director of community services, and marketing specialist.

These titles represent a shift in concept that has taken place over the years from such terms as *public relations* to *community relations* or *community services*, *communications*, and *information*.

Administrative Level

The position of director of school–community relations varies somewhat in terms of the administrative level at which it is placed. Only the largest school systems designate this officer as an assistant or associate superintendent with line authority. Usually the person holds a staff position and in many instances his or her title carries the word *director*, *coordinator*, *officer*, or *specialist*.¹ As a staff member, the officer reports directly to the superintendent, though in some school districts he or she reports to some other administrator, such as an assistant superintendent, an associate superintendent, or a deputy superintendent.

With the public becoming more sensitive to educational costs and to what goes on in schools, it's imperative that the public relations person be a member of the superintendent's cabinet. He or she can help the district administrators understand how a decision will be perceived by the public. Likewise, if the public relations person is to explain, defend, or interpret school district policies properly to the public, he or she must be involved in their development from conception to birth. In addition, this person, with an understanding of citizen attitudes, must be part of the cabinet if the group is to understand thoroughly the feelings of the community.

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Size of System

The question frequently arises as to how large a system should be in terms of student enrollment to justify the employment of a full-time director of school–community relations. A generally accepted rule of thumb is that a full-time director should be employed when student enrollment is in excess of 5,000. Some school districts with 3,000 students, however, have a full-time director of school–community relations. Size, however, is just one criterion. The nature of the community is another. A stable 7,000-student community may not need a full-time director, whereas a problem-ridden 3,000-student community may.

A number of school districts have expanded the office and have given the full-time director all the responsibilities that are directly or indirectly related to communications. Aside from the usual public and community relations duties, these responsibilities can include employee communications, community education, adult education, district printing and graphics, editing all publications from district schools, and supervision of telephone operators, among other responsibilities. To meet such responsibilities some offices of communications employ 20 to 30 people.

In districts that do not group all communications responsibilities in one office, the decision to hire a qualified person to head the school–community relations program is contingent on factors other than student enrollment. Some of these factors probably are the financial condition of the district, the nature of existing community relations problems, and the board members' and superintendent's conceptualization of program requirements.

Functions and Responsibilities

Directors of school–community relations have to perform six basic functions when trying to reach the objectives of the program. One or two more could be added, but their addition would depend on how the position is viewed by the board of education and the superintendent of schools. The term *function* describes something that is done to facilitate the realization of the objectives for which the program is designed. The functions of the director are *research, advisement, planning, coordination, communication, and evaluation*. They make up the structure or system within which the details of the program are selected and carried out. From this point of view, these functions are the constants of the program—they do not change. What makes one program different from another is not the functions but rather the activities or variables that come under them. For example, advising the school board and superintendent should be a permanent task of directors, but the nature and subjects of their advisement may differ markedly from one system to another. The same is true regarding evaluation of program results. Here the function remains constant, but the way it is implemented may range considerably in what is done and how carefully it is done.

There are several reasons why directors' activities vary among school systems. In some districts the perception of their role by superiors is broad and balanced, and in others it is narrow and restrictive. Often district size influences the nature and scope of their activities. In small districts, for example, little or nothing may be done with the research function. Sometimes in larger school systems some of their activities will be handled by line personnel or even the superintendent. The amount of money available for community relations is a strong determinant of how directors spend their time and what they do. The nature of their work is likewise influenced by the kinds of problems facing the district and the image of the school system held by residents of the community.

Against the background of functions, several school systems throughout the United States have worked out statements describing the responsibilities of full-time directors of school–community relations. These statements represent not only the conceptualization of their role in a particular school system but also the nature and scope of the program they are expected to develop and put into practice. In one school district, for example, the director of communications' major activities are as follows:

1. Interpret policy of the board of education and the program of the school district to the public.
2. Edit the district's staff newsletter.
3. Plan and develop online content as well as internal and external publications.

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Supervise and assist the supervisor of communications with news media relations and with public affairs programming on the district's cable television channels.

- Facilitate staff recognition programs.

- Assist school personnel and board personnel in planning public participation events.

- Provide school–community relations consulting service to board of education members, central office administrators, and school principals.

- Help assess public attitudes and keep appropriate school personnel informed.

- Serve as a source of information to individuals from the community regarding school matters.

- Serve as a consultant in the preparation of informational materials prepared by school personnel.

- Serve as assistant clerk of the board of education and assist with agenda preparation, as needed.

- Provide effective leadership in implementing the school district's commitment to full compliance with civil rights legislation, rules, and regulations.

A somewhat different type of statement was prepared for the supervisor of information for another school district. It describes the office's major responsibilities as follows:

1. Counsels superintendent of schools, board of education, and others as needed, in matters relating to public relations.
2. Produces district newsletters, brochures, and Web materials (editor, writer, photographer).
 - a. Staff monthly newsletter on board of education actions
 - b. Staff quarterly newsletter
 - c. Monthly newsletter to all parents

- d. Annual report to all residents and businesses in the community
- e. Periodic brochures as needed, usually two or three each year

3. Prepares all district news releases and writes magazine articles.
4. Counsels school personnel on writing manuscripts and approves material written by school personnel if it mentions the district personnel, programs, methods, materials, or other related information associated with the school district.
5. Approves requests to use students and facilities for "production" purposes not covered under civic center requests, and acts as liaison between the school district and photographers, film and television companies, and other media.
6. Represents the school district as spokesperson to the media.
7. Attends all regular board of education meetings to assist media.
8. Answers general inquiries about the school district and is the contact person in other phases of community relations.

In systems that employ a part-time director of school–community relations, the position is given a range of titles. In many instances, this individual is a central office administrator who reports directly to the superintendent of schools.

The responsibilities assigned to the part-time director are associated mostly with the use of online and mass communication. They include handling the development of online content and information, collecting news and preparing news releases, writing community newsletters and staff newsletters as well as leaflets and brochures, developing video and audio material for community relations projects, producing speeches and reports, and performing editorial services for members of the central office staff. In addition, the part-time director may be responsible for handling citizen inquiries and complaints, a speakers' bureau, and millage and bond campaigns. Some part-time directors prepare the superintendent's annual report, establish contacts with civic groups, disseminate information on federal and state projects, and direct special-event undertakings, such as American Education Week activities or school open-house events.

Professional Qualifications

More and more school systems have established formal requirements for the position of director of school–community relations. One school district has as its requirements graduation from a four-year

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Supervise and assist the supervisor of communications with news media relations and with public affairs programming on the district's cable television channels.

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Standards for Educational Public Relations Professionals

A skilled school public relations professional performs essential communication functions to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. While qualifications can vary depending on the sophistication of the work required, all practitioners should meet certain minimum standards.

General Standards

An understanding of and commitment to the role and social responsibility of public relations and communications for all educational institutions, organizations, and agencies in a democratic society.

A commitment to improving educational opportunities for all.

A commitment to professional performance and ethical behavior as described in the National School Public Relations Association's Ethics for Educational Public Relations.

Professional Preparation

A bachelor's degree from an accredited university or—for department leaders—experience in the field is a minimum requirement.

Abilities and Aptitudes

A comprehensive working knowledge of internal and external public relations and communications programs for an educational organization.

A mastery of communications skills.

An understanding of the importance of two-way communication between an organization's staff and its many publics and audiences, and the ability to carry it out.

A thorough knowledge and understanding of communications theory and research.

An ability to provide expertise and advice to top management.

Professional Growth and Development

Standards for professional growth and development require that educational public relations and communications professionals continue to refine their skills and expand their knowledge by:

Maintaining membership and participation in the National School Public Relations Association and other professional public relations associations and societies.

Pursuing professional accreditation.

Participation in public relations seminars, conferences, workshops, and institutes.

Pursuing additional study beyond a bachelor's degree.

Reading, researching, writing, speaking, and consulting in education, public relations, and communications.²

Communication Specialists

Except in small school systems where it would be difficult to justify the expense, directors of community relations need the services of one or more trained communication specialists.

Without such

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help it is virtually impossible for them to undertake a comprehensive program or to achieve established objectives. They must instead eliminate all but the most critical parts of the program and then concentrate their efforts on those activities that they handle best. A glance at the nature of programs in school systems having only a director indicates that attention centers principally on such things as preparation and release of news stories, development of newsletters and pamphlets, and maintenance of relationships with some community groups.

Where directors have the right to employ professional staff, practice shows that they usually select individuals with a background of preparation and experience in editing, writing, and use of online and mass media. Many come from journalism, public relations, or broadcasting. Some, however, have specialties in commercial art or graphic and digital design. If the system is large enough, the office of director may be divided into sections such as an information section, Web and publications section, community relations section, and community education section, with a supervisor placed in charge of each one. A substantial portion of the director's time then goes into the administration of these sections.

Plans of Organization

In general, three plans of organization are used to place responsibility for community relations activities and to facilitate the operation of the program. They may be described as centralized, decentralized, and coordinated plans.

Centralized Plan

A centralized plan is one in which responsibility for the program is centered almost entirely in the chief administrative officer and his or her immediate line and staff associates. Those who support this plan of organization point out that the superintendent is the person best known to the people of the community and is looked to for leadership in matters affecting the welfare of children. Superintendents are expected to supply information on the conditions, needs, and practices of the schools. They enjoy many contacts with important citizens that enable them to keep their fingers on the pulse of public opinion. As a result they know when it is opportune to propose new policies and suggest changes in older ones. Specific assignments can be made and responsibility fixed more easily in the plan. Moreover, the staff is readily available for consultation. The example set by superintendents and their associates can have a wholesome influence on all employees in the system, who may show more interest in their own relations with the public.

Thus, in a small school system the superintendent engages in a variety of activities for interpreting the work of the school and earning the goodwill of the public. For example, he or she may give talks before many groups, join different organizations, participate in community affairs, supply news copy, prepare printed materials, and handle complaints received in the system. He or she may also consult with teachers on community problems and urge them to improve their relations with students, parents, and other citizens.

In larger systems, superintendents delegate much of this responsibility to other persons. Usually they will delegate it either to an assistant superintendent in the line of authority or to a director of school–community relations with staff status. The program operates at the top of the system, with comparatively slight attention being given to individual building principals and their staffs. Instead of focusing on the personal side of community relations as an essential part of the total program, emphasis is placed heavily on community group relations, relationships with the community power structure, contacts with commercial media, and the preparation of materials for media distribution.

Although this type of centralized arrangement is found in many large school systems, it has serious weaknesses. The most serious is the fact that good community relations can never be achieved solely through the office of the superintendent and his or her immediate associates. They may do excellent work through their personal contacts in the community and through the preparation and distribution of printed materials, but these activities are scarcely effective enough to offset the negative influence of unsatisfactory relationships between individual building personnel and students, parents, graduates, and others.

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Decentralized Plan

In a decentralized plan, responsibility for the program is centered almost entirely in the building principal and the individual school is regarded as the natural unit for community relations. This is a common plan in many school systems today. There is justification for it. As an educational leader, the building principal is in a strong position to foster friendly relations with the school's publics on a neighborhood and area basis. Principals are close to the people and have a more intimate understanding of their needs and interests than do the administrative and supervisory officials at the top of the system. Principals can work with the instructional and noninstructional staff in establishing need for the program and conduct in-service training through the everyday situations that arise in the school. Excellent media are available for keeping parents informed and educating staff in the service area about instructional aims and practices. Through the principal's efforts, the building can become a community center and activities carried on for the improvement of community living.

Though the decentralized plan is excellent in many respects, it is open to criticism in others. It usually means a neglect of community relations by central administrative officials and a failure on their part to reinforce the efforts of school principals and their staffs. Without central administrative leadership and direction, some principals are incapable of developing sound programs or they are unwilling to take the initiative. Nor does this plan function successfully in systems replete with dissension among staff and with strong conflict between staff and administration.

Coordinated Plan

A coordinated plan is one in which community relations responsibilities of central administrative officers and building principals are fitted together into an articulated unit. The work of those at the top is planned to complement and reinforce that of the principals and their staffs. Each knows what is expected of the other. Central administrators, especially the director of school–community relations, serve as resource persons in assisting the principal and members of his or her staff. The administrator’s advice and special knowledge may be requested in such matters as preparing leaflets and brochures for parents, resolving complaints and criticisms, gathering and writing news stories, and appraising the effectiveness of certain program activities. In many phases of the individual building program, central administrators are expected not only to perform advisory functions but also to share responsibility with the principal and his or her staff. They may share responsibility, for example, in arranging contacts with the news media, selecting a representative panel of citizens for advisory purposes, and assessing the nature of public opinion on particular issues in the attendance area served by the individual school.

In the coordinated plan, the building principals have broad discretionary powers. However, they must use them within the structure of the district’s philosophy and objectives of education and its policy on community relations. In their leadership role, they involve teachers and other staff members in program planning and operation, beginning with the identification of needs through the evaluation and dissemination of results. In making special assignments, they try to gear them to the interests and competencies of staff members. In their role as communicators, the principals explain all facets of the program to building personnel and interpret the educational enterprise and its problems to students, parents, people in the school system, and residents in the immediate attendance area.

In some large secondary schools today, the principal is assisted in his or her work by either a full- or part-time community relations specialist. This person may act as a liaison with community groups, handle news media contacts, prepare news stories and spot news announcements, edit internal and external publications, involve parents and others as resource persons for classes and committees, prepare and direct tours and observations for visitors, organize special advisory groups, and serve as a clearing agent for inquiries.

If the coordinated plan is organized carefully and the division of responsibilities is understood clearly, it offers an excellent opportunity for developing a comprehensive and well-balanced program that should produce satisfactory results.

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Responsibilities of other Team Members

Other central administrative team members, in addition to the superintendent and the director of community relations, have definite responsibilities in the community relations program. These members include assistant superintendents, district superintendents, and directors of special divisions and departments. Their community relations responsibilities cover the reception and treatment of office visitors, the effect of team activities on the community and district employees, the proper handling of telephone calls, the skillful management of correspondence, and the maintenance of satisfactory contacts with professional and noncertificated personnel within the system. They also serve in a resource capacity to building principals, as in the coordinated plan of organization. Through contacts with business leaders and others in the community, they have many chances to interpret the school and to create channels for a two-way flow and exchange of ideas and information.

These administrative members are expected in some systems to prepare their own interpretive materials, using the services of the community relations director's staff and special offices of the school system, such as that of the audiovisual director. They are also expected to furnish information requested by the community relations director and to apprise him or her of any significant happenings that come to their attention. In a number of districts, they are assigned responsibility for specific program activities, such as television programs, sociological studies, special events, and the preparation and application of evaluative instruments.

Budgetary Provisions

How much money should a school system spend for public relations personnel, services, and media? Administrators and school board members frequently ask this question. They want to know approximately what their school system will have to pay for a good public relations program. No method has been discovered for calculating this figure, nor is there likely to be one in the future. The cost will naturally vary with the amount of work to be done and the willingness of the system to do it. Therefore, the only practical answer to the question is to first build the program and then determine how much money must be appropriated to operate it.

Determining how much money a program will cost is not easy because many of the activities are interwoven with regular services. However, many methods have been advocated for arriving at a cost figure. One is to take a fixed percentage of the total school budget—say, one-half of 1 percent (0.5 percent)—and allocate this amount of money for program operation. Another is the project-appropriation method, whereby the budget is based on the estimated cost of the projects planned for the year. A third method is followed in systems having a public relations office with a director in charge. The budget is restricted to this office alone and worked out in the same way as the budgets for research, student personnel, accounting, adult education, and similar departments performing special services. Still another method is to make a careful analysis of the program for the year and estimate how much money the board of education must provide. The amount needed can be presented in a separate budget statement, or it can be included in the budgets of the several departments and units of the system having responsibilities in the program.

A problem in public relations budgeting is determining just what should be included. So many activities in a school district can be considered public or community relations activities, such as any external correspondence, report cards, appearance and printing of stationery, telephone costs of all offices, board meetings, appearance of buildings and transportation equipment, special events, community education, adult education, and so forth. Obviously, in many districts budgeting for these activities can't be included totally under the school–community relations section of a school budget. In some larger districts it may well be.

More specifically, the budgets of many school–community relations offices would include such considerations as salaries, telephone costs, postage, stationery, office supplies, printing and publications, graphic supplies, memberships in organizations, travel, conferences, and subscriptions to professional

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publications and local papers; equipment such as cameras, audiovisual items, computers, and printers; and outside services such as graphic artwork, photographs, mailing services, online services, and clipping services. If any special event is the total responsibility of the school–community relations office, it should also be included in the department's budget.

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Specific Community Relations Responsibilities

No community relations program or plan of organization will function successfully until employees know exactly what they are expected to do and understand the limits of their authority. Although the general community relations responsibilities usually apply to all employees in all school districts, specific responsibilities may differ between one system and another. Those described here may be tailored to the needs of a particular school system.

Teacher

The teacher is a frontline interpreter of the school system through daily contacts with members of its different publics, particularly the students. In this capacity teachers have a number of specific community relations responsibilities:

Do as good a job of teaching as possible. The backbone of any community relations program is the teaching job done in the classroom.

Work constantly for good relations with students, parents, and people in the community. Much of this book is related to working with these three groups. It offers some ideas on working with students, outlines the partnership between the parents and the schools, and suggests ways of working for good relations with the community.

Work cooperatively with colleagues. Few school systems can attain or hold the confidence of the community if there is internal discord. Successful schools and teachers have learned that they must live in some degree of harmony if they are to gain the support of the community and maintain educational effectiveness.

Participate in community affairs. It is important that the teacher voluntarily take an active person-to-person role in the community if the school–community relations program is to be effective. By virtue of background, education, and experiences, he or she should be able to make a contribution to the community.

Work closely with the director of community relations. If a school system employs a director of community relations, he or she, working through principals, can be a great help to the teachers. Usually, the director brings to the position a background that enables him or her to see the community relations value of classroom activities, which may be overlooked by the teacher. Therefore, the director of community relations needs to be informed of the activities the teachers are planning over an extended period of time to make a judgment on their community relations value.

Cooperate in the development of an individual community relations program for a school. Even though a school system may develop a total community relations program, each school is responsible for developing whatever part is unique to the individual building. This possibly calls for a committee of administrators, teachers, parents, and even students to suggest activities that will help the school and the community understand each

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other better. However, some school principals may choose a method other than a committee to develop a community relations program.

Specialists

Specialists are those professionals in the school whose services in no way affect class size. Usually included among specialists are subject specialists, counselors, school psychologists, home visitors or social workers, librarians, nurses, doctors and dentists, and tax collectors. Many of their community relations responsibilities parallel those of the teachers. Others are unique.

Subject specialists. This group includes the coordinators and staff members who have specialized in a subject area such as music, art, languages, and so forth. Their community relations responsibilities include those of a teacher plus the responsibility of keeping their colleagues and students informed of the activities and developments in their subject field.

Counselors. Like teachers, the guidance counselors work closely with students, parents, other staff members, and the community. They have a major responsibility in making sure that the relationship with these various publics continues to result in better education for the students and continued support of the schools.

School psychologists. Psychologists' relations with the various publics are similar to those of a guidance counselor; likewise, many of the responsibilities are the same. Much of what has been suggested in the way of activities to promote confidence and understanding of the school applies to school psychologists.

Home visitors or social workers. Many school systems are fortunate to have a home visitor. Often, this person is the only contact between the home and the school—a fact that emphasizes the importance of his or her community relations role and personal qualifications.

Librarians. The librarians bear an important responsibility for the success of a school–community relations program. They have contacts with students, parents, and the community and work closely with colleagues in making sure that students are provided a good education. What they do in establishing and maintaining good relations with these groups is instrumental in building the image of the school that is conveyed to the community.

Nurses. In the course of the school year, many students come in contact with the school nurse. This, of course, means that there are many occasions for direct or indirect contact with homes and colleagues. The importance of the nurses in school–community relations is apparent in the skill with which they perform their duties and the manner in which they work with students, parents, colleagues, and the community.

Doctors and dentists. Often these medical professionals, because they are usually part-time employees, don't consider themselves part of the school team. Yet their level of competency in treating students and their contacts with parents and the community are bound to have an effect on the school–community relations program.

In the community, these professionals have contacts with colleagues and patients that give them an opportunity to interpret and explain the schools. This means that school administrators have an obligation to provide the school doctors and dentists with helpful information about the schools. Conversely, they should keep the schools informed of information, community attitudes, and opinions toward local education.

Tax collectors. Schools must work closely with these professionals to keep them informed about the schools. They come face-to-face with many taxpayers who are critical of the schools. Tax collectors who understand the school district and its needs, goals, programs, and procedures can deter many critics. In fact, they can provide citizens with a significant amount of positive information about the schools. This requires school officials to maintain a structured

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program to keep tax collectors informed through workshops, meetings, and literature.

Support Personnel

This group of employees typically includes the clerical personnel, maintenance and facilities personnel, transportation workers, and food-service workers. They all have a measurable influence on the school–community relations program, yet they are sometimes overlooked by school officials.

Clerical personnel. In a real sense these employees are on the front line of the school–community relations program. They are often the first contact the parents and the community have with the school. What they say, the tone they convey, and the courtesy they extend all contribute to the attitude and opinions formed by the public about the schools. The sheer number of contacts with the public each week puts clerical workers in an instrumental position for developing good or ill will for the schools. It cannot be stressed enough how important these employees are to the effectiveness of the school–community relations program both internally and externally.

Maintenance and facilities personnel. Opinion about a school is often formed from two impressions—the appearance of a building and the personnel associated with the school. Often overlooked in a community relations program are the maintenance workers: custodians, groundskeepers, and mechanics. Their influence is felt primarily in the housekeeping and the general appearance of the building and grounds.

If they take pride in what they do and in keeping the building clean and maintained properly, this will reflect favorably on the school. Well-kept buildings and grounds say something to the public about the school system: that tax money is being spent wisely, management is effective, and public property is maintained properly.

Transportation workers. In many districts, bus drivers—after teachers—constitute the second largest group of school employees. Their contacts are primarily with students, some parents, and the community. It is with these groups that their primary community relations responsibilities lie.

Food-service workers. These employees also hold a strategic position in carrying out a school–community relations program. Many students carry home impressions of the cafeteria that influence parents' attitudes toward the school. An adequate selection of food, a diverse and popular menu, and reasonable prices impress children. Cafeteria workers have the responsibility of being courteous and clean, treating students with respect, and serving them efficiently.

Professional Development

Provision for professional development of communication skills is part of a good community relations program. Staff members must possess the knowledge and skills required to meet their responsibilities. Training may be given either through direct instruction or indirectly through a series of devices. The nature of the training will be determined by the experiences of the staff and the demands of the local program.

Direct Training

The more usual and successful types of direct training are as follows:

Orientation programs. These are designed to acquaint the new staff members with the school system and to help them make a satisfactory adjustment. During this training, their attention is directed to the community relations objectives and activities of the school system and the responsibilities they must meet. A staff member who has gone through a good orientation program is better equipped to interpret the schools and to build wholesome relations with the public.

Instructional courses. These are formal courses taught by competent instructors from

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both inside and outside of the school system. They may be offered online or in traditional face-to-face formats and are used to train personnel for work done in all branches of the system. Courses in radio, television, video, editing, interviewing, news reporting, opinion polling, online communication, and e-mail correspondence make it possible for interested staff members to receive technical training and to qualify themselves to work with special communication media. Other courses of a more generalized nature may also be organized and offered in connection with the community relations program.

Workshops. The workshop method of training is regarded as an excellent means for increasing staff efficiency. It is built around problems that grow out of daily experiences, or it may be used for planning purposes. Held during the school year, the summer months, or both, the workshops meet in small groups with consultants to exchange ideas and to pool thinking. Groups may be set up to deal with such matters as home visits, open-house programs, oral and written expression, relations with parents, lay advisory committees, news reporting, and the like.

Clinics. This word is sometimes applied to short, intensive training programs for experienced personnel in specialized fields of service. For example, a clinic might be held for teachers who are responsible for gathering and reporting news stories. The purpose of the clinic might be to review their work and to find out how it could be improved, or it might be to propose a new system of reporting and acquaint teachers with the procedures.

Special meetings. From time to time the staff may be called together for special meetings devoted to community relations. Matters of current interest can be taken up with the entire group and points emphasized that are in need of immediate attention. Such meetings are more effective for disseminating and imparting important information than are written communications. The response to these meetings is favorable when good instructional techniques are employed in the presentation of materials.

Preschool conferences. As the title suggests, preschool conferences are held before the official opening of school in the fall. Anywhere from three days to two weeks are set aside for the conferences. During this time, the staff can work without interruption on the program for the year. They may be assisted by consultants and resource persons. The results more than justify the time expended.

Faculty meetings. Time can be set aside in regular faculty meetings for in-service training in community relations. The agenda should be planned cooperatively by the staff and administration and restricted to topics in which there is a mutual interest. More will be

achieved when subject matter is presented with the aid of films, videos, PowerPoint presentations, charts, graphs, printed materials, demonstrations, objects, and panel discussions.

Executive luncheon meetings. Executives need training just as much as do other staff members in the school system. This training can be carried on through a series of monthly luncheon meetings. The conference method of discussion, using carefully prepared material, is effective in dealing with problems that need attention and in presenting new ideas for consideration. Not enough has been done to stimulate the growth of executive personnel in school systems generally.

Indirect Training

Indirect training is accomplished through the use of instructive devices. The following are some of these devices:

Handbooks. Two types of handbooks contribute to the training of personnel in service. One supplies information that should be known by staff members in order to intelligently discuss the school with the public. The other outlines the responsibilities of each person in the program and how they should be

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handled. Both may be revised annually and distributed for ready reference and reading.

- **Internal publications and online resources.** These may take the form of a magazine, bulletin, newsletter, or material and resources available on the school system's intranet or other online communication system. They are prepared for employees of the school system. Published and updated regularly, they keep users and readers informed of what is happening in the system and offer many practical suggestions for better community relations. Sometimes they contain a citation column for bestowing recognition on those who have performed outstanding services.

- **External publications.** All staff members should have access to copies of every external publication, including the annual report of the superintendent to the board of education. They should know how the schools are being interpreted to people in the community and the nature of the publications distributed. The information contained in these publications is essential to their own work of telling the school story.

- **Checklists and rating scales.** These devices cause staff members to look at themselves and evaluate their own practices. Used sparingly, they can be valuable aids in the training program.³

- **Subscriptions to publications.** A number of worthwhile national publications on school–community relations are available at a reasonable price to distribute to employees. The National School Public Relations Association in Rockville, Maryland, publishes many of them.⁴