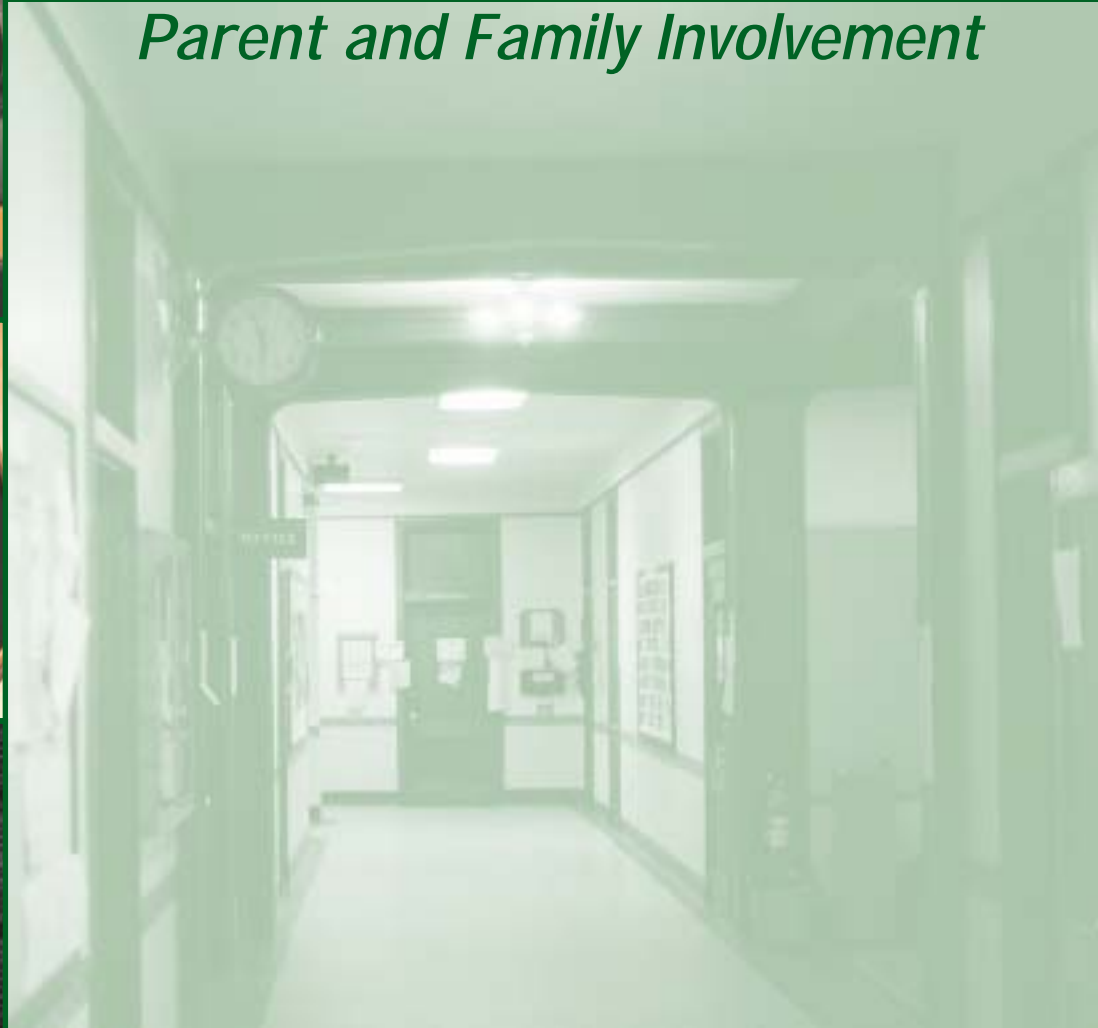


How Strong Communication Contributes to Student and School Success:

Parent and Family Involvement



From the
National School Public Relations Association

NSRA



National School Public Relations Association

15948 Derwood Road
Rockville, Maryland 20855
301-519-0496
www.NSPRA.org

Executive Director Richard D. Bagin, APR

© 2006 National School Public Relations Association.

The text in this document may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as NSPRA copyright and the title of the document specified.

Any inquiries relating to the copyright should be directed to the address above.

How Strong Communication Contributes to Student and School Success: *Parent and Family Involvement*

From the National School Public Relations Association

*How Strong Communication
Contributes to Student and School
Success: Parent and Family
Involvement* is the first in a series of
white papers sponsored by the
National School Public Relations
Association.



NSRA

Contents

Foreword 3

Section One 5

How Communication Can Strengthen Parent and Family Involvement 6

End Notes 15

Section Two 17

A Few Ideas on Getting Started 18

New Standards for the School Public Relations Profession 20

A Final Lesson 29

Section Three 31

National PTA — National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs ... 32

Appendices 35

About NSPRA 36

Communication Accountability Project Committee 37

About the Author — Anne O. Cary 38

2005-06 NSPRA Executive Board 38

Senior NSPRA Staff 38





Foreword



Gay Campbell, APR

NSPRA President
2005-2006

Those of us who work in school communication know how much our efforts contribute to our districts' bottom lines. We understand just how year-round communication and meaningful parental and community involvement build support for our schools and the children they serve.

To continue to document the vital link between school communication and school and student success, the Communication Accountability Project (CAP) by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) has undertaken a number of research and educational efforts.

As one part of those efforts, we are pleased to present this compilation of research investigating the links among communication, involvement and achievement.

NSPRA and its many members are working to gather and analyze even more insights and data. Just a few examples: CAP research teams are gathering data about successful superintendents, what search firms look for in superintendent candidates and how year-round programs contribute to the bottom line — both financially and in student success. A group of NSPRA members has committed their time to conducting research to show the contribution of a good communication program to student learning and financial stability.

We are confident our NSPRA research will help educational leaders, as well as the parents and communities they serve, better understand and appreciate the essential role strong communication plays in helping schools and children succeed.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gay Campbell".

Gay Campbell, APR





Section One

How Communication Can Strengthen Parent and Family Involvement





Communication is the heart of education.¹ School communication is a dynamic part of education success. Effective two-way communication is cited as a necessary trait for success at all levels of education, from school board to superintendent to principal, administrator and teacher. In a survey conducted by the Educational Research Service for the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association, both board presidents and superintendents named “good communication” as the chief reason boards had a good

relationship with their superintendent. To them, “good” meant having a “constant flow of quality information from the superintendent to the school board.” On the other hand, “an unwillingness to talk candidly” was a major obstacle to a sound relationship (Educational Research Service 1985).²

No longer can an educator get by just slipping a monthly newsletter into the backpack and ensuring that the local paper gets the sports schedule. In an age of instantaneous access and 24/7 demand, schools must be able to manage the flow of information not only from teacher to students sitting in a classroom, but also to parents at the workplace and home. Administrators must be able to handle the news media’s asking about incidents texted from student cell phones or to respond to queries about school performance reports posted on the web. School staff must be creative and innovative as the means of communication and the expectations expand rapidly. At a time when school choice, vouchers and charter schools provide more alternatives for parents, selling a school becomes more of a priority. What types of communication work best to build, maintain and strengthen a school community of parents, students, teachers, administrators, community leaders, social groups, businesses, political leaders, taxpayers and neighbors? The research is uneven and of very limited quality, depending predominately on less than rigorous case studies, pre- and post-comparison studies or anecdotes. This unevenness is shared by many other areas of educational research. There are not enough experimental or quasi-experimental studies; sample sizes are frequently small and few studies are long-term and many do not have independent verification.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the key 2001 legislation that is driving much educational reform, puts emphasis on determining which educational programs and practices have been proven effective through rigorous scientific research. Federal funding is targeted to support the programs and teaching

methods that work to improve student learning and achievement. The field of K-12 education contains a vast array of educational interventions that claim to improve educational outcomes. The evidence offered is frequently poorly designed and/or advocacy-driven. Many interventions were fad-like, yielding little in the way of positive and lasting change — a perception confirmed by the flat achievement results over the past 30 years in the National Assessment of Educational Progress long-term trend. The NCLB “What Works” approach, with its systematic testing and review of practices and their applicability, will give practitioners the tools to identify evidence-based interventions and use them to spark major improvements in their schools. NCLB requires schools to develop ways to get parents more involved in their child’s education and in improving the school. Schools receiving federal funds under Title I (seeking to bridge the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged children and other children) must fund family involvement activities.

The research is clear that communication plays an important role in the type and quality of parent/community involvement. In *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp examine 51 research studies conducted between 1993 and 2002 and synthesize the studies’ findings. They found there is a positive and convincing relationship between family and community involvement and improved student academic achievement, including higher gradepoint averages and scores on standardized tests, more classes passed, higher enrollment in more challenging academic classes, better attendance and improved



behavior at home and at school. This holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages.⁵ Parent and community involvement are identified as factors in most studies which examine the research on effective schooling.⁶ Numerous school/family/community partnerships have produced dramatic and lasting increases in student achievement. Some positive examples include James Comer's work with New Haven schools (Comer 1988), Joyce Epstein's School, Family and Community Partnerships Network in Baltimore (Epstein, 2001) and the work of seven urban principals cited in the Heritage Foundation's *No Excuses* (Carter, 2000).

Key characteristics associated with academic improvement include high standards and expectations for all students and curriculum, effective leadership, focused professional development, frequent monitoring of teaching and learning, and parent and community involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The importance of establishing and maintaining meaningful, direct, two-way communication between schools, parents and the community is one of the defining features of effective parent and community involvement. Actively encouraging parental and community involvement has been part of the National Education Goals since 1994. The PTA introduced national standards for development and evaluation of parental involvement programs in 1997. The 2001 NCLB legislation mandates written parent involvement policies.

While the importance of building these partnerships is widely embraced, the practices in most schools have hardly caught up with the flourishing rhetoric.⁷ Schools still struggle to engage families in helping their children succeed. Home-school relationships are often characterized as centered on school priorities and initiated by the schools at the expense of ignoring families' concerns and expertise regarding their children.⁸ Parents and principals cite lack of time as the most common barrier to increased involvement, but research identifies lack of planning for partnerships and lack of mutual understanding as the two greatest barriers to effective family involvement.⁹ Other factors which affect increased family involvement include previous negative

It's disappointing that less than half of Americans are satisfied with the quality of public education in the nation, but it is not surprising. Our attitudes toward the nation's schools come principally from the news media, and most of this information is negative. The key for school districts is to communicate the successes of students to parents – and to non-parents as well, since they make up about 70% of voting citizens in most communities.

– Gary Gordon
Gallup Poll, Global Practice
Leader for Education
May 2004

experiences with the school, language and cultural differences, the absence of requests and invitations from the school for family involvement, child care constraints, lack of transportation and feelings of inadequacy or inefficacy in dealing with school officials.¹⁰

Teachers also struggle with increasing family engagement in children's education. While 98% of teachers believe that effective teachers need to work well with students' families and 90% see it as one of their school's priorities, the 2005 edition of *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships* found the biggest challenge new teachers face and the areas in which they feel least prepared is parent involvement. New teachers are most likely to report communicating with and involving parents as their greatest problem. Thirty-one percent believe that this is the greatest challenge, compared to 22% who say that it is getting sufficient resources and 20% who say that maintaining order and discipline in the classroom is the greatest challenge. Other barriers from a teacher's perspective include low teaching efficacy, negative experiences with parents, uncertainty about working with diverse families and inadequate school support for involvement efforts.¹¹



A 2001 Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) Digest titled *Preparing Teachers to Work with Parents* found that teacher education programs and local school districts offer limited educational opportunities to new teachers on family involvement issues. This, despite proven best practices which show that outstanding teachers with National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification or Milken Teaching Award recipients regularly communicate with parents and value communication as an effective tool for working with students.¹²

Traditional school organization and practices, especially in secondary schools often discourage family members from becoming involved. Schools can make changes that make them more welcoming and inviting places, less hierarchical and more personal. Such institutional changes include creating schools-within-schools, establishing community or parent centers within schools, using parent leadership programs and ensuring that parents are a respected and valued co-equal in organizational structures such as curriculum, course scheduling, assessment, budget committees and that they participate on site-based management councils and school improvement teams.¹³

Developing effective partnerships with families requires that all school staff (administrators, teachers and support staff) create a school environment that welcomes parents and encourages them to raise questions and voice their concerns as well as to participate appropriately in decision making.

— **Janie E. Funkhouser & Miriam R. Gonzales**
“Family Involvement in Children’s Education”

Most Studies Agree on Parent Involvement

Recently there seemed to be one blip on “the-parent-involvement-makes-a-key-difference screen.”

A new study entitled, *Similar Students, Different Results: Why Do Some Schools Do Better?*³², surveyed 5,500 teachers and 257 principals of low-income public schools in California. Results indicated that other factors, such as experienced teachers and principals, sticking to rigorous content that fits the state’s assessments, assessing student strengths and weaknesses to bolster achievement, and providing the best educational equipment created the blueprint for student achievement. Parent and family involvement was still positively correlated, but below the factors just mentioned.

No one, we believe, has ever said that parent involvement alone will increase student achievement. In fact, the quality of staff and programs has to be in place before parent involvement can make the well-recognized difference it makes in schools throughout North America. But just about everyone had said that parent and family can make a huge difference in student achievement when schools and homes are working together in a collaborative and competent approach to education.

And let’s not forget that parent, family and community involvement should also play an integral role in making sub par schools better. Parents need to hold school leaders accountable so their children have experienced teachers and principals, rigorous content, helpful assessments to prepare for state testing and the best educational equipment and resources available for their children.

That too, is what parent and family involvement is all about.

— **Rich Bagin, APR**
NSPRA Executive Director



What We Know About Effective Family Involvement



Effective family involvement has a positive impact on students, families and the schools. The research shows that the most effective forms of family involvement are those in which parents actively work directly with their children in the home on learning activities, such as reading, homework or tutoring using materials and instructions provided by teachers. The earlier a parent becomes involved, the more powerful the effect on student achievement. Training and orientation for family members enhances the effectiveness of parent involvement and the most successful parent

involvement programs are those which recognize the diversity of the school community and offer a variety of ways in which families can participate with a continuum of options.¹⁴

Increasing family participation, thus, is an important goal for schools and schools must take the lead in providing families with the opportunities and support needed.¹⁵ To be effective in increasing student achievement, school-family involvement policies must be well designed and focused. Family and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement. The form of involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills.¹⁶ Every state and most districts have a family-involvement law or policy. However, in many instances, the policies are not supported with resources necessary to implement the policy. Research shows that family-involvement programs have to be well planned, comprehensive (reaching all families) and long-lasting. Hiring a family involvement facilitator can be a very cost-effective means of improving implementation of a school district's policy.¹⁷

Joyce Epstein's work with family-school partnership programs shows that school efforts to engage families make a difference in student achievement. Schools with more highly rated partnership programs made small but significant gains on writing and math tests, and attendance also improved when compared with schools with lower-rated programs. Epstein and her colleagues at Johns Hopkins University identify a framework which provides a broader vision of involvement than the traditional PTA activities, booster support and annual parent teacher conference.¹⁸ Epstein's framework describes six types of activities that schools use to involve families and

communities: parent-education activities, communication between schools and families, volunteer opportunities, at-home learning activities, decision-making opportunities and community collaborations. The more active the involvement and the more different types of involvement, the higher the achievement gains.

Type of Involvement / Types of Activity

Parenting — Expressing expectations about students' education; limiting TV viewing; supervising time use and behavior; teaching children attitudes, beliefs, customs and social skills; supervising academic work; discussing interests, issues and studies.

Communicating — From school to home about programs, progress, academic achievement including notices, memos, phone calls, report cards, conferences, open houses, web sites, e-mail and voice mail. Family-initiated contact about performance and academic programs; post-secondary plans.

Supporting School — Volunteering and attending school activities.

Learning at Home — Interactive homework; information on how families can monitor and assist students at home with learning activities; ways to help students practice and study for tests; information about expectations; academic lessons outside of school, music or dance lessons; encouraging college; learning about post-secondary education.



Decision-Making — Participatory roles in parent-teacher-student organizations; school advisory councils; committees; school site improvement teams; school advocacy groups.

Collaborating with Community — Using community learning resources; taking part in community groups; communicating parent to parent; establishing connections to increase access to community and support services.

A 2001 Westat study of standards-based reform practices found that reforms are more likely to have a positive effect on students' test scores when teachers communicate regularly with parents. Effective outreach practices include meeting face to face, sending materials home and keeping in touch about progress. In schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, test scores grew at a rate 40% higher than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach.¹⁹

Workshops for parents on helping their children at home were linked to higher reading and math scores in studies by Shaver and Walls. Schools with highly rated partnership programs make greater gains on state tests than schools with lower rated programs. Schools that succeed in engaging families from very diverse backgrounds share three key practices.

- 1 They focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community members.
- 2 They recognize, respect and address families' needs, as well as class and cultural difference.
- 3 They embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared.²⁰

A number of cities and states have been successful in creating programs that develop parent leaders and promote school achievement. Different approaches have evolved based in large part on how willing schools and districts have been to engage parents. Where the system is open to collaboration with

parents a "Parents as Partners" approach has been successful. The goal of the parents as partners approach is to equip parents with skills and contacts to engage other parents; connect schools with the community groups; identify and engage resources for schools; and collaborate with administrators, teachers and other school staff. Kentucky's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) follows this tact. The Institute has trained more than 1,100 parents in effective school partnership skills. Parents are taking an active lead in identifying problems and working together with schools to create solutions. In Louisville, two parents believed that incoming 6th graders would do better academically if they had help adjusting to the middle school environment. With the help of a school team, they organized a "Transition Night" that included workshops for parents on such subjects as adolescent development, academic standards and school safety. The experience was so successful it is now used for each grade. Another program which uses the parents as partners approach is Boston's Parent Leadership Exchange which works with parent leaders in three New England states. It offers networking opportunities through conferences, newsletters, a web site and a forum for sharing best practices. The Connecticut Commission on Families offers a Leadership Training Institute for parents.

When there is resistance to family or community collaboration a "Parent Advocacy" approach has evolved. Examples include Chicago's Parents United for Responsible Education, New York City's Advocates for Children and the New Jersey Education Law Center. These use training, technical support and sometimes legal action to achieve their goal.

"Parent and Community Organizing" is a political approach adopted when a school or district administration is closed and defensive and usually school performance is low. Groups like the Boston Parent Organizing Network, Mothers on the Move in the Bronx and the Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago use direct actions, such as demonstrations, media events and public meetings with candidates and office holders to focus attention on their problem.²¹



What We Know About Effective Community Involvement



In the United States, schools originally were an integral part of a community, reflecting its political, moral and institutional identity. At the beginning of the 20th century there were about 100,000 local school districts, each of which hired its teachers and principals and set its own curriculum. After World War II, the relationship of the school to the community began to change, reflecting major demographic and social changes — increased individual mobility, greater female workplace participation, divorce, fragmentation of traditional ethnic neighborhoods — and functional and organizational shifts. By the end of the 1970s, research demonstrated that schools had taken on their own organizational culture and lost their community-based identity. Sociologists found that public school variation in the U.S. was minimal.²² Today the number of school districts is down to about 16,000. Huge, consolidated school districts deal with a population increasingly diverse by language, cultural and ethnic background, economic status and family composition. As a result, links to the community disappeared. Rebuilding these links with the community should be part of an administrator's public relations program. A school connected with its cultural community enjoys school pride, open communication, productivity, cooperation, widespread involvement, sense of cohesiveness and acts of caring and sharing (Barth, 2002; Brandt, 1998).

There is clear evidence that expanding the school's outreach beyond families into the community also has measurable positive impact in at least four important areas: student learning, family engagement, school effectiveness and community vitality.²³ Studies find that community organization contributes to the following changes in schools:

- Upgraded school facilities.
- Improved school leadership and staffing.
- Higher quality learning programs for students.
- New resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum.
- New funding for after-school programs and family supports.²⁴

Community schools link school and community resources. As a result, such schools have access to additional resources, reduce demands on the school staff, provide both academic and non-academic learning opportunities and build social capital — assets which connect students to people and information that can help them solve problems and meet their goals.

The extent to which community assets are made available is related to the community's attitude towards

the school. The more familiar people are with the school, the more likely they are to view it favorably. According to the 2003 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll on public schools, 26% of Americans give the national public school system an overall grade of A or B, 48% gave their local school an A or B and 68% of public school parents rated the school their oldest child attended an A or B. Gallup concludes that Americans tend to base their perceptions of the state of the educational system on what they see and hear in the media, what they personally experience and the experiences of their peers. Parents have firsthand knowledge of those schools and witness their accomplishments on a day-to-day basis through the progress of their children. Communities are often financially invested through local tax dollars. Homeowners are further invested in their local community's schools because real estate investments frequently depend, in part, on the reputation of the local schools.²⁵ Communities have a self-interest in developing and maintaining good schools.

There are a variety of models for building or increasing community involvement in schools. In some cases, the impetus to involve the community stems from the community itself, responding to what it perceives as a crisis or failure of the school to meet basic needs. In other cases, the school reaches out to the community in an effort to increase resources.



Since the late 1980s, communities, parents, schools, activists and other groups have sought to use the school as a social center to address broader community problems. These have produced a number of new models of partnership. By mobilizing the assets of the community to solve barriers to learning resulting from poverty, changing demographics and other social changes, these programs have not only been successful in raising academic achievement, but also in triggering positive shifts in actions, attitudes, interests, motivations and relationships of students.²⁶ The programs have produced innovations, such as family support centers, early childhood and after-school programs, health and mental health services, academic outreach and adult literacy, as well as partnerships with business and civic groups and use of the school for community activities. School, family and community partnerships have the most success when partnership activities are linked directly with school goals. A 1999 study by Sanders and Simon²⁷ examined schools participating in the National Network of Partnership Schools. They found that partnership activities lead to improvement. (See chart below.)

The partnership must reflect the community and involve them in all stages of program development — from selecting the partnership goals to determining evaluation methods. Families, school staff and community representatives should be selected for their talents, interest and dedication. Flexibility is a key component of success.

A meta-analysis on comprehensive school reform and student achievement by Borman, Hewes, Overman and Brown,²⁸ published in 2002, reviewed all the known research on the achievement effects of the most widely implemented, externally developed school improvement programs known as “whole-school” or “comprehensive” reforms. The U.S. Department of Education has established criteria that qualify a program as one serving “comprehensive school reform (CSR).” The criteria include:

- Using proven methods based on scientifically based research and effective practice that have been replicated successfully in schools.

- Providing for the meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning.
- Implementing and evaluating school-improvement activities.
- Employing annual evaluations of student achievement and implementing of reforms.
- Using external technical support from an entity with experience and expertise in schoolwide reform and improvement.
- Using high-quality and continuous professional development for staff and teachers.

The researchers looked at 29 of the most widely implemented CSR models and found that the three models meeting the highest standard of evidence have been shown to be effective in improving student achievement across reasonably diverse contexts. These programs are Direct Instruction, School Development Program and Success for All. The School Development Program established by James Comer stresses the impact of the community in education. Success for All uses a family support team concept and one-on-one tutoring. Direct Instruction uses highly interactive lessons presented to small groups of students. Nine other programs were found to be highly promising or promising, while 14 were considered needing additional research.

	Improve Student Achievement	Improve Attendance	Improve Behavior
Elementary Schools			
% using partnership activities	97	75	84
% reporting improvement	79	70	71
Middle Schools			
% using partnership activities	93	82	91
% reporting improvement	80	61	68
High Schools			
% using partnership activities	100	96	96
% reporting improvement	85	58	74



Action Plan



Communication is the foundation of effective partnerships. To build effective partnerships with families and the community that will enhance student achievement, schools must first talk to — and listen to — parents, community groups, business leaders and others with a stake in student learning. Any strategy must accommodate the diverse language, cultural needs, lifestyles and schedules of all parties. This means the school often must take the initiative in reaching out to its community and parents. Successful partnerships require sustained mutual collaboration and support — from school staffs and from families at home, at school and in the community. It requires a school environment that welcomes its partners and encourages them to raise questions and voice their concerns, as well as to participate appropriately in decision-making. “Once community members are given meaningful involvement, a sense of ownership and pride develops. This leads to new innovations, contributions and support — which leads to success and more success.”²⁹

Most families and community groups do not have the needed information or the training to be effective school partners. Lack of understanding of school policies and procedures fosters misperceptions and distrust. Interpreting school performance data correctly can be difficult. The school must educate not only its students and their families, but the community as well. Information must be clear and easily understandable, in the languages that the community uses. It must be timely. Newsletters, handouts, e-mails, press releases, web sites, neighborhood forums, phone calls, listservs, home visits and meetings are only some of the great variety of methods which can be successfully used to get information out. Because no single means will reach everyone, multiple ways need to be used to ensure the greatest possible dissemination.

Training for parents and school staff is another important element in building trust and effectiveness. While parents want to play an important role in their children’s education, they often don’t know how they can best help their child. Workshops, family nights, instructional information and reference materials which provide knowledge on a range of topics — such as child safety, parenting skills, academic support services, conflict management, child development, standardized testing, curriculum, homework and school programs — are valued by parents. Leadership training for parents — such as the Kentucky CIPL program — tends to shift the balance of power to a more equal footing, helping parents become more effective advocates for their own and other children. In-school parent/family centers —

where families or community members can easily interact with school personnel — facilitate training and frequent communication. These centers generally make the school seem more open and inviting to the community and have been used very effectively throughout the nation. School personnel also need training on how to effectively work with parents, mentors and community members. This is especially true when the cultural/linguistic/ethnic/class make up of school personnel does not mimic that of the student body. Establishing a sense of trust must be a priority. Direct personal communication can build better understanding and a shared sense of purpose. However, in many instances, and particularly beyond the elementary level, the only direct communication a parent has with a teacher is negative. Schools that enforce policies which require teachers to regularly engage all families have improved student achievement. Positive feedback when a child is doing well creates a sense of goodwill between parents and schools which can be very beneficial when problems arise.

The greater the community ties, the more resources become available to the school. School districts, community organizations, public agencies, local colleges and universities, state education agencies, the local business community and foundations are all potential sources of funds, expertise and assistance. As public entities, schools must provide value to the community in order to maintain public support. Communities which understand what is happening in their schools and support it value their school more highly than communities which do not believe the



school is doing a good job. Some schools have had success with Community Days, which help bring community members and the school staff together in support of shared educational goals. Families and community members join teachers and school staff in team-building activities, discussing and setting educational goals and devising strategies for accomplishing the goals. Other schools have used Community Walks to introduce teachers to local neighborhoods and help them better understand the lives of their students outside of school.

Creating a partnership and nurturing it takes time and commitment by all stakeholders. Each community is unique and success rarely comes easily. Build on what works well locally. Begin the partnership by identifying the community's goals for its students in consultation with families, students, residents, educators and community partners. Focus on the strengths, interests and needs of each to help design, implement and evaluate activities that will achieve the goals. Goal setting should be concrete, with verifiable results and timelines. School staff, parents, community leaders and partner agencies and organizations should use available data to determine which conditions for learning are in place, the changes that need to be made and the expectations that may reasonably be set.³⁰ There must be flexibility to adapt or drop programs or activities which are not succeeding or when conditions change. Ongoing assessment of effectiveness is a critical element of any partnership plan. Modifications over time help a school to build on its success.

Establish a written formal school policy on family and community involvement. This must be done in collaboration with the families, businesses, foundations and community groups you intend to engage. A school district should develop public relations strategies to inform families, businesses and the community about involvement programs and policies. It is critical that the strategies recognize the importance of a community's historical, ethnic, linguistic and cultural resources. An effective public relations program promotes planned, ongoing, two-way communication between the school and its community. It helps build an honest relationship between the school and its stakeholders that results in better educational programs and experiences for learners. "Genuine public relations are a continuous process that involves an effort to understand the

concerns of relevant populations (student, parents, teachers, staff, taxpayers and so on) and to respond to those concerns in a meaningful way."³¹

Allocate adequate resources to carry out the policy.

The scope of involvement will dictate whether additional financial resources are needed and where they may be found through reprogramming, identifying new sources — such as district or state education funds, public agencies, foundations, Title I, other federal government funds and local businesses. Resources needed may include a dedicated space for family use, additional social or health services, telephones for teachers, computer training sessions, stipends for teachers for training or outreach, and a community/parent coordinator. Continuity of funding is an important factor so identifying streams of funding is important.

Define outcomes. Specify what it is you hope to achieve and over what period. These should be verifiable and achievable.

Plan your communication. Look at the various parent segments in your schools, seek their input on the best ways to reach them and then do it. Remember that one communication technique rarely is a "silver bullet" for reaching most parents. You may be able to write the same messages but some will prefer e-mail or a listserv, while others prefer the "backpack method" or delivery through their churches or community and social centers. It will take time, but you need to assess what works best for your community and your school.

Establish assessment and evaluation procedures.

Ask parents how communication is working. How can you improve it? How will you assess progress? Attendance at parent meetings, rising test scores, better student attendance and feedback from teachers that parents are more involved are all factors of increased and effective communication.

Effective communication today needs the commitment of all levels of school staff as well as a core group of parents to remind the schools of the need for more and better communication. Collaboration makes the home-school connection effective. And effective communication increases parent and family participation which has proven, study after study, to increase student achievement — our ultimate goal.



End Notes

- 1 Rowicki, Mark A., *Running Head: Communication Skills for Educational Administrators*, Educational Management, Alabama, 1999.
- 2 Fulbright, Luann and Goodman, Richard H., *Ten Things Superintendents Can Do to Create and Maintain an Effective School Governance Team*, ERS Spectrum, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 3-13, Fall 1999.
- 3 Henderson, Anne T. and Mapp, Karen, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Southwest Education Development Lab, Austin, TX, 2002.
- 4 Coalition of Evidenced Based Policy, *Educational Practices Supported by Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide*, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Science, National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Washington, DC 2003.
- 5 Henderson, Anne T. and Mapp, Karen, op. cit.
- 6 Marzano, Robert J., *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA, 2003.
- 7 Davies, Don, *The 10th School Revisited: Are School/Family/Community Partnerships on the Reform Agenda Now?*, Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 83 No. 5, pp. 388-92, January 2002.
- 8 Lopez, M. Elena; Kreider, Holly; and Caspe, Margaret, *Co-constructing Family Involvement*, The Evaluation Exchange, Harvard Family Research Project, Vol. X No. 4, Winter 2004-2005.
- 9 Cotton, Kathleen and Wikelund, Karen Reed, *Parent Involvement in Education*, School Improvement Research Series, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, OR, May 1989.
- 10 Norton, M. Scott and Nufeld, Jean C., *Journal of School Public Relations*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 45-58, Winter 2002.
- 11 Hoover-Dempsey, Kathleen V.; Walker, Joan M.; Jones, Kathleen P.; and Reed, Richard P., *Teachers Involving Parents: An in-service teacher education program for enhancing parental involvement*, Teaching and Teacher Education, Vol. 18 No. 7, pp. 843-67, October 2002.
- 12 Hiatt-Michael, Diana, *Preparing Teachers to Work with Parents*, Eric Digest, ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, Washington, DC, 2001.
- 13 Funkhouser, Janie E. and Gonzales, Miriam R., *Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches, An Idea Book*, Office of Education Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC, June 2001.
- 14 Cotton and Wikelund, op. cit.
- 15 Funkhouser and Gonzalex, op. cit.
- 16 Henderson, Anne T. and Mapp, Karen L, op. cit.
- 17 Jones, Rebecca, *How Parents Can Support Learning*, American School Board Journal, pp. 18-37, September 2001.
- 18 Drake, Daniel D., *Parents and Families as Partners in the Education Process: Collaboration for the Success of Students in Public Schools*, Educational Research Service, ERS Spectrum, Spring 2000.
- 19 Henderson and Mapp, op. cit.
- 20 Henderson and Mapp, op. cit.
- 21 Henderson, Anne; Jacob, Bonnie; Kernan-Scholss, Adam; and Raimondo, Bev, *The Case for Parent Leadership*, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, KSA, January 2004.
- 22 Davis, Patricia W. and Karr-Kidwell, JP, *School Leaders and Community: Research and a Plan for Collaboration*, Texas Woman's University, 2003.
- 23 Blank, Marvin, J.; Melaville, Atelia; and Shah, Bela P., *Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools*, Coalition for Community Schools, May 2003.
- 24 Henderson and Mapp, op. cit.
- 25 Lyons, Linda, *Americans Stay True to Their Local Schools*, Gallup Reports, September 9, 2003.
- 26 Henderson and Mapp, op. cit.
- 27 Sanders, M.G. and Simon, B. *Progress and Challenges: Comparing elementary, middle and high schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools*, Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19-23, 1999.
- 28 Borman, Geoffrey D.; Hewes, Gina M.; Overman, Laura T.; and Brown, Shelly, *Comprehensive School Reform and Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis*, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, 2002.
- 29 Miller, M.S. and Hart, C. A., *Bridging the Gap*, Thrust for Educational Leadership, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 22-25, September-October 1998.
- 30 Blank, Melaville and Shah, op. cit.
- 31 Martinson, D., *School Public Relations: Do It Right Or Don't Do It At All!*, Contemporary Education, Vol. 66 No. 2, 1995.
- 32 Williams, T., Kirst, M., Haertel, E., et al. *Similar Students, Different Results: Why Do Some Schools Do Better? A large-scale survey of California elementary schools serving low-income students*. Mountain View, CA: EdSource, 2005.





Section Two

Where to Go from Here



Ideas on Getting Started



A school district should develop public relations strategies to inform families, business and the community about involvement programs and policies. It is critical that the strategies recognize the importance of a community's historical, ethnic, linguistic and cultural resources. An effective public relations program promotes planned, ongoing, two-way communication between the school and its community. It helps build an honest relationship between the school and its stakeholders that results in better educational programs and experiences for learners.

NSPRA, the leader in school public relations since its founding in 1935, defines school public relations this way:

Educational public relations is 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 public relations programs assist in interpreting public attitudes, identify and help shape policies and procedures in the public interest, and carry on involvement and information activities which earn public support and understanding.

Start with policy. Review or create policy on family and community engagement. It is critical that you collaborate with the families, foundations, businesses and community groups you intend to engage.

- Identify and target leaders representing all stakeholders, keeping in mind that specific outreach efforts may be needed to reach certain groups in the student population which are usually under-represented in normal school activities.
- Survey groups about outcomes they want and how they perceive the status quo. This should include focus groups, telephone and written surveys and community and neighborhood meetings.

- Make relevant test data and other academic information readily available including instruction on how to interpret the data.
- Check out other school districts' policies for effective practices as well as resources from NSPRA.
- Establish an on-going dialog with the community, instituting regular, two-way communication through a variety of methods.
- Include family and community members in school-based management teams, improvement planning and school governance.
- Publicize the policy widely. Make sure every family is aware of the policy.
- Establish a schedule for review and revision.
- Implement the policy fully, with full and continued support from all levels.

Identify barriers to increased community involvement (time constraints, child care, language, transportation, cultural beliefs, lack of understanding, discrimination or exclusion) and identify community foundations and governmental sources of funding to address the barriers.

- Specify training programs for teachers, parents, administrators and community members to improve the quality and type of interaction. (NSPRA resources can help here.)



- Examine possible infrastructure constraints including health and safety concerns.
- Develop and implement a cohesive communication program to ensure that the family and the community at large is informed and kept up to date on school activities, achievement indicators and policies.
- Examine ways to increase the interaction between the school and the community. These can include instituting a mentoring program, opening the school to greater community use as a venue, holding a weekend or evening public information fair, having a community/student exchange day, having a meet and greet program, hosting leadership classes or serving as a site for community health and other social services.
- Look for ways families and communities can be involved either at home or in the work place.

Define where you want to be. Specify what it is you hope to achieve, over what period and how you plan to achieve it. These should be verifiable and achievable. If the goal is an increase in standardized test scores, specify what increases in what subjects by which groups over what period of time. What are the means to achieve it — more instruction time, smaller class size, more teacher training, greater use of parent/community mentors or volunteers, after-school tutoring, different curriculum?

You can't do much without money. According to NSPRA membership surveys, less than one-tenth of one percent (0.01%) of a school district's operating budget is spent on communication. More of a commitment is needed. Check for any federal or state grants your school district has received to see if budget allowances are given for communication/dissemination. Seek funds from your operating budget now that you can prove that communication leads to involvement and greater student achievement.

And finally, seek budget assistance from parent groups or local corporations to help you in gathering resources for your critical communication effort.

Don't forget about assessment. Determine how you will assess your progress.

- Develop ways to regularly gather and report data on the effectiveness of the policy. Use multiple indicators to evaluate the program.
- Use a variety of means and sources to avoid subjective bias. Qualitative evaluations should come from all sectors of the community.
- A multi-year time frame is more realistic for capturing systemic change, but evaluation and data gathering over shorter time periods allow for assessment and revisions as needed.
- Use independent, external evaluation.

More resources also are available from the NSPRA. Visit www.NSPRA.org for information on monthly newsletters, e-newsletters, publications, educational programming, networking and more.

There is a place in America to take a stand: it is public education. It is the underpinning of our cultural and political system. It is the great common ground. Public education after all is the engine that moves us as a society toward a common destiny... It is in public education that the American dream begins to take shape.

— Tom Brokaw



New Standards for the School Public Relations Profession



Every school, school district and organization has public relations — just like everyone has a personality.

If the organization understands and tries to practice school PR as the NSPRA defines it, chances are that the organization will foster productive relationships and effective communication with its employees, students, parents and the broader community as well.

If the organization has no planned public relations, then chances of having effective communication and positive relationships with key audiences will be pretty much hit or miss — with a stronger emphasis on the “miss.”

In *Raising the Bar for School PR*, NSPRA sets forth some standards for:

- the preparation of school public relations professionals.
- comprehensive school public relations programs.
- the financial support needed to implement good programs.

We recommend this publication to every school board member, superintendent, chief executive officer, and any individual who may have responsibilities for education communication and public relations. It outlines what school public relations professionals believe and have successfully implemented in hundreds of school districts in the United States and Canada: It is possible for schools and districts to have good public relations! Make the commitment and look inside.

Standards for Educational Public Relations and Communication Professionals

A skilled school public relations professional performs essential communication functions to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. While qualifications can vary depending on the sophistication of the work required, all practitioners should meet certain minimum standards.

General Standards

- An understanding of and commitment to the role and social responsibility of public relations and communication for all educational institutions, organizations, and agencies in a democratic society.
- A commitment to improving educational opportunities for all.
- A commitment to professional performance and ethical behavior as described in the NSPRA's Ethics for Educational Public Relations.

Professional Preparation

- A bachelor's degree from an accredited university or — for department leaders — experience in the field is a minimum requirement.

Abilities and Aptitudes

- A comprehensive working knowledge of internal and external public relations and communication programs for an educational organization.
- A mastery of communication skills.
- An understanding of the importance of two-way communication between an organization's staff and its many publics and audiences, and the ability to carry it out.



- A thorough knowledge and understanding of communication theory and research.
- An ability to provide expertise and advice to top management.

Professional Growth and Development

Standards for professional growth and development require that educational public relations and communication professionals continue to refine their skills and expand their knowledge by:

- Maintaining membership and participation in the NSPRA and other professional public relations associations and societies.
- Pursuing professional accreditation.
- Participating in public relations seminars, conferences, workshops and institutes.
- Pursuing additional study beyond a bachelor's degree.
- Reading, researching, writing, speaking and consulting in education, public relations and communication.

Educational Public Relations Program Assessment

Purpose

NSPRA's Educational Public Relations Program Assessment enables governing board members, superintendents, chief executive officers and public relations practitioners to work toward achieving criteria that the Association believes are components of a comprehensive school district public relations program.

These criteria apply district- or system-wide, involving not just the formal public relations program, but the way in which every school and central office unit interacts with employees, students, parents, news media, elected officials and the community at large.

Criteria

The following NSPRA-developed criteria should be evident in any organization that is working to develop and achieve a strategic and comprehensive public relations program.

Governing Board — The governing board of the organization understands and models its policy-setting responsibilities on actions that are in the best interests of students and their learning.

- The board has adopted and ensures periodic review of a mission, goals and objectives that have been developed with stakeholder involvement.
- The board has a code of conduct that includes modeling respect, civility and integrity.
- Board members work with the superintendent and staff in relationships that are built on mutual trust and respect.
- The board understands and practices its role of setting clear policy direction and helps build a culture that supports the staff in its role in implementing and administering those policies.
- The board seeks input from organization stakeholders before developing policy and clearly communicates its actions and the reasons for them.

Communication Policy — The governing board of the organization has adopted written policies to guide its communication/public relations efforts. They include:

- A policy that commits the organization to providing comprehensive communication/public relations in an open and honest way that meets the needs and desires of all internal and external publics.
- A policy regarding the release of information about individual staff, students or clients.



- A policy that describes public involvement in the organization's decision-making.
- A policy that enables employees, parents and others to appeal policy or administrative decisions.
- Policies that require the organization to learn what employees and patrons want to know and to provide that information in various ways.
- A community involvement policy that encourages interested citizens to review the district's mission, goals, and objectives, and to become educated about and offer opinions on issues that may require action in the future.

Communication Procedures — The organization has written procedures to implement the governing board's policies and to provide clear direction for various staff roles in public relations.

- Procedures are in place that outline various communication responsibilities in crisis situations.
- Procedures clarify a policy of openness and honesty in interacting with the news media. Job descriptions clarify staff responsibilities in communicating with and through the news media.
- Procedures exist describing formal and informal methods of communicating with organization employees.
- Procedures are in place describing formal and informal methods of communicating with parents and the broader community.
- Procedures have been developed describing how the organization will seek the views of employees and patrons on a regular basis.

Organizational Positioning — The director of the public relations effort is a member of the superintendent/ chief executive officer's cabinet and is directly accountable to the superintendent/chief executive officer.

- The person with public relations responsibilities is involved with the strategic management processes of the organization.
- The strategic management process includes communication programs for interacting with key publics, especially those who might be affected by a decision.
- The person with public relations responsibilities provides leadership for an issues management process to ensure that potential problems and issues are identified and dealt with in a strategic fashion.
- The budget for communication/public relations is sufficient to achieve program goals.
- The public relations leader ensures that educators and the community are aware of trends and other forces that may impact the school system, students and the community at large.

Professional Preparation — The public relations effort is headed by a strategic leader, rather than a technician or an administrative manager.

- The director of the public relations effort is accredited in public relations by the Universal Accreditation Board (UAB).
- All public relations staff are appropriately trained for their responsibilities.
- The director and other staff are members of the NSPRA and an NSPRA chapter (if one serves their area).
- They regularly attend NSPRA seminars, workshops and other professional development opportunities.
- Members of the organization's governing board and its executive leadership demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles of good communication.



Counseling and Training — The job description for the person with public relations responsibilities includes counseling the governing board, the superintendent/chief executive officer, and other administrators and staff in public relations strategies.

- Regular opportunities are provided for administrators to obtain training in effective public relations practices, including interaction with the news media.
- Regular opportunities are provided for teachers and other staff to become effective public relations ambassadors for the organization and to deal with students, parents and others in ways that promote their involvement, understanding and cooperation.

Research — Before major communication/public relations efforts are initiated, staff determines relevant factors relating to the demography and opinions of the community and its various components.

- The organization's goal setting is based on research and direct involvement with stakeholders to determine their educational priorities.
- The organization's public relations/communication efforts are research based (i.e., its planning and strategies are based on research that indicates various audiences' perceptions, desires, interests, opinions and needs for information and involvement.)
- The organization regularly elicits both quantitative and qualitative information through means such as formal and informal surveys, advisory councils, and focus groups that involve both internal and external publics.

Planning — The public relations/communication efforts are planned on a systematic (often annual) basis to support the achievement of the organization's goals and objectives.

- The plan has the approval of the superintendent/chief executive officer.
- The plan focuses on meeting the goals of the organization and ultimately improving education and, to the extent possible, enhancing student achievement.
- The plan identifies the needs of target publics and uses research data to identify key messages and strategies for delivering those messages.
- Communication plans for specific program changes or initiatives are developed in conjunction with the staff responsible for them.
- Communication plans identify the various publics who will be affected and the strategies for reaching them.
- To the extent possible, communication plans include measurable goals for behavior change or accomplishment, deadlines, responsibilities, resources, and strategies.
- Plans are reviewed regularly to ensure that communication efforts remain relevant, are on schedule and are adjusted whenever necessary to reach planned goals or to deal with emerging needs and opportunities.

Communicating — A variety of channels that are based on research and planning and are appropriate to the communication goals are employed in communicating with all publics.

- Communication by the organization and its units is planned and includes opportunities for target publics to obtain further information or to respond.
- All communication is timely, meets the needs of the target publics, and uses language and formats that are appropriate for particular audiences.



- The language, format and general presentation of all efforts are planned so that they communicate successfully.

Employees — The organization has procedures and strategies that stimulate regular, two-way communication with all employees. Those procedures and strategies might include:

- A regularly scheduled communication vehicle from the organization that provides information employees need to be well-informed and to do their jobs effectively.
- A communication vehicle might be printed or electronic or be a combination of these possibilities, but the distribution system ensures that it is conveniently available to every employee.
- New programs or initiatives are planned with staff input and are communicated in appropriate ways to each employee group.
- E-mail, voicemail, intranet, or other electronic systems that facilitate communication with and among employees, accompanied by procedures for the appropriate use of the systems.
- A crisis plan for the district and for each unit that is up-to-date, comprehensive, and available to the employees who need it. It states responsibilities for all staff during a crisis, including communication.
- A systematic and ongoing program that recognizes the efforts of individual staff and organization units and thanks them for their contributions.
- An up-to-date manual of district policies and procedures that is conveniently available to all employees.
- A directory — available to all employees — which contains the organizational structure; names, titles, and telephone numbers of personnel in each unit; and how to access needed services.

- A variety of vertical and horizontal two-way communication opportunities within the organization structure.
- Regular meetings of employees with supervisors where a spirit of openness encourages questions and suggestions for improving education and/or dealing with other work-related issues.
- Orientations that acquaint employees with the organization's goals, structure and culture; their specific job responsibilities; and their public relations roles.
- Systematic (generally annual) plans for each unit of the organization, spelling out strategies for communicating with employees and with the organization's many constituents.
- Regular opportunities for employees with similar responsibilities to meet and discuss issues of common interest.
- Regular training for various employee groups addressing their public relations roles in the organization and within the community.
- Regular (perhaps quarterly) meetings of the superintendent/chief executive officer with representatives from various organization units to discuss matters of mutual interest.
- Formal and informal methods for asking employees, at least annually, to evaluate the organization and its units on the availability, relevance, and responsiveness of communication efforts.

Students — The organization has policies and procedures that encourage sound communication with students and encourage their involvement in their school. These procedures and policies might include:

- Student handbooks, focused on each school or each level, that are distributed to and reviewed with every student to help them understand school rules as well as academic, behavioral and other expectations.



- Involvement of students in ways that will make it possible for them to contribute to the organization's strategic goals and initiatives.
- Information that is communicated to students and their parents or guardians about safe practices in getting to and from school.
- A safe, welcoming learning climate with staff who encourage students in both academic and extracurricular activities.
- A principal and teachers who communicate regularly with students about the school environment and issues of concern to both students and staff. Whenever possible, reasons for school policies and procedures are explained to students.
- A student government organization in each school that encourages students to become appropriately involved in decision-making about issues that concern them.

Parents — The organization has policies and procedures that encourage regular, two-way communication and help to develop appropriate mutual expectations between parents and their schools.

- Each school has a handbook, distributed to each student/parent, that describes district and school rules, and ways that parents can work with the school to improve their child's education.
- Parents are involved with the staff in establishing school goals, and these are communicated regularly.
- A regular school communication vehicle or vehicles exist to communicate important events, dates, and news about the school, staff, and student accomplishments. It is transmitted using methods to ensure that it will be received by parents. District news of importance

to parents is communicated to the school so that it can be easily incorporated into this parent communication. The school's parent organization contributes to and assists with school-to-parent communication.

- Regular opportunities are provided for the principal and teachers to meet face to face with parents.
- Any major change in school rules, procedures or educational programs is discussed at an early stage with interested parents.
- Interested parents help contribute to the decision, and the decision and the reasons for it are communicated clearly and promptly to all parents.
- All communication and interaction with parents is based on mutual respect and an attitude of true partnership in their children's education.
- Parents and others in the community are encouraged to volunteer at the school in ways that are important for students. There is a handbook of guidelines for volunteers and for school staff, and schools regularly recognize the contributions of volunteers.
- Teachers and parents receive guidelines for holding productive parent-teacher conferences. Conference times are flexible to meet parents' needs and schedules.
- School staff are accessible to respond to parents' questions, inquiries or ideas.
- In schools where parents are not fluent in English, special efforts are made to communicate with them and to seek their involvement in school affairs.
- A parent-complaint procedure exists to facilitate the resolution of problems at the lowest possible level.



- Parents are encouraged to serve and have leadership roles on school and district-wide committees that study and propose solutions to identified problems.
- In addition to regular report cards, teachers are encouraged to communicate regularly with parents about each student's educational progress. A well-established, effective procedure exists for communicating and resolving concerns about a student's behavior or education progress.
- The school gives support and encouragement to related parent and community organizations.
- Parents are invited annually to evaluate the school climate, program and communication efforts.
- A district that must seek public support for referenda, bond or millage issues, works closely with parent leaders on election efforts.

Community — The district has regular, two-way communication with various segments of the community.

- School and district administrators are encouraged to belong to and participate actively in civic and service organizations.
- The superintendent/chief executive officer maintains regular, two-way communication with business, civic and religious leaders, and other influential members of the community.
- A key communicator program facilitates regular communication with its members and invites them to contact the organization for information or to alert it to misinformation and rumors.
- Community members are regularly sought to serve on school district advisory committees.
- The district uses multiple channels of

communication to reach citizens who do not have children in the schools. Opportunities are provided for citizens to ask questions or seek further information.

- The person with public relations responsibilities is accessible to and visible to the community.
- The organization has an Internet web site that is well constructed and user-friendly; contains timely information of use to staff, parents and community members; and helps to recruit future employees and parents/students for the district.
- The district makes regular efforts to communicate with citizens of various cultures who are not fluent in English in ways that seek their involvement, input and support.
- The organization seeks partnerships with local businesses that provide mentors and other assistance to students and their schools.
- Community views and opinions are sought in periodic public opinion surveys.

News Media — The organization has policies and procedures that promote good communication with the news media, responsiveness by school officials and honesty and openness in providing information to reporters.

- Personnel in the public relations office have a complete list of local and regional news media outlets and reporters and make information about the organization available to the news media on a regular basis.
- District policies and procedures support responding to news media inquiries in a timely fashion, designation of a spokesperson or spokespersons (such as during a crisis), confidentiality as well as



the public release of information, publication of student names and photographs, and notification of all public meetings and events.

- Personnel in the public relations office conduct periodic inservice training for staff in news media relationships, including forums with reporters.
- The staff alerts the news media promptly in the event of any crisis or other newsworthy situation.
- The superintendent/chief executive officer and the director of public relations/communication periodically meet with newspaper and other news media editorial boards to alert them to the background and the organization's position on issues that have the potential to become controversial.

Elected Officials — The organization recognizes the political leadership exercised by elected officials and makes regular efforts to communicate with them.

- The superintendent/chief executive officer maintains regular, two-way communication with elected officials.
- The organization communicates regularly with local and regional governments and their officials, especially when an educational issue is likely to have an effect on their scope of responsibilities.
- The organization communicates regularly with state legislators and the state education agency to ensure that these officials are well informed about the district, its goals and objectives, and any issues that may arise before these groups.

Evaluation — Every major communication effort is evaluated to determine whether planned goals were met and objectives achieved.

- The organization and each of its units engage in both formal and informal evaluations of its communication practices and the levels of satisfaction with its performance.
- Overall personnel evaluations of district administrators and staff include a component addressing the need for effective internal and external communication practices and the levels of satisfaction with their performance. Job descriptions and regularly developed goals and objectives also include a focus on communication responsibilities.
- Whenever possible, evaluation methods are built in to each element of the organization's annual communication plan. These evaluations are used to create, modify, or discontinue practices or projects.
- Each of the organization's regular communication channels and vehicles is evaluated at least every two years to determine its relevance, interest and ability to communicate important information.



Standards for Educational Public Relations and Communication Program Budgets

The public relations and communication budget for staffing, services, and programs will vary according to an organization's size, needs, and availability of resources. Budgets can be based on a fixed percentage of the total organization's budget or allocations can be based on projects planned for the year.

Resources can be allocated to a single department, be included in the budgets of several departments, or be a combination of the two approaches. However, in every situation, the individual directing the public relations efforts should be involved in the preparation of the communication program budget. To operate a solid communication program provisions should be made for the following:

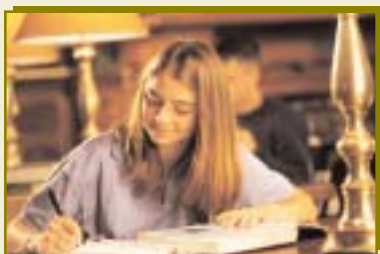
- salaries and benefits.
- internal support/professional and clerical assistance, as-needed external assistance, support and counsel, as needed.
- ongoing professional development opportunities for the public relations staff and professional development in communication for district staff and other key publics.
- office materials and supplies.
- equipment — telephone with voice mail or answering machine; office furniture, file cabinets, computer with desktop publishing and word processing software, fax machine, scanner, laser printer, 35-mm camera and digital camera, CD burner, copy machine (or immediate access to one), etc.
- Internet access with e-mail.
- contracted technical services or in-house staffing and equipment, where appropriate (printing, advertising, video taping, graphic design, crisis communication, web page, research, etc.).
- subscriptions to professional publications, newspapers, media guides.
- professional growth and development, including membership fees to professional organizations, conference fees, travel, meals and other reasonable expenses.
- research and evaluation.
- publications — printing, design, photography, postage.
- operating expenses/equipment repairs.
- community relations — membership and participation in identified community/civic organizations.
- special events, publications; or other communication efforts that will not be included in other departments' budgets.

To be successful, schools must create the conditions that make good development and learning possible: positive and powerful social and academic interactions between students and staff. When this happens, students gain social and academic competence, confidence, and comfort. Also, when parents and their social networks value school success and school experiences are positive and powerful, students are likely to acquire an internal desire to be successful in school and in life, and to gain and express the skills and behavior necessary to do so.

-- James P. Comer M.D.
"Schools That Develop Children,"
The American Prospect
Vol. 12 No. 7, April 23, 2001



A Final Lesson: Schools that Fail to Communicate Put All Students at Risk



Punditry is great work if you can get it. Take the issue of school accountability, for instance. With emotional rhetoric focusing on a few scores and trends, far too many politicians, media and activists indict education and educators in general while failing to advance specific solutions to help all kids achieve.

Such self-serving invectives often are a kind of verbal drive-by shooting, with innocent schools and communities left tending those injured or killed in the crossfire, while perpetrators slyly glide off to plot their next assault. The stakes are enormous. And our students and schools deserve better. In such a muddled and emotional debate, it is easy to lose sight of what really contributes to student success.

Confront Bogus Labels

Support for school communication programming is just one potential victim. Too easily, bad things happen to good kids and programs when budget decisions get made in the “fog” of such manufactured conflict.

Despite the oft-repeated talking points of a few to the contrary, the overwhelming majority of our teachers come to school every day eager to teach and committed to helping their students learn. Schools find ways to open their doors and teach our children day after day, despite razor-thin staffing ratios that leave teachers in crowded classrooms and administrators overburdened with a seemingly infinite list of vital but competing priorities.

Even with these challenges, educators — from novice teachers to veteran superintendents — continue to dedicate their lives and commit their passions to helping students succeed. Thanks to their unfaltering effort, lives are enriched and communities prosper.

Invest for the Long Term

In many ways the system seems designed to pit forces of good against other forces of good. And that’s too bad. No one wins in this war of attrition. And lost too often on both participants and pundits are the devastating results on the children that our schools were created to serve. The pattern is relentless — designed to wear down even the heartiest champions. Year after year, needs rise while funding falls. Competing tensions run the gauntlet annually to try to survive another fiscal year. Investments for the long haul give way to fixes for only the most pressing, immediate needs.

But if any endeavor demands a solemn commitment to investing for long-term success, it must be the education of our children.

Make the Right Choices

If we fail to confront it, the system makes it far too easy for school decision-makers to sidestep the overwhelming evidence that students do better in systems that enjoy the benefits of planned and ongoing communication. Students enjoy greater success in schools with strong parental involvement, enthusiastic community support, vigorous partnerships, steady enrollments and stable finances. But like classroom teaching, school communication is a tough business. It takes research and planning, professional direction, administrative support, unrelenting execution day after day and so much more. Sometimes it will fail. More often it will succeed. But in the end, successful communication programs provide the means to both deliver and nourish the rich environment that schools and teachers need to effectively transact the business of helping kids succeed.

Advocate for School PR

The next time a budget ax takes a swing at school communication in your schools, make sure those decision-makers know exactly what is at stake.

When schools reach out and engage parents and communities, great things happen. Student performance and attendance rise. Communities and schools strengthen each other. And when schools fail to communicate, they place all students at risk.

*Source: Edward Moore, APR
NSPRA Associate Director*





Section Three

National PTA – National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs





In 1997, National PTA set standards for parent and family involvement programs — more than 30 years of research and 100 years of practice helped develop the standards by which parent involvement programs can excel. National PTA in collaboration with parent involvement researchers and other national leaders — including NSPRA — developed the standards. Nearly 100 professional education and parent/family involvement organizations, state departments of education, colleges of teacher education and school districts endorse them. The standards clearly delineate those practices that have been shown to lead to success and high-quality parent involvement programs.

The standards booklet was developed to be a practical tool for meeting the threefold purpose of the voluntary national standards:

- To promote meaningful parent and family participation.
- To raise awareness regarding the components of effective programs.
- To provide guidelines for schools that wish to evaluate and improve their programs.

Effective parent involvement programs include activities that are addressed by the following six standards:

- I. Communicating — Communication between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful.
- II. Parenting — Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- III. Student learning — Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- IV. Volunteering — Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- V. School decision-making and advocacy — Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- VI. Collaborating with community — Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families and student learning.

Benefits of Parent Involvement

Students

- Higher grades, test scores and graduation rates
- Better school attendance
- Increased motivation, better self-esteem
- Lower rates of suspension
- Decreased use of drugs and alcohol
- Fewer instances of violent behavior
- Greater enrollment in post-secondary education

Teachers

- Greater morale (and self-esteem)
- Teaching effectiveness (proficiency) increases
- Increased job satisfaction
- Communication/relations with students, parents, families and communities improves
- Increased community support of schools

Parents

- Communication/relations with children and teachers improves
- Higher self-esteem
- Increased education level/skills
- Stronger decision-making skills



- Attitude toward school and school personnel improves

Parent Involvement and the Law

Studies have documented that regardless of the economic, ethnic or cultural background of the family, parent involvement in a child's education is a major factor in determining success in school. Recognizing that parents are a child's first teacher, National PTA has worked with federal legislators to include parent involvement requirements in education laws. Now, numerous laws require meaningful parent involvement, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). National PTA worked with Congress to initiate the PARENT Act, which sought to strengthen the parent participation policies in the ESEA.

In January 2002, the ESEA was signed into law as the No Child Left Behind Act. It authorizes more than 40 programs that provide federal funds to nearly every school district in the nation. This law now includes many of the provisions of the PARENT Act and, for the first time, bases the definition of parent involvement on National PTA's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.

National PTA has all the tools you need to create quality parent/family involvement programs in your school community.

Copies of the *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs* can be purchased from the National Education Service by calling 800-733-6786, e-mailing — sales@nesoline.org, or visiting their web site — www.solution-tree.com/Public/Main.aspx, for more information. Please request item #BKF175.

Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.

— James Madison





Appendices



What Is NSPRA?



Since 1935, the National School Public Relations Association has been providing school communication training and services to school leaders throughout the United States, Canada and the U.S. Dependent Schools worldwide. NSPRA's mission is to advance education through responsible communication. We accomplish that mission through a variety of diverse services that we provide to our members and to other school leaders who contract with or purchase products from us.

With 70 years of experience, we have a reputation in the field for practical approaches to solving school district and agency communication problems. We have useful communication products, offer workshops and seminars, maintain resource and research files, have contacts and resources within the corporate communication industry and have 34 chapters throughout the country that provide local networking opportunities for members.

In keeping with our mission, NSPRA provides workshop assistance to school districts, state departments of education, regional service agencies, and state and national associations. For many of these groups, we have completed research-based communication audits to analyze the communication flow, targeting, content and effectiveness of their communication messages.

The NSPRA National Seminar, the most comprehensive school communication workshop anywhere, is held each July. This four-day session offers more than 70 topics on a wide array of school communication issues.

NSPRA's monthly membership newsletter *Network* is seen as a communication resource for school leaders, not just our members. Each edition tackles a major problem and explains how communication can play a vital role in solving it.

Principal Communicator is our building-level PR newsletter which provides practical help to school principals and other building-level leaders. The calendar and variety of communication topics are helping many to effectively improve communication at the community level.

Our four electronic newsletters, *NSPRA This Week*, *The NSPRA Counselor*, *NSPRA Alert* and *Opportunities*, provide summaries of breaking national education news, in-depth studies of issues and trends and updates on seminars, products and services available to educators. *Communication Matters for Leading Superintendents* is an electronic newsletter targeting issues and topics related to communication for school system leaders.

The Flag of Learning and Liberty is a national education symbol, developed by NSPRA in its 50th Anniversary Year. On July 4, 1985, the Flag of Learning and Liberty flew over the state houses of all 50 states to launch the rededication of America's commitment to education and a democratic, free society.

NSPRA is a member of the Educational Leaders Consortium and works with all major national organizations to help improve educational opportunities for the nation's young people. In addition, NSPRA is a sponsoring agency of the Educational Research Service (ERS). The association also sponsors four national awards programs to bring recognition for excellence in communication to individuals, districts and agencies.

More information about NSPRA is available at www.NSPRA.org.



Communication Accountability Project – 2005-2006 Task Force

Chairs

Jim Dunn, APR (MO)
jdunn@liberty.k12.mo.us

Marsha Chappelow (MO)
mchappelow@ladue.k12.mo.us

Board Liaisons

Gay Campbell, APR (WA)
gay_campbell@everett.wednet.edu

Bob Noyed, APR (MN)
bnoyed@elkriver.k12.mn.us

Staff Liaison

Edward H. Moore, APR
emoore@nspra.org

CAP Steering Committee Members

Ellen Boyd, APR (NC)
boyde@kannapolis.k12.nc.us

Susan Hardy Brooks, APR (OK)
hardybrooks@pldi.net

Annette Eyman (NE)
aeyman@paplv.esu3.org

Louise Henry, APR (TX)
louisehenry@lrhenry.net

Barbara Hunter, APR (VA)
bhunter@nsba.org

Rick Kaufman, APR (CO)
rkaufman@jeffco.k12.co.us

Bonnie Reidy (NC)
breidy@gaston.k12.nc.us

Athena Vadnais (OR)
athena_vadnais@gbsd.gresham.k12.or.us

Gary Aungst (AZ)
gaungst@tempeschools.org

David Voss (FL)
david@vossandassociates.net

CAP Support/Research Committee

Candace Ahlfinger, APR (TX)
cahlfinger@wisd.org

Amanda Brooker (WI)
abrooker@greenbay.k12.wi.us

Mary Jo Burton, APR (MO)
mburton@nkcsc.k12.mo.us

Nora Carr, APR (NC)
n.carr@cms.k1.nc.us

Brett Clark (IL)
bclark@glenview34.org

Rochelle Cancienne (LA)
rcancienne@stcharles.k12.la.us

Jennifer Caracciolo (GA)
jcaracciolo@forsyth.k12.ga.us

Katherine Collins, APR (OR)
kmcollins@srvinet.com

Tom DeLapp (CA)
tomdelapp@aol.com

Georgia Duran (CO)
georgiad@admin.aps.k12.co.us

Cindy Gibson (MO)
gibson@ritenour.k12.mo.us

Eileen Harvala, APR (MN)
eileen_harvala@hopkins.k12.mn.us

Mary Ellen Marnholtz (WI)
memarnhz@wausau.k12.wi.us

J. Marie Merrifield (WA)
j.marie@idealcommunications.us

Lana Mueller (NJ)
lmueller@ltps.org

Sharon Raffer (CA)
sraffer@powayusd.com

Laurie Reilly, APR (GA)
lreilly1@bellsouth.net

Elise Shelton (TN)
elise.shelton@cmcss.net

Carol Votsmier (IL)
cvots@springfield.k12.il.us

Allison Westfall (ID)
awestfal@sde.state.id.us



About the Author

Anne O. Cary

Anne Cary is an economist and a retired diplomat. She spent 25 years with the U.S. Department of State, serving in Belgium, Haiti, France, Ethiopia, India, Morocco, South Africa and the U.S. Ms. Cary attended Trinity College in Ireland, graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and holds an M.A. from Stanford University. She spent a year at Georgetown University as a Rusk Fellow, teaching an undergraduate seminar. She was president of the school board of the Casablanca American School and has been active in PTA and PTSA's both in the U.S. and abroad. Ms. Cary edited and published a weekly economic newsletter and as a consultant does editing and research for various organizations including the World Bank, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Montgomery County Public Schools. She is also the parent of three public school students.



2005-06 NSPRA Executive Board

President

Gay Campbell, APR

President-Elect

Bob Noyed, APR

Vice President for Diversity Engagement

Anji Husain

Vice President at Large — Superintendents of Schools

Kenneth E. Bird

Vice President at Large — School Board Focus

Thomas J. Gentzel

Regional Vice Presidents

Northeast — Patricia Crawford

Mideast — Ronald E. Koehler, APR

Southeast — Tim Hensley, APR

North Central — Nancy Kracke

South Central — Susan Hardy Brooks, APR

Northwest — Larry Wiget, APR

Southwest — Janelle R. Albertson, APR

Senior NSPRA Staff

Executive Director

Richard Bagin, APR

Associate Directors

Ed Moore, APR

Karen Kleinz, APR





National School Public Relations Association
15948 Derwood Road
Rockville, Maryland 20855
301-519-0496
www.NSPRA.org

© 2006 National School Public Relations Association.