Establishment of public relations programs in New Jersey public schools

Liberty Delgado Harshaw

Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd

Part of the Public Relations and Advertising Commons

Let us know how access to this document benefits you - share your thoughts on our feedback form.

Recommended Citation
https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/1938

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact LibraryTheses@rowan.edu.
ESTABLISHMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS
IN NEW JERSEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by
Liberty Delgado Harshaw

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division
of Rowan University
May 15, 1998

Approved by

Date Approved 5/15/98
ABSTRACT

Liberty D. Harshaw

*Establishment of Public Relations Programs in New Jersey Public Schools*

1998

Larry Litwin, Project Advisor
Rowan University Graduate Program

The purpose of the study was to determine effectiveness of public relations methods through use in a centralized, decentralized or coordinated plan. Survey research of public schools in New Jersey studied the following areas:

1. Superintendent training in public relations
2. Establishment of policies
3. Type of programs - centralized, decentralized, or coordinated - and reasons why used
4. Methods of communication used
5. Success of public relations program
6. Feedback methods used to evaluate effectiveness of programs
7. If no PR program existed, reasons why and intentions for implementation of future programs.

The survey was mailed to the superintendents of 594 operating public school districts in New Jersey. Results were compiled according to district classification (i.e. K-6, K-8, etc.), type of district (rural, suburban, urban) and student population (i.e. 0-500, 501-1000, etc.).
Survey responses included 222 districts (37 percent). Of these districts, 150 (68 percent) have PR programs. Of these districts with programs, the coordinated plan was used most frequently (93 or 62 percent). The importance of the superintendent’s role in the PR program was confirmed. Public relations specialists were employed mainly in part-time capacity (59 percent). Main factors affecting programs were funding, time and personnel.
MINI-ABSTRACT

Liberty D. Harshaw
Establishment of Public Relations Programs in New Jersey Public Schools
1998
Larry Litwin, Project Advisor
Rowan University Graduate Program

The purpose of the study was to determine effectiveness of public relations methods through use of centralized, decentralized or coordinated plans. Survey research of New Jersey public schools studied various areas of PR programs.

Survey responses showed 68 percent with programs, with the coordinated plan used most frequently. PR specialists were employed mainly in part-time capacity. Main factors affecting programs were funding, time and personnel.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank those individuals most greatly affected by the creation of this thesis - husband Chip, son Edward, and daughters Lana and Christina. They have displayed extraordinary patience, tolerance and cooperation while undergoing the “thesis experience.” Chip has been a terrific sounding board and unsuspecting recipient of all the new knowledge gained by my research. Edward, Lana and Christina have had to deal with a distracted, sometimes impatient mother who didn’t always have dinner planned and lugged textbooks from which to research to all of their football, soccer and basketball games.

Many thanks also go to other family members, friends, and professional colleagues who have been my “cheerleaders” and given much encouragement and steadfast support from the beginning to the end of this project.

Much appreciation goes to seminar professor Dr. Estelle Resnick for imparting “quiet knowledge” in class. Most especially, my deepest gratitude to my seminar advisor Larry Litwin, who steered me in the right direction during those exciting moments of finding too much research material. He offered encouragement, displayed much patience and was always available to answer any questions that arose during this excellent educational experience.
# Table of Contents

## Chapter 1 - Introduction
- Background of the Problem .................................................. 1-2
- The Problem ........................................................................... 3
- Delimitations of the Study ..................................................... 4
- Hypothesis ............................................................................. 4
- Assumptions ........................................................................... 4-5
- Definitions of Terms ............................................................... 5-6

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review
- The Need for School Public Relations ...................................... 7-10
- Public Schools Challenge ....................................................... 10-14
- Definitions of Public Relations .............................................. 14-18
- Importance of School Public Relations ................................... 18-23
- Relationship of Study to Other Work .................................... 23
- Public Relations Training ....................................................... 24-26
- Role of Superintendent in Public Relations ............................ 26-28
- Public Relations Policy .......................................................... 29-31
- Public Relations Plans of Organization ................................... 31-38
- The Public Relations Specialist .............................................. 38-47
- General Planning and Goals of a Public Relations Program ....... 47-55
- Methods Used in School Public Relations Programs .............. 56-71
- How Effective is a Public Relations Program? ....................... 71-74
- Evaluating the Public Relations Program .............................. 75-84

## Chapter 3 - Study Design
- Data Needed ........................................................................... 85
- Data Sources ......................................................................... 85
- Research Method ................................................................. 86
- Data Collection Method ......................................................... 86-87
- Data Analysis Method ............................................................ 87
Chapter 4 - Data Analysis

General Survey Background .................................. 88-90
Superintendent Experience and Public Relations Background ... 90
Public Relations Policy and Programs .......................... 90-91
Designation of Public Relations Program ....................... 91
Explanations Why Public Relations Programs Used ............. 92-101
Titles of Person in Charge of Public Relations Program ........ 102-104
Public Relations Specialists and Handling of PR Matters ...... 105-106
Methods of Communication Used in Public Relations Programs .. 106-108
Success of Programs and Methods of Feedback ................ 108-109
Satisfaction with District Public Relations Programs .......... 109-114
Dissatisfaction with Public Relations Program ................ 114-117
Reasons Why Public Relations Programs Do Not Exist ........ 117-118
Potential Implementation of Public Relations Programs ....... 119
Additional Comments from Superintendents .................... 120-123

Chapter 5 - Summary and Interpretation

Research Background Information .......................... 124-125
Evaluation and Interpretation ................................ 125-132
Conclusions ............................................. 132-134
Contribution to the Field .................................. 134-135
Practical Influence on the Field ............................. 135-136
Further Research ....................................... 136-137
Final Note .............................................. 137

Bibliography

Books .................................................. 138-140
Periodical Literature ..................................... 140-141
Unpublished Sources .................................... 141

Appendix

A - School District Responses by County and Classification . . 142
B - Percentage of Overall School District Responses by County 143
C - Survey Cover Letter .................................. 144
D - Survey Instrument .................................... 145-148
E - Survey Tally ........................................ 149-158
F - Biographical Data .................................... 159

Copyright 1998
Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Problem

Interaction between school and community takes place on many levels in public schools. Whatever the level of interaction, the importance of a good public relations program cannot be underestimated. Schools are owned and operated by the public, and this fact must be kept in mind by boards of education planning a community relations program. Children are sent to schools to learn by the local citizens, who also pay the funds needed for the existence of schools. It is the right of these people to be kept continually informed of the school programs taking place and to know that their money invested in the local system is providing the best possible education for their children. People own the schools and elect representatives to govern them.¹

School boards can let people find out information about the district for themselves, which can be a risky proposition that many times ends in frustration or dissemination of

misinformation. Or, board members can provide as much information as possible with a properly managed and executed public information and community relations program. Such a program will ensure that people have an accurate picture of the board’s activities and intentions, and can satisfy the community’s need for knowledge about the district.  

Interaction between school and community must be based on trust if it is to be meaningful and fruitful. That trust develops through two-way communication and openness on a continuing basis. This two-way communication must take place at the classroom, school building and at district levels. In order to receive continued monetary and moral support, public schools must realize that an active PR program is vital for establishing this type of interaction and communication with its publics.

It is the obligation and responsibility of educators to ensure that the public is aware of and understands the school district’s needs, problems, objectives, and goals. Through the years, public relations has gained increased importance. It is a necessary function of local school districts in this age where many school budgets fail to pass across this nation. An effective public relations program can be crucial to producing the desired outcome when voting for budgets and bond referenda.

---


The Problem

The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of public relations methods through use in a centralized, decentralized or coordinated plan. Through survey research of public schools in New Jersey, the study specifically does the following:

1. Determines the number of school systems (as reported by superintendents through a survey) which have established public relations programs and which do not;

2. Ascertains the number of school districts with full-time and part-time public relations practitioners or administrators;

3. Identifies whether those districts with established public relations programs use a centralized, decentralized or coordinated plan and reasons why they chose such a plan;

4. Measures effectiveness of public relations programs as reported by respective districts through the survey instrument.

The intended purpose of the study is to present a current description of public relations programs in the public school systems in New Jersey. A determination was made regarding effectiveness of centralized, decentralized or coordinated plans of public relations.
Delimitations of the Study

The study was made of questionnaires sent to all 594 operating public school districts in New Jersey (there are 24 non-operating school districts not included in the survey; these districts do not operate a school building in their own district and contract with another school district to provide actual education for their children). The study involved a period of time spanning from September 1997 to May 1998.

Hypothesis

By means of a survey, it was determined that a coordinated plan of public relations will provide the best results for a school district. Working cooperatively with all administrative levels (central administration and building principals) and possibly using public relations specialists, a balance of the public relations methods available can be maintained for maximum effectiveness of these methods.

Assumptions

It was assumed that there are more school districts without a functional public relations program compared to those that have well-balanced coordinated public relations plans. In districts where PR specialists are employed, it was assumed that the majority

\[Vital\ Education\ Statistics,\ 1996-97,\ (Trenton,\ NJ:\ New\ Jersey\ Department\ of\ Education,\ 1996),\ p.\ 32.\]

\[Bagin,\ p.\ 66.\]
would be hired in part-time capacities. It was also assumed that the factors most affecting a public relations program would be funding, time, and availability of qualified personnel. Out of the surveys mailed to superintendents, it was expected that less than 50 percent of the questionnaires would be returned.

**Definitions of Terms**

**Centralized public relations plan** - A public relations plan where the responsibilities of delivering the public relations program rests entirely in the school district’s chief administrative office and with his/her immediate line and staff associates.

**Coordinated public relations plan** - In this public relations plan, community relations responsibilities of the administrative officers, and building principals work together as an articulated unit. A part-time or full-time public relations specialist may assist in the implementation of this plan.

**Decentralized public relations plan** - A public relations plan in which the responsibilities for the program rest almost entirely with each building principal and in which the individual school is regarded as the natural unit for community relations.

**Effectiveness** - Effectiveness is defined as a successful delivery of public relations methods to specific publics to achieve desired results.

**External public** - Individuals or groups separate from the school whose support and understanding of public education is vital and necessary. Included are parents, taxpayers, media, business organizations, political groups, neighborhood associations, civic clubs, cultural organizations, economic groups, fraternities, governmental agencies,
and labor unions.

**Internal public** - Individuals in a school system who administer, attend or are employed by the school district. This includes the board of education, administration, teachers, non-instructional personnel, and students.

**PR** - Public relations.

**The public** - The residents of municipalities where public schools are located.

**Public relations methods** - Methods used in a public relations program to accomplish intended goals for specific publics.

**Public school system** - One of 618 public school systems in New Jersey operated under the auspices of the New Jersey State Department of Education. Each school system derives its primary support from public funds.

**The publics** - Groupings of individuals on the basis of such factors as occupation, education, special interests, religion, political affiliation, and race.

**School public relations** - A two-way communication process between school and community to inform the community of school programs and policies. It is a planned function designed to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. Its purpose is to stimulate better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the school district to earn public support morally and financially.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

“All of human society today pivots on communication. Public relations deals with understanding and using mass communication.

“Understanding human institutions and the attitudes of their members has emerged as one of the greatest needs of our time. This understanding, plus knowledge of how to cope with these attitudes and direct them, is the rationale of public relations.”

Preface, Lesly’s Public Relations Handbook

The Need for School Public Relations

Edward L. Bernays, generally regarded as the father of public relations in the United States, called the task of salvaging education through better public relations “possibly the most important in the country, because the future of the country depends on it.”


Public schools today face stiff challenges. Schools must convince their publics that they really need more money, or they will simply have to make do with less. The community’s children might end up with an inferior education with latter alternative, but the community somehow does not seem to understand that or appears not to care.

Raising funds means more than going door to door. The public must be shown clearly and persuasively what the money pays for, and why funds may be needed more even when the enrollment is declining. The majority of citizens (the two-thirds or more of the community who do not have children in schools) must be convinced that maintaining the quality of local schools benefits everybody.\(^9\)

Many attitudes in the community need improvement. School districts need to get serious about public relations because effective efforts in this area can shape these community attitudes. Individuals fostering these attitudes include elected leaders who think schools get too much money and waste it, parents who think schools have full responsibility for their children’s education, and students who do not recognize that learning is making an investment in their own future.\(^10\)

Nancy Breggi Warren reported in “Chalk Up a Winning Season for Building Level PR” that the school setting and field of education have had the stigma of always trying to be humble. Schools forget to tell people that they are doing a good job of teaching in the classroom, serving meals in the cafeteria, delivering kids to and from school, and


maintaining a clean, healthy environment for the students. Schools often think that people naturally know what a good job they’re doing. The 1987 Gallup Poll found that only 25 percent of public school parents felt well-informed about their local schools. More disturbing was the fact that more than half (55 percent) of those polled who didn’t have children in school didn’t know what was going on.

Warren suggested that support for the schools can be gotten by:

1. Establishing programs that bring people into the building,
2. Listening to the concerns of citizens and answering their questions,
3. Communicating on an ongoing basis through newsletters, meetings and activities which inform and involve everyone.¹¹

Author B. Rodney Davis said that the secret to building public confidence in education can be stated quite simply: “If we know what the public expects of its schools, and if the public knows that its schools are doing what they expect, public confidence must inevitably follow. . . . we must fulfill public expectations of education if we are to regain public confidence.”

Records clearly show that schools are doing the best job in America’s history, or the history of any other country in the world. But the public remains unimpressed. America’s concept of providing education for everyone is in danger of failing because it is losing the confidence of the people.

NSPRA executive director John H. Wherry believes educators need to do four

things in the area of public relations:

1. Determine what the public now expects of its schools, community by community;

2. Exercise educational leadership individually and collectively to improve educational performance;

3. Provide the public with adequate information about its schools;

4. Recognize the active role that every school employee plays in providing attitude-forming information to the community and provide training for this staff responsibility.

Simply said, “our schools must implement total public relations programs.”

Public Schools Challenge

Herbert W. Hoover ("This Board Member Casts His Vote for a District Public Relations Man") states: “If you simply are maintaining the status quo, there is no need for a PR program. If you are not building new buildings, not changing curriculum, not negotiating, not wrestling with integration, not hiking taxes, not redistricting, not raising salaries - that is to say, not if you are not involved in change - then chances are your public knows from experience what’s afoot in the schools and your need for PR is minimal.

“But when you start building new schools, changing curriculum, adding blacks to your teaching staff, sending upper income children to lower income schools, and paying

\[\text{Davis, pp. 17-18.}\]
teachers an almost respectable wage, then a public relations program is a must."

During the 1967 National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) Seminar, views of participants were reflected in an opinion poll conducted by the public relations firm, Harshe-Rotman & Druck, Inc. The survey included results of 126 of 150 participants (71 PR directors, six other administrators, six teachers, and 33 others, mostly state association directors).

Survey results indicated the top problems facing schools at that time. These included (in order):

1. Increasing power and militancy of teachers organizations;
2. Shortage of qualified teachers;
3. Community tension caused by school integration and open occupancy issues;
4. Low salary scale for educators;
5. Inadequate school facilities (crowded classrooms, etc.);
6. Public fear that integrated schools provide poorer quality of education than segregated schools, also creating serious social problems;
7. Difficulty of urban schools in maintaining education status of suburban and private schools;
8. Public uncertainty about quality of public school instruction;
9. Poor image of teaching profession;

---

13 Hoover, Herbert W., "This Board Member Casts His Vote for a District Public Relations Man," American School Board Journal, January 1970, p. 34.
10. Juvenile delinquency;
11. Poor communication between school officials and community;
12. Lack of public interest in schools.

The survey also indicated that the major obstacles to effective community involvement in school programs were:

1. Public’s lack of understanding of techniques and goals of modern schools;
2. Apathy of news media toward school events and achievements.¹⁴

Though these survey results were released over 30 years ago, several of the top problems listed are still problems in today’s schools of the 90's. And the major obstacles indicated still exist as deterrents to an effective public relations program in a school district.

Albert E. Holliday, publisher and editor of the Journal of Education Relations, wrote “106 Ways to Better School-Community Relations” in the early 1970s. He lists ways that boards of education and their school staffs could increase communication within a district, in schools, and in the community at large and with various segments of it. (He notes that is unrealistic to implement all 99 ideas). The list is divided into what the following could do: school board, superintendent, and principals, and teachers. Holliday also adds seven additional areas of concern from the 1980's and '90s. These are (as numbered from his list):

100. Partnerships with businesses and other organizations on or off campus to benefit students.

101. Mentors and programs for one-on-one student and even parent counseling and support.

102. Senior citizen communications and involvement.

103. Formation of alumni associations at schools (to identify role models or build financial support for a worthy project).

104. Structured parent involvement programs, especially for at-risk students.

105. Consideration of a marketing program, especially in suburban areas or locations where choice plans or charter schools are available to parents.

106. Publication of statements of accountability, at least annually, as to the status of academic achievement, and school discipline/safety matters at each school.\(^{15}\)

Holliday indicates that priority should be given to the seventh one, noting that national media coverage from the late 1980s to date is often negative about the quality of public education, in spite of evidence to the contrary.\(^{16}\)

In 1982, the 14\(^{th}\) Annual Gallup Poll revealed that parents of children in public


\(^{16}\)Holliday, p. 19.
schools were the most informed and most positive about the public school system. The most negative responses were from those who were least informed about public schools (those whose children attended nonpublic schools and those without any children in school). These people are important to the public schools because of taxes they pay and votes cast in elections. If a public relations program reaches them and influences them in a positive fashion, and it is seen that tax dollars spent have favorable results, then they are more likely to vote for more school bonds and pay more taxes. The desired end product of this support is a quality education of the community's future - the children.\(^\text{17}\)

Not only is public relations needed to provide information and answer questions, it can also put to rest rumors and misinformation as well. The PR program should show the public what it is getting for its money.\(^\text{18}\)

## Definitions of Public Relations

What exactly is public relations?

"... a twentieth century profession - ages old" states Ann and John Kadon in *Successful Public Relations Techniques*.\(^\text{19}\) The Kadons further state that a PR program is the communicating bridge between a group or individual on the one hand, and on the other hand, a particular public. A public relations specialist must know everything


\(^{18}\)Hoover, p. 34.

possible about the group or individual that the program is to work for and about the public to be reached.\textsuperscript{20}

*Public Relations News*, an international PR weekly for executives, defines public relations as a broad field involving “a total communications effort.” It must be earned through its performance, not by what it says. PR should be “preventive” (“it should be used not only to throw communications snowballs, but also to help make and shape them according to the topics of targets to be hit”). Time is necessary to “gain public impact and to change people’s minds.”

At an international meeting of public relations practitioners in Mexico City, PR is described as an art and social science that analyzes trends to predict their effect and to help organization leaders implement programs to serve both the organization’s and public’s interest.

The definition from *Public Relations News* points out that the ultimate quality evaluation for any public relation campaign is the final performance. Public relations can be a force for good - a persuasive force. It has to be employed in the open, with public scrutiny. PR requires a degree of acceptance. It’s one part of the job to communicate well - the other is to influence the audience to accept the messages and respond according to design.\textsuperscript{21}

Public relations is an ethical enterprise where untruths and tricks do not have to be

\textsuperscript{20}Kadon, p. 35.

used to promote anything that is worthwhile. "Good relations with the public" is a
definition of PR in its simplest form. Also, "... the establishment and maintenance of
mutual understanding between a business, an institution or an individual and the public
with which it or s/he is concerned. An attempt is made to win goodwill and understanding
and, as a result, to influence opinion."22

Public relations is also called "public information," "public affairs," and
"community relations." Whatever the label, the bottomline is that PR is effective, two-
way communication that helps to shape attitudes and builds a positive reputation.23

Donald L. Hymes, author of *Learn from the Winners: School PR Programs That
Work*, differentiates between "community relations" and "public relations." "Community
relations" is a component of a "public relations" program. It is an important component,
but not the whole ball game. If "public relations" is defined as an umbrella term covering
all aspects of two-way communications with the many publics in a school district,
"community relations" is the program that seeks involvement of members of the
community in day-to-day operation of the schools.24

Albert E. Holliday, editor and publisher of the *Journal of Educational Public
Relations* and former public relations director for the Pennsylvania State Education
Department, defines school public/community relations as "a systematic function on all
levels of a school system, established as a program to improve and maintain optimal levels

---

22Kadon, p. 17.

23*Practical PR for Principals*, p. 4.

24Hymes, p. 45.
of student achievement, and to build public support.” The function consists of communication with, and involvement of, internal and external publics in the school system.

Holliday states that the two main purposes of such a program are to foster student achievement (through establishment of a positive school climate and parent and citizen involvement) and build citizen knowledge and understanding leading to financial support.\(^2\)

A current definition of educational public relations can include “... A two-way communication between the school and the community to inform the latter of school programs and policies. It is continuous and involves itself with human as well as press relations. It is a two-way relationship between school and community to improve educational offerings to meet the needs of the community.”\(^2\)\(^6\)

NSPRA defines educational public relations as a planned, systematic management function, designed to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. It relies on a comprehensive, two-way communication process, involving both internal and external publics, with the goal of stimulating better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments and needs of the organization.

Educational PR programs assist in interpreting public attitude, identify and help shape polices and procedures in the public interest, and carry on involvement and informational activities which earn public understanding and support. Key words leading

\(^{25}\)Bagin, p. 8.

to public relations success are:

* planned - too many common projects are hit and miss;

* two-way - not just talking at people, it implies to also listen to them and understand perceptions and needs;

* internal and external publics - schools deal with many different “publics”.

Patrick Johnson, one of the national’s foremost public relations counselors, defines PR as “building relationships which change attitudes and bring about desired behaviors.”

Thomas F. Koerner in “Why Your Board Deserves a Full-Time PR Man” states, “Negatively speaking, public relations is not whitewashing, it is not advertising, it is not publicity. Rather, it is employing a keen sense for the public’s needs, aspirations, and attitudes in all decisions that affect the public directly and indirectly. Above all, public relations is subtle. When it is otherwise, it is self-defeating.”

### Importance of School Public Relations

The most important quality that a school has is its reputation, which influences the level of community support, staff morale, and student motivation. It also increases the likelihood that tax measures will pass and businesses will become partners. Another likely result is that news media will report positive stories about the school district.

---

27Rotman, p. 1.

A poorly handled single incident can damage a school’s good reputation which has taken many years to build. An effective public relations program can help reach the goal of making a school’s reputation more positive. Paying more attention to public relations can be the best investment for a school district.  

A task force made up of business and community leaders were asked to study the Baltimore school system’s reputation in the early 1980s and suggest ways of improvement. The task force of the Greater Baltimore Committee is a group that is given much credit for the urban renaissance of the city in the prior decade. It found that the school system was troubled by a poor public image. The report said that much of the blame was with the system itself because it failed to effectively “market” public schooling.

To improve the school’s negative image, the task force suggested that system officials turn their office of public information into a professionally staffed division of marketing and marketing research. Though it may seem inappropriate to discuss marketing in reference to education, the report pointed out that the school system clearly had a product: educational services. It had customers: 115,000 students who attended city schools and their parents, and eventually, the businesses that would hire those students. There were many publics that needed to be kept informed and satisfied: students, parents, teachers and employees, school-board members, elected leaders, taxpayers, neighborhood groups, the business community, and others.

---

29Practical PR for Principals, p. 3.

Developing good press relations is a vital part of the job. Community awareness of the school system’s problems and achievements depends greatly on the district’s relations.\textsuperscript{31}

There are two components to a school public relations or communication program. First is the traditional political aspect—laying down the foundation of understanding for staffing, facility and curricular needs, and building support to finance them. Second is the relational aspect—the ways educators, parents, and others in the community work together to enhance opportunities for students to achieve.\textsuperscript{32}

People in business know that for a business to be successful, it must remain close to its customers. The people closest to the customers are the sales and/or service personnel. Successful businesses invest in these people—training them well, involving them, listening to them, and praising them. They know that the business will fail if these people are not successful in dealing with customers.

In a school district, members of the staff that are the primary sources of information about schools and attitudes regarding school programs and systems. “Staff” includes everyone involved with the schools—administrators, teachers, cafeteria workers, secretaries, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, custodians, and contracted workers. Information should be delivered to all personnel via regular staff meetings and memos. Public relations should be listed among the responsibilities in their job descriptions.


\textsuperscript{32}Holliday, p. 19.
Employees should be informed of their respective roles in community relations from the beginning during the orientation of new staff members. Ongoing staff development programs for all staff should have a community relations component. Staff should clearly understand the reasons why positive community relationships are important, and how those relationships can have both short- and long-term benefits for them. Benefits include increased community support for additional teaching resources, better facilities, higher salaries, and reasonable class loads. Parental involvement can increase as parents become more aware and supportive of the classroom environment and activities.

Research showed that when teachers and staff were very involved in planning staff development programs, the result was higher morale. As staff members became attuned to their role in school and community relations, they themselves will determine the kinds of things that should be included in staff development programs to help them with this role. Knowledge about programs and new directions must be shared with all staff, certified and uncertified. Exchanging ideas among staff members can foster collegiality. Internal communications can be enhanced when staff members learn of matters that affect them internally and not be external sources like the local news media.

Low morale is usually associated with powerlessness, frustration, and alienation. A climate that motivates radiates self-respect. People become knowledgeable about what is going on within the organization and what is expected of them. They feel they are part of the organization because both their achievements and concerns are acknowledged.

When staff members truly feel that they are part of the educational team, they know that they have a major responsibility in meeting the goals of the team. They know
that developing and maintaining good school-community relations are important for school improvement and accomplishing the schools’ goals.\textsuperscript{33}

On the secondary level, teachers may possibly reach 160 (or more) sets of parents and children per day. Everything that is said about the district, administration, and other teachers can potentially be taken home by those 160 students. The importance for teachers to be as positive as possible about their jobs and the school district is stressed. Teacher contributions to the public relations program range from being simple to being time consuming and requiring much planning. The easiest form is writing comments on students’ papers, as well as calling one or two parents a week to give a positive report on their child’s progress or behavior. Another valuable public relations methods is for teachers to attend school plays, athletic events, and community functions.\textsuperscript{34}

The Baltimore report found that people held varied views of the local system, but that “the closer one gets to a school and sees it in operation, the better the impression.” The task force found important reasons for the system’s negative image. Repeated complaints included a chronic lack of sufficient funds, poor working conditions, shortages of books and supplies, overcrowded classrooms, poor discipline, crime, and poor management. The report noted that confidence in the school district was undermined by negativity from employees, teachers, and administration, with school personnel at all levels defensive and quick to point blame at others for problems. Recommendations from the

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Yantis, John, “Get Staff Involved in Community Relations,” Education Digest, January 1996, pp. 53-55.}

\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Connors, pp. 401-402.}
task force were for the school board to recognize and address the morale problem as a distinct and separate problem from improving the school’s image.\textsuperscript{35}

**Relationship of Study to Other Work**

One purpose of this study is to determine effectiveness of public relations plans of public schools in the state of New Jersey. Through a survey, several influencing factors were researched. These included finding out the public relations background and experiences of school superintendents and whether a written public relations policy existed in the school district. Also determined through the study was the existence of public relations programs using centralized, decentralized, and coordinated plans with explanations as to why the districts used particular plans.

The study identified whether the public relations program was administered by a PR specialist or a member of the school district’s administrative or teaching staff. Methods of communication used in the public relations programs were indicated, as well as a determination on whether these methods were effective through various forms of feedback. If not satisfied with the district’s PR program, the superintendents indicated areas where improvement was needed.

If a public relations program was non-existent, reasons were explored as to why this was so. Also surveyed were a school district’s intention to implement a PR program, as well as an explanation as to which type of plan (centralized, decentralized, or coordinated) would be selected.

\textsuperscript{35}York, p. 2.
Public Relations Training

In 1968, two studies revealed the startling inadequacy of communications training for school administrators and key staff public relations directors. Topping the list of serious problems were internal and external communications for which the superintendents were unprepared.

One of these studies was “Issues and Problems in Contemporary Administration” by Keith Goldhammer and others of the Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, published by the University of Oregon Press. The purpose of this study was to interview superintendents to identify problems as well as learn about the quality of preparation and inservice training programs for administrators.

Lacking skill and confidence in the ability to effectively deal with people was a concern in the study. Another result showed that lacking good means of evaluation and strong communications channels left administrators feeling helpless. Internal communications in large and growing school systems posed problems. The report criticized the quality of university training, calling for more emphasis on quality inservice programs in the public relations field.36

The second study was a report on a national survey of graduate school programs in educational public information entitled “The Present State of Neglect.” This was compiled by Lindley J. Stiles, a Northwestern University professor of education. It was done for Project Public Information, an Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title V program to strengthen state department of education information programs.

36Preusch, pp. 5-6.
Stiles asked officials at 131 institutions with school superintendent preparation programs for information. Of these, 45 did not respond. Some effort to acquaint students with public relations occurred in 60 institutions, while 21 of the 60 reported specific plans for expanding the PR emphasis. Only seven institutions prepared school public relations personnel. The result: a low level of interest and emphasis in public relations.

A multi-million dollar Cooperative Program in Education Administration was financed over a five-year period by the Kellogg Foundation. This project studied administrative behavior and needs for preparation for administrative leadership. Results of the research projects and studies clearly showed that the keys to administrative success were communication skills and understanding how to work with groups and individuals both inside and outside of schools.37

Carroll B. Hanson, director of Publications and Information Department of the Seattle (Washington) Public Schools, observed that many principals found community relations a whole new field of interest. Most of the school district's principals revealed a genuine talent for involving their communities in the school enterprise. Hanson had a two-fold prediction. One was that public relations will become a part of the principal's responsibilities to an increasing degree. The second prediction was that it would only be a matter of time before schools of higher education would offer substantial preparation in public relations to its administration majors.38

In 1992, over 200 colleges and about 100 graduate schools offered degree

37Preusch, p. 7.
38Hymes, pp. 41-42.
programs or special curricula in public relations, usually in a communications or journalism department. Many other colleges offered at least one course in this field. Although there are no defined standards for entry into a public relations career, a college education combined with public relations experience (usually gained through an internship) is considered good preparation for public relations work.39

Role of the Superintendent in Public Relations

Superintendents today are faced with strong demands from organized groups. They become mediating agents in matters relating to public education. Superintendents are cast by circumstances into the role of educational diplomats. Much of their time is spent dealing with individuals and groups whose influence and power help to shape the quality of educational opportunity in the community. They are central to developing and putting into practice the several strategies and activities called for in a school-community relations program.

As program leaders, superintendents have certain functions to discharge. As heads of their school systems, they must maintain, facilitate, and improve educational opportunity for all children and youth in their districts. Correlating to these duties are community relations functions - decision making, communicating, influencing, coordinating, and evaluating.

These community relations functions break down into specific types of actions:

* Developing policy for constructive relationships between school and community;

* Assuming initiative procedures to keep board, staff, and public well informed on school matters;

* Helping all school system personnel to become sensitive to the importance of their contacts in the community;

* Ensuring establishment and maintenance of open communication channels within school system and between system and the public;

* Developing structure of delivery of community relations responsibilities by administrative staff and others;

* Working with key groups and influential individuals in community and seeing that they are supplied with accurate facts and information;

* Taking leadership in providing opportunities required for district-wide involvement of citizens in programs for educational improvement;

* Putting board and staff members in contact with groups and individuals whom they are most likely to influence in behalf of better education and with whom a two-way system of communication may be developed;

* Seeing that school and community relations programs are evaluated and results reviewed by the board of education;
* Bringing together administration and involving their experience, knowledge, perceptions, and decision making skills into the school-community relations program.40

The superintendent’s role in the school’s public relations organization involves at least five areas of responsibility:

a) providing leadership in public relations,

b) maintaining a working partnership between the school system and the community,

c) gearing school policy to good public relations principles,

d) organizing public relations assignments, and

e) evaluation.

The quality of leadership determines the success of school public relations. Edward Bernays expresses the public relations point of view on leadership as “leadership is the ‘engineering of consent.’” It is getting people to follow you because they want to, not because you want them to.” The superintendent has the obligation as well as opportunity for providing the proper motivation to the public relations program.41

40 Bagin, pp. 58-59

Public Relations Policy

A public relations program cannot exist without the support of the organization’s leadership - the chief administrator and board. A formal policy adopted by the board of education is the foundation of a full-fledged communication operation. This policy must be codified alongside those dealing with education and the selection of staff. The policy must state commitment of the board of education to a partnership with the community - both internal and external - in the educational process.

The greatest impact that this kind of policy has is that it puts all persons connected with the school district on notice that they must be frank and open with the community. They must actively seek input to ensure that the community’s needs and desires are being addressed. Staff are not obligated to ask the public for its views before decisions are made.42

Nothing happens in a school public relations program unless it is a stated policy of the school board and firm conviction of the superintendent that the public shall be informed, and the school system shall give full support to the public relations department.

If there was no policy, it would be impossible to adequately staff the PR department and give it the authority to make decisions and give direction to school employees. It would also be difficult to acquire funds to conduct audiovisual presentations, research and special events.43

42Hymes, p. 45.
43Preusch, p. 37.
NSPRA recommended that five key points should be considered by a school board as it develops its own communications policy statement.

1. The educational organization should commit to writing a clear and concise policy statement with respect to its public information program.

2. The policy statement should be approved through formal action by the governing board of the organization, should be published in its policy manual, and should be reviewed by the governing board annually.

3. The policy statement should express the purposes of the organization’s public information program and provide the delegation of such authority to the executives of the organization as necessary to achieve the objectives.

4. The provisions of the policy statement should be made known to the entire staff or membership of the organization through all appropriate means.

5. Commitment to the achievement of the purposes of the organization’s public information policy should be demonstrated through the allocation of adequate human and financial resources to the public information program.

School systems should draft policies that will support:

* Establishment of a communication and community relations program for
the district,
* A news policy based upon honesty, openness, and fairness,
* Recognition of the schools as an integral part of the community,
* The concept that institutions, including schools, are built and improved through shared ideas, not only within the system,
* The formation of advisory groups,
* The participation of parents and other community resources in school programs,
* A rational plan and procedures for community use of school facilities and grounds,
* Guidelines for distribution of materials, the conduct of promotions and contests, and soliciting of funds from school personnel or students,
* Communication between and among governmental agencies, and
* A plan for communication in the event of a disaster.\(^{44}\)

**Public Relations Plans of Organization**

Public relations programs generally use three plans of organization to place responsibility for community relations activities and to facilitate the operation of the program. These are centralized, decentralized or coordinated plans.

A centralized public relations plan is one in which responsibility for the program is centered almost entirely in the chief administrative officer and his /her immediate line and

\(^{44}\)Davis, pp. 29-30.
staff associates. The superintendent is the focus of this plan, since s/he is the person who is best known to the people of a community and is looked to for leadership in matters affecting the welfare of children. Superintendents are expected to supply information on the conditions, needs, and practices of the schools. Having contacts with important citizens in the community, they are able to keep abreast of public opinion.

In smaller school districts, superintendents engage in a variety of activities for interpreting the work of the school and earning the goodwill of the public. These activities can include public speaking before groups, joining various organizations, participating in community affairs, supplying news copy, preparing printed materials, and handling complaints received in the system.

In larger systems, superintendents may delegate public relations responsibilities to other persons such as an assistant superintendent in line authority or to a director of school and community relations with staff status. The program operates at the top of the system, with slight attention given to individual principals and their staffs. Centralized plans rely heavily on community group relations, relationships with the community power structure, contacts with commercial media, and the preparation of materials for media distribution.45

Channeling all news through one office should not be looked upon as “censorship” by individual schools and teachers in a school district. If the newsgathering is cooperative, then it should be realized that centralizing news service is a more efficient and successful way of working with the press. A centralized public relations office makes and maintains

contacts with all news media. A date book is kept, preferably on a year-round basis, along with a file on all news releases, published reports, and news contacts (with working hours and home phone numbers).\textsuperscript{46}

There are serious weaknesses connected with the centralized arrangement. The most serious concern is that good community relations can never be achieved solely through the superintendent’s office and his or her immediate associates. Excellent work may be achieved through the superintendent’s personal contacts in the community and through the preparation and distribution of printed materials. But these activities are scarcely enough to offset the negative influence of unsatisfactory relationships between individual building personnel and pupils, parents, grandparents, and others.

A decentralized plan is one in which the responsibility for the public relations program is centered almost entirely in the building principal. In this plan, each individual school is regarded as the natural unit for community relations. This plan, with its focus on the building principal, is common in many of today’s school systems.

The principal is in a strong position to foster friendly relations with the school’s publics on a neighborhood and area basis. Principals are closest to people and have a more intimate understanding of their needs and interests than do administrative-supervisory officials at the top of a school system. They can work with instructional and non-instructional staff in establishing the need for the public relations program and conducting inservice training through everyday situations which arise in schools. The school building can become a community center and activities carried on for improvement

\textsuperscript{46}Lewis, p. 80.
of community living through the principal’s efforts.\textsuperscript{47}

The Dallas Independent School District (DISD) in Texas realized the principal is the “No. 1 Communicator” for the school, and that much of the success of a school is tied to the principal’s ability to communicate effectively. As part of its TOTAL Public Relations Program, DISD offers its district principals a handbook of “down-to-earth information and suggestions” under the title, \textit{What You’ve Always Wanted to Know About Working with News Media Representatives . . . but were too Shy to Ask}. The 12-page book reminds principals that each school serves as an extension of communication division which really cannot know what is going on without reports from the field. The book points out that it’s up to each principal to handle communications for that local school, meaning than when the media calls, the school may have to be on its own. If the principal is not there, another spokesperson should be available.

Principals need to understand what makes the media “tick.” The book states that “a reporter represents the public when he comes into your school. The public has a right to know what’s going on, therefore, the principal has the responsibility to assist a reporter as long as his or her activities don’t disrupt the learning process. The reporter’s job is to give accurate, objective news to citizens - even when the news is bad or unfavorable to the school. A reporter is hired to report what happens, not publicize the school.”\textsuperscript{48}

The Seattle (Washington) School District incorporated the concept of a decentralized community relations program as the second step of its three-phase total

\textsuperscript{47}Bagin, p. 66.

\textsuperscript{48}Hymes, p. 22.
public relations program in the late 1960's. This was based on the theory that each school must be in good shape on its communications or the whole system will suffer. This program reaches those persons who are loyal only to the local school and do not comprehend the total school system.

The program divided Seattle into 12 areas using the senior high school attendance boundaries. The heart of the program centers around citizen advisory committees. Established were 12 Area Citizens Advisory Committees, each composed of about a dozen leading citizens appointed by the school board or nominated by the principals. A Program and Exhibits Committee of principals book and show color-slide presentations to service clubs and lodges in its areas (Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, etc.). Counter exhibits are periodically set up and serviced at locations such as banks, beauty parlors, drug stores, and medical offices.

A Roster Committee of high school principals kept IBM mailing lists updated. A Special Levy Committee of principals went into action two months before the annual levy election date. By splitting the program up into small, manageable segments, the total job got done. In the opinion of many citizens, the community relations program was effective.49

A weakness to the decentralized plan concept is a neglect of community relations by central administrative officials and failure on their part to reinforce the efforts of school principals and their staffs. Without central administration leadership and direction, some principals are incapable of developing sound programs or else are unwilling to take

49Hymes, p. 41.
initiative. This plan does not function successfully in school systems with dissension among staff and with strong conflict between staff and administration.

In the coordinated plan, community relations are the responsibility of central administrative officers and building principals working together as an articulated unit. The work of those at the top level complements and reinforces that of the principals and their staffs. Central administrators serve as resource persons assisting the principals and members of his/her staff. Administrative advice and special knowledge may be requested for preparing leaflets and brochures for parents, resolving complaints and criticisms, gathering and writing news stories, assessing effectiveness of certain program activities. These responsibilities are shared with the principal and his/her staff.

The building principal has broad discretionary powers in this plan. They involve teachers and staff members in program planning and operation, beginning with identifying needs through evaluation and dissemination of results. The principals try to gear special assignments to the interests and competencies of staff members. In their role of communicators, principals must explain all facets of the public relations program to building personnel. They interpret the educational enterprise and its problems to students, parents, people in the school system, and residents in intermediate attendance areas.

A full-time or part-time community relations specialist may assist in the facilitating of this plan. S/he is the liaison with community groups, handles news media contacts, prepare news stories and spot news announcements. The specialist may edit internal and external publications, involve parents and others as resource person for classes and committees, prepare and direct tours and observations for visitors, organize special
advisory groups, and is the clearing agent for inquiries.\textsuperscript{50}

Every comprehensive public relations program must include in it a concerted effort to educate the entire staff - school-based as well as central office - in the ways of the press. When they learn what the media is all about, how important the right kind of coverage can be to the overall health of the school district, and what role they can play in insuring that coverage, they can give the program a tremendous amount of help.

“PR is everybody’s job.” Every member of the school family should be a missionary for public education, especially the administrative leaders who must be prepared to go forth into the community and build an informed constituency for the public schools.\textsuperscript{51}

A study conducted in New Jersey showed that the superintendents spent 37 percent of their time in communication or public relations-related activities. NSPRA Executive Director John H. Wherry pointed out that principals spent at least the same percentage of time on PR, and that teachers spend at least 10 percent of their time on PR. School secretaries spent 60 percent of their time (including telephone time and other communication activities) on public relations by conservative estimates. Other support staff members - custodians, food service employees, bus drivers, and maintenance personnel - also spent a surprising amount of time communicating with each other, students, parents and the general public as well.

Wherry explained that if the percentage of each employee’s time spent in public

\textsuperscript{50}Bagin, pp. 66-67.

\textsuperscript{51}Hymes, p. 24.
relations was computed, and then multiplied by their annual salary, school districts would find that they are already spending a great deal on public relations. The question, Wherry says, is “are we getting our money’s worth? A coordinated school district public relations program can make the money we are already spending on PR much more effective.”

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

The Public Relations Specialist

In many school systems, directors of school-community relations are members of the administrative team, with a variety of position titles. The most frequently used titles are:

* assistant superintendent
* director of information services
* director of public relations
* director of information and public relations
* director of community-school relations

* administrative assistant
* director of community relations
* communications director
* director of information and community relations

Another title is press relations officer. The titles “publicity director” or “agent” should be avoided. These recommended titles show a shift in the concept that has taken

---

^52 Davis, p. 36.

^53 Bagin, p. 67.

^54 Lewis, p. 79.
place in the last two decades. Previously the emphasis was on public relations, whereas today it is more on community, communication, and information. These words are now used in combination with another term such as director or officer in the title of the position.55

How large should a school system be to justify the employment of a full-time public relations director? When a student enrollment exceeds 5,000, employing a full-time director is the accepted general rule of thumb. In addition to size as one criterion, the nature of the community is another. A full-time director may not be needed in a stable 7,000-student community, but one may be needed in a problem-ridden 3,000-student community.

There are six basic functions that a director of school and community relations performs in trying to accomplish a program’s objectives. The functions are research, advisement, planning, coordination, communication and evaluation. They make up the structure or system within which the program’s details are selected and carried out.56

Directors’ activities vary among school systems. In some districts, the perception of their role by superiors is broad and balanced, while it is narrow and restrictive in others. District size influences the nature and scope of their activities. Some activities are handled by line personnel or the superintendent in a larger school system. Funds available for community relations affects how directors’ duties and schedules. Also influencing the nature of their work are the kind of problems facing the district and the image of the

55Bagin, p. 60.
56Bagin, p. 61.
school system held by community residents.⁵⁷

All news (other than that created directly by the superintendent) from a school system should flow through the public relations specialist’s office. In addition to the PR office, some school systems use the advice of a public relations committee, usually made up of other administrators and teachers.⁵⁸ Board members and administrators should “touch base” with the school public relations director before making “off-the-cuff” remarks in public.⁵⁹

The DISD (Dallas Independent School District) Administrative Regulations handbook outlines the responsibilities of the communications division in the production of a wide variety of publications “to interpret the educational program of the school to the public”. Also, this division prepares news releases and “cooperates with news media to insure complete and accurate coverage of school events.” Regulation #1130 states “public education must have complete understanding of the community it serves and must attempt to inform the community about the school and its programs. Each department and school will develop programs designed to establish communication with the community. Such programs shall be developed with the appropriate involvement of staff.”⁶⁰

Results from the opinion poll conducted by Harsch-Rotman & Druck released during the 1967 NSPRA Seminar show that the most important roles assumed by their

⁵⁷Bagin, p. 62.
⁵⁸Lewis, p. 79.
⁵⁹Lewis, p. 85.
⁶⁰Hymes, p. 6.
survey participants were:

1. Justify greater financial support for schools;
2. Stimulate public interest in the schools;
3. Produce written materials for dissemination to news media, governmental bodies, and local groups;
4. Produce other materials for dissemination to news media and local groups;
5. Encourage news media to devote more time and space to schools.\(^{61}\)

In 1967, the largest United States school districts were more likely to have a full-time PR director than not. A survey of 198 school districts revealed that 60 percent had full-time directors, 18 percent had part-time directors. (This information was revealed in *The Administration of PR Programs in Local Systems, 1966-67*, published by the Educational Research Service in Washington, D.C.). Ninety percent of the full-time directors reported directly to the school superintendent. The survey revealed that very few actually had a “public relations” label in their position titles even through there was a common tendency to apply the term “public relations” to almost any activity designed to interpret the school program to the community.

Other survey results were that most full-time directors had staff assistance, but a few had no help. Many said that they were not expected to provide PR counsel. One-half said they advised the school board, one-third advised the superintendent’s council (45 percent held membership in such a council), and 22 percent provided advisory assistance

---

\(^{61}\)Preusch, p. 9.
to curriculum councils.  

Under the systems approach to administration, the public relations director is only one member of the superintendent’s team. The public relations director should report directly to the superintendent, and should contribute any special skill he has to solutions of the many problems that the superintendent faces. The PR director is not a policy maker, though he may make policy suggestions from time to time. Analogous to a ship, the PR director is not the captain, but is more like the navigator.

The public relations specialist should think about questions likely to confront a superintendent and the school board. Carrol B. Hanson, director of the publications and information department of the Seattle (Washington) Public Schools, outlined issues facing boards of education in the late 1960s. These issues were presented during his address at a conference of school administrators in Portland (Oregon) sponsored by the Oregon State Department of Education in cooperation with the Oregon Association of School Administrators. These issues included changes in curriculum and teaching methods, school buildings, teacher negotiations, de facto segregation, partnership between education and industry, policy, levy program, and the nature of the message being communicated through organizations, contacts and media.  

Responsibilities of the school information director were included in the annual W. Harold Kingsley Memorial Lecture by Claude W. Fawcett, a professor of school personnel administration at the University of California at Los Angeles. The Lecture was presented__________

62 Preusch, p. 44.

63 Preusch, p. 35.
at the 1967 National School Public Relations Association Seminar. These responsibilities were:

* development of communication programs,

* provide conditions under which a community of understanding among diverse opinion is so strong that there is identification with school purpose and an understanding of the manner in which orderly dissent within common purpose can lead to a balance of achievement,

* task of developing public confidence,

* provide the conditions under which orientation to the school district is quick, complete, and accurate,

* in a period of rapid change, s/he is required to establish the communication system sensitive enough to detect changes in purpose soon enough for the generation in school to respond while it is in school,

* assume critical administrative role in the development of language of organizational communication in developing an external communications program, and in developing an internal communications network.64

What kind of person is a public relations specialist? According to Morris B. Rotman, author of Opportunities in Public Relations Careers, this person should have the

64Preusch, pp. 14-18.
following qualities, traits and abilities:

* Be knowledgeable about many subjects and be able to adapt to a rapidly changing world;

* Be a “jack-of-all-trades.” Applied psychology and intuition help to evaluate people are thinking. Economic and financial savvy brings and understanding of business. Knowledge of foreign affairs and foreign languages bridges gaps between cultures. An interest in the arts deepens an individual’s personality. Knowing sociology helps tune into rapidly changing fans and trends;

* The PR person must communicate very effectively, write well, and be able to present oral material in a straightforward and interesting fashion;

* S/he must be a consummate journalist. A highly developed sense, based on deep understanding of journalism, remains one of the fundamentals of public relations;

* The specialist must stay in step with the times. S/he must serve as the person who comprehends problems that require communications;

* The PR specialist plays a key role in deciding what appears on television and what does not.\(^\text{65}\)

Specific qualities that will help an individual become a professional public relations person include: reading copiously and consistently; learning to successfully use the two

\(^{65}\)Rotman, p. xiii.
important elements of publicity and advertising; knowing something about the target audience for whom the message is intended; learning to understand people in order for ideas to succeed; learning the importance of research; learning to deal with both mass and specialized media; having integrity; developing perception to distinguish quickly the good from bad accomplished only through keen awareness developed by reading, observing and listening; and having a tolerance for different views.\textsuperscript{66}

A public relations practitioner should be congenial, friendly, and capable of working with all types of people. The specialist's strongest assets are the abilities to meet the public on its various levels and to build confidence. Not only are the basic skills of writing ability and speaking directly and clearly important, but the specialist should have a strong liking for these tasks. The ability to use graphics in print and other media is also useful. Public relations personnel can be only as effective as the board and administration permit them to be by letting them operate at decision-making levels. In order to perform their specialties, PR specialists must be involved and actively engaged in helping decision makers arrive at their decisions. The specialist can offer alternate actions, suggest possible public reactions, and reflect prevalent community attitudes.\textsuperscript{67}

Characteristics that a public relations person needs are the same qualities necessary to succeed in the business world in general. These characteristics suggested by E. Mandell de Windt, president of Eaton Corporation, Inc., are: self realization, judgment,\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{66}Newsome, Doug and Alan Scott, \textit{This is PR: The Realities of Public Relations}, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 11-12.

\textsuperscript{67}Koerner, p. 36.
decisiveness, energy, perspective and open-mindedness, ability to think things through, willingness to commit oneself, intelligence, courage, and the ability to "take it."

Charles W. Pine, a PR agency president, in Phoenix (Arizona) offers the following list of personal qualifications of a public relations person:

* Be able to express him/herself fluently but also know when to listen;
* Be observant, quick to learn and the possessor of a good memory;
* Possess the gift of human understanding;
* Have courage and integrity, and be able to think in bold concepts;
* Be sufficiently self-disciplined to execute the most minute detail;
* Have intellectual maturity, sound judgment, and sufficient leadership qualities;
* Be a prolific producer of new ideas;
* Be able to think and act efficiently in emergencies, able to make decisions quickly;
* Be able to write rapidly and well;
* Be able to interpret miscellaneous information, marshal thoughts in an orderly sequence, recognize facts, and know where to find them;
* Have a sound knowledge of the workings of business;
* Be versed in psychology, philosophy and economics, and know something about politics and current events;
* Be able to organize him/herself and other people;

68 Newsome, p. 12.
General Planning and Goals of a Public Relations Program

Whether a school district is aware of it or not, it has a public relations program. A school system is a communications system, made up of staff members and students who day in and day out are sending messages (often unknowingly) to a wide variety of publics. B. Rodney Davis in School Public Relations: the Complete Book, points out that wise school administrators know that they have to manage their communications before their communications manage them.

Starting a public relations program is not really the problem. Doing a better job with the one that exists is. It takes active commitment from the board of education, superintendent, other top administrators, principals and teachers in each school building. After the commitment comes analysis. By asking specific questions, a district needs a clear picture produced by public opinion analysis. The district must know what the community expects of education, what the community’s knowledge or ignorance is of education, and what the community’s hopes, aspirations, and desires are as to the

69Newsome, pp. 10-11.
educational program for their children.\textsuperscript{70}

Communications should be planned for every identifiable public. Recognizing a public relations program’s limitations is every bit as important as stressing its strengths. At the top of the list of things that cannot be accomplished is to create a favorable image when the facts of the matter speak otherwise. An image reflects reality. An image cannot be created that does not already have its roots in reality.

It takes years to build an effective public relations program. The long-range goal of any public relations program is totality. Individual phases should be adopted one or two at a time for implementing a program. Press contact are usually the first item on the agenda to develop. In the meantime, other school officials should maintain or initiate effective personnel programs for staff and students. Other projects can and should be introduced when the time is right. The entire effort, including the board’s goals and objectives, should be followed closely, with changes made as reviews and evaluations highlight weaknesses.\textsuperscript{71}

Immediate and long-range needs of a district should be determined. Any statement of goals and objectives is a board of education’s commitment to a public relations program.\textsuperscript{72} Goals of a public relations program should be determined from the start. These goals must be sincere and realistic. PR should not try to fool the public, and should be clearly stated, positive, and optimistic. The goals should be keeping with the policies

\textsuperscript{70} Davis, pp. 27-28.

\textsuperscript{71} Koerner, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{72} Koerner, p. 36.
of the group and reflect the characteristics of the group.

In preparing a plan for a PR program, authors Ann and John Kadon state that it is wise for a public relations specialist to look "back" into what has been done and what could have been done, in at yourself, your organization, your weaknesses, and your capability, around at your publics, situation in general, and what others are doing, and ahead as far as possible to anticipate problems and potentials.”

The underlying goal of every public relations program is to establish a favorable climate in which to operate. In Press and Community Relations, five guidelines are presented to Board of Education members:

1. **Honesty is the best and most important policy.** A good program will keep the community, media, and staff well informed of district happenings. Information should be presented truthfully, dispassionately, completely and continuously.

2. **Program should be organized with an eye toward keeping community members involved and interested in the district.** There should be feedback procedures - the program should not be a one-sided affair.

3. **The board should develop a coherent public relations policy.** The policy should lay out goals of the program, establish mechanisms for achieving the goals, and a plan to measure how well the goals are met.

4. **Everyone in the district has a role in the communications program.**


---

73 Kadon, p. 39.
Only one board member should be directly responsible for operating the program. This member is the spokesperson to field all questions from the media, staff or community. If a full- or part-time public relations specialist is employed, the board spokesperson acts as a liaison with him or her. The staff person assigned to carry out the program is the key participant in the whole program. The ideal person is a trained PR professional working full-time on a communications program. The next best thing is to write responsibility for public information and community relations into the job description of a current district staff member. That person should preferably have some common experiences or be willing to get training in how to operate a public relations program. The board may find a wealth of talented people in the community willing to volunteer their services.

5. The board of education must have an ear to listen. An ideal communications program emphasizes receiving as much as transmitting, and good communicators not only get their message across but also listen closely to the response.

Credibility, the most important public relations tool, is earned and not magically bestowed.\textsuperscript{74}

Bernays said that goals must be \textquoteleft\textquoteleft defined in simple terms as the Ten

\textsuperscript{74}Kanige, pp. vii-xi.
Commandments or the Four Freedoms or the 14 Points.” Goals must be defined on the basis of three time elements: short-term, intermediate and long-term. Bernays said that the school public relations planning process should involve:

1. A statement of goals,
2. A statement of research pertaining to goals,
3. A statement of school district reorientation that must be accomplished in light of the research and new goals,
4. A definition of the strategy to be used in accomplishing the goals, and
5. The timing of the tactics to accomplish your goals.\textsuperscript{75}

The Dallas Independent School District was one of three winners in the Total Public Relations Program category in the 1981 Gold Medallion Awards competition (sponsored by the National School Public Relations Association). The district’s overall goal was “to help provide an effective and efficient education system by maintaining an ongoing, comprehensive program of internal and external communications.” Specific objectives of the PR program focused on six broad areas in which to concentrate energies and resources during the decade from the “DISD Targets for the 80s.” The targets were based on suggestions and views of board members, staff, students, community groups, parents and other interested citizens.

\textit{Goal 1: To Improve Student Achievement} - This involved the communications operation in reducing teacher paperwork and testing new strategies to improve attendance.

\textsuperscript{75}Davis, pp. 28-29.
Goal 2: To Increase Employee Performance - Specific included reviewing and improving efforts to respond effectively to employee requests, questions, concerns and complaints. Also, establishing and promoting new methods of recognizing outstanding employees, and working with employer and employee organizations to improve teaching conditions.

Goal 3: To Provide Accountability - This gave the public relations operation two explicit charges. One, to improve techniques for communicating with parents about their role in the learning process. And secondly, to expand efforts of interactions with community leaders about the progress and needs of public schools.

Goal 4: To Promote School-Community Relationships - The focus of this goal was creatively involving communication with citizens in order to establish public education as a priority of the community. New efforts were undertaken to involve, inform and listen to special parent groups, including middle class, minorities and non-English speaking. A senior citizen action program was established, and existing partnerships within groups and individuals involved in the adopt-a-school and volunteer programs were strengthened. Attitudes were continued to be monitored, along with the needs, perceptions and understanding of citizens and groups. The district’s capacity to respond effectively to citizen concerns and
requests were improved. Working relationships with other agencies and governmental entities were created.

**Goal 5: To Maintain an Effective Governance System** - Calls upon community people to maintain and improve upon vehicles used for involving and getting input from staff and citizens.

**Goal 6: To Insure Adequate Funding** - This was an additional area of responsibility for the public relations operation: “provide legislative leadership that results in more equitable funding for urban school systems.”

The communication people in the DISD Division of Communication prepared specific tasks to meet four informational goals:

1. *Obtain comprehensive, accurate and fair coverage of school activities.*
   
   Ways were looked for to encourage news media to cover school events as well as train employees in news media relations.

2. *Provide employees with timely and accurate information.* Tasks involved internal communication and two-way communication with employees.

3. *Provide citizens with accurate and timely information.* Information was communicated about district programs other than through the media. Public relations training was provided for central staff and school employees and efforts expanded to communicate with the

---

76Hymes, pp. 5-6.
Spanish-speaking community and other minorities.

4. Assist the general superintendent and Board of Education in their efforts to communicate with employees and other citizens. This involved getting messages from the superintendent and Board of Education to the community through newspaper columns or radio and television appearances. Workshops were also held for board members on news media relations.77

The Utica Community Schools in Michigan was one of the 1981 winners in the category of Total Public Relations Program. This district of 28,200 students is near Detroit, and has been conducting Project HEAR (Householder Educational Attitude Reactions) surveys since 1971. Relying on volunteers to telephone a random sample of about 300 persons, 15 minutes of questions are asked. The questions are borrowed from the annual Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools and from a countrywide survey conducted by the Macomb (Michigan) Intermediate School District (a pioneer in public opinion polling). Other questions reflect local school district issues.78

Utica’s administrative assistant for school-community relations, Cass Franks, describes an example of the school district’s comprehensive program as a series of paragraphs labeled “Goals,” “Methods,” and “Results.”

Goal: Halt local reflection of national enrollment loss trend to private and parochial schools. Local real estate agents were contacted and

77Hymes, p. 7.

78Hymes, p. 9.
encouraged to explain the advantages of public schools to prospective home-buyers. Parents of preschoolers were invited to sample services and see other good things happening in the buildings. New pre-school brochures were bulkmailed to them and a parent orientation held. Also, a kindergarten “recruitment” took place.

**Goal:** Conduct a major series of boundary changes - including the first-ever merger of two schools - with a minimum of public dissension.

A districtwide Enrollment Implications Committee was established to work with administration on all planning. The superintendent personally communicated with affected staffs. Newsletters and “hotlines” published explained all aspects of the change.

**Goal:** Keeping pace with changing public desires and requests. Project HEAR surveys were conducted. A citizens advisory committee on “Meeting the Challenges of the 1980's” was formed.

**Goal:** Improve parent communication. Parent conferences were held, and junior high and elementary parents were surveyed.

**Goal:** Improve general communication and understanding of school district goals and policies with students. Press conferences were held in the high school with the superintendent and a similar one with the elementary.  

---

79Hymes, p. 14.
Methods Used in School Public Relations Programs

According to the Census Bureau in the early 1980s, 72 percent of adults in most communities have no children in public schools. “Tax support to pay for the schools comes from the entire community, not just the parents,” said Barbara Kudlacek, director of communications for the Topeka (Kansas) public schools in “Schools Wooing Public With Media Campaigns.”

Most school leaders do not need new ways to spend money on any activity, including public relations. Wise leaders make sure they exploit inexpensive ways to develop public support. Word-of-mouth communicates a great deal of information about any enterprise. Perhaps even more than newspapers and other formal communication techniques. People associated with schools are usually seen as credible and knowledgeable source of information about the school. They are always asked questions in their encounters with the public, such as in the supermarket checkout line, playing golf on a Saturday morning, or having their hair done at a beauty shop.

The opportunity to brag about their school district exists each time school staff members are asked questions. These are the times to communicate good news and start developing awareness of the school’s successes. Total public relations efforts are more than spreading good news. Communicating success is a part of it.

Some key points suggested when planning an approach to public relations are:

---


81Practical PR for Principals, p. 161.
* Don’t be embarrassed about highlighting what’s working. Schools need
to tell their stories often and to everyone who will listen to
encourage the public to support their efforts.

* Begin yesterday. Ongoing public relations strategies should be part of
everything done.

* Make sure the communication is two-way. Ask the community what they
need or are interested in. Get everyone involved.

* Keep it up. Schedule meaningful, regular contact with publics involved
through newsletters, press releases, meetings, telephone calls, etc.
A single event is not enough for spreading the word.

* Let the students do it. Children speak much louder than adults.

* Be creative. The school can be thought of as a business, and can benefit
from effective advertising and PR campaigns.

* Build on successes. Share stories about what worked in the past when
writing grant proposals or building local business partnerships.

* Don’t focus on the money. Schools’ PR efforts have far less to do with
generating financial support for specific projects than they do with
preparing their students to be globally competitive. By involving
kids, adults with and without children, local businesses, seniors and
everyone else who has a stake in the community’s future, the entire
“village” is involved with, feels ownership in, and is committed in
student success.\textsuperscript{82}

There are numerous methods that a school district can effectively use to get their message to their various publics. In this era modern technology, message centers, voice mail, Internet communication, video programming, cable television, broadcast FAX capabilities and desktop publishing technology can expedite the communication process.\textsuperscript{83}

*A Publications Primer - How to Produce Publications That Work* offers these tips:

* Never lose sight of the audience. (The publication must be looked at from the audience’s point of view, and must be written in language that the average citizen can understand. It must contain information that they really care about.)

* Know the purpose of the publication. (The publication should not do more than it is meant to do. A newsletter should be full of news and news features, not lengthy essays and dull reports).

* Have the design enhance the message, not obscure it.

* Have material typeset, if possible.

* Use color wisely.

* Use photographs well.\textsuperscript{84}

Numerous types of publications can be used to deliver the school district’s


\textsuperscript{83}*Practical PR for Principals*, pp. 173-184.

\textsuperscript{84}Hymes, pp. 18-19.
message to its internal and external publics. These include: superintendent’s annual report, teacher recruitment brochure, employee manual, board briefs, pay envelope stuffer, student handbook, calendar of school events, superintendent’s monthly or weekly bulletin, budget and bond issue publication, fact and figures booklet about the school system, directory of school personnel and special purpose publications.85

* Practical PR for Principals, A Handbook to Help You Build Support for Your Schools recommends administrators to use staff bulletins, parent newsletters, calendars, handbooks, bulletin boards, report cards, school newspapers, Internet home pages, question-and-answer fact sheets or brochures, marquee boards and school walls (i.e. Hall of Fame, special recognition for teams winning state championships, etc.).86

Additional public relations techniques suggested by Annette J. Connors in “Let’s Hear About the Good Stuff!” for secondary school principals to use are:

* forming booster clubs,
* organizing a parent advisory council,
* news releases on athletic events,
* forming a PTA,
* calls and letters concerning attendance and truancy,
* seminars on academic programs,
* the school newspaper, yearbook and theatrical performances,
* art and photography displays in local malls,

85Myers, pp. 43-44.

86Practical PR for Principals, pp. 87-106.
* career days using parents as the models for particular jobs and careers,
* banquets for athletic awards, Black History Month, Honor Society,
* open house, and
* student recognition and incentive programs

One thing in common that the winners in the Gold Medallion competition had was good media relations. Suggested winning media relations techniques are:

* Maintain close personal daily contact with news people;
* Conduct special orientations for new press people;
* Distribute news releases on systemwide stories;
* Send “Media Tips” of feature story possibilities;
* Memos to news media on upcoming events of interest;
* Public service announcements for radio and television;
* Weekly taped radio programs about the school system;
* Press packets for board meetings;
* Information, photos and articles for local media;
* Interviews of board and key staff members;
* Proof that it works.

Examples of spreading the word about a school’s technology program are given in “Understanding Public Relations: A Primer for Schools.” Author Ann H. Orwig, a consultant in strategic technology planning, and staff development and technology

---

87Connors, p. 401.

88Hymes, pp. 20-21.
implementation, suggests that a great place to start is with the parents, grandparents and friends of the students.

* Worcester Country School in Berlin, Maryland, showcases its expertise during an annual technology night. Computer stations run with students demonstrating CDs, Internet access and instructional software.

* The entire community is invited to a weekend technology fair which takes place on a Friday evening and Saturday during the day in the Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Florida. The word is spread through flyers, letters home, telephone calls, posters at local businesses, and TV and radio public service announcements. Community members can try out new technology at an event sponsored by a student computer users group. Local businesses give away pizza and T-shirts.

* In Kelowna, British Columbia, students organized a booth which used a computer to create return-address labels. Their efforts were part of a fundraising effort to purchase new playground equipment. In addition to helping the worthwhile effort, the students also showcased skills learned in the classroom.

* Principal Lisa Holmes in Oakesdale, Washington, experimented with monthly technology nights. A question-and-answer session began each night, after which parents had the chance to try new software
or get advice on purchasing equipment for their homes.  

The Baltimore school system task force report listed 25 “Image Building Ideas.” These included recruiting famous alumni to mentor students and to appear in public service announcements, starting a job placement service for teachers to provide supplementary and summer jobs, and inserting news of school activities into utility and tax bills.

In the Dallas Unified District, programs include: a corporate adopt-a-schools project with 2,153 business sponsors; a volunteer program with 12,760 volunteers, a cable-television station that produces educational programs; a graphics and printing department, and 16 telephone lines to handle inquiries and comments from the public.

William J. Banach and the Macomb Intermediate School District in Michigan used marketing concepts to sell the schools’ story to the public. They used marketing techniques traditionally used by companies to sell soap, cars and other products. The program identified audiences to reach and defines how public schools could best meet the needs of those audience with the schools’ services. The program offered bumper stickers, refrigerator magnets, pencils and other gimmicks to keep the school story in front of large numbers of people.

Banach, administrative director of the school district in Mount Clemens, launched

---

89 Orwig, pp. 20-21.
90 York, p. 2.
91 Bridgeman, p. 3.
92 Bagin, p. 8.
a comprehensive two-year campaign he called “The Marketing of Education” which won a Gold Medallion in the Total Public Relations Program category for Intermediate Agencies, State and National Education Groups.

Banach said, “Schools cannot continue doing business as usual because ‘traditional markets’ for schools are drying up. We must reassess public education’s mission and go beyond the foundation we’ve established. That means developing a consumerism attitude - listening to what the public needs and creating schools people want to do business with.”

Banach pointed to these factors that showed a different marketplace:

* There are fewer students.
* There are more citizens without school-age children.
* There are more one-parent families.
* And there was a tremendous new market for job training and child care programs.

A pioneer in public surveying in education, Banach noted that public confidence in education was at a low level, and that public perception is that schools have stopped teaching “basics.” Concluding that there was a gap between schools and the public, he formulated the Macomb Marketing Plan.

Banach felt schools had to become more aggressive in telling the public school story. Goals of this plan were to develop a consumer orientation among school people, and to create schools that people WANT to do business with. The plan was based on well-defined marketing research, the kind each advertising firm conducts before launching a selling campaign. The focus was on showcasing educational programs in basic skill
areas to show people that schools never left the basics and are in fact doing more in the
basic skill areas today than ever before.

The first phase of the Macomb marketing effort was a concerted effort to reach
administrators, teachers, and teacher leadership representatives (there were 21 school
districts in Macomb County). Banach and his staff promoted the effort and distributed a
booklet that described the program and the concept behind it. It consisted of a “90-7-3”
concept of communication.

* 90 percent of the school’s image is who we are and what we do 24 hours
a day;
* seven percent of the marketing effort is listening - tuning in to find out
what people like and don’t like;
* three percent is outbound communication - publications, posters, news
releases and other visible and tangible items.

The plan considered the four aspects of “marketing warfare” - defensive, offensive,
flanking and guerilla. Marketing efforts show that the best defense is a good offense.

The Macomb slogan to show its position in the marketplace was “Your public
schools ... There’s no better place to learn.” The slogan, its logo and all of the messages
that went with it became household words in all 21 districts in Macomb County and
spread over its borders. The idea behind it reinforces what people believe ... and it
represents what public education has been, is and will be.

The three-phase marketing plan consisted of:

Phase 1 - This phase was targeted at the elementary parents and focused
on the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic.

*Phase 2* - Aimed at secondary students and their parents, this phase focused on basics and beyond. High school seniors were surveyed, with specific objectives based on survey results and meetings with student leaders.

*Phase 3* - This was directed toward those without children in school. A variety of products were used by the district to spread the slogan and created a logo of a red apple with a "#1" symbol inside it.

* Friday envelopes (designed to send classroom materials home every Friday)
* Welcome posters (these featured a girl with her reading, writing and arithmetic books, along with the message, "Welcome to your school . . . there’s no better place to learn.")
* Tee shirt transfers (10,000 for teachers to give to students who do well in basic skills)
* Peel and stick apples (stickers for teachers)
* Notepads and pencils
* Self-help records
* Parent-conference planner
* Refrigerator magnets
* Stock articles (communications staff regularly sent articles to principals to use in staff and communication newsletters)
A survey conducted a year after the program began showed that the public confidence was up. Parents believed that their child’s school was better than the year before “because schools are listening.” The theme of the campaign was recognized by 33 percent of all parents and almost 75 percent of elementary parents who were targets of the first phase.

“The Macomb Marketing Plan has made a difference,” Banach wrote in his award winning contest entry. “Staff morale is up. Public confidence is up. And support for our local schools continues to grow as we continue to improve our programs and be responsible to the people we serve.”93

The new stress on public information activities developed from school leaders’ perception that “the more people know about public schools, the more satisfied they are with them,” noted Claire From, chairperson of the New York Alliance for the Public Schools in 1984. A New York City civic alliance launched an aggressive, privately financed marketing campaign for the city’s public schools, which featured full-page advertisements in major newspapers and magazines, videotaped presentations in department stores in each of the five boroughs, posters on 3,000 public-transit buses and students’ academic achievements celebrated in a week-long event. The campaign cost $90,000.

93Hymes, p. 25.
A grocery store chain in California (Safeway Stores Inc.) distributed 12 million shopping bags throughout the state printed with the slogan “Parents are Teachers Too” as part of the state department of education campaign to encourage parental involvement in education. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) created a kit of pamphlets, posters, bumper stickers, decals and T-shirt order forms based on the theme, “Education . . . a sound investment in America.”94 The kit includes a letter from NASSP president Dale Graham that stated, “building a high degree of confidence in schools and in educators among the general public is a goal of all of us.”95

Public school campaigns and promotional efforts do not have to be costly for districts. In 1984, Director of Public Relations for NSPRA, Virginia Ross, said that school districts did not have big jumps in their budget for public relations. She found an emergence of cooperative ventures involving school boards, parents, business representatives and educators in an effort to promote public schools. Ross said that groups that previously moved in isolation began forming coalitions, with the corporate sector playing a major role.96

Good school communications programs do cost money, but there are “cheap frills” suggested by Lois Lange in “Inexpensive Ways to Dress Up Your School PR Program.” These are low cost activities to “stretch the PR dollar” and program effectiveness. Lange recommends to operate on the theory that “to know us is to love us.” Keep news in front

94Bridgeman, p. 2.

95Bridgeman, p. 4.

96Bridgeman, p. 2.
of the community of the educational process and student and staff efforts and
achievements. Create a special event, such as a “school pride week,” where the mayor
and school board can be asked to issue special proclamations, students’ schoolwork are
displayed in store windows throughout the town, and provide placemats to local
restaurants with “reasons for pride.”

Piggyback on local events, such as coordinating a theme-related event activity in
schools to coincide with a community festival. Use the radio for short radio spots
recorded by students, teachers and administrators about school pride, or produce a
county-wide salute to teachers.97

Many school districts do not realize potentially strong support in new residents
moving into their community. Some approaches used by school districts are:

* In Alhambra (California), city and high school districts launched a
  systematic procedure to reach newcomers. Created was a 16-page
  booklet which included a welcome from the school board and
  provided basic information about the districts. The chambers of
  commerce in the two communities served by the schools supplied
  the names and addresses of new residents and the booklet was
  mailed out monthly. The booklet was also presented by a
  community hostess service to the newcomers.

* Copies of special reports dealing with projected elementary and
  secondary enrollments together with construction plans for

97Lange, pp. 26-27.
buildings were provided to real estate agents. This method was used successfully in the Downers Grove Schools in Downers Grove, Illinois.

* The Tacoma (Washington) district distributed “Welcome Resident” bulletins from the superintendent with facts about basic school services and policies.

* Real estate brokers in Mountain Lakes (New Jersey) were invited to a half-day briefing by the superintendent about policies of special interest to new residents. Other topics included transportation, other services, financial data, etc. The brokers were given a tour of the newest building in the system and were treated to a luncheon by the high school home economics students. The favorable response to this program led to a “Senior Citizens Day,” where the seniors were fascinated and stayed an entire day looking over the high school. (Each senior attending was mailed a lifetime pass to all school functions.)

* A seven-item kit was presented to each new family in Simi, California. Items included in this kit were:

1. Directory of public services (names and phone numbers of agencies to contact regarding school and non-school problems)

2. Directory of schools and letters of welcome
3. School calendar

4. Booklet of Board of Education meeting procedures with a calendar of meeting dates

5. Student behavior policy booklet

6. Map of district showing attendance area boundaries

7. Copy of School Days, district newsletter which included the article, "Don’t Ignore Community Newcomers."98

When working with the news media, certain journalistic needs must be understood by the public relations specialist. Released news items should have an "indicator of newsworthiness" - proximity, timeliness, prominence, consequence, human interest and conflict - these are the traditional values of journalists.

Examples of proximity include stories about scholarship recipients, athlete recruited by prestigious universities, and National Merit Award winners. These have proximity because readers may be acquainted with the people, places and issues involved. An event that is going to happen is news; an event that has already taken place is not. Media value timeliness and appreciate advance notice about an event ahead of time.

Prominent people attending or being part of an event always attracts newspaper and television reporters. Celebrities often take the opportunity to mention good deeds performed for local schools, and the school district will get a favorable mention on radio or television plus the added bonus of additional people attending the event to see the local personalities. How is the laying off of 12 teachers going to affect the school curriculum

98Preusch, pp. 58-59.
and its program offerings? The news value of consequence can result in concrete stories with definite cause-and-effect relationships which are easier to report than many stories about education.

*Human interest* stories are items which are out of the ordinary, and can be researched, written and kept on file to be used later when they are more timely, correspond to a national trend, or when a special educational series is being printed or aired. These could be stories about the physical education teacher whose guest presenter is a male dancer performing Renaissance dance in costume of the era, or a quartet of singing sisters whose acapello performances have "wowed" local audiences. *Conflict* is an often-used (sometimes overused) news value. Reporters like clear-cut issues where it is easy to detail cause-and-effect relationships. A good example of school district conflict that always makes the news is contract negotiations.\(^9\)

**How Effective is a Public Relations Program?**

Although it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of a public relations program, thorough research and honest evaluation can still make PR more understandable and precise.\(^1\) There are misconceptions that exist about effective school public relations:

*Public relations is not a coverup.* PR cannot hide a bad program. Public relations should help a school program improve by being responsive to its clients. The first step is making the school as good as one can

---

\(^9\)Hymes, pp. 399-400.

\(^1\)Newsome, p. 50.
be . . . then promote it.

Public relations is not mystical. A great deal of public relations is common sense and putting oneself “in the other person’s shoes.” One does not have to be a public relations professional to communicate effectively.

Public relations is not expensive or slick. Good public relations is simply building good relationships with people, not necessarily producing slick, full-color publications. It takes attention, time and a small amount of money.

Public relations is not one person’s job. Everybody in the school family needs to work on building good public relations.¹⁰¹

A public relations program must be “total.” A program cannot be part-time, even if the person responsible for it is. The budget does not have to be large, but the commitment to communicating - in good times as well as bad, in calm moments as well as during crises - must be total.¹⁰²

In the early 1980s, Donald Hymes found that surveys were increasingly popular in education, and showed the same thing in virtually every part of the country: Public confidence in education was declining in proportion to the increasing number of adults who had no children in the schools. It was shown that education was given a higher rating by citizens who had some direct contact with a school compared to those whose

¹⁰¹Practical PR for Principals, p. 6.

¹⁰²Hymes, p. 4.
knowledge came only from the media. Those who heard about schools primarily through newspapers or television tended to be negative, generally voting “discipline” as the number one problem that faced educators. People who had spent time recently inside a classroom quickly disputed that assumption.

A skilled public relations practitioner knows that the perception of the public is what counts - that the reality of a situation means nothing if the community sees something else.\textsuperscript{103}

The Fairfax County (Virginia) Public Schools is a large district in suburban Washington, D.C. It was the winner of a Gold Medallion for its Total Public Relations Program. Its successful program incorporated the following:

* Monthly meetings with the superintendent and advisory councils representing all categories of employees,

* Bi-monthly meetings with the superintendent and Planning Council,

* Regular meetings with the superintendent and countywide Student Advisory Council,

* School officials maintained liaisons with their community organizations.

* The PR office maintained regular contact with local organizations (universities, businesses, etc.),

* Speakers Bureau,

* Slide-tape presentation called “Public Education: Something for Everyone,”

\textsuperscript{103}Hymes, p. 8.
* Tours of the central administration building for school-based staff,
* Student awards ceremonies. 104

Nancy Stark (ASPR) stated that three ingredients were needed to develop and maintain effective relationships with print and electronic media: perspicacity, patience and perseverance. Perspicacity means to be discerning, understanding, and knowing how the media operates so that the public relations specialist may work smarter, not harder. Find out all possible about the media - deadlines, resources in staff and equipment, and practices and policies that have a bearing on schools’ media time and space.

Patience pays off when dealing with media. Patiently explaining the school’s issues can result in a more balanced media perspective on them. Perseverance means not to give up. Every elementary school in the area has the same story to tell at Thanksgiving and are competing for the same space. There will always be stories to tell, progress to report, achievements to recognize plus activities and events. Persevere and help media to find out this information in a timely manner.

A final tip from Stark on practicing the Three P’s - don’t expect the media to tell all of the story. Messages from the schools are delivered in many ways, and it is easy to miss a newspaper account or a two-minute television clip. Use other effective ways to get news to the community, and give them more than one chance to know about the schools. 105

104 Hymes, p. 16.
105 Lange, pp. 41-42.
Evaluating the Public Relations Program

“A smart person makes each mistake only once.”

This statement stresses the importance of evaluation and feedback.

Communication is not an exact science. Messages are formed in different ways and different people will react differently to the same event. It is essential to test a school’s communication/public relations efforts. This is not so much to say that someone did a good or bad job, but to ensure that if something did not work, it will be improved or not repeated.\textsuperscript{106}

There are two times to conduct research:

1) initially (to determine the amount of information that the audience already has and how they receive their information), and

2) at the conclusion of the project (when it is looked at to see whether or not the objectives were achieved).

Formal and informal research techniques can be used to evaluate a public relations program. Formal research requires more time and expense, and gives definitive information on which major decisions can be based. This includes telephone surveys, written questionnaires, and door-to-door surveys. Reaching large numbers of people, the population of the survey should be representative of the targeted audience. It is wise to consider formal research for major activities (i.e. planning the strategy for a revenue election or implementing a home page or other publication).

Informal research, which can be done quickly and inexpensively, tends to provide

\textsuperscript{106}Practical PR for Principals, p. 209.
guidance since it tests opinions of a smaller audience. Communication projects (i.e. parent newsletter) should be evaluated at their conclusion with a short survey included as part of the first issue or as a separate item mailed with the newsletter. The effectiveness of a staff bulletin can be discussed by a representative group of staff members. Focus groups can be conducted after projects are completed.\textsuperscript{107}

"Guidelines to Collecting Feedback" suggested in \textit{Practical PR for Principals, A Handbook to Help You Build Support for Your Schools}, includes: a mid-term evaluation, letting people know results of contributions to the district’s efforts, and to not assume that readers will interpret survey questions in the manner they were intended to be.\textsuperscript{108}

The premise for a district-wide communications program is two-way communications. Views of the public can be solicited by a public relations specialist by producing and distributing a survey periodically about the following types of topics:

* school district policies and procedures,
* whether district communications should be increased,
* knowledge of the existence of the public information and services office,
* whether children bring home district newsletters,
* whether newsletters are informative,
* respondents’ main source of information about the school district,
* how the school district compares nationally,
* what district-related topics respondents would be interested in.

\textsuperscript{107}\textit{Practical PR for Principals}, pp. 209-226.

\textsuperscript{108}\textit{Practical PR for Principals}, p. 212.

76
This type of feedback mechanism can assist the public relations department in forming recommendations for improvement of the school district’s communications program.

Random sampling can take place as part of pretesting. By choosing every "nth" name, 10 percent of the people in a particular public are contacted. This involves exposing a small segment of the public to the public relations items for objective, critical reaction. Post testing is the public relations evaluations after the items have been presented to the public. This will determine what the organization can expect from the item.

A good method is to solicit some type of response within the public relations piece (i.e. coupon in newspaper ad, include return envelope reply in direct mail letter requesting some kind of action). An interview (mailed, personal or telephone) after the PR item is presented can also get responses.

Impact testing is the most important kind of testing for the success of the whole public relations program. It shows what effect public relations has had on its audience. This is usually done midway through a public relations program so that information gained can be used to improve the remaining segment of the program. Its value at the end of the program is that information is provided where the organization stands and how successful it is.

There are four basic components that are integral parts of the overall plan in a total

---

109 Kadon, p. 186.

110 Kadon, p. 188.

111 Kadon, p. 190.
public relations program. These are analyzing, planning, communicating and evaluating. A total PR program could not be called outstanding if it were not “comprehensive” and “ongoing.”

**Step 1: Analysis** - This process is a chance to examine the public’s perceptions and to try to determine the reasons for them before they are translated into action. These perceptions can be learned through:

* formal surveys,
* election results (can force severe budget cutbacks and compound problems that do not exist),
* movement toward private education (accompanied by decline in revenues and deepening of financial crises of the past decade).

In order for any public relations effort to have impact, a clear understanding must exist of the public’s perceptions. The most effective way to gain that understanding is through a public opinion survey. A school district must be sensitive throughout the year to both formal and informal indicators of public opinion (in addition to a public opinion survey). These include public hearings where citizens voice their concerns and informal meetings over coffee with key members of the community. Also, keeping one’s eyes and ears open can tell a great deal about the mood in the community.

---

112 Hymes, p. 4.
113 Hymes, p. 8.
Step 2: Plan - This follows logically from information learned in the analysis phase. Ideally, goals for the year should be written. Specific goals should be established - not just “improve image of schools in our community” - and ideas should be noted on how to accomplish them.

Step 3: Communication - The TOTAL Public Relations Program of Dallas Independent School District used the following methods:

* Employee Relations

*Operation Involvement - (This included monthly written feedback to employees on specific questions and monthly rap sessions for employees with the superintendent).

* Community Relations - (Adopt-a-school and volunteer programs, Partners in Learning and a School Action Center were incorporated into this area. Also, Community Network for Public Education involved a city advocacy group for the schools, enlisting the aid of community specialists to assist local schools in desegregation efforts, and a senior citizens action program).

* Information Service - (Created were internal publications, external publications, news media relations and a weekly Spanish radio program. A special project to increase attendance included working with a minority public relations
consultant. A variety of activities ranged from audiovisual and layout, design and editing services).\textsuperscript{114}

\textit{Step 4: Evaluate} - The evaluation phase of one public relations program can be the analysis phase of another. Until there has been an evaluation of how it worked and why, no PR program can be considered complete. Gold Medallion winners used the following techniques of evaluation:

* Distributed evaluation forms to audience members to rate the effectiveness of a workshop or meeting presentation,
* Clipped coverage of the school district and log minutes of television or radio air time; tally up the “good” versus “not-so-good” stories,
* Included a questionnaire in a newsletter or had someone make random phone calls,
* Used a mailing list to ask a few pertinent questions,
* Asked for feedback at parent-teacher conferences,
* Key communicators network.

In a broad sense, everything that the school district does can be considered part of its “total” public relations program. Every action taken or communication made can impact on the attitudes of its community, its staff or its students. A total public relations program is a \textit{positive} force when the communications are planned, based on evaluation

\textsuperscript{114}Hymes, p. 12.
and analysis. Everybody *communicates*, but the impact of that communication depends on how well it has been tailored to the situation of the moment and the audiences it reaches.\textsuperscript{115}

In 1972, an evaluation instrument was designed to represent NSPRA Program Standards. School public relations professors and executive officers of educational organizations could use this instrument to evaluate a public relations unit. The instrument was not designed to provide an indication of *how good* or *how bad* the organization’s public relations is. It was not designed to assess the *product* of the organization’s formal public relations program. It was intended to serve as a basis for evaluating the extent to which an organization had made provisions for ongoing and conducting a formal public relations program as advocated by NSPRA.

Realistic and honest evaluation should identify the strengths and weaknesses of the organization’s public relations unit and provide a factual basis for making decisions in the interest of strengthening the unit. Information from the evaluation instrument may be the basis for an annual report on the public relations unit to the governing body of the organization. Format of the instrument included:

* NSPRA standards appeared in boxes and evaluation item(s) pertaining to each standard appeared immediately following each box;

* Responses were limited to “Yes” or “No”;

* Each item is reviewed independently and in the context of the others (could not simply count the number of “yes” responses);

\textsuperscript{115}Hymes, p. 31.
A summary form was provided. It listed eight major categories of NSPRA Program Standards, how many evaluation items were included in each category, and a space to note how many items were being met or not met;

* A scoring worksheet was included.\(^{116}\)

Evaluation categories of the instrument were:

I. Clear Concept of the Purposes of the Public Relations Program

II. Provision for Public Relations Professional(s) in the Organization

III. Relationship of the Public Relations Professional to the Governing Body, the Administration, and Staff of the Organization

IV. Provision for Adequate Resources for the Public Relations Program

V. Provision for Internal Communication

VI. Provision for External Communication

VII. Provision for Evaluation of Program Performance

Also included were the NSPRA Professional Standards for Programs Scoring Worksheet and the NSPRA Program Standards Evaluation Summary.\(^ {117}\)

Two systematic approaches to evaluation in public relations are communication audits and evaluation of PR objectives. Results from the audit evaluation system can be used to plan new strategies and activities to achieve the overall goals of a school system.


\(^{117}\)Evaluation Instrument . . . , pp. 5-23.
A communication audit is an analysis of the school district’s internal and external communications. It takes a “snapshot” of the system’s communication needs, policies, activities, capabilities and programs. The audit may be the best method to evaluate a long-term program in school PR because it pinpoints strengths and weaknesses, uncovers needs and gives validity for doing more in this area.

Evaluating public relations objectives is a natural follow-up to the audit as new, measurable objectives are usually generated from it. Nager and Allen in *Public Relations: Management by Objectives*, defines the evaluation of PR objectives as a total management system that focuses on results rather than on activities for performance evaluation. This approach to evaluation allows public relations specialists to tie their objectives into school districts’ goals. It allows PR specialists to focus on those areas where they feel measurable results will do the PR program and the school district the most good.  

Dr. Don Bagin of Rowan University lists the following feedback devices that school districts can use:

1. *Citizen Parent and Student Groups of All Kinds* - citizen advisory committee, citizen committees and panels, community council community education and study groups, small home meetings, PTA, parent and citizen publications, school parent clubs, and other meetings as need arises;

2. *Visits To and Use of the School by Parents and the Public* - meetings, teacher conferences, displays, shows, group tour, luncheon, question and answer session, parents of the week and back to school night, open house,

\[118\text{Davis, p. 203.}\]
3. *Questionnaires, Direct Interviews, Informal Opinion Surveys*

4. *Parent Teacher Meetings and Visits* - parent teacher conferences, room meetings, back to school night, phone conversations, teacher visits to homes;

5. *School Board Activities* - informal surveys of associates, friends, neighbors, encouragement of public attendances at meetings; meet at different neighborhood schools to do this, plan an educational presentation or round table discussion at each meeting;

6. *Citizen and Community Resources* - community experts teach Saturday or summer courses, community resource file of parents and others willing to share their specialized knowledge, interest forms for parents of all new pupils, thoughtful use of cooperative/distributive education programs;

7. *Speakers and Listeners Bureaus*

8. *Use of Community Power Structure* - lunch-tour-briefing sessions, monthly breakfasts, visits by PR person to community association presidents, regular meetings with church and recreational representatives;

9. *Miscellaneous Techniques* - press conference, question and answer meeting, administrator, guidance, faculty office hours for parents, hot line, radio call-ins.¹¹⁹

Chapter 3

Study Design

Data Needed

The study revealed how many New Jersey public school districts had public relations programs. Of these districts with public relations programs, it was determined whether they used a centralized, decentralized or coordinated plan. The reasons a school district has a public relations program were identified. The effectiveness of the plan used was determined by each district according to the success rate in reaching the desired publics. The types of public relations methods used by each district were noted, as well as whether a full-time or part-time public relations specialist was employed to deliver the program.

Data Sources

The study was limited to public school systems in the State of New Jersey. Only the 594 operating school districts were surveyed.
**Research Method**

A survey was mailed to the superintendents of the 594 public school districts in New Jersey.

The survey was as brief as possible (while including all necessary data) to encourage a high percentage of returns. A self-addressed envelope was included for convenient survey return.

**Data Collection Method**

To gather information for this study, a written survey was sent to public school superintendents. A thank you letter was sent to the districts who responded to the mailing.

Among the questions asked in the survey were:

1. School district classification (K-6, K-8, K-12, 7-12, 9-12, 9-12 County Vocational-Technical School or Institute, Special Services);
2. Superintendent’s public relations background and years of experience in the district;
3. Existence of a public relations program; if yes -
   a. Was it a centralized, decentralized, or coordinated plan and why;
   b. Title of person in charge of program, capacity employed, and to whom public relations specialist reports; if there was no specialist, who handled public relations responsibilities;
   c. Methods of communication used in public relations program
were indicated;

d. Success of public relations program, and methods of feedback used to evaluate effectiveness;

4. If no public relations program existed, were there intentions to implement a program, and if so, which plan (centralized, decentralized or coordinated) and why.

**Data Analysis Method**

The data gathered was compiled and statistics determined from the major areas of the survey:

* identification of school district classification (i.e. K-12, K-8, K-6, etc.), type of district (rural, suburban, urban) and student population (i.e. 0-500, 501-1000, etc.),

* determination of public relations backgrounds of superintendents,

* establishment of existence of public relations program and use of centralized, decentralized, and coordinated plans,

* identification of title and employment capacity of PR specialists,

* determination of methods used in public relations program,

* determination of satisfaction of PR program,

* identification of feedback techniques, and

* determination of effectiveness of program.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis

General Survey Background

A questionnaire survey was sent to the superintendents of all 594 operating school districts in New Jersey located in 21 counties. A response from 222 school districts established an overall 37 percent return rate of the surveys. School districts were classified in the following categories with the return rate noted as well as the specific number of responses and total districts in each classification (refer to Chart 4.1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Survey Return</th>
<th>Responses/Total # Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>25/67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>86/227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>84/214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - 12 &amp; 9-12*</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>16/49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12 Vo-Tech</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>9/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Services</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2/16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These two classifications were grouped together as one in the New Jersey Department of Education Comparative Spending Guide March 1998 which documented the total number of New Jersey school districts in each division. However, survey results were tabulated in the two divisions of 7-12 and 9-12.

Survey results will be discussed in the following areas:

* Superintendent experience in the district and public relations background,
* Existence of written public relations policy and program,
* Use of centralized, decentralized or coordinated public relations program,
* Explanations why certain public relations program used,
* Title of person in charge of public relations programs,
* Public relations specialist and handling of public relations matters,
* Methods of communication used in public relations programs,
* Determination of successful program, and methods of feedback used,
* Satisfaction with PR programs, along with desired areas of improvement,
* Areas that need to be addressed if dissatisfied with PR program,
* Determination of reasons for no existing public relations program,

* Intentions to implement a public relations program, along with type of program most likely to be used (centralized, decentralized, or coordinated), and why.

Superintendent Experience and Public Relations Background

Superintendent experience in individual districts ranged from seven months to 27 years. The overall average was nearly nine years (experience was specific to district only, and did not include total years of experience as a superintendent).

Of the 222 superintendents, only one indicated a degree in public relations. The majority (183) acquired their public relations knowledge through “on the job experience.” Attending seminars and workshops attributed to the experience of 142 superintendents. Twenty superintendents received public relations experiences outside of the education field, 13 had no experience at all, and 2 indicated taking graduate courses in PR. One superintendent reported being an instructor of a graduate public relations course at Rutgers University.

Public Relations Policy and Programs

When questioned as to the existence of a written public relations policy in their school districts, 130 superintendents (59 percent) said “yes” while 84 (38 percent) responded in the negative. Eight superintendents (three percent) gave no response. Sixty-eight percent (150) of the school districts have a public relations program, with 32 percent
responding that a program does not exist. Two superintendents did not indicate existence of a PR program.

**Designation of Public Relations Program**

Of the 150 school districts that implemented a public relations program, the majority (93 or 62 percent) used the coordinated plan. The centralized plan is used by 43 districts (29 percent), with 14 districts (nine percent) using the decentralized plan. *(See Table 4.1).*

### Table 4.1

*Number of school districts with public relations programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>K-6</th>
<th>K-8</th>
<th>K-12</th>
<th>7-12</th>
<th>9-12</th>
<th>9-12 Vo-Tech</th>
<th>Special Services</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centralized</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralized</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Explanations Why Public Relations Programs Used

The following reasons were given by the superintendents as to why a certain public relations program was used in their districts (symbols denote what district classification response is from):

* K-6       ☐ 7-12
☐ K-8       ☐ 9-12
☒ K-12       ☒ 9-12 Vo-Tech

Centralized -

* district has only one school where the superintendent is also the principal;
* board and office personnel must have direct connection with the public;
* no other personnel (besides superintendent) available to do the job;
* clarity of information and timeliness of material;
☒ because of small size, unable to have a PR director;
☒ size of district, personnel limitations;
☒ small, rural district without the staff or the resources to do more than this type of program;
☒ policy;
☒ to insure the public and staff knows what is going on in the district year-round and not just at budget time;
☒ budget constraints;
☒ superintendent historically responsible for public relations;
☒ cost effective;
part-time public relations person recently hired that oversees all internal and external communications programs - other Board of Ed staff members assist with media calls, etc., when PR person is not in;

to communicate consistently with constituents;
district is large (nine schools) - things need to be centralized then released;
consistency of response;
district has 32,000 students and over 40 schools, not including pre-K sites.

There was no program before the superintendent came. Training is presently taking place for school administrators, directors, etc., in a new communications program;

control of information;
all materials needed for publication are disseminated and collected with coordinator;
considered to be most effective way to get out accurate and timely information concerning school district;
provides consistency with media;
board of education has public relations committee and this is a model used over the years;
market the school district;
district has had one person (reporting to and working with the superintendent) for 19 years. The job has gone from “public information” to school-community relations. It encompasses the Community Education Center
(with a staff supported by the center), publications, public relations -
communicating with the many publics served by the district requires a
"centralized" approach - philosophy/goals/strategies from the top (with
input from staff, parents, PR task force). Within that framework, schools
do their thing: parent meetings, newsletters, bulletin boards, special events;

- build community support;
- superintendent is official spokesperson for the district;
- to maintain close proximity to central office and to provide two-way
  communication with those seeking and requesting district information;
- small district with limited resources (personnel);
- lack of funds; need for centralized message;
- to better monitor output;
- inform through newsletter parents and voters of school events;
- single campus regional high school district;
- maintain continuity - small staff - one building in district;
- have a full-time PR professional.

Decentralized -

- wants community involvement in plan;
- it works - financial constraints;
- cost effective;
- to sell the district;
no opportunity to develop another approach;
schools are totally different - the interests of the parents differ;
district size, concept of neighborhood schools;
support and understanding of school programs;
lack of funds for any type of public relations specialist;
to provide information to the community concerning the positive aspects of public school education; need to do this to maintain public support of school system;
effectiveness;
every school has ownership.

Coordinated -

* to communicate positively about the school’s program and the achievements of its students and staff; to get the annual budget passed at the polls;
* best compromise at present time in terms of staff and cost;
* utilize team approach to all aspects of school administration;
* public relations functions are carried out through coordinated administration/Board of Education efforts with ultimate responsibilities in the hands of the superintendent;
* a board public relations committee works with the superintendent, and a consultant develops the community newsletter;
* due to funding, a half-time person is no longer available to coordinate PR
program - one administrator is "allocated" one half-day per week for all
district public information activities;

☉ some information is directly related to the CSA (chief school administrator)
office (budget, district goals, board news) and some is directly related to
school level business (spelling bee winners, concerts, etc.). It is efficient to
split responsibilities this way absent any additional PR personnel;

☉ district attends to centralized PR while each school does its site-based public
relations;

☉ it works, no additional cost;

☉ most democratic and effective (one-school district);

☉ most likely to cover all areas;

☉ a small district that develops PR more as a district than individual sites;

☉ cost effective and building based;

☉ element of time in getting product out;

☉ share time responsibility;

☉ minimal resources available - would prefer to have one person responsible but
not available at this time;

☉ funds not allocated for a specialist - the superintendent and administrators share
responsibilities;

☉ full-time PR specialist employed in district, however all administrators act as
public relations ambassadors within the community;

☉ communications department is responsible for disseminating information to the
community through various vehicles (i.e. media, newsletters, web page, etc.);

- it's everyone's job;

- believe that EVERY employee has an obligation to contributing to the PR efforts of the school district by information sharing and data interpretation and by their behavior;

- a district administrator coordinates program along with principals of each building; the size of district dictates this method for maximum exposure and coverage;

- it gives a better picture of what goes on in the individual schools and the district as a whole;

- cost;

- to be proactive in the dissemination of information to the public;

- as an urban school district, need to ensure that community and surrounding communities know about all the positive programs in school system;

- do not have a public relations specialist; to keep costs down, each school sends out weekly newsletters and communicates directly with the media;

- volume of information to be disseminated makes it necessary;

- provides a balance of central office control and input at the building level;

- more or less a matter of expediency as well as the fact that most decision-making is site based;

- cost effective - part-time person relieves some work from superintendent's
office; part-time person is a teacher who is familiar with schools and
district;

* individual building principals will be responsible for publicizing their students
and staff. The district can have a coordinated approach to some public
relations areas (i.e. town crier - local paper that goes to ALL residents six
times a year;

* it works for us;

* past effectiveness;

* allows building principals to work with the press when necessary, without

having to get approval, etc., and still allows for a central “point-of-view”

with the press when necessary. Also, a part-time PR person is not always

available and this method allows other school personnel to step in;

* to better inform its publics;

* have no designated PR person/position;

* it maintains a strong communication between the district’s schools and offices

(central administration) if this plan is used. Schools can focus on their

purpose - to educate! Public can be informed of school business and

progress in an organized, uniformed format;

* have a district-wide school community relations council composed of teachers,

board, administration, parents, support staff, students (9-12), community

members and local business/government reps. The coordinator directs this
council;
needs coordinator, yet daily program PR is handled easier by local schools, big
issues, budget, building referendum and quarterly mailings done at central
office;

team approach to issues is effective;

being so diverse and located in a rich county, test scores and press do not
convey the quality with the schools;

allows for greater communication between the school district and the media and
community;

building personnel best source of student accomplishments. Central office is the
best source for budget, operations, general issues affecting the school
system;

public relations is the job of every district employee. We all share in the task of
providing an excellent education for our students and we are all responsible
to the taxpayers - our public. Shared responsibility and cooperation also
makes a lighter load for everyone;

four district newsletters prepared by District Director (CST administration) with
input from each school; all other PR done through school principal - this is
very effective and inexpensive.

involves those people who are closest to particular activities and projects (e.g.
teachers, room mothers, PTA, principals, club advisors, etc.) in publicizing
their work while also providing for district-level reporting and activities
(e.g. newsletters, annual report, realtor materials, press contacts, etc.)
provide information to the public; help coordinated several community/school programs;

it seems to work; it has evolved via public input/request;

accurately relay information;

enables each administrator to engage his/her staff in a proactive manner; central office services (public relations specialist) can be called upon for photographs and special features; each school works with its local PTA, as well as the district public relations personnel (subcontractor);

PR is the responsibility of everyone in the school system - all share this;

individual schools are best qualified to promote their school events and issues - always with the support and approval of the central office, and at budget time the central office works on PR to “educate” the public;

in order to provide thorough coverage all parties need to cooperate; building principals and teachers keep the PR staff informed of events in their school - without their input important events may be missed;

available personnel and resources (limited);

no single person can communicate needs, successes, commentary, etc.; no single voice should be heard; must be multifaceted;

most expedient, seems to work best;

with two schools, each school has a teacher assigned to secure public information from that school and send it to a part-time PR person; the superintendent also sends out his own newspaper releases;
professional approach and limited staff time;

- one building, small school, little staff; everyone pitches in;

- central clearinghouse provides oversight, newspapers want student interest,
  articles generated in school;

- the individual schools can do some excellent PR - e.g. pictures of students, etc.;

- proven to be the most effective method for district;

- district has an extensive marketing program that is primarily designed to
  promote an awareness of vocational programs and services that are
  available in the district and to attract students to these programs. The
  marketing component is coordinated through a district marketing specialist.
  The actual public relations program is somewhat fragmented;

- development and coordination of brochures about school and program
  offerings; off-site visitations promoting district offerings;

- promote district, set budget and specific plan of activities, recruitment of
  students;

- most manageable; school level staff handled by school personnel with
  coordinator; district-level staff by superintendent; controversial stuff by
  superintendent.
**Titles of Person in Charge of Public Relations Program**

The superintendent or chief school administrator (CSA) was designated most often as the person in charge of a public relations program 35 percent of the time (53 out of 150 programs). Of all the district classifications, the superintendent was in charge of a PR program most frequently at the K-6 level (75 percent), followed by the K-8 level (47 percent). The remaining classifications showed the following degree of superintendent control of the public relations area - 9-12 (33 percent), K-12 (28 percent), 7-12 (25 percent), 9-12 Vo-Tech and Special Services (zero percent).

Other titles used by the school districts included:

* Administrative Assistant
* Assistant Superintendent
* Board Committee
* Chairman, Board of Education Committee for PR
* Committee chair
* Communications Coordinator
* Communications Director
* Communications Institute of Rowan
* Communications Specialist
* Community Relations Coordinator
* Consultant (on an as-needed basis)
* Coordinator for Grants, Research, School/Community Relations and Community Education
* Coordinator of Communication Services
* Coordinator of Community Education/Public Information
* Coordinator of Personnel/Public Relations
* Coordinator of School/Community Relations
* Coordinator of Public Relations
* Curriculum Coordinator
* Director of Communication Services
* Director of Communications
* Director of Community Relations
* Director of Community Relations/Affirmative Action
* Director of Media Services
* Director of Personnel and Monitoring
* Director of Personnel and Public Relations (plus part-time PR consultant)
* Director of Public Relations
* Director of Public Relations and Community Information
* Director of Public Relations and School Communications
* Director of Special Projects
* Director of Special Services (part of many diverse duties)
* District Communications Officer
* Pat Morris Associates (subcontractor)
* Public Relations Consultant
* Public Information Coordinator
* Public Information Officer
* Public Information Specialist
* Public Relations Advisor
* Public Relations Coordinator
* Public Relations Director
* Public Relations Officer
* Public Relations Specialist
* Public Relations Specialist and Administrative Assistant to Superintendent (intern)
* Recruiter/Public Relations
* School/Communications Officer
* School/Community Coordinator
* School Information Officer
* School Principals
* Special Projects Coordinator
* Superintendent and Board of Education PR Committee
* Superintendent, Business Administrator and Principal
* Superintendent/Principal
* Superintendent with School Photographer
* Supervisor of Community Activities (PR part of responsibilities. Also have part-time PR person who works 15-20 hrs./month)
* Supervisor of Special Programs (coordinates district-level newsletters)
* Teacher-in-charge of Public Relations
* Teacher/Public Relations person

Several districts did not specify a title, but indicated the following person to be in charge of their PR programs:

* writer and editor of district digest,
* Marketing specialist is responsible for the overall program, individual building principals, however are responsible for weekly informational pieces and press releases,

* Subcontract with neighboring district for PR services,

* No designated person - shared responsibility of recreation director, superintendent and committee members,

* Part-time responsibility of secretary, assistant superintendent and superintendent,

* No one is “in charge” - a consultant to edit and format two newsletters a year is hired,

* Superintendent - also rely on expertise of a consultant,

* Each building has a PR liaison,

* Research Assistant to superintendent (district newsletter and other district efforts),

* Part-time newsletter editor (superintendent in charge),

* PR liaison only for quarterly Brave News.
Public Relations Specialists and Handling of PR Matters

Fifty-nine of 150 school districts (39 percent) with public relations programs hired public relations specialists. The majority of public relations specialists (20) were employed on a part-time 12-month basis (34 percent). Full-time 12-month employment of 17 specialists (29 percent) and part-time 10-month employment (25 percent) of 15 PR professionals followed closely. Seven public relations specialists (12 percent) were hired on a full-time 10-month basis. (Refer to Chart 4.2).

A large majority (89 percent) of public relations specialists reported directly to the superintendent, with lesser numbers reporting the board of education (four percent), principal (one percent) and other (five percent). (‘‘Other’’ included the Director of Public Relations, Assistant Superintendent, and Director of Personnel and Public Relations.)

Final decisions in PR matters were made 77 percent of the time by superintendents. Boards of education influence final decisions 16 percent, the principal five percent, the PR specialist eight percent of the time. Six percent of final decisions were made by ‘‘other’’ - administrative team, cooperation/collaboration with board of education, assistant superintendent and combination of all (superintendent, board of education, principal, public relations specialist).
If a public relations specialist was not employed, the superintendent handled public relations responsibilities (51 percent). Assistant superintendents were in charge of PR seven percent of the time, but principals handled the duties a larger percentage (29 percent). Teachers were given these responsibilities nine percent out of the 150 districts which reported having PR programs. A public relations consultant and/or firm only handled PR responsibilities of a district a combined three percent.

In 15 percent of the situations, public relations duties were handled by: the Home and School Association, business administrator, board of education member/committee, Pride Committee, Supervisor/Director of Special Services, school photographer, Parent and Teacher Association (PTA), administrative assistant to the superintendent, supervisors, research assistants, Assistant Superintendents and an English teacher.

Approximately seven percent of the districts indicated multiple personnel combined to handle public relations duties. In several cases, the duties were spread out (e.g. superintendent, principal and teacher handled public relations responsibilities).

**Methods of Communication Used in Public Relations Programs**

Results from the 150 school districts with programs showed calendars of school events and news releases to media were used in 142 of the systems. Photo releases to the media (136) was the next most-used method, followed closely by parent newsletters (130). Budget and bond issue publications were used in 122 districts, and data booklets about the system appeared in 117 of them. Bulletin boards (112), report cards (109), school newspapers (108), and special events (106) were widely used. *(Refer to table 4.2).*
"Other" methods of communication indicated by respondents included:

- fact sheet
- community newsletter
- parent academy
- key communicator
- parent institutes
- open houses
- choir
- own television studio
- PTA (Parent Teacher Association)

paid advertisements, flyers ("backpacks")
quarterly district-level newsletter
realtor tour of schools
PTO Council
floats in parades
alumni association
several committees
web site

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods of communication used in public relations programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(responses from 150 districts with PR programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(method/number of districts using it)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>calendar of events</th>
<th>142</th>
<th>student handbook</th>
<th>97</th>
<th>marketing items</th>
<th>63</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>news releases</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>supt. annual report</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>employee manual</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>photo releases</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>board briefs</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>marquee boards</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parent newsletter</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>video prog/cable TV</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>in-service training</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>budget &amp; bond pub.</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>Internet home page</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>pub. service ann.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>data booklet</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>supt. bulletin</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>pay envelope stuffer</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bulletin boards</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>school walls</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>tchr recruitment pub</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>report cards</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>school personnel dir.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school newspaper</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>spec. purpose pubs.</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>radio program</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>special events</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>staff bulletin</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>speakers bureau</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

107
Also noted was a monthly minitab newsletter sent home with each student and mailed to all residences and businesses in the community. An invitation to students, staff, community, etc., to lead the flag salute at board of education meetings was mentioned, as well as the giving of certificates of excellence/appreciation. Another method is an articulation newsletter in conjunction with the sending elementary districts. Community liaison and business development programs were a part of one district’s methods of communication.

**Success of Programs and Methods of Feedback**

Eighty percent (120) of the 150 districts with public relations programs indicated that their programs successfully delivered the intended messages to the targeted audiences. Only 12 (eight percent) responded in the negative. There were 18 districts (12 percent) that did not indicate whether or not their PR program was successful.

The most used method of feedback were parent-teacher conferences (84), with monthly meetings (between school administration and parents, superintendent and advisory councils, etc.) used in 75 cases. Clipping coverage of the school district in newspapers was third with 73 notations. *(Refer to Table 4.3).*

“Other” methods of feedback used were: word-of-mouth, budget passage, comments from parents and citizens, district curriculum council, coffee clutch, informal feedback through board trustees, board of education meetings, web page feedback, and a district advisory council.
### Table 4.3

Methods of feedback used to measure public relations activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>parent-teacher conferences</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monthly meetings</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>key communicators</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newspaper clip coverage</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surveys (various types)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus groups</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>questionnaire in newsletter</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interview (various types)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct mail</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluation forms</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log minutes of TV/radio time</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newspaper ads</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Satisfaction with District Public Relations Programs

Twenty-nine school districts reported satisfaction with the existing public relations programs. Many (64) stated that even though they were satisfied with their programs, there is still room for improvement. Comments from the superintendents regarding improvements included the following:

* need more help, would like more interaction with senior citizens

* impact of message is missing; people hear but are not necessarily persuaded

* always room for improvement, but additional funds or people would be needed
* want to do more with home page and use local cable access

* there are always complaints of “I didn’t know”

* relationship with local papers must be improved

* rebuilding trust between PTA leadership and administration is an issue

* need at least a part-time person

* just began with part-time person; are refining and expanding as progress occurs

* need to do a more consistent job with cable TV channel

* need to get more feedback from audiences

* need to communicate that the PR coordinator coordinates all PR

* need more and more, but where are dollars to be found?

* one can never do enough - must “keep at it”

* more public relations could be done by buildings

* need to provide a better articulated program

* always room for improvement - there are people who are not and cannot be reached, but never stop trying and reaching out to people

* need for student and teacher handbooks, directions to staff regarding producing PR materials, engagement of principals, getting better feedback, emphasizing that public relations is everyone’s job

* not enough time or resources; school administrators do not have a “PR mentality” and therefore miss many opportunities

* can always do more, more effectively
* are just beginning, have a way to go

* the time factor prevents the district from maintaining a "steady" flow of public relations material

* like to expand to include additional news releases, more information on school events, more information to public on the good things that happen in district

* improve TV show, more photography

* always room for improvement, especially in the area of understanding educational initiative

* would do more with more resources

* have a good PR program, but would like to see more coverage from larger papers, e.g. The Star Ledger. The local papers provide great coverage for district, but it is difficult to get info in the bigger papers.

* need for personnel assistance

* we could and should do more!

* the public relations program is not as strong as I would like it to be. We have many fine program services and activities, as well as outstanding staff and students. I believe our community could be better informed. A primary weakness is a need for an individual with strong writing and verbal communication skills to coordinate this aspect of the public relations program.
* Vocational education is not viewed as it really exists at our school.

Parents and the community often think we are a school for bad, poor, troubled kids, not so with the needs of America’s competitive workforce.

* does require a more coordinated effort by a specialist in public relations

* continually refining approaches; looking to reach various stakeholder groups

* staff needs more time

* time and personnel not there for complete usage of methods of communication and feedback

* always room for improvement since issues in education are so dynamic

* time constraints, would like to do more

* someone needed to coordinate all areas of program

* we need a more formal program

* more consistent release of news articles

* increased coverage

* communication is always an area that can be improved

* staff time necessary to do well

* don’t feel it is strong enough. We send newsletters home and parents still don’t know the score

* we have several target audiences. We are doing better with some than with others
* we will be assigning specific responsibilities to one administrator

* better video presentations

* efforts are evaluated annually by board public relations committee

* given our size, we cannot employ a PR person

* too disorganized

* more awareness of the needs of each “audience” to get information to them in timely and appropriate format

* needs help

* need more press releases

* the PR function in the district has just begun. Certainly we will conduct future surveys and interviews, as well as develop PR policies. For now, the district is evaluating what programs need to be developed over what timeline.

* more time to develop additional items or enhance those currently used; lack of secretarial time is a problem

* some components of school districts are not well-informed of our programs/progress/priorities

* there are always more and better ways to enhance communications

* in this business you are never really sure whether or not your intended message is being received

* additional positive press

* need more time to develop publications, need someone to coordinate
videotaping for local cable TV station

* more systematic, better organized
* board reports are quarterly - should be monthly
* always room to improve
* we all must do a better job at “selling” our districts
* always need to be looking for new, creative ideas
* because the position is part-time, sometimes tend to be put “on the back burner” such as getting feedback
* we are still not reaching all of the community - some of the schools are ineffective because of the lack of a concerted decentralized program of press and news releases.

Dissatisfaction with Public Relations Programs

There were 25 school districts that were not satisfied with their present public relations programs. The superintendents reported that the following areas needed to be addressed:

* we’re anxiously awaiting the development of our web page
* need more time to develop better communications
* all of it; more time in the day to spend on public relations
* ours is too hit or miss. We are ready, fire, aim - and sometimes find our timing was off, or two issues should have been put together, etc.
* consistency - needs help
* coordinated effort to professionally format and reproduce all publications and correspondence

* more comprehensive approach and more frequent formal communication to staff, parents and community are needed

* person-to-person contacts

* needs to be broader, more daily coverage needed

* more opportunity for two-way communication

* there never seems to be enough communication. I think it can be a full-time job and none of us have enough time or expertise to figure out how to best handle this area. Communication is a good area of our school district’s Strategic Plan. We will continue to work at it !!

* I would like to get district-wide newsletter completed more frequently to distribute to the community I would like better coverage by our local newspaper.

* a plan - coordinated and organized effort

* need for more community input

* more communication with parent and public

* sources of funding for a broader coverage

* a specialist to work with staff and be the primary liaison to the media would be very helpful. We are too large not to have one. We are considering contracting with a firm in the future.

* more organized and targeted; engage the building personnel more; more
aggressive

* more eye-catching material

* we need to target non-parents and sending district municipal authorities

* a person who could just focus on this task - that would help

* consistency of providing information

* public’s understanding of how funding affects the quality of education

* use of technology - more on student/teacher successes

* coordinated schedule of activities; planned calendar of activities;

  timeliness; financial resources

* we need to consolidate material and send out less

* more focus, more, more, more!

* we need a formal coordinator of public relations to improve our plan and

  do the necessary follow up to insure implementation and to measure

  effectiveness

* timeliness - increase public awareness of positives

* broader coverage/more frequency

* the board of education needs to conduct a very formal plan which needs

  to have money remain in the budget for such a plan

* coverage about the district to community-at-large and parents

* could use part-time personnel to handle PR but budget precludes this

  from happening

* all
* consistency of message, marketing plan

* need a constant, sustained effort to be able to appropriately communicate with the various segments of the community. Also, there is a dire need to constantly reach in the native language of the community, therefore every piece of information needs translation and appropriately communicated to the different ethnic groups.

* additional time to manage it

* further parent contacts and involvement

* press coverage in state and local newspapers

* a true plan rather than activities

**Reasons Why Public Relations Programs Do Not Exist**

There were 70 school districts that indicated no existence of a public relations program. The major reason is that the districts are unable to fund a public relations program, as indicated by 33 of them. Twelve superintendents felt a public relations program is not necessary. Eight chief administrators had no qualified individuals in the district to administer a PR program.

Other various reasons given by 18 superintendents included:

* has not been a priority need area

* the Director of Human Resources takes care of whatever PR is required

* board of education would not fund or support a program

* board members do not realize the need - they do not feel public funds
should be used in that manner

* has never been addressed as a formalized program

* specific issues are dealt with as they occur - there is no "ongoing" public relations program

* there is no "program," but there is an informal plan in place

* we just do it as we go

* we will be writing one as I revise all board of education policies

* chief school administrator works with the public

* we are a small personal approach district - we provide a private school education in a public school setting

* there is no formal program, however we implement activities when needed i.e. budget, building projects, etc.

* district is small (105 students), CSA and board member (chairperson of PR committee) handles public relations

* only one school of 145 students and 15 staff

* we do this informally - we do not have an ongoing formal program

* PR handled via a variety of staff (administrators, teachers, support staff)

* limited staff and resources prevent us from developing a full-fledged "program"; not high on priority but would like it to be

* time constraints are the main difficulty in maintaining a formal program.
Potential Implementation of Public Relations Programs

Of the 70 school districts without a public relations program in place, 44 have no immediate intentions to implement a public relations program. Twelve plan to do so within one-to-two years. Six of these districts indicated they would choose a coordinated public relations plan, three would go with the centralized, and one would select a decentralized plan. Fourteen districts gave no indication of future public relations plans.

The following reasons were identified for selection of specific PR plans:

Centralized

* it is a small district and there is not a staff member available to do the job of public relations
* coordination of efforts is easier through CSA’s office
* program will be conducted and implemented from central office by superintendent

Decentralized

* each principal will most likely end up doing his own publicity

Coordinated

* so left hand knows what the right hand is doing
* it worked in the past
* the load must be properly distributed for the objectives to be met
* share the effort - have each key person feel part of the program
* spread the workload - get more people involved
* no full time staff dedicated to this effort.
Additional Comments from Superintendents

Several superintendents sent their best wishes and wished this writer good luck with this project. Here are some of their comments.

“... We do our own type of PR - that is newsletters by me - notes home - letters to newspapers - pictures in newspapers, etc. But I did not count this as “a PR PROGRAM . . .”

“... Funding and personnel are the key issues regarding having no PR program or actually very limited. We have one building in the district and one administrator - me. I write articles about programs and issues occasionally, honor roll every marking period, and sometimes PTO will write articles about a particular program or event. The last big event we had I arranged for it to be taped by a local TV channel, it was ‘aired’ and parents were able to purchase a copy of the tape. Also, sometimes teachers write articles about their program or the parent volunteer coordinating the program. Recently our Cyber Surfari program in the media center got good coverage (pictures, interviews or students and the teacher) . . .”

“... Small districts really do not have a need for a formal PR program. We communicate directly with the public through the high school newsletter . . .”

“... Since we are a small district (370 students), we are able to communicate with parents and public through newsletters, press releases, announcements, school activities and the like. The finest public relations is an excellent school . . .”

“... An area of need for all schools . . .”
“... Do you have a ‘clue’ as to the diversity of school districts in NJ in relation to finance, administrative and support staff, enrollment, parental involvement, SES (district factor groups) etc.? ...”

“... Several of your survey questions are appropriate - but several are mandated and/or monitored by the state and/or must be available thru BOE policy manuals, so I believe you’ll receive many of the same responses.

“When you mention PR Program, many schools do a credible job with school and community relations, with no written program, but many have policies, procedures, and practices that do the same job.

“My opinion → “Public Relations” seem to smack of business, corporations, and competitive marketing. Above, you can find what I prefer to use instead of PR ...”

“... Public relations is unique for each district and importance varies with given issues. Certainly at budget times, communication with the public is essential. Mostly we focus on keeping our parents informed ...”

“... We do OK, but the anti-school news is hard to combat (101.5, Trentonian, political leaders taking potshots) ...”

“... We have constant effort at sharing news with community, newspapers, etc. We don’t call it a PR program because, quite frankly, in a small district I don’t think the populace wants to be barraged with data, especially statistics, which can be manipulated in ways with which you are surely familiar! ...”

”... is a single school district with 140 students - no real need for special public relations program. We rely on personal contacts with community/parents ...”
"... This area is increasing as a district concern. However most public relations is damage control - rather than up front planning - given that budgets and other issues - it is difficult to provide resources for this need . . ."

"... Any well-trained PR person knows not to jump into developing programs without proper research. Because this district’s PR function is so new, the appropriate research must be done to identify clear objectives, goals and methodologies. With school districts growing as quickly as they are today, the need for on-staff PR people is growing. However, it is also important to remember that public school budgets are tight - most money is directed toward educating students. PR is often considered “frivolous” or not vital to the administration of a school . . ."

"... Finding competent, experienced and knowledgeable people in this field of school experiences is difficult . . ."

"... You can please some of the people all of the time, all of the people some of the time BUT you can’t please ALL the people ALL of the time. We keep trying!!! . . ."

"... I believe a public relations program is an important, efficient method of disseminating information concerning the positive aspects of a school system . . .”

"... Public relations should be part of the job description of every school administrator. School districts that are small cannot justify the cost of a PR salary . . .”

"... Public relations are critical to any school. It is beneficial to all involved that the public taxpayers be kept informed of all issues in if done in the local papers . . .”

"... Public relations programs are vital to the success and perception of any school district . . ."
“... It becomes increasingly difficult to place items in the countywide newspaper.
If their special assignment writers can be involved through a personal phone call, they
often will write an article featuring a program or group of students - excellent publicity! .”

“... Public relations ought to be planned on a county/regional level as well as by
district. There is a greater need to reach the general public . . .”

“... We will use PR when we do our building plan. However, in that case, the
money will be incorporated in the architect fees - not the local budget. Very conservative
Board . . .”

“... Many do not see the value of PR, but usually they are the “control” types
who want things done their way - with no interference. That’s not realistic in today’s
society. There are ALWAYS people ready to criticize, so districts need an advocate to
make sure the “good stuff” gets recognition too . . .”

”... Our PR program’s success was enhanced by having our advisors write the
articles, take the pictures and submit to the newspaper rather than wait for the newspaper
to come on site for a picture or article . . .”

”... Best wishes - this must be a Don Bagin project . . .”
Chapter 5

Summary and Interpretation

Research Background Information

The purpose of this study was to present a current description of public relations programs in public school systems in New Jersey. It established the types of public relations programs that exist and also determined the effectiveness of public relations methods through use of centralized, decentralized, and coordinated plans.

The names and addresses of the superintendents and their respective school district addresses were taken from the *School Directory 1996-1997*. A helpful source in establishing figures (the number of total school districts in the state and the numbers of districts in the survey classifications) was the electronic reference service provided by the New Jersey State Library on the Internet. (A librarian named Robert Lupp gave several sources as well as phone numbers in the search for information in this area.)

Sources and references used in the research of this study included Rowan University Library, Cape May County Library, New Jersey State Library, and the Internet.

---

Also used were texts from courses in the Rowan University graduate program of public relations.

The survey questioned superintendents about their training in public relations, policy, programs, handling of PR duties and responsibilities, methods of communication used, success of programs, and methods of feedback used for evaluation of effectiveness. If no public relations program existed, reasons why were given as well as intentions for implementation of future programs.

A survey tally form was created, and the results tabulated and compiled according to school district classification (K-6, K-8, K-12, etc.), type of district (rural, suburban, urban) and student population (0-500, 501-1000, 1001-1500, 1501-2000, 2000 plus).

**Evaluation and Interpretation**

Due to the large number of public school districts in New Jersey, a mail survey was the selected method of research. It was assumed that less than 50 percent of the questionnaires would be returned. The responses from 222 school districts constituted a 37 percent return rate. According to Anthony Fulginiti in *Power Packed PR: Ideas That Work*, among the three surveying techniques (mail, face-to-face, and telephone), mail surveys are the least effective due to a low, slow response rate. It was noted that a 20 percent or less return should be expected with this technique.\(^{122}\)

Response rate was rapid in the first week after the surveys were mailed, with 119

(54 percent) received. The rate dropped to 65 (29 percent) the second week, and 18
(eight percent) the third week. Over the course of the next several weeks, responses
slowly trickled in to eventually total 222 returns.

It was also assumed that there were more school districts without a functional
public relations program compared to those with a well-balanced coordinated public
relations plan. This assumption was proven incorrect, for there were 72 districts
indicating that no public relations plans were used, compared to 150 with programs.

When the returns were broken down into the different school district classifications, the
range went from the highest at 43 percent (9-12 Vo-Tech) to the lowest at 13 percent
(Special Services). *(Refer to statistics in Chapter 4, Data Analysis, p. 86).*

It was hypothesized that a coordinated plan of public relations will provide the best
results for a school district. Of the 150 school districts with public relations programs,
120 systems (81 percent) indicated that their program successfully delivered the intended
messages to the targeted audiences. There were 89 districts (out of 150) using
coordinated plans, and 80 (90 percent) of these districts reported successful delivery of
their messages.

In 1968, a study indicated the inadequacy of communications training for chief
school administrators *(refer to Chapter 2, Public Relations Training, p. 24).* Thirty years
later, this survey indicates that this type of training may still not be prevalent for
superintendents judging by the number of responses in the “on the job experience” area.
(This survey did not specifically ask about public relations training in college level studies
for chief school administrator preparation).
Another study (Chapter 2, Public Relations Training, p. 252) showed seven institutions preparing school public relations personnel. In 1992, over 200 colleges and 100 graduate schools offered degree programs or special curricula in public relations. However, only three superintendents (one had a degree in public relations, two had taken graduate courses in this field) studied PR as part of their training.

A prediction by Carroll B. Hanson (director of Publications and Information Department of the Seattle, Washington Public Schools) was that principals would find community relations as a whole new field of interest. Hanson’s prediction was that public relations would increasingly become part of the responsibilities of school principals (Chapter 2, Public Relations Training, p. 25). Of the 150 school districts with public relations programs, 93 (62 percent) had coordinated plans, and 14 (nine percent) had decentralized plans. These numbers substantiate that this prediction may have come to pass since building principals play roles in both types of public relations programs.

The role of the superintendent in a school district’s public relations program include these areas of responsibility: providing leadership in public relations, maintaining a working partnership between the school system and the community, gearing school policy to good public relations principles, organizing public relations assignments and evaluation.

The survey showed that in 35 percent of the situations, the superintendent was the sole individual in charge of a public relations program. The K-6 level had the most programs where the superintendent was solely in charge (75 percent of the indicated programs in this district classification). When public relations specialists were employed, a large majority (89 percent) reported directly to the superintendent. In 77 percent of the
cases, final decisions were made by the superintendent. A superintendent from a large
district (32,000 students with over 40 schools) noted that there was no program before he
arrived, with training presently taking place for personnel in a new communications
program.

Not all school districts have a public relations policy, with survey results showing
that 59 percent (130 of 222) have a policy, while (84) 38 percent of the districts do not.
Though 150 of the districts (68 percent) have a PR program, not all of them have a policy.
(This survey did not study public relations policy any further than establishing the number
of districts with and without them).

A public relations study of public schools in Virginia (1975) reported a similar
return, with a 58 percent response rate that there were established policies or guidelines in
their systems.123 In comparison, a research project by the Michigan School Public
Relations Association in 1988 showed that 58 percent of the state’s school districts did
not have a written board policy concerning public relations.124

Centralized public relations plans mainly focus on the superintendent and his/her
direct administrative line. Of the districts indicating the presence of PR programs, 29
percent (43 of 150) used this type of plan. At the K-6 level, five out of eight systems
(with 0-500 student population) had centralized plans, with the superintendent solely in
charge of these program in four of these programs.

123Pinelli, p. vi.

124Feaster, Kathy, “MSPRA PR Needs Assessment,” Hot Topics in School Public
Explanations for having a centralized plan point towards the superintendent being the mainstay of the program. These reasons included: a one-school district where the superintendent was also the principal; limitations due to the school/district size; the superintendent is historically responsible for public relations; to communicate consistently with constituents; the district is large (nine schools) - things need to be centralized then released; the superintendent is the official spokesperson for the district; a better way to monitor output; and to maintain continuity.

The decentralized public relations program, with its emphasis centered in the building principal, was least used (14 of 150). Most districts using this program had student populations between 501-1000. The K-8 and 9-12 Vocational-Technical districts reported the highest usage of this type of program (13 percent each).

Survey results supporting the use of the decentralized program include these comments: community involvement wanted; schools are totally different - parent interests differ; the concept of neighborhood schools; and every school has ownership.

In the coordinated PR program, central administration and building principals work together as an articulated unit, possibly with the assistance of a public relations specialist. In Chapter 2 of this study (p. 37), the statement is made, “PR is everybody’s job.” John Wherry (NSPRA Executive Director) notes that a New Jersey study showed school districts were already spending a good amount of time in public relations-related activities. Wherry states that a coordinated PR program makes the money spent on public relations more effective. This theory is reinforced by the results of this study.

Survey results showed that 93 of 150 districts (62 percent) used coordinated PR
programs. The Virginia study showed similar results - 71 percent of the study’s respondents identified the coordinated plan as most used.

Comments supporting coordinated programs were: most likely to cover all areas; share time responsibility; it’s everyone’s job; believe that every employee has an obligation to contributing to the PR efforts of the school district by info sharing, data interpretation and by their behavior; volume of info to be disseminated makes it necessary, team approach to issues is effective; and no single voice can communicate the needs, successes, etc. - no single voice should be heard, it must be multifaceted.

In 1967, it was noted that the largest United States school districts were more likely to have full-time directors than not, with 90 percent of the full-time directors reported directly to the superintendent. Results from this survey showed that 89 percent of the PR specialists reported to the superintendent. The county vocational-technical school districts had full-time PR specialists on staff in seven of the eight schools that responded to the survey. In the larger school systems (2000-plus student population), 17 of 45 hired full-time specialists, while 22 of 45 hired part-time specialists (either 10 or 12 months).

Total employment figures (combined 10- and 12-month positions) from this survey’s results show that New Jersey districts had 59 percent (35 of 59) of their public relations specialists hired part-time, and 41 percent (24 of 59) have full-time positions. In comparison, the Michigan research project showed very few districts having a full-time person whose duties were devoted to PR activities. Most of its districts had a part-time

\[^{125}\text{Pinelli, p. vi.}\]
person 41 percent of the time. The Virginia study reported 12 full-time (13 percent) and 20 (22 percent) part-time PR directors employed in the state’s school districts (93 of 139 responded).

Most frequently used titles for public relations specialists included: Community Relations Coordinator/Director/Officer, Coordinator/Director of PR, and Public Information Officer/Specialist.

In trying to keep its community informed, calendars of events, and news releases were the most dominant form of communications. Photo releases, parent newsletters, and budget and bond publications followed. Every school district that had a public relations program used several methods of communication to get information out to its publics.

There was a high success rate reported by the school districts. The most used methods of feedback were parent-teacher conferences, monthly meetings (between parents, administration, superintendent, advisory councils, etc.), key communicators, and clipping coverage in newspapers.

There is a great desire among the districts with public relations programs to improve their programs further. The most common areas for improvement include the necessity of more funds, personnel to perform the tasks, time, the need to reach more audiences, more consistency and continuity of programs, and better media relations. In general, the districts would and could do more if given the proper resources.

Lack of funding was the main reason that many school districts (70) could not

\[126^{Feaster, p. 5.}\]

\[127^{Pinelli, p. v.}\]
have public relations programs. Some of the reasons are the same as those of the districts with programs that were satisfied with their PR programs but looked for improvement - limited staff, time and resources. There also are indications that lack of board of education and/or administrative support (from the superintendent) were reasons for non-existent public relations programs.

Conclusions

A second letter with another survey could have increased the return rate of the surveys. However, due to financial and time constraints, the second mailing did not occur. The writer felt that the 222 replies were a sufficient cross-section of the school districts in the various classifications to compile results for this study. The writer considered the 37 percent return rate successful, since it is above the average 20 percent rate normally encountered with this type of research technique (refer to p. 123).

The assumption that there would be more school districts without functional public relations plans was proven incorrect with 72 of 222 districts indicating no plans. The hypothesis that the coordinated plan of public relations would provide the best results was successfully proven, with 81 percent of the districts using this type of plan, and 90 percent of them reporting success.

The data regarding the superintendent’s role in public relations programs reinforces the the writer’s belief that the chief school administrator is a central and influential figure in a school public relations program. This was the reason for the surveys being directed to the chief school administrator. No matter what type of PR program is
being used - centralized, decentralized, or coordinated - the superintendent and his/her attitude towards public relations plays an important role in the direction that a school district takes in this field.

The comparison between the public relations training available for superintendents in the past and present leads this writer to believe that there may not be a major emphasis on this area. This is supported by the number of superintendents who responded as acquiring their PR experience “on-the-job” and/or from workshops in this area.

Centralized public relations plans were more prevalent in those districts with smaller student populations. Main reasons are the size of the district, limitations, funding, and control by the superintendent. Decentralized PR plans were most likely used in districts with several schools. The coordinated plans were used by districts of all types but were most prevalent in the larger school systems. Limitations of funding, time, and lack of qualified personnel to perform public relations tasks were the most common causes affecting the type, quality and existence of PR programs.

In New Jersey, the number of public relations specialists employed part-time was 59 percent, with 41 percent hired full-time. The assumption that there would be more part-time than full-time PR specialists was proven correct. Comments from the superintendents indicated that more specialists would be employed if school budgets allowed it and/or there are qualified individuals for the job.

The number of titles afforded to the individuals in charge of public relations programs was quite overwhelming. These titles give school districts options for specifying designations of personnel and/or structuring of their public relations programs.
This writer believed that news releases would be the most used form of communication. It’s one of the least expensive methods; however, it does require time and personnel able to handle this task. Also to be considered is not so much that the task is performed but the quality of the performance in attempting to get news in the newspapers and/or solicit reporters for coverage.

As expected by this writer, the most common factors affecting a public relations program were funding, time, and personnel. These facets affected existing programs that needed improvement and were the excluding factor of those districts that did not have PR programs.

The most successful methods of feedback - parent-teacher conferences, monthly meetings, key communicators - had a common thread. These are all methods which involve “face-to-face” personal contact. “Word-of-mouth” has long been proven to be a most effective method of communication and feedback technique. This emphasizes the belief (which several superintendents related in this study) that EVERYONE in the school community is involved and has a stake in good public relations. The school district faculty, staff, administration, and students are the best ambassadors in a successful public relations program.

Contribution to the Field

This study established the types of programs that exist in New Jersey public schools. It indicated the successful methods of communication used by districts with programs and methods of feedback used to measure this success.
When performing the research, there were many sources in school public relations. Many contained general information about the field, and were written (on the average) at least 10 years ago. It was difficult to find information specific to this study for the State of New Jersey. It is this writer's opinion that there is not much material existing in this state regarding the topics covered by this study.

There were several unpublished sources that touched the topics of school public relations that covered certain aspects of this study.

A Master's Thesis written by Thomas Pinelli (Old Dominion University, 1975) held a similar concept, but focused on the administration and organization of PR programs in Virginia Public Schools. Another New Jersey study by Bruce Myers (Glassboro State College, 1973) studied PR programs of elementary and secondary school districts only in Essex County. John Thomas Greed, Jr., wrote a dissertation regarding the attitudes of New Jersey School board presidents toward public relations policies and practices for Fordham University in 1967.

The writer feels that this study contributes to the field by establishing what exists in New Jersey public schools. Though New Jersey is a small state, it has 594 operating school districts reflective of the diversity of communities and populations that exist within its borders.

**Practical Influence on the Field**

As a graduate student at Rowan University, this writer has observed that there are more students in the corporate public relations track than in the educational area. Perhaps
this is so because more career opportunities exist in the corporate venue as well as the lure of more lucrative compensation. However, skills learned in each specialty can cross over and be adapted to the other emphasis.

It is not lack of desire that influences a school district’s wanting and/or improving a public relations program, but more likely a lack of funding or personnel - or a combination of both. If school districts were able to get adequate funding and resources, this writer believes that there would be a great proliferation of school public relations specialists. This is an era when many districts have to work extra hard in communicating to their communities about the positives of their school district. School budgets are voted down annually, and taxpayers need to be kept informed of where their tax dollars are going regarding the educations of the community’s children.

School public relations specialists are needed - there will always be children that need to be educated, therefore schools will always exist. If school districts improve in the area of funding and/or administrative support, it could be a “wide open field” for PR specialists in this centuries-old educational arena.

Further Research

There are several areas of this study in school public relations which could be further researched:

* training and preparation for chief school administrators in the area of PR,

* public relations policies in school districts,

* specific implementation of methods of communication,
* thorough evaluation of feedback methods to measure success of public relations programs,

* in-depth research into correlation between school district classification, type and student population and chosen public relations program and/or methods of communication,

* identify and research methods of internal and external communications that school districts should use in a successful PR program.

* investigate correlation between county vocational-technical schools and influencing factors that affect their abilities to employ full-time PR specialists (i.e. they are not subject to the annual tax levy vote that affects other public school districts). (Survey results that seven of the nine vocational-technical schools that responded employed full-time PR specialists.)

**Final Note**

This quote appeared in a couple of sources during the research of this study, and the writer believes that if all public relations specialists can remember it, their focus in the field can remain clear:

"If the people around you are spiteful and callous and will not hear you, fall down before them and ask their forgiveness. For in truth, you have caused them to be as they are."

Fedor Dostoevski, Russian writer

---

\(^{128}\)Davis, p. 16
Bibliography

Books


**Periodical Literature**


Yantis, John. “Get Staff Involved in Community Relations,” Education Digest, January 1996, v. 61 n 5.


Unpublished Sources


Murray, Michael J. “An Investigation of Community Attitudes Toward the School After Involving the Community in Determining and Ranking Educational Goals,” (Master’s Thesis, Glassboro State College, 1974).


### Appendix A

**School District Responses by County and Classification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>K-6</th>
<th>K-8</th>
<th>K-12</th>
<th>7-12</th>
<th>9-12</th>
<th>9-12 Vo-Tech</th>
<th>Special Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape May</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlesex</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passaic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sussex</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>86</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix B**  

**Percentage of Overall School District Responses by County**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>Possible Total</th>
<th>Percentage of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape May</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlesex</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passaic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sussex</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
March 9, 1998

Dear Superintendent,

I am a Master’s degree candidate in the school public relations program at Rowan University. I am conducting a survey of the superintendents of New Jersey public schools to gather information about public relations programs.

Enclosed please find a survey entitled “Public Relations Programs in New Jersey Public School Districts”. The purpose of the survey is to determine effectiveness of methods used in a school district’s public relations program.

It would be most appreciated if you would kindly complete the survey and return it in the enclosed self-addressed envelope as soon as possible before March 31, 1998. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions at the above address or telephone number, or by e-mail at ldharshaw@hotmail.com.

The time that you are taking from your busy schedule to complete the survey is deeply appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Betty Harshaw

Enclosure
Appendix D

Public Relations Programs in New Jersey Public School Districts

Name of Superintendent ____________________________________________
School District _____________________________________________ County ___________
School Address _____________________________________________
Phone No. ___________________________ FAX No. _______________________

The purpose of this survey is to determine effectiveness of methods used in a public school district's public relations program. Please check (✓) and/or fill in the appropriate answers.

1. School District Classification (check one):
   - [ ] K-6
   - [ ] 9-12
   - [ ] K-8
   - [ ] 9-12 County Vocational-Technical School or Institute
   - [ ] K-12
   - [ ] Other (please specify) ___________________________

A. Type of district:  [ ] Rural  [ ] Suburban  [ ] Urban

B. Number of total pupils in district’s school(s):
   - [ ] 0-500
   - [ ] 501-1,000
   - [ ] 1,001-1,500
   - [ ] 1,501-2,000
   - [ ] 2,000 plus

2. How many years have you served as superintendent of your district? ______

3. Please indicate your public relations background.
   - [ ] Degree in public relations
   - [ ] Public relations experience outside of education
   - [ ] “On-the-job” experience in district
   - [ ] No experience at all
   - [ ] Attended seminars and workshops in public relations

4. Is there a written public relations policy in your school district?  [ ] Yes  [ ] No

5. Does your school district have a public relations program?
   - [ ] Yes (Please complete questions #5 A-L)  [ ] No (Please continue survey from question #6)

   A. If yes, which of the following public relations plans best describes your school’s public relations program? (Please check the appropriate box).
      - [ ] Centralized plan - responsibilities for delivering the public relations programs rests entirely in the school district’s chief administrative office with his/her immediate line and staff associates
      - [ ] Decentralized plan - responsibilities for the program rest almost entirely with each building principal and in which the individual school is regarded as the natural unit for community relations
      - [ ] Coordinated plan - community relations responsibilities are shared by building personnel and central office administration. A part-time or full-time public relations specialist may assist in the implementation of this plan.

OVER

145
B. Please explain why your district uses the public relations program indicated in question #5A.

C. What is the title of the person in charge of your public relations program? (Please indicate).

D. If your district employs a public relations specialist, in what capacity is this person employed?

- full-time (10 months)
- full-time (12 months)
- part-time (10 months)
- part-time (12 months)

E. To whom does the public relations specialist report directly?

- Superintendent
- Principal
- Board of Education
- Other (please describe)

F. Who makes the final decisions in public relations matters?

- Superintendent
- Public relations specialist
- Board of Education
- Principal
- Other (please specify)

G. If your school district does not employ a public relations specialist, who handles public relations responsibilities?

- Superintendent
- Public Relations Consultant
- Assistant Superintendent
- Public Relations Firm
- Principal(s)
- Other (please describe)

H. Please indicate which method(s) of communication are used in your PR program:

- superintendent's annual report
- teacher recruitment brochure
- employee manual
- "board briefs" (summary of meetings)
- pay envelope stuffer
- student handbook
- calendar of school events
- superintendent's monthly or weekly bulletin
- budget and bond issue publication
- data booklet about school system
- directory of school personnel
- special purpose publications
- staff bulletin
- parent newsletter
- speakers bureau
- in-service training in school and community relations for administration, faculty and staff
- bulletin boards
- report cards
- school newspaper
- Internet home page
- marquee boards
- school walls ("wall of fame")
- news releases to media
- photo releases to media
- special events
- video programming/cable TV
- radio program
- public service announcements
- "marketing" items (bumper stickers, magnets, pencils, etc.)
- Other (please describe)

PLEASE GO TO NEXT PAGE
I. Does your public relations program successfully deliver the intended messages to targeted audiences?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No

J. What method(s) of feedback are used to determine whether public relations methods used are achieving the desired goals? (Please check all that are applicable.)

☐ parent-teacher conferences  ☐ questionnaire in newsletter
☐ interview (mailed, personal or telephone)  ☐ newspaper ads
☐ direct mail  ☐ evaluation forms
☐ clip coverage of school district in newspapers  ☐ focus groups
☐ log minutes of TV or radio air time  ☐ key communicators
☐ survey (telephone, written questionnaire, door-to-door)  ☐ monthly meetings (between school administration and parents, superintendent and advisory councils, etc.)
☐ Other (please explain)  

K. Are you satisfied with your district's public relations program?  
☐ Yes  ☐ No
☐ Yes, but there is room for improvement (please explain).  

L. If you are not satisfied with your public relations program, what areas need to be addressed?

6. If your district does not have a public relations program, what reason(s) listed below best describes your situation.

☐ A public relations program is not necessary.
☐ The district is unable to fund a public relations program.
☐ There are no qualified individuals in the district to administer a public relations program.
☐ Other (please explain)  

A. Are there intentions to implement a public relations program in your district?  
☐ Yes, in ____ years (please indicate how soon)  ☐ No

B. If yes, which public relations plan will be most likely used? (Please refer to #5A for full descriptions of plans).

☐ Centralized plan  ☐ Decentralized plan  ☐ Coordinated plan

C. Please explain why your district would select the indicated public relations plan indicated in #6B.  

OVER

147
7. Please include any additional comments you feel may be helpful to this survey.

Completed surveys should be returned to:

Betty Harshaw
413 W. Andrews Avenue
Wildwood, NJ 08260
Appendix E

Survey Tally

1. School District Classification: ____________________________
   A. Type of District: ____________________________
   B. Number of total pupils in district: __________

2. Years superintendent served in district: ____________________________
   Average: ______

3. Public relations background of superintendents:
   ______ Degree in public relations
   ______ “on the job experience”
   ______ attended seminars and workshops
   ______ PR experience outside of education
   ______ no experience at all

4. Written public relations policy: Yes ________________ No ________________

5. Existence of public relations program: Yes ________________ No ________________
   A. PR plan used by district
      Centralized plan ________________
      Decentralized plan ________________
      Coordinated plan ________________
   B. Explanations why district used PR program indicated in #5A: (See Attachment A)
   C. Title of person in charge of PR program: (See Attachment B)
   D. If employed, capacity of PR specialist:
      full-time (10 months) ________________
      full-time (12 months) ________________
      part-time (10 months) ________________
      part-time (12 months) ________________
   E. PR specialist reports directly to:
      superintendent ____________________________
      board of ed ____________________________
      principal ____________________________
      other ____________________________
      Specify: ____________________________

149
F. Final decisions made in PR matters:

Superintendent
Board of Ed
Principal
Public relations specialist
Other

Specify:

G. If no PR specialist employed, PR responsibilities handled by:

Superintendent PR Consultant
Asst. Superintendent PR Firm
Principal(s) Other
Teacher Describe

H. Method(s) of communication are used in PR program:

superintendent’s annual report bulletin boards
teacher recruitment brochure report cards
employee manual school newspaper
“board briefs” Internet home page
pay envelope stuffer marquee boards
student handbook school walls
calendar of school events news releases to media
super’s mtly or wkly bulletin photo releases to media
budget and bond issue publication special events
data booklet about school system video programming/cable TV
directory of school personnel radio program
special purpose publications public service announcements
staff bulletin “marketing” items
parent newsletter Other
speakers bureau Describe
In-service training

I. Does your public relations program successfully deliver the intended messages to targeted audiences? Yes No

J. Method(s) of feedback used:

parent-teacher conferences questionnaire in newsletter
interview newspaper ads
direct mail evaluation forms
newspaper clip coverage focus groups
log minutes of TV or radio air time key communicators
survey
monthly meetings
Other
Explain

150
K. Satisfaction with district's public relations program:
   Yes ____________________ No ____________________
   Yes, but there is room for improvement ____________________
   Explanation: (See Attachment C)

L. If not satisfied with PR program, areas needed to be addressed: (See Attachment D)

6. Reason(s) for no PR program:
   A public relations program is not necessary. ____________________
   The district is unable to fund a public relations program. ____________________
   No qualified individuals in the district to administer PR program. ____________________
   Other ____________________
   Explain: (See Attachment E)

A. Intentions to implement a public relations program:
   Yes ____________________ in ____________________ years
   No ____________________

B. If yes, public relations plan most likely to be used:
   Centralized plan ____________________
   Decentralized plan ____________________
   Coordinated plan ____________________

C. Explanation why district would select the indicated public relations plan: (See Attachment F)

7. Additional comments: (See Attachment G)

Total number of school districts that responded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Atlantic</th>
<th>Middlesex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>Monmouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>Morris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>Ocean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape May</td>
<td>Passaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland</td>
<td>Salem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essex</td>
<td>Somerset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>Sussex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson</td>
<td>Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>Warren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

151
Attachment A

#5B. Explanations why district used PR program indicated in #5A.

Centralized Plan -

Decentralized Plan -

Coordinated Plan
Attachment B

#5C. Title of person in charge of PR program
#SK. Satisfaction with district’s public relations program:
Yes, but there is room for improvement explanation
Attachment D

#5L. Areas needed to be addressed if not satisfied with PR program.
Attachment E

#6. Reason(s) for no PR Program:
Other explanation
Attachment F

#6C. Explanation why district would select PR plan:

Centralized -

Decentralized -

Coordinated -
Attachment G

#7. Additional Comments
Appendix F

Biographical Data

Name: Liberty Delgado Harshaw

Date and Place of Birth: July 4, 1958
Mlang, Mindanao, Philippines

High School Education: Pemberton Township High School, 1976
Pemberton, New Jersey

College Education: Trenton State College
Trenton, New Jersey
B.S. in Health and Physical Education, 1980