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Establishing Everybody's Role

Successful school-community relations do not occur accidentally. Rather, they take calculated efforts in order to be achieved. As the best school leaders already realize, the efforts required are necessary. Although time-consuming, working hard at establishing, maintaining, and nurturing healthy school-community relations is the right thing to do if an educational system that all constituents are a part of is our ultimate goal.

It is very important to note that the efforts required to develop these positive school-community relations ought not come from a single source. In fact, in today's climate, it would be impossible for this to happen. Years ago it may have been appropriate for school districts to hire an individual to single-handedly oversee public relations as it were. To foster the kinds of school-community relations that are necessary today, however, it is totally unreasonable to expect one person to be responsible. Parents are busier and, in some cases, more critical of schools. Politicians, although always interested in education, are feeling an increased sense of urgency to be involved in the business of schooling. Taxpayers are demanding more accountability for the money they feel is being drained from their homes and given to the schools. These actions are true regardless of the size of the school or school system you are working in. School-community relations is everybody's responsibility. To be successful, everybody who has a stake in the union between schools and their communities must recognize the significance their role has in the process of developing healthy school-community relations.

School-Community Relations at the District Level

In some parts of the country a school district consists of a single school. In other areas school districts are defined by county boundaries, creating some metropolitan districts with upward of 200 schools. Obviously, there will be differences in both the number of employees who work directly on fostering positive school-community relations and the specific responsibilities that these individuals are charged with carrying out between these two extremes. This being said, there are similarities in what school districts of

varying sizes do to keep school-community relations positive and nurtured. Outlined below are the responsibilities of key personnel working in district offices in "typical" school districts. Although the specific job titles of some of these individuals may differ from the titles held by their counterparts in districts you are familiar with, the required job tasks are similar. This section will then end with a broader summary of district level responsibilities so that these responsibilities may be compared/contrasted with the "typical" building level responsibilities that many principals and/or their designees are charged with carrying out.

The Superintendent

It would defy logic if this text failed to discuss the critical role of the superintendent in a school district's school-community relations plan. As the chief officer of a district, the superintendent can be and usually is the most influential member of the certificated staff. This is not only true because of the importance of a superintendent's particular tasks relative to school-community relations. Rather, what is referred to here is the importance of the superintendent's leadership in making school-community relations a priority. A leader, it is argued, is an individual whom people will follow to a place that they would not otherwise go by themselves. In this regard, the superintendent who is a true leader exerts tremendous influence over the success or failure of his or her district's school-community relations plan. This influence is not necessarily exerted because of any tasks that the superintendent carries out. Instead, leadership is exerted through the moral authority, or the authority vested in the superintendent based on subordinates' perceptions of his/her values and beliefs, rather than by tasks or edicts. As Schlechty (1990) maintains, superintendents can delegate almost every type of authority they have with the exception of moral authority. Moral authority rests in the office of the superintendent and is, therefore, much more difficult to delegate or empower others to possess. If the superintendent does not use his/her moral authority to get people enthused about strong school-community relations, but attempts to delegate such tasks instead, then there is little hope that any majority of stakeholders will be excited about the process. Therefore, the specific tasks of the superintendent, which vary considerably from one school district to the next, are not nearly as important as the belief system of the superintendent and his/her willingness to use the moral authority accompanying the office to make positive school-community relations a priority for everybody.

Having made this point, there are tasks relative to many school-community relations plans that are best assigned to the superintendent. They are simply not carried out as effectively in the absence of moral authority. Among the school-community tasks often carried out by the superintendent are the following:

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- Bringing members of their administrative team together in a way that each individual benefits from the knowledge, skills, and experiences of the others relative to school-community relations
- Establishing and maintaining open communication channels within the school system (internal communication)
- Developing and nurturing open communication channels between the school system and the public (external communication)
- Developing and championing the basic school system policy for creating relationships between the school and the community
- Taking the initiative to keep the school board, the staff, and the general public informed of school matters
- Ensuring that the school system's plans for school-community relations are assessed and evaluated, and then seeing to it that the findings of these assessments are made available to the school board
- Making sure that influential groups and community leaders are provided with factual information that will cause them to act on behalf of the community's children and their education

In addition to performing the above tasks, the superintendent must act as a model for what the school system believes in and hopes to accomplish in terms of school-community relations. In this regard, he/she must always remember that the only way to get other administrators and staff members to be visible in the community is to model this behavior first and foremost. This requires the superintendent to do many of the things discussed in Chapter 2. He/she must be aware of who the community leaders are and must actively seek their support and counsel on school matters.

In many districts, superintendents serve on the boards of local civic and community organizations. In this way, the superintendent models the importance of community involvement to all members of the school community. An additional benefit from such involvement is that it affords the superintendent an opportunity to engage regularly in meaningful two-way communication with community leaders. As expanded upon in Chapter 4, two-way communication involves both listening and informing. It is the purest way to ensure that the interests and concerns of all parties communicating are addressed. Superintendents who spend all of their work time in the office find little opportunity to engage in two-way communication. As such, these individuals find themselves expert at one-way communication, that is, giving information through memoranda and news releases with little opportunity for public response. By being involved with community leaders through service to community and civic groups, the superintendent has much greater opportunity for meaningful two-way communication with constituents.

Mistakes Made By Superintendents

The job responsibilities of the modern day superintendent can be overwhelming. As the public demands greater accountability for student achievement, lower taxes, and safer schools, overworked superintendents can often forget the importance of school-community relations and experience pitfalls that can cause real damage. Below are six of the more common mistakes superintendents make that hurt their school system's overall school-community relations. While the list does not report every mistake made by every superintendent, it illustrates some of the more common pitfalls that many readers will recognize.

1. **Listening to and responding to parental complaints without referring them to the proper channels.** Superintendents understand the importance of responding to parental concerns. The mistake occurs when they listen to and respond to these concerns without first ensuring that the problems are dealt with at the appropriate level. A superintendent who fails to refer building level concerns to the appropriate place justifiably upsets principals and teachers. This behavior also creates a climate of micro-managing, which is very unnerving to those at the school level.
2. **Failing to listen to principals, other administrators, and teachers.** While the superintendent is ultimately responsible for the school system's school-community relations plan, the wise one recognizes that employees are great sources of public information. The wise superintendent further recognizes that these employees often have a keen understanding that leads to very good suggestions regarding school-community relations. The superintendent needs to make employees feel as though their suggestions are listened to.
3. **Making political appointments.** Whether we like it or not, there is a political element to some of the decisions made in our schools. People are hired or dismissed, bids are accepted, and contracts are awarded for reasons that sometimes have political foundations. The superintendent concerned with school-community relations should avoid politics and base decisions on what's best for students and the school system, not for political gain.
4. **Making decisions on matters about which they are ignorant.** In an overzealous attempt to show people that they are knowledgeable and qualified, some superintendents make decisions about issues on which they are ill informed or ignorant. Rather than seeking out the counsel of those who best understand the issues (other administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students), some superintendents make the mistake of thinking that they must have all the answers. This arrogance causes some damaging decisions to be made.

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5. **Showing more concern for finances than for employee welfare.** The financial solvency of some school systems is one of the more stressful aspects of the job for superintendents. However, schools are about people first. The superintendent who fails to demonstrate an understanding of this priority can cause great harm to the school system's efforts at positive school-community relations.
6. **Failing to have both an internal and an external publication that shows the activity of their office.** Chapters 5 and 6 will go into great detail about the importance of internal (within the school system) and external (outside of the school system) communication. As there is a certain degree of mystery surrounding the public's ideas of what the superintendent does all day, it is prudent for the superintendent to regularly publish information for all stakeholder groups. This is the superintendent's way of both keeping people informed and of demonstrating accountability to all who are associated with the school.

Anybody who has had any experience with the superintendency can surely recognize how easy it can be to experience the above pitfalls while still caring about the school system and working very hard at being its leader. For this reason the list is not intended as a condemnation. It does illustrate two important realities, though. First, the superintendent is a significant player in a school system's school-community relations plan. Second, successfully modeling appropriate school-community relations behaviors requires a deliberate attempt on the part of the superintendent.

The Director of School-Community Relations

Because the importance of school-community relations is finally being realized, many school systems employ a full-time administrator to oversee this significant function. This individual, designated by the superintendent, formulates, carries out, and assists others in adhering to the school system's school-community relations plans.

As each school system designs its administrative cabinet differently, the actual title given to the administrator directing school-community relations varies considerably from one place to the next. Exhibit 3-1 shows the most commonly used position titles.

Note that these titles represent a change in the way we now think of school-community relations. Previously known simply as public relations, the responsibilities individuals in these leadership positions typically assumed indicated that they should be referred to with such titles as public relations officer, director of public relations, or director of information and public relations. Words such as "communication" and "community" have now become much more commonplace in these titles, representing a shift in how we view the essential duties that are required.

Exhibit 3-1 Position Titles

The director of school-community relations is sometimes called the following:

1. Assistant Superintendent
2. Assistant to the Superintendent
3. Director of Information and Community Relations
4. Director of School-Community Relations
5. Director of Information Services
6. Director of Publications
7. Coordinator of School Information
8. Public Information Officer

As the occupation titles vary, so do the specific responsibilities assumed by the director of school-community relations. This variance has a great deal to do with the size of the school system. In some larger school systems, for example, the director of school-community relations assumes a major research responsibility. That is, the director and the director's office staff design all surveys, sample the appropriate populations, gather and analyze the data, interpret the results, and make recommendations based on their interpretations. The directors in these larger districts have immense responsibility in recommending policies to the school board based on public opinion and research. They are often skilled in both qualitative and quantitative analyses, and they can assist the school staff in interpreting survey results.

Many smaller school systems do not have the resources to perform these functions. Because their populations are much smaller and often less diverse, they do not have as much need for a director with research capabilities. In the smallest of districts, public opinion can be understood through steps as simple as town meetings and open houses. In many of these school systems, if there is a director of school-community relations, that person's primary function is to write news releases and newsletters.

Exhibit 3-2 lists some of the most common, generalized responsibilities that this district-level official often assumes:

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Exhibit 3-2 Duties of the Director of School-Community Relations

- Interpret school board policies to the public
- Serve as a source of information to the community regarding school matters
- Assess public attitudes and opinions and keep appropriate school personnel informed
- Compose and/or edit all written communications (internal and external) from the school system
- Interface regularly with members of the media
- Assist school officials with crisis management plans
- Provide and/or arrange for staff development or in-service training in the area of school-community relations for all school personnel

SHOWCASE

Developing Relationships Between School Leaders and the Central Office

School leaders must understand that a positive and productive relationship with central office staff ultimately benefits students. A few ideas that may lead to developing such relationships are:

- Always send minutes of building meetings to central office personal.
- Always introduce central office personal and board members at public events.
- When communicating with other principals via e-mail, copy to appropriate central office staff.
- Praise teachers in front of and to central office staff.
- Communicate with all people as peers
- Remember that everybody is important. More importantly, everybody needs to feel important.
- Never take credit for the school's accomplishments.
- Always give credit to others.
- Approach issues in a "we" not an "I" point of view
- Know you may not have all the information
- Know that as good as you are, you can always get better

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School-Community Relations at the Building Level

The Principal

Just as the superintendent exerts tremendous influence over the school system and significantly molds and alters the system's approach to school-community relations, the principal influences the school. As the chief administrator, it is the principal whose leadership determines the degree to which the school enjoys positive and productive relationships with the communities it serves. The principal, through deliberate behaviors and innate values and beliefs, sets the tone for communication patterns, partnership formations, and/or alienation.

Many studies have been done regarding the influence more positive and more negative principals have on the climate, culture, and overall environment of a school (Fiore, 1999; Whitaker, 1997; Stolp, 1996). These studies conclude that the principal, more than any other individual in the school, determines the degree to which people feel welcome, accepted, and comfortable within the school's walls. Without these feelings, any attempt at involving the community in schools will be severely challenged.

As was true when speaking of the superintendent's role, the principal's role in school-community relations is largely a leadership issue. There are certainly tasks that the principal must attend to relative to school-community relations, but the values and beliefs that guide the principal's behavior are even more important. In other words, a principal who really believes that our schools belong to the publics they serve will be more in tune with the importance of school-community relations. A principal who believes, as former Senator and now Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, that it "takes a village" to raise a child will emphasize relationships with all school stakeholders. A principal who believes in and thus engages in continuous and deliberate two-way communication with internal and external groups will find school-community relations tasks to be a natural outgrowth of all that they do on a regular basis.

This being true, the following tasks of the school principal relative to school-community relations are important parts of the principal's job. They, like the superintendent's, differ somewhat from one school to the next. Like the superintendent's these tasks ought to be recognizable and applicable to most principalships, though.

- Being a good listener whenever others speak with him/her
- Being tactful and diplomatic in all relationships
- Creating meaningful professional development activities that assist the staff in developing strong communication skills

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- Promoting an open-door policy and being accessible to students, parents, staff, and others
- Keeping the superintendent informed of successes and failures relative to the school's overall school-community relations efforts
- Recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of all members of the school family
- Maintaining school publications that keep internal and external groups informed about what's going on in the school

There are other responsibilities that principals assume, depending largely on the size of their school and staff and the demographics of their community. However, the list above highlights many of the significant responsibilities as confirmed by several studies (Fiore, 1999; West, 1993; Schueckler & West, 1991).

While there are implications throughout this book for all school employees desirous of improving their school's overall relationship with the community, the major focus is on the role of the principal. Even if the principal is not directly responsible for a particular school-community relations task, he/she still plays a significant role in seeing to it that the task is carried out by the person responsible. In larger schools, for example, there are assistant principals or vice-principals who play a role in the school's school-community relations plan. Although tasks vary considerably from one environment to the next, what follows are seven critical roles for assistant principals or vice-principals at virtually any school level:

1. Act as liaison between the principal and staff members
2. Maintain positive rapport with staff members
3. Communicate effectively with parents and students
4. Strive to motivate students and faculty
5. Work on maintaining high morale among staff
6. Illustrate professional demeanor with all stakeholders
7. Establish a disciplined student body

Without discussing each administrative position within a school system and without allowing much devotion to the different environmental factors among and between our schools, it is clear that the administration plays a large role in a school or school system's ability to develop and maintain positive school-community relations. For this reason, books like this are written and graduate courses are developed that illustrate to prospective and practicing administrators how keenly important their role is. However, another group that is vitally important to any school or school system's success in this regard is the teachers. These individuals, on the front line of education, can make or break a school's efforts at maintaining positive school-community relations.

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The Teacher

You might say that every decision made by a teacher and every action taken by a teacher affects school-community relations to some degree. Although most of a teacher's time is spent working with students, the attitudes and feelings that students have about their teachers spill out into the rest of the community through home dialogue, schoolyard games, and to some degree the students' achievement. Think of these words by noted child psychologist, Haim Ginott:

"I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized."

Through these behaviors, which humanize or dehumanize and escalate or de-escalate, teachers impact the attitudes that their students have about school. Not only do these attitudes have a profound effect on the students' feelings, they necessarily wind up affecting what parents think of the school. By and large, if children are miserable in school, then their parents will be miserable, too. Miserable parents are logically less willing to be involved positively in schooling. Miserable parents also tend to say miserable things at work and in the community about their child's school. The effect that these derogatory remarks have on school-community relations can be devastating for a school.

Because of these devastating effects, school administrators have a responsibility to create a culture in their school that prohibits students from being made to feel dehumanized. By doing so, the administrator exerts great influence over the behaviors of teachers. The administrator makes it known that students, even those in need of correction, are treated with dignity in their school. In this way, school administrators provide great assistance to teachers in promoting positive school-community relations.

This being said, there are specific tasks that teachers perform in advancing a school's school-community relations plan. These tasks include the following:

- Being visible and accessible to students and parents
- Communicating regularly and purposefully
- Demonstrating a positive attitude about school

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- Taking pride in the physical, child-centered appearance of their classroom
- Forming and maintaining business partnerships between the school and the community
- Teaching students the value of communities and the importance of being community members

There are certainly times in a teacher's professional life when the teacher is annoyed by a decision that an administrator or the school board has made. One of the most damaging things a teacher can do in those instances is to speak negatively about the administrator or board member in public. The professionalism required of teachers mandates that they understand the influence their words have within the community. While it is perfectly justifiable for them to be unhappy with decisions made or actions taken, the professional teacher keeps these professional problems at work and does not vent his/her negative feelings out in the community. It is up to the school leader to set the tone and verbalize this expectation. Again, in this way, the school leader can exert tremendous influence over the teacher's ability to advance or inhibit the school's school-community relations goals.

The Office Staff

The office staff, whether consisting of a single secretary or a group of staff members with secretarial, administrative, and or bookkeeping duties, plays a significant role as well in advancing or inhibiting a school's school-community relations plan. In Chapter 5, attention is paid to the communication patterns of the secretary. As the voice of the school, it is the secretary who has the most direct contact with school stakeholders. The administrator must, therefore, be sure that the secretary understands the significance of his/her role in school-community relations. Much of the information supplied in Chapter 5 is applicable not only to the school secretary but also to any individuals in the main office who have contact with the public.

Because communication patterns of the office staff get treatment in Chapter 5, the focus here is on the physical appearance of the main office. Just as nonverbal body language influences a person's perceptions, so does the physical appearance of the school office. If I use kind words to speak with you, but I do so with a scowl on my face, you may begin questioning how genuine my comments are. In the same way, a school secretary may speak in a friendly tone, but if the office appearance conjures up opposite feelings, then you may begin questioning how genuine the school secretary is being with you.

Consider Exhibit 3-3 and 3-4 as examples. Both of these are signs that were hung in schools with which I was familiar.

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Exhibit 3-3 Sick Day Sign

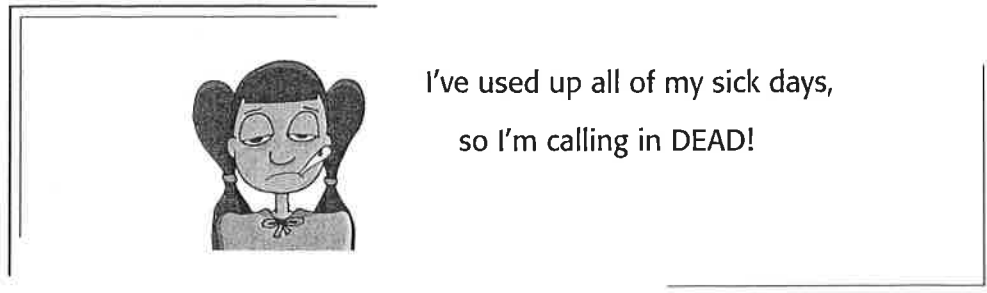
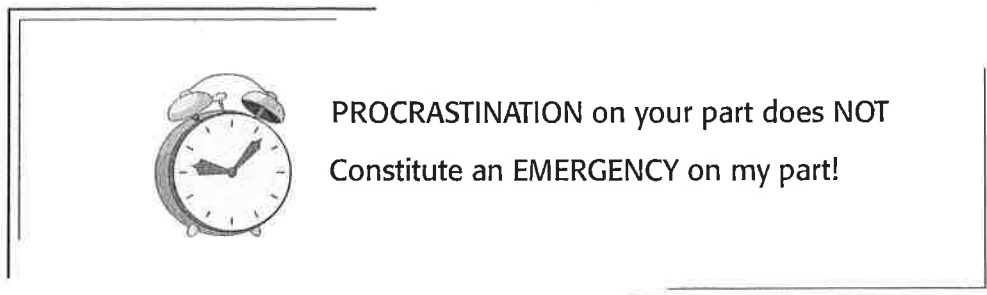


Exhibit 3-4 Procrastination Sign



Both of these signs say something about the atmosphere in the office. They may say that the atmosphere is fun and that people who work there have senses of humor. Or, these signs may say something else. Exhibit 3-3, for example, can imply that this school is not a place where people enjoy coming to work.

Because signs such as these are open to different interpretations, the office staff must be mindful about their display. Failure to do so could lead visitors to the office to draw incorrect conclusions that could, in some cases, damage a school's image. Although successful school-community relations is much more than mere image building, the image that the public has of a school is an important factor in that school's ability to foster and maintain the kinds of relationships that are desired.

It is up to the school administrator to ensure that the tone set in the main office is one that is consistent with the image the school wishes to portray to the community. In this way, the administrator exhibits the leadership necessary to assist the office staff in doing their part to foster positive school-community relations.

Not to be ignored in this section is the role of the food service staff. Without question, what is served at school and how it is served certainly affects public perceptions. Because food is served to students, staff, some parents and visitors, the food service staff members are in great positions to affect

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dramatically the morale of the entire school community. The same can be said of bus drivers, the custodial staff, and virtually every single employee of the school. Each individual, without regard to the specific role he or she plays, has both responsibility for and effect on school-community relations. He or she may not always realize this, though. That is why it is ultimately up to the building-level administrator to make school-community relations a conscious and important part of everybody's job.

Organizational Standards

As more and more educational institutions turn their attention to the importance of sound school-community relations, educational organizations such as the National PTA and the National Education Association also adopt standards or principles that schools ought to embrace in order to be in full concert with the organization's mission and purpose. This section focuses on standards from important organizations and agencies, beginning with the federal government. The focus is on major legislative motions that have occurred since the dawn of this century, with the primary emphasis on where current legislation appears to be headed.

Goals 2000

Goals 2000, the educational legislation initiative introduced by former Secretary of Education Richard Riley is replete with directives speaking to the importance of bridging existing gaps between our public schools and the communities in which they are located. Complying with the goals outlined in this legislation virtually requires schools to value collaborative relationships with community members. Exhibit 3-5 outlines the goals as the 103rd Congress of the United States declared them. Note elements of school-community relations, which have been woven through much of this legislation's fabric.

Exhibit 3-5 National Education Goals (GOALS 2000)

1. School Readiness.—
 - A. By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.
 - B. The objectives for this goal are that—
 - i. all children will have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school;

continued

Exhibit 3-5 National Education Goals (GOALS 2000) — *continued*

- ii. every parent in the United States will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping such parent's preschool child learn, and parents will have access to the training and support parents need; and
 - iii. children will receive the nutrition, physical activity experiences, and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies, and to maintain the mental alertness necessary to be prepared to learn, and the number of low-birthweight babies will be significantly reduced through enhanced prenatal health systems.
2. School Completion.—
- A. By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
 - B. The objectives for this goal are that—
 - i. the Nation must dramatically reduce its school dropout rate, and 75 percent of the students who do drop out will successfully complete a high school degree or its equivalent; and
 - ii. the gap in high school graduation rates between American students from minority backgrounds and their non-minority counterparts will be eliminated.
3. Student Achievement and Citizenship.—
- A. By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy.
 - B. The objectives for this goal are that—
 - i. the academic performance of all students at the elementary and secondary level will increase significantly in every quartile, and the distribution of minority students in each quartile will more closely reflect the student population as a whole;
 - ii. the percentage of all students who demonstrate the ability to reason, solve problems, apply knowledge, and write and communicate effectively will increase substantially;
 - iii. all students will be involved in activities that promote and demonstrate good citizenship, good health, community service, and personal responsibility;
 - iv. all students will have access to physical education and health education to ensure they are healthy and fit;

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- v. the percentage of all students who are competent in more than one language will substantially increase; and
- vi. all students will be knowledgeable about the diverse cultural heritage of this Nation and about the world community.

4. Teacher Education and Professional Development.—

- A. By the year 2000, the Nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.
- B. The objectives for this goal are that—
 - i. all teachers will have access to preservice teacher education and continuing professional development activities that will provide such teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to teach to an increasingly diverse student population with a variety of educational, social, and health needs;
 - ii. all teachers will have continuing opportunities to acquire additional knowledge and skills needed to teach challenging subject matter and to use emerging new methods, forms of assessment, and technologies;
 - iii. States and school districts will create integrated strategies to attract, recruit, prepare, retrain, and support the continued professional development of teachers, administrators, and other educators, so that there is a highly talented work force of professional educators to teach challenging subject matter; and
 - iv. partnerships will be established, whenever possible, among local educational agencies, institutions of higher education, parents, and local labor, business, and professional associations to provide and support programs for the professional development of educators.

5. Mathematics and Science.—

- A. By the year 2000, United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
- B. The objectives for this goal are that—
 - i. mathematics and science education, including the metric system of measurement, will be strengthened throughout the system, especially in the early grades;
 - ii. the number of teachers with a substantive background in mathematics and science, including the metric system of measurement, will increase by 50 percent; and
 - iii. the number of United States undergraduate and graduate students, especially women and minorities, who complete degrees in mathematics, science, and engineering will increase significantly.

continued

Exhibit 3-5 National Education Goals (GOALS 2000) — *continued*

- 6. Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning.—
 - A. By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
 - B. The objectives for this goal are that—
 - i. every major American business will be involved in strengthening the connection between education and work;
 - ii. all workers will have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills, from basic to highly technical, needed to adapt to emerging new technologies, work methods, and markets through public and private educational, vocational, technical, workplace, or other programs;
 - iii. the number of quality programs, including those at libraries, that are designed to serve more effectively the needs of the growing number of part-time and midcareer students will increase substantially;
 - iv. the proportion of the qualified students, especially minorities, who enter college, who complete at least two years, and who complete their degree programs will increase substantially;
 - v. the proportion of college graduates who demonstrate an advanced ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and solve problems will increase substantially; and
 - vi. schools, in implementing comprehensive parent involvement programs, will offer more adult literacy, parent training and life-long learning opportunities to improve the ties between home and school, and enhance parents' work and home lives.
- 7. Safe, Disciplined, and Alcohol- and Drug-Free Schools.—
 - A. By the year 2000, every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
 - B. The objectives for this goal are that—
 - i. every school will implement a firm and fair policy on use, possession, and distribution of drugs and alcohol;
 - ii. parents, businesses, governmental and community organizations will work together to ensure the rights of students to study in a safe and secure environment that is free of drugs and crime, and that schools provide a healthy environment and are a safe haven for all children;
 - iii. every local educational agency will develop and implement a policy to ensure that all schools are free of violence and the unauthorized presence of weapons;

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- 8. Parental Involvement in the Education of Their Children.—
 - A. By the year 2000, every school will have a policy that encourages and supports the active participation of parents in their children's education.
 - B. The objectives for this goal are that—
 - i.
 - ii.
 - iii.

In examining the importance of these 8 clearly defined goals to business and other community leaders, although improvement in community relations has increased recently, a leader who As evidence shows, 100 days of content and educational programs obviously could have been the p

- iv. every local educational agency will develop a sequential, comprehensive kindergarten through twelfth grade drug and alcohol prevention education program;
- v. drug and alcohol curriculum should be taught as an integral part of sequential, comprehensive health education;
- vi. community-based teams should be organized to provide students and teachers with needed support; and
- vii. every school should work to eliminate sexual harassment.

8. Parental Participation.—

- A. By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.
- B. The objectives for this Goal are that—
 - i. every State will develop policies to assist local schools and local educational agencies to establish programs for increasing partnerships that respond to the varying needs of parents and the home, including parents of children who are disadvantaged or bilingual, or parents of children with disabilities;
 - ii. every school will actively engage parents and families in a partnership which supports the academic work of children at home and shared educational decision making at school; and
 - iii. parents and families will help to ensure that schools are adequately supported and will hold schools and teachers to high standards of accountability.

In examining the contents of the eight goals listed in Exhibit 3-5, the importance of school-community relations is crystal clear. Not only is Goal 8 clearly directed at improved parent involvement, but also Goal 4 refers to business and community partnerships and the need for relationships with other community groups is implied throughout the legislation.

Although each presidential administration will promote its own school improvement agenda, it is certain that some form of improved school-community relations will be advocated in any national plan. This is because of the increased recognition that schools cannot educate children alone. The school leader who recognizes this will find great support in federal legislation.

As evidence, consider the educational initiatives enacted during the first 100 days of President George W. Bush's term in office. His program, whose content and mere title has been the topic of greater debate than any previous educational legislation, "No Child Left Behind" contained elements that are obviously different from those of Goals 2000. Most notable of these elements were the proposals regarding school choice and charter schools funding.

Remember, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the public supports charter schools, but they have many questions about what this actually means.

However, there are themes in NCLB relative to school-community relations and parental involvement that are quite consistent with the themes in Goals 2000. This illustrates again that the federal government, regardless of the majority party or the individual in the President's office, is well aware of the role parents play in education and the importance of this role to positive school-community relations.

Exhibit 3-6 Title IV (No Child Left Behind)

Promoting Parental Options and Innovative Programs

(Title IV)

Overview

The purpose of Title IV is to promote parental choice and to increase the amount of flexible funds available to states and school districts for innovative education programs.

Systems are often resistant to change — no matter how good the intentions of those who lead them. Competition can be the stimulus a bureaucracy needs in order to change. For that reason, the Administration seeks to increase parental options and influence. Parents, armed with data, are the best forces of accountability in education. And parents, armed with options and choice, can assure that their children get the best, most effective education possible.

Summary of Proposals

Promotes Charter Schools. Funding will be provided to assist charter schools with start-up costs, facilities, and other needs associated with creating high-quality schools.

Broadens Education Savings Accounts. The amount of funding that can be contributed annually to these accounts will be increased to \$5,000 and allowable uses of funds will be expanded to include education-related expenses in Kindergarten through 12th grade.*

Expands School Choice. A school choice fund will be created and administered by the Secretary of Education to demonstrate, develop, implement, evaluate, and disseminate information on innovative approaches that promote school choice.

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Consolidates Categorical Grant Programs to Send More Dollars to Classrooms.

Overlapping and duplicative grant programs will be consolidated into one flexible grant for innovative programs and sent to states and school districts. Funds may be used for local innovative programs, as well as to provide choice to students in persistently failing or dangerous schools so they can attend adequate, safe schools of choice.

Expands Public-Private Partnership in School Construction. States are currently allowed to issue a certain number of tax-exempt bonds for private contractors to build public facilities, such as airports and low-income housing. Public school construction is currently not an allowable use of such bonds. By allowing private activity bonds to be used for public school construction, local districts across America will be able to leverage additional funds to be used for school construction and repair. The amount of bonds in each state able to be used for public-private partnerships in school construction would be based on the state population.

While there were slight modifications to some of this plan's components, particularly those involving the controversial decisions of using state money to fund non-public schools, it was clear from its inception that Title IV from the Bush administration intended for parents to have more choice in the schools their children attend.

Furthermore, the Bush plan, as sent to the 107th Congress, clearly sought to strengthen the relationships between school personnel and students' families. Again, while modifications occurred, examine the specific wording as it appeared in Senate Bill S.7 of the 107th Congress:

Subtitle C—Parental Involvement

SEC. 221. STATE PLANS.

Section 1111 (20 U.S.C. 6311) is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsections (d) through (g) as subsections (e) through (h), respectively; and

(2) by inserting after subsection (c) the following:

“(d) Parental Involvement.—Each State plan shall demonstrate that the State will support, in collaboration with the regional educational laboratories, the collection and dissemination to local educational agencies and schools of effective parental involvement practices. Such practices shall—

“(1) be based on the most current research on effective parental involvement that fosters achievement to high standards for all children; and

“(2) be geared toward lowering barriers to greater participation in school planning, review, and improvement experienced by parents.”

SEC. 222. PARENTAL ASSISTANCE.

Part D of title I (20 U.S.C. 6421 et seq.) is amended to read as follows:

“PART D—PARENTAL ASSISTANCE AND CHILD OPPORTUNITY

“Subpart I—Parental Assistance”.

“SEC. 1401. PARENTAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCE CENTERS.

“(a) Purpose.—The purpose of this part is—

“(1) to provide leadership, technical assistance, and financial support to nonprofit organizations and local educational agencies to help the organizations and agencies implement successful and effective parental involvement policies, programs, and activities that lead to improvements in student performance;

“(2) to strengthen partnerships among parents (including parents of preschool age children), teachers, principals, administrators, and other school personnel in meeting the educational needs of children;

“(3) to develop and strengthen the relationship between parents and the school;

“(4) to further the developmental progress primarily of children assisted under this part; and

“(5) to coordinate activities funded under this part with parental involvement initiatives funded under section 1118 and other provisions of this Act.

“(b) Grants Authorized.—

“(1) In general.—The Secretary is authorized to award grants in each fiscal year to nonprofit organizations, and nonprofit organizations in consortia with local educational agencies, to establish school-linked or school-based parental information and resource centers that provide training, information, and support to—

“(A) parents of children enrolled in elementary schools and secondary schools;

“(B) individuals who work with the parents described in subparagraph (A); and

“(C) State educational agencies, local educational agencies, schools, organizations that support family-school partnerships (such as parent-teacher associations), and other organizations that carry out parent education and family involvement programs.

“(2) Award rule.—In awarding grants under this part, the Secretary shall ensure that such grants are distributed in all geographic regions of the United States.

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No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) experienced modifications and adjustments since its inception. Essentially, as all educators know, this sweeping federal legislation required states to demonstrate progress from year to year in raising the percentage of students who are proficient in reading and mathematics and in narrowing the achievement gap for subgroups of students. NCLB set five performance goals for states, and the states had latitude in how to achieve these goals. Although the goals are listed below, the new education agenda advanced by President Barack Obama will doubtlessly lead to modifications.

- All students will reach high standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics by 2013–2014.
- All limited English proficient students will become proficient in English and reach high academic standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- All students are to have been taught by highly qualified teachers by 2005–2006.
- All students will learn in schools that are safe and drug free.
- All students will graduate from high school.

ISLLC Standards

Developed in 1996 as the *Standards for School Leaders*, but what are now commonly referred to as the ISLLC standards, have become the framework on which many higher education programs in school administration and many state licensure requirements are built. These six standards, arrived at by the School Leaders Licensure Consortium under the direction of the Council of Chief State School Officers, attempt to develop a common core of knowledge regarding the elements of effective school administration. It is universally accepted that the six ISLLC standards do, in fact, identify important qualities, characteristics, and behaviors of effective school leaders. At present, there is discussion of these Standards being revised, although no substantial change is expected. At present, state educational representatives meet three to four times per year to discuss the Standards and recommend any updates,

The ISLLC standards appear in Exhibit 3-7. Pertinent to the study of school-community relations is the undercurrent of communication and stakeholder engagement practices woven throughout these six standards.

Exhibit 3-7 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards

**Standards for School Leaders (1996). Washington, DC:
Council of Chief State School Officers**

Standard 1

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Standard 2

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Standard 3

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Standard 4

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Standard 5

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Standard 6

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

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Standard 1, for example, illustrates the necessity for school leaders to share their school's vision with the larger community. Further, this standard requires the leader's vision to be supported by the school community. Such support can only be gathered through effective two-way communication techniques.

In Standard 2, the importance of a school culture conducive to student learning and staff professional growth is emphasized. The development and sustenance of such a culture requires leadership centered on communicating with and engaging all stakeholders. As discussed in one of my previous books, *Creating Connections for Better Schools: How Leaders Enhance School Culture* (Fiore, 2000), culture development is arguably the most significant activity a school leader is involved in. This can only be done when the leader willingly reaches out to other constituents and involves them in the creation of a positive school culture.

While Standard 3 on the surface may not appear to be too closely related to school-community relations, the importance of managing the organization and its resources effectively cannot be overstated. School leaders who reach out to businesses and civic organizations in their community find these tasks to be much easier than do their counterparts who by default often alienate these important community members.

Standard 4 is closely related to school-community relations as it illustrates the need for principals to collaborate with the families, appreciate diversity, and mobilize community resources. Again the ability to communicate and the desire to do so purposefully is an important component of any effective school-community relations plan. Such purposeful communication is an obvious foundation of Standard 4 behaviors.

Many of the topics in this book (i.e., working with the media, dealing with a crisis, student discipline) require the school leader to act with integrity and in a fair, ethical manner. In this way, Standard 5 relates strongly to the study of school-community relations.

As schools are susceptible to the power of many outside sources (i.e., the school district, the state department of education, the federal government), it is extremely important that the school leader keep open the lines of communication with these agencies. Schools do not exist apart from the political and social fabric of our nation.

Standard 6, in speaking of the importance of understanding and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context, lends itself well to strong school-community relations.

Although differing in their target audiences and their intentions, all standards are designed to illustrate what is really most important in education. It is clear from the ISLLC standards that the ability to communicate effectively and to involve all stakeholders fairly and equitably in the educational process helps to define what an effective educational leader is. When these standards are viewed along with goals and programs from the federal government and other agencies involved with education, the need for effective school-community relations is obvious.

SHOWCASE

Accountability Via Standards

The ISLLC standards provide tremendous guidance to school leaders who wish to measure their practice and performance against the most widely recognized standards of their field. However, it is important to note that too few administrators actually are aware of what the standards require. This is because the ISLLC standards typically are used as the framework for administrator preparation programs and for the licensure of administrators, but they are not used by practicing school administrators in many places. In fact, many states require that candidates for school administration licensure take and pass the School leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA), which is based entirely on the ISLLC standards. No such provision exists for those school administrators that were licensed prior to these regulations. Until there is accountability for practicing administrators, a concept being developed in several states, the wisdom of the ISLLC standards will remain unknown to many school leaders.

Exhibit 3-8

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The National PTA

Of similar focus, but coming from an agency with a somewhat different agenda, the National PTA has adopted standards (see Exhibit 3-8), which clearly relate to the importance of school-community relations. As an organization existing to promote parent involvement, it is no wonder that the National PTA's focus is on parents much more than it is on other aspects of the community. Nevertheless, the standards adopted by this organization in 1997 indicate the strong commitment that this large and powerful advocacy group has to impact school leadership's recognition of the significant role parents ought to play in education.

Since the National PTA's adoption of these standards in 1997, they have been used by many local PTAs to impact decisions made at the local school level and as a benchmark against which the effectiveness of long-term school reform efforts to involve parents/families in education have been measured.

Community Schools

The concept of community schools, which is the foundation upon which the Coalition for Community Schools rests, is that all people in any given community can and should be given opportunities to benefit from offerings within our schools. Related to our discussions of school-community

Exhibit 3-8 National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

(National PTA)

Standard I: Communicating-Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Standard II: Parenting-Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Standard III: Student Learning-Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Standard IV: Volunteering-Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

Standard V: School Decision Making and Advocacy-Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

Standard VI: Collaborating with Community-Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

relations, the Coalition for Community Schools seeks to expand the concept to include the many ways communities can utilize our schools' resources to benefit all members.

So without focusing attention merely on how the school and community can work together to accomplish goals for the students, the concept of community schools includes the benefits that all citizens, whether formal students or not, can and should receive from our local, neighborhood schools. There are many partner agencies associated with the Coalition for Community Schools. The majority of these organizations have adopted standards of their own that speak to the importance of the school and the community working harmoniously for the benefit of all citizens. The list of partners includes the following:

- American Association of School Administrators
- American Federation of Teachers
- Collaborative for Integrated School Services
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Association of State Boards of Education

- National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
- National Community Education Association
- National Education Association
- National School Boards Association
- Corporation for National Service
 - Learn and Serve America
- U.S. Department of Education
 - National School-to-Work Office
 - Office of Education, Research and Improvement
 - Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
 - Office of the Secretary
 - Office of Special Education Programs
 - Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
 - Administration for Children and Families
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - Office of Adolescent Health
 - Office of Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
 - Office of University Partnerships
- U.S. Department of Justice
 - Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

If nothing else, the above list demonstrates the significance seen by many national organizations of bringing our schools and our communities together. The list further illustrates that resources for arriving at standards and for planning programs are plentiful for the school leader who seeks them. What is required first, however, is a commitment to establishing strong school-community relations.

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This chapter has focused on the roles and responsibilities many key individuals play in establishing meaningful plans of school-community relations. It has demonstrated that, regardless of the size or location of any individual school system, the task of school-community relations should not be handled by one person. Rather, every member of the school community has a responsibility to ensure that a school's relationship with its community is solid and inclusive. In fulfilling this responsibility, all school employees must recognize that the support from outside of the school does exist. Although agendas may differ, organizational standards and plans exist in many agencies that can assist the school leader in being a leader who recognizes the importance of school-community relations.

Chapter Summary

- The Superintendent is usually the most influential member of the certificated staff. As a result, his/her vision for school-community relations is critical.
- Superintendents must be assisted in avoiding some of the common pitfalls, such as failure to consult with other members of the school system staff.
- The role of the district level Director of School-Community Relations has changed, with much less focus on pure public relations skills.
- Principals have tremendous influence over the culture of their schools and the ways in which staff members interact with members of the community.
- One of the most important responsibilities of the principal is to ensure that all staff members recognize the valuable role they play in the school-community relations plan.
- The government and many prominent organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of strong relationships between schools and communities.

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CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The Balancing Act

When Principal Wes Berry was summoned to Superintendent Elliott's office, he feared the worse. In the 4 years he had worked for the Rockmart County Schools, he had been called to the superintendent's office on only one other occasion. That other occasion was not for him to receive a pat on the back.

Superintendent Elliott began, "Wes, you know that I believe there are two sides to every story. In fact, that's why I've called you here. I want to hear your side. Yesterday, I received a very disturbing telephone call from a Mr. Patterson. He claims that the newsletter you sent home last week contained no less than five spelling errors. His concern is the example this is showing to kids. Now Wes, I don't need to tell you that this Mr. Patterson is the husband of Sharon Patterson, the lady sure to be elected to the school board in three weeks. Although I haven't seen your newsletter, Mr. Patterson needs to be made happy. Do I make my point clearly?"

Many thoughts ran through Wes Berry's mind, but none of them seemed appropriate to share. "Yes, sir," was all he said. With that the meeting was over, and Wes was on his way back to his school.

Questions for Analysis

1. Can you identify any of the commonly made errors that Superintendent Elliott has made in this situation?
2. Aside from the Superintendent's behavior, what are some other school district problems you can identify that hinder strong school-community relations?
3. What should Wes Berry do to avoid situations like this in the future? Where should he turn for assistance?