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Reading the Pulse of the Community

In Chapter 1, the importance of understanding what the public really thinks of our schools was discussed in great detail. Paying close attention to the public's perception of schools and then using this knowledge to design a school-community relations plan that fits and creates lasting connections was referred to. In this chapter these concepts will be expanded upon. Particular attention will be paid to the significance of understanding exactly what your community expects from your school and what your school needs from your community. With this knowledge, school administrators are best able to design and implement the most effective school-community relations plan for the community they serve.

Get to Know Community Leaders

Every community, regardless of size or location, has individuals who are considered to be the community leaders. Often these people are seen in this light because of the status of the jobs that they hold. For instance, in many communities, bank presidents, leading attorneys, and medical doctors have traditionally emerged as community leaders. Some communities see school administrators, higher education faculty, contractors, builders, and religious leaders in this leadership capacity. While the specific occupations of community leaders vary from one community to the next, all communities seem to have individuals who emerge in these leadership roles.

In addition to these more easily identified community leaders, there are many communities that have what is referred to as "pockets" of leadership. These "pockets" refer to smaller subgroups within the community that may have an individual or group of individuals they view as their leaders. Examples are some churches, private schools, ethnic groups, and/or minority groups. This is not to imply that everywhere these groups are found they exist as a subgroup or "pocket." It is certain, however, that in some communities groups that do not fit the description of the community norm find themselves forming an unofficial subgroup. These subgroups or "pockets" have their leaders as well. They may not be leaders in the broader community, but these "pockets" of leadership exert great influence over the people who may be a part of their "pocket."



School leaders must be aware of who holds leadership positions, either formally or informally, within these groups and within the community in its broadest sense. They must form professional relationships with these leaders in order to understand the needs and desires of the community members they represent. In most communities it is virtually impossible for a school leader to get to know, even on a shallow level, all of the members of the community. For this reason, the school leader must make every effort to begin forming relationships with the community leaders. By understanding who these individuals are and what interests they may be representing, the school leader can begin developing plans for including them in the school-community relations plan for their school. How to specifically accomplish this will be discussed later in this chapter.

For now, the focus is on how the school leader can go about getting to know these community leaders. Since the size and demographics of communities have such variation in them, what are some steps school leaders can take to begin the process of getting to know their community's leaders? Then, what specifically should be done with the information collected from these community leaders? The answers to these questions begin with the leader's willingness and ability to reach out to the different groups within the community. A great place to start is with local civic and cultural organizations.

Look to Local Civic Organizations

People who assume leadership roles in many communities frequently do so, at least in part, through their association with local civic organizations. While membership in many civic organizations is open to any members of the community desiring to serve, we are all aware of some organizations that limit their membership to individuals holding identifiable leadership positions within the community. While our own feelings of social and community justice may or may not support all of these organizations, it is difficult to deny the fact that many community leaders are found to have some association with these civic groups. It is also true that many of these organizations perform valuable services for the communities in which they are located. This provides school leaders with one more rather compelling reason why they should get to know leaders of civic organizations.

If school leaders desire to understand who the community leaders are, then they must look to these organizations. There is no implication here that the school leader must necessarily join any of the organizations. It is important, however, that the school leader is aware of who the members are and how leaders in the organization can be contacted. This information is of great value whenever the school leader is seeking a community outlet for garnering support for any type of school initiative. While these organizations can be great sources of funding, the support they can lend in other ways may be equally important to the school leader. Exhibit 2-1 lists some of the more common organizations

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Exhibit 2-1 Major Civic and Cultural Organizations

- AARP
- AMVETS
- American Red Cross
- American Cancer Association
- Kiwanis International
- Boy Scouts of America
- Girl Scouts
- Rotary International
- Lion's Club
- Fraternal Order of Police
- Jaycees
- Delta Kappa Gamma
- Chamber of Commerce
- Arts Council
- Historical Society
- Tourism Development Authority
- VFW
- YMCA
- Salvation Army

found within American communities. Absent from this list are organizations that profess or practice a particular religion or faith. These organizations can also be very important to the school leader, as they represent either majorities of the community or a community pocket, as referred to earlier. While some of these organizations may be unfamiliar in your particular community and other prominent local ones may be absent from the list, Exhibit 2-1 lists some of the more common organizations to look for.

By getting to know leaders of these organizations, school leaders will have at their disposal a tremendous connection to public opinion. Although a large segment of any given community will not be represented by these organizations and must be reached through alternative means, these organizations will provide access to the opinions of a large percentage of community leaders.

It is wise, therefore, for school administrators to arrange to speak to these groups whenever they implement or propose a program that would benefit from community support. Many of these organizations hold regularly scheduled meetings and enjoy having school personnel present innovative and necessary information about their school's goals and/or programs. Again, it is important to note that the responsibility for actually presenting to these groups is not solely the school administrator's. Many programs are best presented by the teachers and students involved in them. For example, when starting a conflict resolution program in elementary schools, many

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Joining Civic Organizations

There are school districts all over the United States in which school administrators are urged to join civic organizations in order to best represent their school as a vibrant part of the community. Although no public school employee ever should be cajoled into joining a civic organization, participation in such groups provides special benefits to schools of which administrators should be aware. It's good practice to check with the Superintendent regarding her/his feelings about civic organizations in the community. If the goals of the organization(s) do not conflict with moral, ethical standards that you hold individually, consider participating. Not only will the school benefit from the opportunities you will have to publicize your accomplishments or challenges as a school. Also, these organizations provide an early glimpse into challenges or goals that the larger community faces on the horizon.

school leaders have found that the faculty sponsor and some select students are far better at presenting the information than they themselves would be. Additionally, the members of the civic or cultural organization receiving the presentation often enjoy the opportunity to hear from youngsters at their meetings. In addition to meeting the organizations' goals of staying connected to the community, the school administrator, by scheduling such opportunities to inform, will meet the school's goals of creating an informed and supportive public.

Neighborhood Schools

It was once true that schools were considered integral parts of the neighborhoods in which they were located. Many readers can attest to this reality through their own personal memories and through testimony of walking through their neighborhood to their schools each morning. However, as some of our nation's neighborhoods have eroded, so too have the perceptions of the school as a good neighbor. In several of our nation's biggest cities, steps are being taken to reverse this process and return schools to the status of valued neighbor. This is being done in places like Boston, Los Angeles, and New York City because of an understanding that real school reform cannot occur if it ignores the circumstances of students' lives outside of school. The school itself must be returned to the status of "community beacon" so that students who lead impoverished lives can have something safe to rely on. Improving

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educational outcomes for students requires much more than attending to academic content and standards. The conditions in the neighborhood also have to be considered (Maeroff, 1998).

The return of schools as valued centers of the neighborhood is happening in some places. However, many communities cannot relate to this experience. Today, with many communities building schools on huge parcels of land set apart from the rest of the community, a neighborhood feeling between the school and the community just does not exist. Although I do not intend to be too harsh in my judgment of the particular location of schools in our communities, many people feel nostalgic over the loss of the neighborhood school. These feelings are not only induced because many schools are physically isolated from the community, they are often induced because of an emotional isolation. There are many people who literally live next door to a school, yet they feel very disconnected from the building and all of its inhabitants. For these people, school leaders need to demonstrate that they recognize that a relationship with community leaders will only take a school so far. The taxpayer living next door must also believe that he/she is important to the school and that the school family desires a relationship with him/her. Such a bond or relationship is accomplished through being a good neighbor. Good neighbors, I think we would all agree, communicate with and care about one another.

Important First Steps

Sound advice for any new school administrator is to take some time to personally visit the houses surrounding your school. Though you may temporarily feel like a door-to-door salesperson, you will be amazed and pleased at the reaction many neighbors have to this idea. These visits need not be long, but they should be focused on the fact that you are a new neighbor and you just want to say "Hello." You may even bring a set of specific questions that you want answered to assist you in ascertaining the extent to which the neighbor likes living near the school. While this discussion will tell you a great deal about discipline as students walk to and from school and behavior on the playground if you have one, it should not be the main focus of your visit. The purpose of this initial visit needs to be simply saying "Hello."

Exhibit 2-2 illustrates a sample script of how to approach these neighborhood visits. For obvious reasons the script cannot be carried too far as one can never precisely anticipate what the neighbor will say in reply.

While the mock introduction illustrated by the above example leaves no obvious room for response, your judgment must be trusted in determining how to deliver this mini speech. For example, it would certainly be unwise to read this monologue, leaving no opportunity for a reply from the neighbor. However, delivered in a conversational and genuine tone, this little speech accomplishes a few important goals, including the following:

Exhibit 2-2 The Initial Visit

"Good afternoon (morning). My name is Melissa Simone and I'm the new principal next door at Crestwood Elementary. Since we're going to be neighbors, I thought I'd like to just stop by and introduce myself. It's important to me that my family enjoys positive relationships with our neighbors. As I get to know my new school family even better, I'm going to be sure that I impress upon them the value of good neighbors. How long have you lived here? What have been some of the best things about living next to our school? What are some of the most difficult aspects? I don't want this to be the last time we ever speak. Please feel free to drop by the school and visit me whenever you'd like to. It was a pleasure meeting you."

1. It demonstrates a proactive approach. By making the visit in the first place, the school leader establishes that he/she wants to take the first step in relationship building.
2. It introduces the concept of the school functioning as a family within a neighborhood. This allows the neighbor to see the school in a friendlier, more personal way.
3. It invites the neighbor to share and be open without forcing the neighbor to do so.
4. It demonstrates that, as leader, you are interested in hearing about both the positive and negative aspects of your school.
5. It leaves the neighbor with an open invitation to contact you if problems ever do arise.

Again, visiting neighbors and introducing yourself will not be feasible in all situations. Some schools have no neighbors who are close in proximity. Other schools are situated amidst high-rise apartment buildings containing hundreds of residences. There are still other, yet unmentioned reasons why such visits are not possible for all administrators in all settings. However, for the administrators housed in schools where such visits are at least feasible, an opportunity for understanding the community is being missed if you do not take advantage of these situations. For those in communities where such visits are difficult, consider other creative ways that you, too, can get out into the community more. Such steps must begin with a conscious choice on the part of the administrator, though. What is needed is the belief that taking these steps is indeed important.

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Exhibit 2-3 A Welcoming Letter

Dear Neighbor,

As principal of Crestwood Elementary School for the last (insert appropriate time), I have tried to recognize the value of forming and maintaining valuable relationships with our school's neighbors. Since we all co-exist within the same small geographical area, I feel it is important to understand how we can best be neighbors to one another. As we all become so busy during the courses of our days, we have not had ample opportunities to get to know each other to the extent that I feel is important. Because some of you have children in our school, some of us have had occasions to meet and speak before. However, those of you without children in our school are equally important to all of us at Crestwood.

During the week of October 5–9, I will be walking through the neighborhood with the sole purpose of getting to know our neighbors better. If you are available when I'm in the neighborhood, I'd love to visit with you briefly. If you are unavailable or would prefer not to be bothered, I understand completely. Simply feel free to drop by the school and visit with me at your convenience.

Looking forward to being great neighbors, I remain,

Sincerely,

Melissa Simone, Principal

Although Exhibit 2-2 illustrates a visit by a new principal, slight modifications can make this technique just as valuable for veteran leaders who have worked at the neighborhood school for many years. Rather than introducing yourself as the new principal, open with a statement such as, "We've been neighbors for some time, but until now we just haven't had ample opportunity to meet and to talk."

It may be more comfortable and more appropriate in a particular community for the administration to send a notice in the mail informing neighbors that the principal intends to be walking the neighborhood and visiting in the near future. Again, each individual school leader must use his/her judgment in determining whether this is a good step or not. In situations where it is wise to notify neighbors via mail before surprising them with a visit, a letter such as that illustrated in Exhibit 2-3 may be beneficial.

As was the case in Exhibit 2-2, the sample letter depicted above accomplishes some very important goals. Specifically, it does the following:

1. Proactively introduces or reintroduces the administrator to the neighbors. This demonstrates the importance that the administrator gives to seeking out partnerships with the school's neighbors.
2. Establishes the reasons why the administrator thinks communication with neighbors is important.
3. Informs the neighbors when the administrator intends to be walking through the neighborhood, meeting with people.
4. Gives the neighbor a safe and easy way to choose not to interact with the administrator during that time frame.
5. Sincerely invites and welcomes the neighbors to visit the school whenever they would like to.

Also worth noting is that the wording here is merely offered as a generic suggestion. Only you know the phrasing that would be appropriate in your particular community. Modify accordingly, so that you feel more comfortable with the process.

Once again, it may feel awkward to begin communicating with neighbors of the school, as this section of the text has suggested you should. If so, the feelings of discomfort are probably due to the fact that such communication is not typically done in our schools. This brings up a crucial point to consider when planning any aspect of a school-community relations plan, namely that just because things have been done a certain way for a long period of time does not indicate that they should continue to be done that way. The statement has been made that if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten. Perhaps, instead, things need to be done differently for an even longer period of time. Making friendly contact with the neighbors of your school makes for smart school-community relations. There are important perceptions of your school that only close neighbors of the school can have. For example, these individuals know, from an outsider's perspective, how much noise emanates from your school throughout the day. They know the degree to which loitering or vandalism is taking place on school grounds. They understand, better than anybody, about traffic patterns and problems that may be created at different points in the school day. These neighbors often have strong perceptions of your school; perceptions that are based on direct, objective observations. Since, in many ways, perception is reality, failure to acknowledge, appreciate, and, where appropriate, alter these perceptions is simply that—failure.

Remember, too, that a leader is somebody whom people will follow to a place they otherwise might not go. It is imperative that school administrators act as leaders in regards to communicating with the public. Doing so may at

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times may feel awkward, but good communication simply will not happen without strong, committed leaders.

A Neighborhood Tea

Some school leaders prefer to have regularly scheduled meetings of their neighbors inside of the school building. Often there are refreshments served at these gatherings, but that is not an essential component. Each individual leader must use his/her own judgment to determine the particulars of these events.

What is essential is that the event be communicated to the neighbors in a timely and accurate fashion. It is almost always easier to attract parents to the school than it is to attract those adults with no familial ties. With this in mind, a school leader desirous of hosting a neighborhood tea or similar gathering must take extra steps to ensure that the neighbors receive the invitation. Often this involves mailing the invitation, followed up by a telephone call urging the neighbors to attend.

To prevent these events from simply being informal gatherings of neighbors, which is something the school does not necessarily need to be involved with, the school leader should have a focused agenda for each meeting. Topics that may be included for discussion are how to improve traffic patterns, monitoring students prior to the school's official arrival time and after the school's official departure time, and the formation of a neighborhood watch committee charged with overseeing the students' and the building's protection during non-school hours. The session should also always include some type of question-and-answer period, which puts the neighbors in a position to feel as though the entire meeting was not planned in advance. Plans are good, but a certain amount of free expression gives everybody the feeling that his or her issues are important.

Regardless of whether or not "tea" and/or other refreshments are served, the school neighbors must come away from these meetings with the realization that they are important. The meetings must be handled in such a way to communicate that the school is an important part of the neighborhood. They must illustrate the importance of community.

Don't Forget the Parents

The most common way in which school leaders typically learn about the community in which their school is located is through the parents of the students they serve. While a good deal of this information is perceived directly by the leader, there is still more information that the leader gets through indirect means. Examples of indirect means include:

- Information shared by the teaching staff
- Information shared by the students
- Information shared by business and community leaders
- Information shared by other administrators

Paying attention to what these groups have to say about parents in the community will assist the school administrator in forming the best possible notion of the parents' needs, feelings, and desires. Let us examine some specific ways that teachers, students, business and community leaders, and fellow administrators inform the school leader about the attitudes of parents.

Information Shared by the Teaching Staff

Teachers have many formal and informal interactions with a variety of parents during a typical school year. Open House activities and Parent-Teacher Conferences are two of the most often used formal interactions that yield tremendous information to teachers about the parents' feelings toward the school and its staff. Through these opportunities, teachers have the chance to engage in meaningful two-way communication with parents. While the structure of the occasions may limit the extent to which communication can truly be two-way, Open Houses and Parent-Teacher Conferences are characterized by their objective that teachers will communicate with parents and parents will communicate with teachers.

Because attendance at these events may vary considerably from one community to the next, the amount of information about parent attitudes that they yield will also vary. There are, however, many informal ways in which teachers gather information about parent attitudes. It is through these informal interactions that a great deal of understanding regarding parents' attitudes and feelings can be realized. Informal interactions that can be quite informative include:

- Notes from parents
- Conversations in the hallway
- Parents chaperoning field trips or other school activities
- Classroom parent volunteers

Information Shared by the Students

Teachers who get to know their students on a personal level engage in many meaningful conversations with them intended to be of assistance in the teaching-learning process. In addition to the benefits that relationships can have on the teaching-learning process, they are also opportunities to learn

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about feelings, beliefs, and attitudes. Students often reflect the attitudes of their parents. So while it is not always the case, many times through conversations with the students, teachers are able to learn quite a bit of significant information about their parents' feelings regarding schooling. This, although not the primary reason why such relationships are important, adds even more credence to the notion that teachers benefit greatly by taking the time to listen to the hearts and minds of their students.

The same logic applies to the role of the school administrator. Because this leader does not have a regular class of students to meet with on a daily basis, relationships of the same quality as those formed by teachers are difficult to attain. However, this is one important reason why the best school administrators are visible to all stakeholders throughout the school day (Fiore, 1999; Whitaker, 1997). In the case of the students this visibility breeds familiarity and comfort, which will ultimately foster more positive, honest relationships.

Information Shared by Business and Community Leaders

In most communities, some business and community leaders are also parents. Although not always true, a large percentage of these leaders send their children to the public schools in the community. Therefore, there is an additional reason for formulating partnerships and relationships with these business and

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Meetings With Local Realtors

Because engendering positive relationships with the external community is of such vital importance, one productive practice engaged in various parts of the country is the invitation of local realtor associations to hold meetings inside local school facilities. By holding meetings inside of the school, school staff members are positioned to "show off" some of their school's best products. Students can create advertisements and welcome banners for the event. Administrators, teacher leaders, and/or student leaders can provide welcoming comments, and recent awards and/or honors can be on display for all to see. Such a practice gives local realtors a good feeling about the quality education afforded by the school. This, in turn accomplishes two purposes. First, it assists the realtors in being able to market the community because of the positive schools. Second, it increases the likelihood that new homeowners in the area will begin their community experience with a positive opinion of the school due to the great things they heard from their realtor.

community leaders. Namely, these people give you very important information about the attitudes and beliefs of some of your students' parents.

This points to one additional reason why it is important for school leaders to form partnerships with business and community leaders. Such partnerships, in addition to creating tremendous support for the school and its goals, become trusted channels of communication for the school leader. Business and community leaders, particularly those who are parents, know a great deal about what parents in the community think of the school. Their positions as leaders give them access to a good deal of public opinion. Relationships with these people really can become wonderful, efficient channels of communication with a percentage of your school's parent population.

Information Shared by Other School Administrators

One of the skills that school administrators continually hone throughout their careers is how to work with parents. Even before becoming administrators, teachers develop better skills for dealing with parents with each passing year. Books like *Dealing With Difficult Parents and With Parents in Difficult Situations* (Whitaker & Fiore, 2001) provide assistance for dealing with challenging parents and challenging situations. The result is an informed and experienced cadre of educators who can provide great assistance to administrators in understanding parents and how to work well with them. For this reason, administrators can turn to their administrative colleagues, particularly if new to the community, for a great deal of useful information about parents. If the administrative colleagues know very little about the particular parents they're being asked about, their experiences can certainly help in generalizing information that will still be helpful.

Professional literature in school administration can also yield a great deal of help in learning about what parents want from their child's school. In the May 1998 issue of *Educational Leadership*, for example, Dorothy Rich summarizes efforts in Anchorage, Alaska and in Rochester, New York to discover what parents think about their children's teachers. The goal of these districts' leaders is to utilize this information to enhance home-school connections. Rich suggests the following questions be used by school leaders to discover parent attitudes:

- Does the teacher appear to enjoy teaching and believe in what he or she does in the school?
- Does the teacher set high expectations and help children reach them?
- Does the teacher know the subject matter of the class and how to teach it?
- Does the teacher create a safe classroom where children are encouraged to pay attention, participate in class, and learn?

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- ❶ Does the teacher deal with behavior problems fairly and consistently?
- ❷ Does the teacher make clear what my child is expected to learn?
- ❸ Does the teacher treat my child fairly and with respect?
- ❹ Does the teacher contact me promptly with any concerns about my child's academic and behavioral performance?
- ❺ Does the teacher provide helpful information during conferences?
- ❻ Does the teacher use a variety of communication tools to report progress and student needs?
- ❼ Is my child's teacher accessible and responsive to me when I call or want to meet?
- ❽ Does the teacher work with me to develop a cooperative strategy to help my child?

A list of questions such as these is a great starting point for discovering parent attitudes in your school community. Additionally, these questions illustrate the school's commitment to working with parents in order to meet the needs of their children. Just as the case was made in Chapter 1 that it would not be prudent for school leaders to base all of their decisions on public opinion, parental responses to these questions ought not be taken without a grain of salt. Parental attitudes may be skewed somewhat from reality. However, utilizing responses to questions such as these will allow school leaders a better understanding of where to begin in their dealings with parents and their accompanying feelings and attitudes.

Multiculturalism and School-Community Relations

As the second decade of the twenty-first century is well underway, it is clear that people from other countries and from other cultures find the United States to be a source of freedom and opportunity. In fact, with the exception of the first decade of the last century (1901–1910), we have seen a marked increase in the number of people who are immigrants to the United States (Immigration and Naturalization Service Statistics Division, 2009), with the regions from which people emigrate expanding with each decade. What used to be an urban phenomenon is quickly becoming an experience that administrators from varying communities have in common. Our neighborhoods, and consequently, our schools are becoming increasingly multicultural. The benefits this multiculturalism can bring to our educational system will be realized only if school leaders first understand the needs of these cultural communities.

Chapter 4 pays attention to the differing nonverbal behaviors that various cultures exhibit and use in communication. It is important that school administrators are aware of these differences, but they are only one small part of the cultural understanding required to make people from all cultures feel welcomed and valued at school. This is alarming news to administrators who are watching the population in their school community change before their very eyes. Without training to help understand the new cultures arriving at their schools, these administrators either feel lost and insecure, or they become defiant and refuse to adjust to the needs of the changing community. Both of these reactions are mistakes. Reactive behavior seldom enhances communication. For this reason, school leaders must proactively familiarize themselves and their staff members with all cultures that are part of their school communities.

This familiarization does not occur accidentally. Becoming familiar with and showing appreciation for various cultures take a concerted effort, particularly if the culture in question is new to the community. The school administrator must, therefore, reach out to members of the community who can assist him/her in designing staff development or workshop sessions to make staff members aware of customs, traditions, and rituals that may be a part of the new culture. This is the only way that the staff will have to begin showing sensitivity and appreciation for the individuals whose pasts are rooted in the new culture. Once there is an awareness of the community's multiculturalism, then the leaders of the school can incorporate ideas from all cultures into the culture of their school. In doing so, they will create a new school culture that over time will strengthen the sense of community within the school. Examples of some ways that different cultures can be woven into a school's existing culture include the following:

- Celebrating diversity through pictures and posters adorning the school
- Preparing written materials in all languages that are used as primary languages in students' homes
- Bringing cultural sensitivity into the school cafeteria through menu choices reflective of the community's diet
- Acknowledging and educating students about holidays and customs that are integral parts of the community's many cultures
- Re-examining existing school dress codes to see if there are rules and regulations that are insensitive to the dress of different cultures
- Ensuring that respect for and appreciation of diversity are essential components of the school's mission and vision statements

It is important that all school leaders recognize the power and significance of their school's culture. They must realize that all that happens inside

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of a school is inexplicably tied to the culture of that school. School culture, representing the shared attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors of members of the school family, forms the foundation for student achievement, staff morale, parent satisfaction, and school climate (Fiore, 1999).

Failure to develop a school culture respectful and representative of the community's culture can doom a school for failure. If a school-community relation plan is only public relations, then communicating with the public would be all that is required. However, the best school-community relations plans involve more than just communication. They involve a desire to welcome people and to alter some of our own conceptions to include those of our community. This creates the strong tie between school culture and school-community relations.

School culture consists of the commonly held beliefs of teachers, students, and principals that guide such characteristic behaviors as learning activities, grouping practices, and the ways that teachers talk with each other and evaluate student achievement (Heckman, 1993). If these beliefs and resulting characteristic behaviors work for the school but are in conflict with the community, then it will be very difficult for the school to relate successfully to community members and make them feel important. School-community relations can only be strengthened when the community and the school share a common culture. Multicultural communities, therefore, need to develop a common culture that includes everybody. The lead for such an activity must be the school.

Reading the pulse of the community is an important first step. Responding to the pulse and continuing to read and modify it are absolutely necessary if school administrators wish to be leaders in school-community relations.

Chapter Summary

- School administrators must get to know the leaders in their school's community.
- In many communities, leaders can be found holding membership in civic and/or cultural organizations.
- School administrators must also pay attention to subgroups in their community. They must form relationships with leaders of these groups as well.
- It is up to the school leader to introduce and re-introduce the school to its neighbors. These neighbors must be shown the important position they hold in the school community.
- School leaders must continuously reach out to parents for support.

- The many cultures represented in a community should all find a place in the school.
- By fostering and developing a common school culture focused on the needs and aspirations of students and their families, school leaders perform their most important school-community relations task.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Changing Landscapes

The demographics of the Leland High School community had changed quite a bit during the last 4 or 5 years. Carolyn Jackson, Leland's principal, felt that in many ways the school community she was hired to lead 6 years earlier had somehow disappeared. Less than 2% of the student body spoke a language other than English in their homes when Carolyn was hired. Today, that figure was at about 25%. There were houses of worship popping up in the community that Carolyn didn't recognize, and at least a half-dozen ethnic food markets complete with marquis that Carolyn could not read had opened within the past year.

What troubled Carolyn Jackson the most was that parent participation had dropped off dramatically in recent years as well. Carolyn was hired largely because of her people skills; Leland was not starving for instructional leadership 6 years ago when she started. Now, as test scores in the school were showing a rapid decline, the very parent involvement she was so proud of seemed to be disappearing as well. The school lost two of its most valued business partnerships within the past 3 years, as a few local businesses left the neighborhood, yielding way for the new ethnic markets that now characterized Leland High School's neighborhoods.

The students and the few parents Carolyn knew were great people, in her judgment. Leland still had much to be proud of, as there were fewer student disruptions and better attendance than at any other high school in the district. Still, something was missing. Carolyn Jackson stared out her office window and wondered how she could rekindle the spirit of Leland High School and her own spirit that used to be tied directly to it.

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Questions for Analysis

1. What advice would you give Carolyn Jackson as she struggles to rekindle what she perceives as the missing spirit?
2. How can Carolyn compensate for the loss of business partnerships in this school community?
3. Are there ways in which Carolyn can utilize her strong people skills to increase parental involvement at Leland?
4. What has been Carolyn's biggest failure at Leland in recent years?
5. If you were principal of Leland High School, what would your plan be for improved school-community relations? What would you do first?