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**Embracing
Your External Publics**

The communication skills required of successful administrators are not reserved for sole use with a school's internal publics. Although it is, as we have seen, critical for successful school administrators to communicate effectively with the various stakeholders constituting a school's internal publics, it is no less important for them to utilize these communication skills as effectively with those stakeholders spending most of their time outside of the school's walls. In fact, as we witness the speed at which people have access to information during this new century, it becomes clearly apparent that school leaders must keep all concerned members of their external publics informed. Failure to do so gives all school stakeholders opportunities to receive inaccurate information about the state of education, without any rebuttal or clarification from the leaders of our schools. Administrators must not allow this to happen.

But who are these stakeholders referred to as external publics? What information about our schools do they need and desire? Finally, how is this information best communicated to them? This chapter focuses on answers to these questions and gives information necessary to support the notion that successful school leadership lies, at least in part, in the administrator's ability to embrace the school's external publics.

Appropriate Parental Involvement

All professional school staff members are inundated with information regarding the importance of parental involvement and the effect it has on students' academic achievement. As all educators have learned, parent involvement certainly is one of the most significant factors influencing student achievement. Throughout the past decade, there have been numerous reports and a large body of research stating that parent involvement is a critical factor in the success of students (Benson, Buckley, & Elliott, 1980; Epstein, 1992; Rioux & Berla, 1993; Whitaker & Fiore, 2001). In addition to what this literature states, the federal government has been paying increased attention to this concept. Consider that an eighth goal dealing with parental participation was recently added to the now famous National Education Goals (Goals 2000, 1995).

Specifically, the eighth goal is stated as: "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children." (Achieving the Goals, 1997). The wording of this goal, after careful analysis, acknowledges parental involvement's ability to promote social, emotional, and academic growth.

The addition of the eighth goal therefore illustrates, in large part, the federal government's acknowledgement of parents' significance in education. This significance had not previously been acknowledged so strongly by any federal agency (Whitaker & Fiore, 2001). In further acknowledging parents' important roles, the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) devised a list of six national standards with the sole purpose of "promoting meaningful parent and family participation" in 1997 (p. 6). These standards are depicted in Chapter 3. The organization has also led many studies during recent years with the purpose of exploring the nature and intent of parents' involvement in their children's education.

Involving Parents While They Are at School

Helping parents believe that they are important members of our school communities is a difficult goal for many school administrators to accomplish. However, it is a task of utmost importance, which is a prerequisite to any meaningful opportunities for getting and keeping parents involved. Due to a myriad of issues a large percentage of our parents simply do not believe that we, as school leaders, deem their involvement to be at all important. Worse yet, some parents believe, for a variety of reasons, that school leaders do not want them in the school at all. Therefore, it becomes imperative for all school leaders to recognize the significance of creating opportunities for parents to change their misconceptions and to understand that we do really want them and need them to be involved. Elaine McEwan, educational consultant and author, suggests structuring school projects, such as fun fairs, so that parents and teachers work together, and hosting career days in which parents "come to school and educate children about their careers" (McEwan, 1998, pp. 80-89). These structured or forced gatherings of parents and teachers help to break down the invisible wall that so many parents feel has been erected between them and the school. Moreover, when parents can share their careers and/or expertise with children in our schools, their sense of value and worth to our mission and goals is certainly heightened.

Since many states are experiencing a reduction in funding for classroom assistants, teachers are increasingly turning to parents for the instructional support that they used to receive from classified staff members. They are utilizing parents to help tutor struggling students, prepare materials for lessons and/or classroom bulletin board displays, and assist in less-structured school experiences such as recess at the elementary level. Although these represent wonderful opportunities for increased parental involvement, it is important

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for school administrators employing such techniques to consider the potential legal ramifications associated with them. This is often overlooked in the name of necessity of finding some assistance for teachers.

The mention here of potential legal ramifications is not intended to unduly alarm administrators or other school employees. However, it is worth noting that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 provided substantive and procedural safeguards for the privacy rights of students and their parents. Essentially, this means that school officials must keep most data contained in student records confidential. Although school officials and teachers with a legitimate educational interest in the student are entitled to access these records, even their access must be recorded and documented. Volunteers, whether parents or nonparents, who are often tapped by schools to provide necessary tutoring, do not have the same rights in terms of accessing confidential student information.

Also of note, many school districts now require background checks of all volunteers. While this may appear insensitive or demeaning to volunteers, it is a valid concern for school administrators to express, because the risk of liability due to a volunteer's negligence is great. Therefore, these background checks are sound practice. More importantly, background checks on volunteers can be conducted and presented in a way that illustrates to parents and community members alike the school's unending quest to ensure student safety and well being. The smart school leader can use communication and human relations skills to turn this possible concern of appearing insensitive to volunteers into a very positive message of his or her commitment to students and their safety.

Welcome to Our School?

An important consideration of getting and maintaining parental involvement at the school is the ways in which we greet and welcome parents when they arrive. This becomes a potential public relations nightmare when considered along with all of the valid concerns we must have in regards to school safety. School leaders all across the nation are struggling with how to keep their students safe while also maintaining a welcoming, friendly atmosphere. The greatest success in this regard is being enjoyed by those leaders who have found ways to welcome visitors openly within constraints that allow for steady monitoring of all visitors who enter the building. School leaders who mistakenly believe that restrictive entrance to a school building must be accompanied by a cold, unfriendly message, on the other hand, are experiencing failure. Consider Exhibits 6-1 and 6-2. They show examples of greetings that might be found at the entrance to some of our schools. Look at them carefully and try to assess the way in which parents and other visitors may perceive them. Exhibit 6-2 is far more friendly and inviting, yet it still delivers the same important message about student safety and visitor access.

Exhibit 6-1 Unfriendly, Cold School Greeting



"Stop! For the safety of our students, all visitors must sign in at the office before proceeding further."

Exhibit 6-2 Friendly, Warm School Greeting

WELCOME

"Welcome to our school! We are so glad that you are here! We do ask that all visitors please sign in at the office upon entering."

These are actual messages that appear at the entrances of two different schools. Both of them have the same goal and were created in response to the need for keeping track of who is in our school buildings at all times. Not only is this necessary to do, but it also creates an important sense of safety, even though the messages can be ignored in many cases. In some schools, there are guards at the doors, which have a great impact on school safety. In most schools across the country, however, these messages are the only means by which access is truly restricted. So which one is more effective at accomplishing the designed goal?

Some may argue that the forceful language in the first example is necessary. Without such forcefulness, it can be argued, people would not respond and do what they are being asked to do. This position is difficult to defend, however. Others maintain that individuals who would ignore a message that says "Welcome to our school! We are so glad that you are here. We do ask that all visitors please sign in at the office upon entering" are also more likely to ignore a more forceful message. The vast majority of school visitors, especially parents, are well-intentioned people who follow rules and regulations. Additionally, these people appreciate the school's efforts at restricting visitation and creating a safe environment for their children. By utilizing

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Learning Labs

A very innovative approach to involving external stakeholders is the concept of learning labs, as exemplified by this Midwest elementary school. James B. Eads Learning labs took place on a nine-week rotation during the last 50 minutes on the school day on consecutive Fridays. Three nine-week sessions were held during the school year. The courses offered included Architecture and Land Development, Sign Language, Origami and Japanese Culture, Photography, Science Experimentation and Discovery, Writing a Newspaper Story, Spanish, The Stock Market, Environmental Awareness, and Building Complex Machines with Legos, to name just a few. The school staff taught a small portion of the Labs, whereas the majority tapped parents, community leaders and central office personnel. The school staff, led by principal Sondra Estep, prepared a catalogue of course offerings, which changed every 9 weeks. The catalogue was sent home with the students so parents could help their children make choices of which Labs to attend. An assessment of the program showed that parents and students truly enjoyed and learned from the program. The media coverage for Learning Labs was colossal. The newspaper had a smorgasbord of stories to choose from each time Learning Labs were offered. Learning Labs was a very successful program that helped keep many stakeholder groups involved.

an unfriendly, more forceful message, schools unintentionally make some of their more positive visitors feel unwelcome in the school because of the rather unfriendly edict that greets them.

The odds are that the same people will report to the office no matter how the message is delivered. The negative effect that the message has on otherwise positive people is what is of great concern. School leaders must concern themselves with student safety. There is simply no question about that. In doing so, they must be cognizant of who has access to the school building while children are in attendance. Messages, prominently displayed, which urge people to sign in and be accounted for before proceeding throughout the school building, are essential. In designing such messages, however, school leaders must be aware of the other, more subtle messages that they are delivering. These messages, which do no more good than friendly ones, can run the serious risk of making parents and other visitors feel unwelcome in our schools.

Involving Parents While They Are at Home

It is in the best interests of administrators and teachers alike to recognize the important point that parents can be partners in schooling from within the confines of their own homes. Rather than bemoaning the fact that many parents appear unwilling or unable to come to school and be involved, school leaders must recognize that parents play a very important educational role even while they are in the home. The entire school community must understand this, and it must be communicated to parents on a regular basis. Not only is this a welcome idea for some parents, but also it validates the fact that family needs have certainly changed over time. The National Committee for Citizens in Education backs up this notion by urging all parents to do the following:

- Support student events and performances by helping with them (such as sewing costumes or planning scenery for a school play).
- Be part of decision-making committees dealing with school issues and problems, such as a Parent Advisory Committee (these often meet during the evening).
- Ask your child's teacher if he or she has materials that you can use to help your child at home.
- Help your child develop a homework schedule that he or she can stick to.
- Have high expectations for your child's learning and behavior, both at home and at school.
- Avoid making homework a punishment.
- Praise and encourage your child. (Whitaker & Fiore, 2001)

Many individual school districts across the United States have taken the initiative to inform parents of ways in which they can be involved with school from within their homes. Stephen Kleinsmith, assistant superintendent in Millard, Nebraska encourages faculty and staff to share the following list of parent involvement options with parents:

- Call the school staff on a regular basis, and talk with teachers before problems occur.
- Help proofread and edit the school newsletter.
- Become involved in the student's curriculum planning, and discuss academic options with your son or daughter.
- Encourage involvement in the school activities of the student's choice.

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- Ask your son or daughter, "What good questions did you ask today?" or "What did you learn in school today?", and then practice good listening, a key to effective communication.
- Encourage reading, using the library, and purchasing books at a young age. (Dietz, 1997)

Many other schools have developed similar lists for parents. Although the specific content of these lists varies from one community to the next, the common theme of all of them is that there absolutely are ways in which parents can be very involved in education without having to come directly to the school building. All schools must confirm the value of these at-home tasks so that parents will begin to feel part of the educational process without any of the unintended guilt that accompanies not being able to spend time in the school.

Finally, the Parent Partnership program in Philadelphia is another example of an innovation involving parental involvement from home. This program provides reading and mathematics booklets to parents as well as a Dial-A-Teacher Assistance project for help with homework in all basic subjects. Many school systems in recent years have expanded on the Dial-A-Teacher concept to include help and assignment information via the Internet. Also, used in some markets is local access cable television. These telecasts can include advice for parents on providing assistance, as well as the more traditional call-in help programs for students.

The San Diego Unified School District offers materials in both English and Spanish designed to assist in student homework. This is in recognition of the fact that many students do not live in homes that use English as the primary language for communication. As a result, many parents are not involved in their child's school because of an honest barrier to communication. Educators sometimes mistakenly assume that parents have the same command of English as the children we work with do. Often, we have discovered, this is not the case. As in San Diego, many school districts are providing information to parents in multiple languages to reduce this obvious barrier to parental involvement (Whitaker & Fiore, 2001).

Other Members of the External Public

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the importance of involving parents in our schools. Although there will be some more specific ways to accomplish this discussed in subsequent chapters, it is essential to note that parents are not the only external public that school leaders ought to concern themselves with. Exhibit 6-3 illustrates several other external publics and briefly summarizes some of what these groups want to know about our schools. Effective, regular communication with them is essential to ensure that their needs are being met.

Exhibit 6-3 External Publics

Taxpayers	How is their money being spent? Is there evidence showing that money spent is accomplishing a desired goal?
Churches/Religious Affiliates	Is the school discriminating based on religious beliefs? Are students penalized for failing to attend in observance of a religious obligation? Does the curriculum support/counter their religious beliefs?
Legislators	What are some needs in the school that can be assisted through legislative activity? How does proposed legislation affect the learning that takes place in the schools?
School Alumni	Are school traditions still being observed? What is the school staff retention rate?
Families w/o Children in Schools	How do students in this school perform in comparison with those in other schools? What ramifications does this have on property values? Are people attracted to the community because of the schools?
Businesses/Industries	Does the curriculum prepare students for the workforce? What percent of students go to college, instead of directly entering the workforce?

This table does not identify every member of a school's external publics. Additionally, there are individuals who fit into more than one of these categories. For example, a community member may have attended the school as a child, may not have children of his or her own, may be affiliated with a church, and may work in the community. Obviously, this individual would be concerned about the school on multiple levels. Similarly, an individual may belong to several of these groups but have no apparent interest in the school. School leaders ought to communicate with these groups as though everybody is interested, however.

Establishing Key Communicators

Depending on the size and location of an individual community, it may be impossible for a school to have the resources necessary for communication with all members of the external publics. For this reason, it is important that

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Celebrating the Value of Reading

For more than two decades Parkview Elementary School has put on a special event for students in fourth and fifth grade known as "Friday Night Live." This evening is designed to get all stakeholders (internal and external alike) to focus on the value of reading. The entire staff becomes involved in creating skits and other activities that are incredibly elaborate. Creative parents spend a great deal of time procuring decorations and other items that generally amaze the children. The school has enjoyed such visitors as cowboys on horseback, Olympic-level archers, professional basketball players, live tigers, yachts, limousines, ice sculptures, the mayor of the city, classic Harley Davidson motorcycles (roaring down the hallway), letters from a former First Lady, and dozens of other items that people provided because they knew the school was providing something really special for the children. Many former fourth and fifth grade students (years later) say it was the best thing that they were ever a part of in school. The goodwill engendered as a result is beautiful and worthwhile.

key communicators be identified within each of these external groups. These key communicators, whom George Pawlas identifies as "the opinion leaders, the people who influence the directions and actions of the various community organizations" (1995, p. 74), ought to be representatives of these external public groups that have the greatest access to people. The editor of the local newspaper, for example, is often an excellent key communicator due to the access that this individual has to a large audience on a regular and consistent basis. A high-volume local realtor may also be an excellent key communicator. Like the newspaper editor, this individual has access to many people and influences, to a large degree, how people perceive the schools and the community.

In your own community, you can probably think of many people who would be excellent key communicators. They may be religious leaders, business officials, leaders in civic organizations, politicians, higher education faculty members, members of the police force, or the coordinator of the community's Welcome Wagon. What is important is the access they have to community members and the ability they have to communicate with and influence them.

These key communicators ought to be invited to the school at regularly scheduled intervals so that the school principal can share information with them and listen to their concerns. In addition, they should receive copies of the school's newsletters, and should receive telephone calls from the school

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principal whenever matters of importance to the community surface. To ensure that the key communicators best understand what is going on in the school, it is important that the principal answers all questions, letters, and telephone calls with a personal telephone call or letter promptly. This is essential practice for all communication that the principal engages in, but it becomes crucial when dealing with key communicators. School leaders must remember that key communicators see a great number of influential people on a regular, consistent basis. It is, therefore, imperative that they have correct information communicated to them.

Where to Start with Key Communicators

If a school leader wishes to start a program involving key communicators in getting the word out about the school's mission and goals, then an important first step is identifying who these key communicators really ought to be. Suggestions for doing this were made in the preceding section, but they were intentionally largely generic. Successfully utilizing the right key communicators in a school-community relations program necessitates involvement of many school employees. Therefore, the wise school leader should have various school employees compile independent lists of possible community members to include as key communicators. These lists should then be analyzed and evaluated. The odds are that several names will appear on multiple lists indicating, more often than not, that these individuals would be outstanding choices.

The next step that ought to be completed is for the school leader to contact individuals, informing them that they have been identified as community members who would be excellent members of the school's key communicators program. These contacts are best made through formal letters and personal telephone calls. Obviously, contacting members through both of these means increases the likelihood that they will respond favorably to the invitation.

The size of the school and some specific demographic information about the community it serves will have a great deal to do with the next step. In some communities it would be appropriate to then meet with the key communicators either one-on-one or in very small groups. During these meetings, the school leaders would explain the goals of the key communicator program and consistently remind those chosen that they have been identified because of the influential role they play in the community. This serves to increase their level of confidence and commitment to the program. In other school communities, it may be more appropriate to have one big meeting with all of the key communicators where the same goals would be accomplished. The school leaders and their most trusted advisors best determine which method is best. What really matters is that this group, which can range in size from 5 to 100, understands its role in carrying the good news from the school to the community and echoing back to the school any concerns or questions that arise within the community.

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The Importance of Community Members with Grown Children

For the past 25 years, our population has been aging at its most rapid rate in modern history. This has had an impact on many decisions and directions in our country, but has sadly been ignored by many school administrators. Trained in administration years ago, these school administrators have focused their energy and attention on parents of school-age children, thereby ignoring the fastest-growing segment of our population and their community. Contemporary school leaders must understand the importance of older adults as significant members of a school's external publics. Among the many reasons why this is so are the following:

- Approximately 75% of adults older than the age of 65 are registered to vote in this country. Almost as many turn out to vote in national elections, despite the fact that overall voter turnout has declined in the past 25 years. Many of these older adults also turn out to vote on school budget and bond issues.
- Approximately 75% of the tax-paying households in most school districts do not have children in schools.
- The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the largest organization in the United States targeting this population, currently claims a membership in excess of 40 million members (2010).

School leaders must reach out to this segment of their external publics. When they do, they usually find a group that is very supportive of education. Older adults want the best possible educational opportunities for America's youth. What they are lacking, in many cases, is an understanding of what local schools need to do their jobs well. It is, therefore, up to the school leaders to communicate with and reach out to these individuals. This must be done, furthermore, through means that are more personal than mere written communications. Though older adults in your school community ought to receive written communications from you, they should be involved in the school in more personal ways as well.

Intergenerational Programs in Schools

There are programs involving intergenerational relationships popping up all over the country in response to the need for involving older adults in our schools. In 1986, 100 national organizations that deal with people of varying ages formed Generations United. One of the goals of this organization, which involves such groups as the national Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), the National Education Association (NEA), and the National Council on Aging (NCOA), is the establishment of strong intergenerational programs in every single state. These programs get filtered down to our schools and lead to programs that involve older adults and students in meaningful, educational ways.

It is important to note that the involvement of older adults must be more than having them attend an annual Grandparent's Day. Although Grandparent's Day is an important event at many schools and does a great deal toward bridging generation gaps and positively involving older adults, it is quite limited in both its appeal and its effects on learning. Older adults must be involved more regularly through activities such as the following:

- **Computer Activities:** As part of a class, students can tutor older adults in computer usage and applications. This assists the older adults in learning important skills while also providing a wonderful opportunity to assess the students' computer abilities and understandings.
- **Reading Tutoring:** Older adults can serve as volunteer reading tutors for students. This does not require sophisticated teaching skills, but can be as simple as having the older adult serve as a "listener" for a student struggling in reading.
- **Vocational Training:** Older adults can share their vocational expertise with students in a variety of ways. Not only will the students benefit from the expertise that an experienced worker brings, but they will also be able to compare/contrast different methods for accomplishing something.
- **School Safety:** Older adults can assist as doorway and hallway monitors to help keep our schools safer. Borrowing from the concept of "bargain store greeter," this is a great opportunity for a retiree to be involved in the schools while also giving the school another set of eyes to ensure that visitors are following appropriate school safety guidelines.

By following these and other suggestions, school leaders will earn the support of a very important segment of their external publics. At the same time, they will be providing their students with rich learning opportunities that they cannot get from a textbook.

Presenting Students to the Community

It seems that every time members of the community watch students perform, read student publications, or view student creations, they express delight and surprise that children can do things so well. More often than not, these people communicate their delight and surprise to other members of the community through word of mouth. Therefore, if schools provide more opportunities for members of the community to see the wonderful work students do, then there will be an increase in the amount of "good gossip" being spread throughout the community. This can do a great deal toward securing the kind of support and commitment from external publics that schools need and deserve.

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Unfortunately, many school leaders squander opportunities to involve members of their school's external publics in presentations and exhibitions by students. They fail to understand the dividends paid by including and inviting all members of the community to such events as plays, musicals, athletic events, recitals, debates, art shows, and academic competitions. Community attendance at these events can show a great deal about a school's strengths while also increasing the number of people attending in support of the children.

Athletics

Athletic competitions provide many citizens with the only contact they are likely to have with the school. Attendance at athletic events in most communities is far greater than at any other singular school event, with the possible exception of commencement activities. Because of this, resources are often poured into athletic programs at a rate that troubles people involved in other student activities. However, because athletics have proven to be important to local communities, it behooves school leaders to pay attention to how they greet and treat the public at these events. Clean, comfortable athletic facilities, accessible concessions, and reasonable prices for the community are all important matters that school administrators must consider in evaluating how they present student athletic competitions to the public. Because public opinion of a school's athletic programs, fairly or not, often transfers to their opinion of the rest of the school, it is important that athletic teams look good, have presentable uniforms, and play with an acceptable code of conduct. A well-disciplined team often leads the public to assume that the student body is well disciplined at school. A poorly disciplined team can leave members of the external publics believing that the school is a poorly disciplined place for students to learn.

Plays

Dramatic productions and musical plays draw tremendous numbers of people to school in many communities. As is the case with other forms of student productions, the audience is often amazed by the quality of the productions put on by students. This is true of the performances themselves, but also extends to the quality of scenery and set design, and the creation of costumes. Students enjoy being involved in these types of theater productions because of the versatility of talents required. Students can participate in the creation of the program, in technical capacities such as sound and lighting, in various other production roles, or as performers.

Additionally, these productions provide wonderful opportunities to involve members of the community as more than mere spectators. Many productions allow opportunities for citizens to participate in making costumes, properties, and stage sets. The bottom line in evaluating plays as methods

of involving and embracing external publics lies in the versatility of student skills they demonstrate and in their ability to involve members of the external publics in their creations.

Other Artistic Endeavors

Many schools showcase student artwork, either as separate events or in conjunction with artistic endeavors like dramatic or musical productions. Once again, these opportunities often lead community members to feelings of awe and wonderment at the abilities of students. There is an assumption by many that if students can express themselves through their artwork, then there probably is at least some degree of transference to their academic work. In other words, to many spectators quality artwork is indicative of quality academic schoolwork.

Musical recitals and forensic exercises provide similar opportunities for students to show their talents and abilities to members of the school's external publics. In addition to the feelings among community members that students have abilities even greater than they imagined, these opportunities provide students with the feedback necessary to increase their own sense of accomplishment and feelings of self-worth. Such opportunities really do provide win-win situations for students and community members alike.

Academic Competitions

Events such as spelling bees, geography bees, and science fairs provide yet more opportunities to involve members of the school's external publics. Although there are shortcomings to these competitive events, they do assist in demonstrating to the public that our students are indeed academically well prepared. The risk that exists is that the students will perform poorly in front of the public, thereby unintentionally fueling any discontent that may already exist relative to the school's academic strength. However, this risk can be virtually eliminated if the school leaders have done their job communicating with the external publics on a regular, consistent basis, with honest appraisals of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's academic programs. In other words, we should be proud to showcase the academic ability of our students, even when that ability is not as great as that of a neighboring school community. As long as our students are being challenged to stretch beyond their innate abilities, then we should be proud of the results, whatever they may be.

Be Forewarned

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is the risk of appearing to exploit children's talents in the name of public opinion. Again, the ability to understand your community is essential before delving too far into public displays of student talents. We can probably all think of school communities that rely too heavily on a winning football team. This becomes so important to the community that it outweighs all other school endeavors. Worse, when circumstances become such that the school can no longer provide a dominant, winning team, then the players become devalued. This can take a tremendous toll on a young person's psyche. It is, therefore, essential that a healthy balance exist between providing win-win opportunities for student athletes and the community to share in prideful competition and the unnecessary pressure that can be put on student athletes who feel that a victory on the field is their obligation to deliver.

The same concept holds true for all other exhibits of student talents and abilities. They must be done so that students can feel a sense of worth and can contribute in positive ways to the community. Including an audience must serve the dual purposes of providing support to students and involving the community in educational pursuits. When these ideals cease to be the goals and when students begin to be exploited for public relations gains, then school leaders must cease and desist such involvement immediately.

Chapter Summary

- It is essential that school leaders identify all of the different groups that make up their school's external publics.
- Appropriate parental involvement has a tremendous impact on student achievement.
- Parents can be appropriately involved at school only if they really believe that they are welcome in the school.
- It is vitally important that school leaders do a better job of showing parents how they can be involved from within their own homes. Furthermore, all school personnel must value this type of involvement.
- There are many external public groups besides parents that require regular, purposeful communication as well.
- If school leaders identify and then involve key communicators, then they will find it much easier to engage in meaningful two-way communication with their external publics.
- Older adults, the fastest-growing segment of our population, are very significant members of a school's external publics. Consequently, they ought to be communicated with and involved in school activities.

- Presenting student activities to the external publics is an important way to build understanding of and support for the school.
- There are cautions to consider before presenting students and their work to the public on a regular and consistent basis.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

That's Not What I Meant to Say

At the first PTO meeting in September, first-year principal Alonzo Lucas anxiously awaited the opportunity to address the parents in attendance. The first 3 weeks of school had gone very well, so Lucas expected a nice meeting with parents.

"I want to thank all of the parents in attendance for seeing to it that your children are prepared for school and on-time each day," he began.

"Furthermore, I want to express my gratitude for the encouraging notes and phone calls that I have received since arriving here. This school is your school, and your voice will always be heard here. Parents are their children's first teachers, and you know what's best for your own children. Please know that I will never forget that."

The next morning, Alonzo Lucas received a phone call from Patty Thompson, president of the PTO. "Mr. Lucas," she began, "I want you to know how grateful all of us were to hear your words yesterday afternoon. As you know, a few of the teachers here are not very good, and we have always enjoyed the opportunity to let the administration know which teachers we wanted our children to have for the next school year. A few of us were concerned that you would end that policy, but after hearing you say yesterday that we know what's best for our children, we are all delighted that you seem to feel this policy ought to continue."

Questions for Analysis

1. Should parents have a voice who their child has for a teacher? If so, to what extent should their voice be listened to?
2. If Alonzo Lucas wishes to engage in meaningful dialogue with parents about this issue, how should he proceed?
3. Have any communication errors been made to this point? What are some potential pitfalls to anticipate in the future?
4. If you were Mr. Alonzo, what would your first reply to Mrs. Thompson be?