

11

**Saying What You Mean:
Meaning What You Say**

A great deal of what constitutes school-community relations involves the spoken word and the internalization of it by other people. Earlier chapters have focused on the communication process and all of the potential for breakdowns at any point in the process. These chapters have also paid attention to the many different groups that constitute a school's publics. Some of the groups are considered "internal" groups because they spend the majority of their time within the school's walls. Still others constitute those publics who are "external" because of the fact that most of their time is spent outside of the school's walls. These chapters have also focused on ways in which our writing can communicate effectively with groups and individuals and how important clear writing is to effective school-community relations.

The focus of this is on the spoken word. As a great deal of the administrator's time is spent in spoken conversation, it is essential that administrators have a sense of behaviors and techniques that will enhance their ability to speak publicly. These behaviors will be useful in both individual conversations and in large group presentations.

Telephone Etiquette

Although research (Fiore, 1999; Whitaker, 1997) does indeed support the notion that the most effective principals are out of their offices regularly, a fact of school administration is that there are many telephone calls that must be taken or returned. Oftentimes, we know, these telephone calls occur at very inconvenient times for the administrator. The way in which the administrator responds to the telephone calls, convenient or inconvenient, tells a great deal about his or her understanding of school-community relations.

As a rule of thumb, all incoming telephone calls must be taken courteously. This is one reason why school secretaries must undergo training in proper telephone etiquette. They must be taught to answer the telephone in a cheerful voice, identifying the school, and asking the caller how they can be of assistance. Secretaries who fail to do this are undermining severely the administrator's efforts at good school-community relations.

Although the secretary, as the first voice people hear when calling the school, is important; all other staff members must use the same courtesy when receiving telephone calls. This is particularly true of the principal, given the nature of many of the telephone calls he or she receives.

If, for example, a concerned parent calls to speak with the principal, the principal should take the call courteously and with a genuine desire to assist the parent. This courteous tone does not mean that the principal necessarily ought to be on the parent's side regarding the issue being discussed. The tone and manner of the principal's voice must demonstrate a desire to help, though.

The tone also becomes important if a member of the media is calling to get information from the principal. Although the principal may not wish to discuss all of the issues in question, the tone of the principals' voice ought to demonstrate a cooperative nature.

As a final example, consider a telephone call to the principal from an administrator in the county office. This call is being made to request information from the principal that is not readily available or convenient for the principal to get. Again, a courteous, helpful tone is in order.

The two questions immediately raised by these examples are "Why?" and "How?" Why is this tone so important, and how can it be achieved? Let's examine responses to these questions below.

A courteous tone is important because principals must remember that one of their primary responsibilities is to serve the public. In fact, the concept of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) is widely referred to as a model for school leadership. True greatness as a leader is often thought to come from the leader's desire and capacity for serving those who are lead. When visiting a fine restaurant, a rushed greeting by wait staff desirous to take our order quickly so they can move on to other tables, rarely elicits a high tip for service. We tend to expect those who are serving us to be courteous, friendly, and willing to devote time to our needs. Individuals calling to speak to the school principal have a right to the same expectations.

The tone is further important because of our desire to have people deal with us in a courteous and friendly way. The implication is that people will be more attracted to you, and thus more courteous, if they are treated courteously by you. So for selfish reasons, school administrators who are courteous on the telephone are more likely to receive courteous treatment themselves.

Finally a courteous tone is important because of the principals' role as the "tone setter" of the school. In recognition of the important roles all staff members play in a school's success, the principal is the most influential member of the school staff. People look to the principal for guidance and leadership. How he or she deals with other people, therefore, determines the public's perception of how the entire school deals with people. The responsibility of so strongly representing the tone and climate of the school is one more important reason why school administrators must receive telephone calls courteously.

There are times in the workdays of all principals where courteous telephone calls become difficult to take. For this reason, a good secretary takes messages courteously, and then gives the caller an approximate time to expect a telephone call to be returned by the principal. Although people who call want their calls to be taken immediately, they are much more forgiving of a promptly returned telephone call that is courteous than they are of a rude, curt, rushed answer. Administrators ought not feel as though they are held hostage by the telephone. They should not believe that they must be available to courteously receive all telephone calls. To do so, in addition to being mentally challenging, would prevent the administrator from being visible in the school, a behavior supported by research as being essential to a positive school culture (Fiore, 1999). What administrators should realize instead, is that it is important to good school-community relations that they return all telephone calls not taken within a reasonable time.

Telephone Calls From the Principal

Whether a principal is returning a telephone call or placing one on his or her own volition, there are some key elements that must be kept in mind.

1. **Be courteous.** As already discussed, it is essential that the principal place the telephone call in a courteous and friendly tone.
2. **Avoid interruptions.** Although difficult to avoid entirely, it is important that telephone calls be placed at a time less likely to involve outside interruptions. If, for example, the principal has one minute between appointments, this is likely not a good time to be returning a telephone call to a concerned parent who may need several minutes to speak.
3. **Have a script.** Although it is impractical to develop a script for every telephone call in its entirety, having a script for the beginning of a telephone call is a good idea for the sake of consistency. Beginning all telephone calls with the same greeting, whether the call is for good news or bad news, illustrates the principal's fairness and desire to always be familiar.
4. **Prepare relevant data.** If a telephone call is being made to discuss a student discipline referral with a parent, then it stands to reason that the principal ought to be familiar with the incident before placing the call. Likewise, if the telephone call is being made to a newspaper reporter wanting to discuss standardized test data, then the principal may want to have the data available before placing the call.
5. **Anticipate questions.** Similar to preparing a script, the principal ought to anticipate questions likely to be asked by the recipient of the call. Rehearsing some of these beforehand will allow the principal to be more confident in his or her response once the questions have actually been asked.

In essence, it is vitally important that principals and other school officials take some time to prepare for telephone calls. Although any individual call may seem insignificant to the principal placing it, the individual on the receiving end may be speaking with the principal for the first and only time. As such, this person will base many judgments on this seemingly insignificant call. Remembering this, although not intended to make individuals nervous, may serve the purpose of ensuring that principals take their telephone presence seriously.

Face-To-Face Conversations

There are numerous opportunities for face-to-face conversations occurring throughout the typical school day. Some of these are informal and occur in hallways or on sidewalks, whereas others represent scheduled appointments and occur in more formally arranged settings. Although these differences in location impact the nature of the face-to-face conversations somewhat, there are some general rules that should be kept in mind for portraying the desired communication.

In Chapter 4, the importance of nonverbal communication was discussed at length. Paying attention to the nonverbal communication that is a part of your own communication patterns is essential. Not being overly sensitive to other people's nonverbal cues and checking your perceptions of them when they do concern you are other concepts that were discussed. Here, the focus is more on your spoken language, as it was in the section about telephone etiquette.

When given the opportunity to engage in a face-to-face conversation with any school stakeholder, a school principal should remember to speak clearly and deliberately. Practicing clear speech in all aspects of the principal's personal and professional life will make this a natural speech pattern. Feeling and behaving naturally is especially easy if the principal is comfortable with the person whom he or she is communicating with. However, although hopefully less frequently occurring, there may be times in which the principal is not comfortable in a face-to-face conversation. These situations require some special skills.

There should be a careful tone of confidence in the principal's voice at all times. Although certain individual conversations may make the principal more nervous than other conversations, this uneasiness should be absent from the principal's voice if at all possible. Not showing uneasy feelings can be accomplished in three ways.

1. **Close the gap.** Oftentimes, an angry or aggressive individual expects us to back away when they express anger with us. If you think of the stereotypical playground bully, this is precisely the response that person usually receives. In our mental images of bullies, we probably

see them moving aggressively toward the individual they are bullying while that person backs away scared. This gives the bully the upper hand he or she desires in confrontational conversations. The best way to overcome this is to do exactly the opposite of what the bully expects. Therefore, in difficult conversations that make the principal uncomfortable, the best advice is to gradually close the gap. It's important to note that this should be done deliberately, but very gradually. This will make the angry, aggressive person a bit nervous, and may give the principal some needed confidence.

2. **Maintain eye contact.** It is often difficult to look somebody in the eye when they are angry with us. However, that is exactly what a principal should do in a conversation with an angry or aggressive person. Looking the person squarely in the eye accomplishes several goals. First, it shows the other person that the principal is not intimidated by their anger. Second, it makes it more difficult for the angry person to continue expressing anger, as they are not used to be people looking them in the eye when they do so. Third, it restores some of the principal's own confidence. Again, this must be done deliberately to demonstrate the confidence that the principal has in his or her position, even if the principal is not feeling overly confident inside.
3. **Lower your voice.** When involved in a face-to-face conversation with a loud, aggressive person, it is important for a principal to maintain a soft, quiet vocal tone. Although the impulse may be to raise our own voice in response to another's loud voice, the opposite strategy has a more profound effect. Lowering his or her voice will allow the principal to maintain a rational, calm, and confident demeanor. It will also make the other person's inappropriate demeanor seem even more inappropriate in comparison. This, in turn, may lead the other person to become self-conscious of his or her behavior. Any time the principal can cause the angry, aggressive individual to focus on his or her own inappropriate behavior, there will be a new opportunity to gain the upper hand in the conversation.

The primary point to remember is that these techniques are useful in uncomfortable conversations with difficult people. A strong school-community relations plan, based on positive frequent interactions with stakeholders, will severely lessen the extent to which these suggestions will be needed. The principal should remember that a courteous demeanor and clear, deliberate communication best prepares him or her for face-to-face conversations.

Although the focus here has been on the school administrator's behavior, the same techniques discussed are applicable to teachers and staff members. A courteous demeanor and clear, deliberate communication from any school staff member will lead to a multitude of more pleasant face-to-face conversations.

SHOWCASE

Addressing the Tough Questions

Whenever a school leader is going to engage in a meeting with stakeholders of varying perspectives, it is always important to ask oneself the following two questions: "If I were in the audience what would I want to get out of this meeting? And how do I want to feel?" An example occurred when a colleague needed to host a community forum to discuss moving from traditional one-grade classes to multi-age classes. As the meeting started the principal reviewed the issues and asked if anyone had more to add to make sure all concerns were addressed. After teachers presented the process and the plan the principal followed up by addressing questions. He made sure he addressed the tough questions. This is the power of knowing your community. It was easy to know which people would have issues. The principal did this to model how being positive and respectful with responses carries so much more weight than being defensive. This principal's experience reminds us of how the power of being positive, relaxed, and non-defensive carries over to not only the other presenters, but to the entire audience. With that in mind the rest takes care of itself.

Speaking to a Large Group

There are many occasions during which a school administrator may be called upon to speak before a large audience. As several of these are outlined in Chapter 11 as opportunities for a school to make a favorable impression on the public, the administrator's ability to respond with a thoughtfully presented speech takes on relative importance. Although most members of the public do not expect school administrators to be highly skilled public speakers, an administrator who appears comfortably at ease speaking to large groups of people is often perceived more favorably than is one who becomes nervous and perhaps confused in like situations.

One of the best groups to practice speaking in front of is the school faculty. A principal who can effectively and succinctly make points to the faculty during a meeting is able to move a meeting along at a productive pace. Teachers tend to enjoy and look forward to faculty meetings if the principal is able to lead conversations and make points effectively (Whitaker, 1997). This enjoyment is enhanced when the principal involves faculty members in discussions, often serving as facilitator of those discussions (Fiore, 1999; Whitaker, 1997).

As many school faculties are quite large, these meetings can be excellent opportunities for the principal to hone his or her public speaking skills. Being aware of nonverbal messages being sent while speaking and utilizing appropriate vocal volume and inflection are two skills that principals can practice during the meeting. The principal can then ask certain faculty members for feedback regarding the skills and techniques being practiced.

There are several places that principals and other administrators can turn to for suggestions to improve their public speaking abilities. The first and most convenient place is to administrative colleagues that the principal trusts and respects. Having a cadre of fellow administrators to bounce ideas off of is an essential component of many administrators' successes. These administrative colleagues can best understand some of the job's frustrations and can often provide very helpful feedback for colleagues desiring improvement. Many seasoned administrators have tales to tell of some of their own early career miscues regarding public speaking. As speaking before large groups is a skill that is improved over time, many of these colleagues can share their personal accounts of specific steps they have taken to improve their abilities. This can be of great benefit to fellow administrators.

Another place that school administrators can turn to is an organization like Toastmasters International (2001). This organization, with chapters in over seventy countries worldwide, provides instruction and support for giving speeches in public. Their members include professionals, stay-at-home parents, students, and retirees. Among the advice Toastmasters gives is the following, posted on their website (www.toastmasters.org/tips.htm):

1. **Know the room.** Be familiar with the place in which you will speak. Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practice using the microphone and any visual aids.
2. **Know the audience.** Greet some of the audience as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers.
3. **Know your material.** If you're not familiar with your material or are uncomfortable with it, your nervousness will increase. Practice your speech and revise it if necessary.
4. **Relax.** Ease tension by doing exercises.
5. **Visualize yourself giving your speech.** Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear, and assured. When you visualize yourself as successful, you will be successful.
6. **Realize that people want you to succeed.** Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative, and entertaining. They don't want you to fail.
7. **Don't apologize.** If you mention your nervousness or apologize for any problems you think you have with your speech, you may be calling the audience's attention to something they hadn't noticed. Keep silent.

8. **Concentrate on the message—not the medium.** Focus your attention away from your own anxieties, and outwardly toward your message and your audience. Your nervousness will dissipate.
9. **Turn nervousness into positive energy.** Harness your nervous energy and transform it into vitality and enthusiasm.
10. **Gain experience.** Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. A Toastmasters club can provide the experience you need.

By heeding this advice, school administrators will be able to improve their presentation skills. Occasions, such as open houses and school board presentations, will become easier for the school administrator to manage and will result in much more fluid, organized speeches being delivered. As with all things, the school administrator must recognize the need for enhancing oral communication skills and then must learn and practice skills and techniques for acquiring them.

Communicating During a Campaign

It was during campaigns, designed to produce votes or support of an educational idea, that school administrators of old conducted much of what they considered to be school-community relations. As is sadly the case with some contemporary administrators, when the campaign was over and the issue had been resolved, they stopped communicating with any members of the school's external publics. And yet the next time support was needed, administrators put friendly faces back on and went out again to communicate with stakeholders in the community.

This level of school-community relations leads to skepticism in the community. The end result of communicating with people only when you need their support to put a construction project or curricular adjustment through is often a public who mistrusts you and comes to doubt your sincerity regarding communication. For this reason, school-community relations in the twenty-first century demands that school leaders communicate regularly and purposefully with all stakeholder groups. This communication, as has been discussed, must be two-way, with the school leader listening as much or more often than he or she speaks.

However, it is still vitally important that school administrators understand how to communicate effectively during a campaign. This involves an understanding of specific language and delivery systems that will lead to the community's acceptance of the new idea being promoted. Today, more than anytime in public education's history, it is imperative that school administrators successfully communicate with their publics in all financial matters. With Census Bureau data and public opinion polls showing less than 50% of

American families having school-age children in their home, improvements and construction projects can rarely happen without voter support at the polls. An administrator who communicates effectively during a campaign has a much easier time getting the public to support buildings and innovations that his or her students need.

An administrator desirous of community support for an educational innovation must understand how typical people come to make decisions regarding innovative ideas. Without such knowledge, the administrator may end up throwing his or her hands up in the air, claiming that there is no way to convince people. Understanding the mental process people endure and the types of communication most effective at each stage in the process will be a tremendous asset to the administrator.

Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) developed a model of this process containing four steps:

1. Knowledge—This occurs when the individual first hears of the innovation and begins developing an understanding of it.
2. Persuasion—At this step, the individual forms their attitude about the innovation.
3. Decision—During this step, the individual engages in thoughts, dialogues, or activities that lead him or her to accept or reject the innovation.
4. Confirmation—This occurs as the individual seeks reinforcement for his or her decision. The decisions can be reversed if enough conflicting messages about the innovation are presented.

Examining these four steps and beginning to understand their implications points administrators toward certain communication techniques for each step. As it is impossible to engage in face-to-face, two-way communication with each individual stakeholder, understanding at which step such communication is particularly useful provides the administrator with some very useful knowledge.

Consider people's needs during the knowledge step, as an example. Oftentimes, the way that members of the public first become aware of an issue is through one-way communication. They read a news release published in the local paper, or they hear a local radio announcement urging them to attend an informational session about a proposed educational innovation. If they have children in the schools, then the community members may hear of the proposal through a school newsletter.

Following Rogers and Shoemaker's model, it is during the next two steps that most people form their decisions. With this knowledge in mind, school administrators can ensure that as many people are reached face-to-face during these two steps as is feasible. It is perfectly adequate to first inform people of the innovation through a one-way mass communication effort. Then, before

people have had a great deal of time to ponder the idea, the school administrator ought to meet and greet as many of them as possible to persuade them to adopt the innovation as an educational necessity.

The meeting and greeting of thousands of people cannot, obviously, be accomplished without careful planning and organization. For this reason, a member of the school district's administrative team ought to serve as the lead individual for scheduling and organization. This individual, not always the superintendent, should schedule opportunities for key administrators to meet with local civic, government, and business organizations. Many influential community members are parts of these organizations. Speaking before the organization while allowing time for personal, informal conversation afterward, gives the administrative team an opportunity to make their case before people who often have a great deal of influence in the community.

A mistake often made during a campaign occurs when many people are at step four in their decision-making process. School leaders have traditionally overlooked the necessity people have for confirming the decisions they have made. These leaders mistakenly assume that once people have made up their mind they ought to be left alone.

The reality is that some people, as Rogers and Shoemaker's model explains, change their minds after being given new information by another party. Community members who were persuaded and convinced by school officials to vote favorably toward a bond issue may, in fact, change their minds after being confronted by friends, neighbors, colleagues, or business leaders who offer a different perspective on the project's need. It is thought by some school leaders with impeccable records during campaigns that step four is the step at which people need to hear from school leaders the most.

School leaders also want to be careful not to alienate people after receiving their support. This can lead people to feel used, which will make it much less likely that they will support the school's ideas in the future. Instead, people ought to receive confirming news from the school after the decision has been made to show that the innovation was necessary. A school district I am familiar with, for example, sought community support to receive funding to hire additional school nurses. After the nurses were hired, news releases were regularly sent by the school to the local newspaper touting the benefits of these nurses and telling stories of the good work being done for the community's children.

Communicating with a Citizen's Advisory Committee

The general rules to follow during a campaign ought to offer no surprises to individuals already cognizant of how to establish and maintain strong school-community relations. The key is a concerted effort toward understanding the community's needs and utilizing appropriate communication techniques to demonstrate the need that the school believes is present.

SHOWCASE

Getting the Message to the Right People

The following is an example of the importance of delivering the right message to the right people. Dr. William C. Boshier, a former state superintendent of public instruction and superintendent of two large school districts shared this.

"As superintendent I was involved in many bond referenda but few like the 'winner of 96.' Several proposals had been voted down in the state and with 264 'modular classrooms' we were about to propose a \$173 million bond issue to the voters. Since public funds could not be used to promote bond referenda, a citizen group was selected to organize support. The elected officials were supportive and the needs were obvious, but the reality loomed that only 30% of the homes had school-age children. Realizing that parents alone would never have the clout to prevail, we took the case to the "owners." Senior citizens, small businesses, churches and synagogues all provide a forum through which they could be reached. People typically do not vote for money, they vote for their beliefs. In this case, the owners spoke and passed the bond in every precinct with 83.3% of all voters in support. You may have the right message, but you need to get it to the right people.

As presented in Chapter 6, understanding the community's needs and/or perceptions can be a very difficult process for school administrators, particularly for those who are new to their communities. Many of the issues that have taken place through the years in a community have created perceptions that may remain hidden from the view of even the best communicating school administrator. This is one reason why Chapter 6 strongly advocated for the use of key communicators. As it is impossible to always gain the opinions of the community firsthand, school administrators must rely on other people to represent different parts of the community.

A citizen's advisory committee serves the same purpose during a campaign. This important group can help the school administration establish the need for their proposed curricular or facility change. The advisory committee is also of great value in determining how the message ought to be delivered to the community. Finally, the citizen's advisory committee can provide the school administration with assistance in both delivering the message and evaluating its effectiveness. This is all true if care goes into choosing the membership of the committee, though.

If a school district is located in a larger community (over 20,000 residents), then the membership of the citizen's advisory committee ought to number somewhere between 20 and 100 members. The larger the community, the more members there ought to be. Size alone does not constitute a good committee, though. Instead, representation should come from every subgroup (socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, religious) known to dwell in the community. Among some of the "interest" groups that ought to be represented are parent-teacher associations, religious leaders, taxpayers' associations, business people, realtors, mass media representatives, members of the school staff, and students, labor unions, veterans' groups, service clubs, and the local Chamber of Commerce.

As size could not determine a group's effectiveness by itself, the actual composition of the group cannot do so either. This is where the communication skills of the leader are so important. Whether the group is lead by the superintendent or his/her designee from the administrative team ought to be determined by several factors. These factors include:

- The individual's knowledge of the proposed innovation.
- The individual's experiences working with large groups.
- The individual's availability when group members need to confer.
- The individual's skill in all aspects of communication.

In order to effectively lead a citizen's advisory committee and to be successful in a campaign effort, the leader must be able to communicate effectively with all types of people. As the citizen's advisory committee is composed of individuals from all walks of life, their perceptions and goals may differ greatly. A skilled listener ensures that all people are heard during a discussion. An individual who is aware of nonverbal communication has a much better sense of people's inner feelings than does somebody not adept in this regard. Finally, a persuasive speaker can take the viewpoints he or she has listened to and respectfully combine them into one idea that is explained well.

If a citizen's advisory committee is lead by an administrator without strong communication skills, two pitfalls are likely. The first one involves the chaos that is almost certain to break out in the group. As this committee is usually composed of people with their own leadership abilities, conversations can get heated. The leader with strong communication skills often senses conflict before it erupts and takes steps to squelch it. This leader also listens carefully to what people are saying, including what they are saying with their body language, and can restate it in a safe, non-threatening manner. A good listener can often be an effective mediator in a potentially volatile situation.

The other pitfall of having an advisory committee lead by a weak communicator occurs when the leader tries to represent the group's thinking in his/her speaking or writing. Failure to communicate group consensus accurately leads group members to believe that the leader already had a preconceived agenda and was not really listening to other viewpoints. The ability to communicate the group's consensus, even when some individual viewpoints are not represented, is a skill that is learned over time and perfected with experience leading diverse groups.

The Campaign's Conclusion

The ability to orally communicate effectively is often demonstrated by school administrators after a campaign has concluded, regardless of the outcome. As campaigns for facility upgrades, new buildings, or curricular innovations can often be somewhat divisive, the school administrators can count on addressing questions regarding the outcome for some time. The ability to address these questions, utilizing many of the skills presented in this chapter, will define a good part of the administrators' leadership in the eyes of many people.

School administrators also ought to be prepared to include details of the campaign's success or failure in public addresses they may be called on to deliver. If a large high school has experienced a campaign for building a new athletic facility, for example, this will be a discussion point for quite some time, regardless of the outcome. If the campaign resulted in a new facility, then the school administrators will need to reinforce the value of this facility in their speeches. If the campaign was defeated, then a continuing case for the need of the facility likely will be included in speeches.

If the campaign issue was particularly divisive, then the school administrators must use skill and care in bringing the issue to closure. In the heat of the battle, many people mistakenly place too much emphasis on the issue the battle is fought over. As schools are complex organizations charged with important tasks (education of youth) for which there are far-reaching consequences, the school administrators involved must be keepers of the whole vision and help people put the divisive issue into the proper perspective. Leadership from the school administrators is vital to place the community's focus back on other educational issues. Again, the ability to communicate effectively will be tested in this regard.

Exhibit 11-1 is a letter written by a principal after a local campaign resulted in an addition to the school facility being scheduled for building. As the community was divided over the necessity and cost of such an addition, the letter is written to bring some closure to the issue.

Exhibit 11-1 Closure Letter at a Campaign's Conclusion

Woodview School

123 Woodview Lane
Anytown, USA

Ima Goodfellow, Principal
Susie Sunshine, Administrative Assistant

May 28, 2010

Dear Parents,

As many of you already know, the school board voted last night to accept the bid from Reynolds and Harper, Inc. to begin expansion of the north side of our school building. As this approval was the final step in an ideological and fiscal discussion this community endured throughout the past 18 months, let me take this opportunity to thank you all for sharing your concerns and to urge you to join me in moving our school forward.

While many of you supported this addition, which will begin on June 20, there are others of you who did not. Months of discussion ended with this division of opinions still apparent. If we continue to focus on the issues that divide us, I fear that we will create an obstacle to our primary purpose for joining together; namely the education of your children. To that extent, allow me to inform you of some exciting ideas we plan to implement when the next school year begins:

- All of our classrooms will experience technological enhancements, as three new Dell computers per class will be installed on the network during the summer months.
- With the addition of a part-time Art teacher, who will be hired shortly, all classes will now have the opportunity to be visited weekly by Ms. Zamboni. Her collaboration with your child's classroom teacher will result in terrific, integrated Art projects to enhance instruction.
- Our dedicated staff members, who truly care about your children, will all be returning.

Further updates regarding the construction will be forthcoming. For now, let me thank you again for the support you consistently show us here at Woodview. Together, we will continue to create opportunities for all children to succeed and reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

Ima Goodfellow
Principal

Chapter Summary

- All school staff members, particularly administrators, must remember to be courteous in all telephone conversations.
- As “tone setter” for the school, the administrator’s telephone manner helps people form an opinion about the friendliness of the school.
- It is a good idea for the administrator to have a script or outline ready before placing an important telephone call.
- There are techniques administrators can employ to avoid appearing uncomfortable during some face-to-face conversations.
- Administrators should develop skills for speaking before large groups.
- Campaigns are situations, which require particular care in communicating with stakeholders.
- Understanding how people reach decisions about change issues will help administrators determine techniques for communicating effectively with them.
- A citizen’s advisory committee provides great assistance in communicating with the larger community during a campaign.
- Strong communication skills are required of administrators who lead advisory committees.
- The school administrator must bring closure to a campaign through effective communication with stakeholders.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Pass the Antiperspirant

When Reggie Thomas first mentioned the need for a new baseball field to the superintendent 2 years earlier, he never imagined it would be the cause of so many sleepless nights. Reggie didn’t even really like baseball, but as he attended the games during his first year as Clarksville Middle School’s principal, it was apparent that Clarksville’s field looked terrible in comparison with the rest of the area’s fields. Who knew that by asking for a new field, he would become part of a bitter community battle over taxpayer dollars being used to fund a multitude

continued

of school improvements. The high school needed an auditorium, modernization of its eight science labs, and a cafeteria expansion. Two of the elementary schools needed new roofs and parking lots, and his school's baseball field was now part of a multi-million dollar package.

As Reggie sat in his office awaiting the arrival of six angry parents, his stomach ached. Mrs. Jones was representing the Band Boosters, angry because the band room looked worse than the baseball field did. Mr. Green was representing the Swim Club, upset because the pool facility lacked appropriate diving boards. Dr. Harris was representing the basketball team, unhappy about the condition of the boy's locker room. Three other parents were going to be there as well, although Reggie had no idea what their complaints were.

Reggie felt himself sweating, as he wondered why he hadn't noticed the need for these improvements sooner. He wondered if he had done an adequate job informing parents of his perception that the baseball field needed serious renovation. He was concerned about having to address questions about how these multi-million dollar proposals were made, as he did not recall being informed that any of his school's parents were involved in any meetings at all. Was he guilty of being part of a team that "railroaded" ideas through the community?

Reggie's thoughts were interrupted by his secretary's voice. "Mr. Thomas, there are some parents here to see you."

Questions for Analysis

1. Was Reggie wrong for informing the superintendent of the need for a new baseball field two years ago?
2. Analyze Reggie's communication skills since speaking with the superintendent two years ago. Are there glaring errors? Should he have handled things differently? If so, what should he have done?
3. Has this school district done a good job gaining public support for the improvements? Why/Why not?
4. How should Reggie handle his meeting with the six parents? What are some particular steps he should take?