

1983

Development of a Public Relations Program for the Newman Community Unit School District #303

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Eastern Illinois University

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DEVELOPMENT OF A PUBLIC RELATIONS
PROGRAM FOR THE NEWMAN COMMUNITY

UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT #303

(TITLE)

BY

Charles E. White

Field Experience

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Specialist in Education

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1983

YEAR

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DEVELOPMENT OF A PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM FOR THE
NEWMAN COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT #303

By
Charles E. White

Abstract of a Field Experience

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Specialist
in Educational Administration in the
Graduate School, Eastern Illinois University

Charleston, Illinois

1983

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Public relations is an important part of any school district's total program. To be most effective, a written, planned public relations program should be used. This field experience deals with the development of a written, planned public relations program for the Newman Community Unit School District #303 in Newman, Illinois.

The author attempts to provide information that could be used by other educators who wish to develop a public relations program for their school district. Reasons why educators must provide information about the schools to the public and involve the public with the schools are discussed. The reasons for developing a public relations program for the Newman School District's and background information concerning the New School District and the author are presented. Several definitions of school public relations are also included.

A review of current educational literature is contained in this field experience. Reasons why schools should be concerned about public relations, methods of providing information to the various publics, and ways to receive feedback from these publics are discussed. Special areas of school public relations are also considered. Sources of current public relations information such as the National School Public Relations Association are cited.

A survey developed by the author to determine the public relations programs and activities being conducted by East Central Illinois school districts with enrollments of less than 2,000 students is presented. This presentation includes the survey instrument, the survey results, and a list of the school districts surveyed.

A public relations program for the Newman District is developed in this field experience. This program includes objectives, a schedule of public relations activities, and public relations responsibilities.

A summary and recommendations of the author conclude this paper. The recommendations include general recommendations concerning public relations and specific recommendations concerning the Newman public relations program.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Every Gallup poll during the last twenty-five years shows that the public would like more information about the schools and the educational system.¹ Despite this fact, educators fail to provide information about the schools to the public. Often the public's confidence in schools is taken for granted. This attitude diminishes the public's confidence in schools and its support of the educational system.

Superintendent Raj Chapra of Council Bluffs, Iowa, says the biggest problem facing education's leaders today is "educators' failure to educate the public about education."² Among the reasons to inform the public about education and the schools are: (1) taxpayers deserve to know how their money is spent, (2) parents entrust the schools with their most prized possessions--their children--and they deserve to know how schools are educating them, and (3) the public should understand the achievements of its schools.³

The success of a school system not only depends on the support of a well-informed public, but the public must also be involved with the schools. The public must

feel that participation in school activities and affairs is not only a right but a responsibility. In order for the public to be well-informed and involved, a well-planned, written public relations program is a necessity.

A good public relations program encourages the cooperation of home, school, and community in a manner that stimulates them to work together for the education of the community's children.⁴ When the school and community work together, confidence in and support of the schools is likely to increase. This confidence and support is extremely important if a school system determines it necessary to ask the community to increase taxes in order to provide additional finances for the schools.

Purpose Of The Project

The purpose of this field experience is to develop a written, planned public relations program for the Newman Community Unit School District #303. Two schools, Newman Grade School and Newman High School, comprise the Newman School District. Few public relation activities are conducted by the Newman High School staff. This lack of communication with the public results in criticism of the high school programs and personnel. Several public relations activities are successfully conducted by the grade school staff. These activities result in a great deal of support for Newman Grade School. A written, planned public relations program for the Newman School District

will provide even more support for the grade school and increase confidence in the staff and programs of the high school.

Definition Of Terms

For purposes of this field experience, an understanding of the terms school public relations and public is important. The National School Public Relations Association defines school public relations as:

A planned and systematic two-way process of communications between an educational organization and its internal and external publics. Its program serves to stimulate a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization. Educational public relations is a management function that interprets public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action to encourage public involvement and to earn public understanding and acceptance.⁵

Bortner defines school public relations as a series of planned activities and media through which the schools seek to (1) learn about their community; (2) inform the community about, and interpret when necessary, the purposes, programs, and needs of the schools; and (3) involve the community in planning and evaluating school policies and progress.⁶ A simpler definition is "an effort to influence public opinion through good character and responsible performance based on mutually acceptable, two-way community."⁷ These definitions clearly indicate that school public relations must involve two-way

communications with the public.

A public is defined as a group of people who share common characteristics. An internal public is a group of people within the school system, and an external public is a group of people outside the school system.

Background Information

The public relations program developed by this field experience will be very beneficial to the Newman School District. The Newman District is a small K-12 district located in East Central Illinois. The town of Newman has 1000 citizens. The district enrollment is presently 256 students. The high school enrollment of sixty-eight is one of the smallest in this part of the state. The Newman School District encompasses seventy-eight square miles of good farmland and has an assessed valuation of \$31,700,000.

The author is presently the principal of Newman Grade School. The author is adding the duties of superintendent for the 1983-84 school year. This field experience will make a valuable contribution to the author's success as a first-year superintendent. Citizens of the Newman community demonstrate a desire to support the schools and be involved in the schools, and a planned public relations program will give the citizens this opportunity.

NOTES

¹Lew Armistead, Building Confidence In Education (Reston, Virginia: NASSP, 1982) p. vii.

²Barbara Parker, "Blast Your Critics With Education's Good News," The American School Board Journal, 117, No. 6 (June, 1980), pp. 19-22.

³Armistead, p. 2.

⁴Vincent C. Flemmings and Forrell L. McClure, Planning For Effective Community School Relations: A Manual Of Procedures, Center For Urban Education (New York, New York, 1972), p. 3 (ERIC ED 087 981).

⁵Armistead, p. 6.

⁶Doyle M. Bortner, Public Relations For Public Schools (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman, 1972), p. 7.

⁷National School Public Relations Association, PR Packet (Arlington, Virginia: NSPRA, n. d.), n. page.

CHAPTER II

Review Of The Literature

There is extensive literature available concerning school public relations. Several books, periodicals and ERIC documents were examined. Informative and up-to-date material received from the Illinois Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association, The Communications Department of the Illinois Association of School Boards, and the Illinois State Board of Education was also examined.

Much of the literature deals with why schools should be concerned about public relations. Other literature suggests methods of providing information to the various publics and ways to receive feedback from these publics. Special areas of school public relations are also discussed in the available literature.

In an article published in The American School Board Journal, James Caudill states that the public does not understand the problems confronting the schools. He says schools should communicate so the public will understand and support the schools.¹

During a meeting of a study commission of the Council of Chief State School Officers, Nevada Superintendent Ted

7

Sanders states, "The public is demanding answers. We'd better find ways of getting the message through."²

Sanders also says educators must clarify what schools are all about and communicate this to the public.

In his book, Public Relations For Public Schools, Bortner states a very basic reason for developing a public relations program. He says "that it is necessary to make friends even when one does not need them if they are to be available when one does need them."³ Bortner feels strongly that planned public relations programs should be developed before situations arise that demand the public's support.

These are just a few examples of the numerous sources that state the premise that all school districts, regardless of size and available monies, should have a planned and well-organized public relations program. Educators agree that a good public relations program is an important part of a good school system.

An excellent source of current information concerning school public relations is the Illinois Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association. Public relations packages are sent periodically to all member institutions. A recent packet contains information concerning newsletters, low-cost public relations techniques, public relations for small districts, and the principal and public relations. Membership in the association provides a school district with a constant supply of up-to-date literature.

This literature provides suggestions for a variety of methods and sources to communicate information to the public. The various publics to be considered are also identified. The National School Public Relations Association identifies the following internal publics: (1) employees, (2) board members, (3) volunteers, and (4) students. The external publics are: (1) parents, (2) business people, (3) senior citizens, (4) taxpayers, (5) legislators, (6) voters, (7) news media people, and (8) employees from other school districts.⁴

Ned Hubbell states that many parents feel the most reliable source of information is their children. His opinion is that the news media is often the most reliable source of information. Hubbell also lists teachers, other parents, and school publications as sources of information. Sources of information listed for non-parents are: (1) newspapers, (2) someone else's children, (3) school publications, and (4) experience and contact with school employees. He cites a 1979 survey that reveals 54% of parents feel well informed and 40% of non-parents feel somewhat informed.⁵

The handbook, PR for School Board Members, lists several publications that school districts can use to communicate with their publics. However, the newsletter is cited as being a key publication. This handbook recommends that schools publish staff newsletters and community newsletters. The other key publication for a school district is the annual report.

Short sentences and simple words are suggested in order to make the annual report effective.⁶

In Building Confidence in Education, Lew Armistead agrees with Hubbell's viewpoint concerning students as a source of information. He states that students are the primary source of information. If students are made to feel good about themselves and their schools, the information they provide will be positive. He also states that people form opinions based on their experiences with the principal, staff, and students. Good experiences result in positive attitudes toward the school.⁷

The literature also makes suggestions on how to turn public relations problems into public relations triumphs. Among these problems are budgetary matters, energy management, and censorship of books.

In a recent issue of The Executive Educator, Robert Stabile states that "education affects a minority of voters directly but finances affect every taxpayer."⁸ A typical public relations program focuses on education; but emphasis should also be placed on financial matters. He suggests that school districts emphasize (1) good fiscal management, (2) involve staff members in the budget making process, and (3) make good public relations use of the annual budget report. Stabile says that every school board meeting should include an example of good financial management.

Due to the high cost of natural gas and electricity, energy management has become important to the taxpayer. Joseph Rowson offers the following public relations tips for conserving energy: (1) adopt an energy conservation policy, (2) explain the energy policy to the public, (3) feature energy topics in the district newsletter, (4) compile and analyze building energy data, and (5) post energy conservation signs.⁹

Another area that can cause public relations problems is the censorship of books. To prevent such problems, Michelle Kamhi suggests that schools keep the community informed about the procedures for selecting and reviewing books. The community should know that a book selection and review committee is in operation. She states that a clearly defined method of dealing with complaints can prevent a great deal of public criticism.¹⁰

The literature also deals with communication from the public to the school district. Public relations experts suggest that schools find out what the community knows and thinks about its schools. This is done by the use of questionnaires, surveys, interviews, suggestion boxes, and community meetings. Lewis suggests asking citizens to complete a card stating three things they like about the schools and three things they do not like about the schools. This approach works best in small schools.¹¹

The Communications Department of the Illinois Association of School Boards provided this author with some excellent literature concerning surveys. Materials are provided on how to do a survey, basic survey methods, how to draw a sample, and types of questions. A community survey question bank as well as several actual community surveys are provided.

The Illinois Problems Index developed by the Illinois State Board of Education was also examined. This survey instrument provides school districts with a method to identify and prioritize educational problems.

In surveying a community, John Wherry asks the following question: "What would you like to know more about concerning your school?"¹² Responses indicate that the public is interested in: (1) how students are progressing, (2) what teachers are like, (3) curriculum, (4) teaching methods and materials, (5) special instructional services, (6) school policies, rules, and regulations, (7) how tax money is used, and (8) how the public can help schools help students.¹³

Another method of communication is to involve the public with the schools. West suggests that the school ask community members to participate as guest speakers, teacher helpers, supervising field trips, etc. Then schools should promote further involvement by asking some of these people to serve on an advisory council.¹⁴

The extensive amount of literature concerning public relations prohibits a complete review in this paper. However, an attempt was made to provide a written review of some of the important areas of public relations.

NOTES

¹James Caudill, "Three Simple But Super Truths To Make Your Public Relations Better--And Easier," The American School Board Journal, 164, No. 10 (October, 1977), p. 27.

²The Reno Report, Rejuvenating Public Confidence In Education, Study Commission (Washington, D.C.: Council of Chief State School Officers), p. 7 (ERIC ED 197 500).

³Doyle M. Bortner, Public Relations for Public Schools, (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1972), p. 4.

⁴National School Public Relations Association, PR Packet, (Arlington, Virginia: NSPRA, n.d.), n.p.

⁵The Reno Report, p. 9.

⁶Don Bagin and others, PR for School Board Members, (Arlington, Va.: AASA, 1976), pp. 48-49.

⁷Lew Armistead, Building Confidence in Education, (Reston, Va.: NASSP, 1982), pp. 11-12.

⁸Robert G. Stabile, "Showcase Your Money Savvy," The Executive Educator, 4, No. 4 (April, 1982), p. 29.

⁹Public Relations and Communications, Special Session at the 65th Annual Meeting and Exhibits of the Association of School Business Officials, October 15, 1979 (Park Ridge, Ill.: Research Corp. of ASBO, 1979), pp. 40-41.

¹⁰Michell Kamhi, "Censorship Vs. Selection--Choosing the Books Our Children Shall Read," Educational Leadership, 39 No. 3 (December, 1981), p. 213.

¹¹Anne C. Lewis and others, Creative Ideas for Small Schools, (Arlington, Va.: AASA, 1981), p. 64 (ERIC ED 197 903).

¹²John Wherry, "What's Going on at School," NASSP Bulletin, 65, No. 442 (February, 1981), p. 49.

¹³Wherry, p. 49.

¹⁴Joan E. West and Phillip T. West, "Persuading Your School's Publics," Planning & Changing, 13, No. 1 (Spring, 1982), p. 19.

CHAPTER III

Survey of Public Relations Programs

Purpose of the Survey

A survey was conducted to determine the normative type of public relations programs and activities being used by schools in East Central Illinois. The survey instrument was developed after examining current literature concerning public relations and talking informally with other administrators about public relations. The activities included in the survey instrument are those most frequently mentioned in the literature and conversations. This author feels such a survey provides useful information for the development of a public relations program for the Newman Schools.

Survey Procedures

Surveys were mailed to the superintendents of twenty-six school districts within an approximate forty mile radius of Newman, Illinois. School districts within this area that have enrollments of 2,000 or less students were

surveyed. Twenty-three surveys were returned. The eighty-eight percent return is excellent.

Survey Results

The survey questions and responses are presented in table and figure form on the following pages. When applicable, the number of responses and percentages are indicated. Rank order is used to present the results of questions seven and eight. The survey instrument, the school districts surveyed, and a list of successful activities and comments made in response to question twelve are included in the figures.

TABLE 1

USE OF A WRITTEN, PLANNED PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM

-
1. Does your district have a written, planned public relations program?
-

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	0	0
No	23	100

The responses indicate that none of the surveyed districts have a written, planned public relations program. The development of a written program for the Newman Schools could serve as a model for other districts.

TABLE 2
RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

2. Who has the main responsibility for public relations in your district?

Response	Number	Percent
Superintendent	6	26
Principal	1	4
Both	16	70

The respondents indicate that the main responsibility for public relations is shared by both the superintendent and building principals.

TABLE 3
IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION - SUPERINTENDENT

3. Which of the following do you feel is the most important for you to inform your school district citizens about?

Response	Number	Percent*
Curriculum	12	34
Finances	11	32
Special Programs	5	14
Extra-Curricular Activities	4	11
Other (All)	3	9

The response indicates that superintendents feel all areas are important. However, superintendents place more importance on curriculum and finances than the other areas.

*Since some of the superintendents indicate more than one area, percentages are based on total responses rather than the number of districts surveyed.

TABLE 4
IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION - CITIZENS

4. Which of the following do your citizens indicate is most important to know about?

Response	Number	Percent*
Extra-Curricular Activities	11	39
Finances	9	32
Curriculum	5	18
Special Program	2	7
Other (All)	1	4

The responses indicate that superintendents perceive citizens as being interested in all areas but most interested in extra-curricular activities and finances.

*Since some of the superintendents indicate more than one area, percentages are based on total responses rather than the number of districts surveyed.

TABLE 5
USE OF A NEWSLETTER

5. (A) Does your district publish a newsletter?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	15	65
No	8	35

The responses indicate that a large majority (65%) of the districts publish a newsletter.

(B) Who receives the newsletter?

Response	Number	Percent
Parents	6	40
Parents and Non-parents	9	60

The responses indicate that a majority (60%) of the school districts that publish a newsletter do so for all members of the community.

TABLE 6
USE OF SCHOOL-COMMUNITY CALENDAR

6. (A) Does your district publish a school-community calendar?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	10	43
No	13	57

The responses indicate that a majority (57%) of the districts do not publish a school-community calendar.

(B) If yes, who pays for the printing of the calendars?

Response	Number	Percent
School District	5	50
Advertisers	5	50

The responses indicate that 50% of the schools that publish a school-community calendar pay for the printing and 50% have advertisers pay for the printing.

TABLE 7
SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

7. Rank the sources of providing information to parents.^a

Source	Average Rank
Students	1.7
Written Announcements To Parents	3.0
Newsletter	3.1
School Staff	3.6
Newspaper	3.7
Radio	5.1

The responses indicate that superintendents agree with the literature that students are the most effective means of providing information to parents. The least effective source in this area of Illinois is the radio.

^aSuperintendents were asked to rate the most effective source as #1 and the least effective source as #6.

TABLE 8
SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR NON-PARENTS

8. Rank the sources of providing information to non-parents.^a

Source	Average Rank
Newspaper	1.4
School Staff	3.1
Students	3.2
Radio	3.3
Newsletter	3.4

The responses indicate that the newspaper is easily the best source of information for non-parents. This result reinforces many public relations experts' advice of establishing good rapport with the press. The other sources rank almost evenly with school staff ranking as the second best source of information to non-parents.

^aSuperintendents were asked to rate the most effective source as #1 and the least effective source as #5.

TABLE 9
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

9. Does your district have a school board advisory council?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	14	61
No	9	39

Many (61%) of the school districts surveyed are using advisory councils as a means of citizen participation.

TABLE 10
USE OF A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

10. Does your district have a volunteer program?

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	10	43
No	13	57

A majority (57%) of the school districts have not developed a volunteer program.

TABLE 11
USE OF AN OPEN HOUSE

11. Does your district conduct an annual Open House?

Response	Number	Percent
Elementary	20	87
Junior High	19	83
High School	18	78

A high percentage of the superintendents indicate that an Open House is used as a public relations activity. The Open House seems to be more popular at the elementary level than at the junior high and high school level.

FIGURE 1

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

School District _____ Total Enrollment _____

1. Does your district have a written, planned public relations program?
 Yes No If yes, please send me a copy.
2. Who has the main responsibility for public relations in your district?
 Superintendent Building Principal Both
3. Which of the following do you feel is the most important for you to inform your school district citizens about?
 Curriculum Special Programs Finances
 Extra-Curricular Activities Other
4. Which of the following do your citizens indicate is most important to know about?
 Curriculum Special Programs Finances
 Extra-Curricular Activities Other
5. (A) Does your district publish a newsletter?
 Yes No
 (B) Who receives the newsletter?
 Parents Parents and Non-parents

6. (A) Does your district publish a school-community calendar?

_____ Yes _____ No

- (B) If yes, who pays for the printing of the calendars?

_____ School District _____ Advertisers

7. Please rank the following sources of providing information to parents. Rank the most effective as #1 and the least effective as #6.

_____ Students _____ Newsletter _____ Newspaper

_____ Radio _____ School Staff _____ Written announcements
to parents

8. Please rank the following sources of providing information to non-parents. Rank the most effective as #1 and the least effective as #5.

_____ Students _____ Newsletter _____ Newspaper

_____ Radio _____ School Staff

9. Does your district have a school board advisory council?

_____ Yes _____ No

10. Does your district have a volunteer program?

_____ Yes _____ No

11. Does your district conduct an annual Open House?

_____ Elementary _____ Junior High _____ High School

12. Please list public relations activities that have been successful in your district.

Thank you for completing this survey.

FIGURE 2
SCHOOL DISTRICTS SURVEYED

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. ABL (285) | 14. Lovington* |
| 2. Arcola (736) | 15. Monticello (1516) |
| 3. Arthur (570) | 16. Oakland (4 86) |
| 4. Atwood (575) | 17. Paris Crestwood (1,052) |
| 5. Bement (588) | 18. Paris Union (2,000) |
| 6. Bethany (530) | 19. Ridgefarm (400) |
| 7. Cerro Gordo* | 20. Shiloh (435) |
| 8. Chrisman (496) | 21. Sullivan (1170) |
| 9. Deland-Weldon (325) | 22. Tolono (1,450) |
| 10. Georgetown (1,253) | 23. Tuscola* |
| 11. Homer (390) | 24. Villa Grove (797) |
| 12. Jamaica (570) | 25. Westfield H.S. (63) |
| 13. Kansas (326) | 26. Westville (1,500) |

Enrollment is in parentheses.

*Did not return the survey.

FIGURE 3

SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

12. Please list public relations activities that have been successful in your district.
 1. Elementary parent group
 2. Special features in newspaper
 3. Student articles in newspaper
 4. Newspaper coverage of extra-curricular activities
 5. Parent-teacher conferences
 6. Homecoming activities
 7. Winning athletic teams
 8. Adult education classes
 9. Monthly newsletter
 10. Annual arts/crafts show
 11. Annual honors reception
 12. Open House
 13. Good student awards
 14. Attendance awards
 15. Staff involvement in community
 16. Parent volunteers
 17. Demonstration activities
 18. Annual report
 19. Advisory council
 20. Senior citizen day
 21. Newsletter by individual grade
 22. Coffee hour with non-parents
 23. "Back-to-School" guide
 24. School-community calendar
 25. Booster club activities
 26. Use of school facilities by community

FIGURE 4

COMMENTS CONCERNING PUBLIC RELATIONS

1. "Take time to talk to reporters and explain activities."
2. "Work closely with reporters who cover school news.
These people can make or break a district depending
on the manner in which they slant their articles."
3. "Teachers must project a positive image of the school
to the community."
4. "Teachers and administrators must listen to people
with problems."

CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPMENT OF A PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM FOR THE NEWMAN COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT # 303

Information from a review of the current educational literature, conversations with other administrators, and a survey of area school districts are used in the development of the Newman School District public relations program. The first step in this development is the establishment of objectives. The following objectives will be adopted for the Newman public relations program:

1. To promote public interest and participate in the operation of the Newman school system
2. To gather public attitudes about the Newman Schools
3. To provide an honest, continuous flow of information about the policies, procedures, programs, problems, and progress of the school system to the Newman community and the Newman school staff
4. To develop the most effective means of communication with each of the Newman school system's publics
5. To develop and maintain the confidence of the Newman community in the school board and school staff

6. To encourage the school staff to strive for excellence in the educational program
7. To anticipate and forestall problems that are brought about by lack of understanding
8. To evaluate past procedures in order to make improvements in future communication procedures¹

The next step is the development of a set of public relations activities and methods to meet each of these objectives. This plan will be comprehensive but also practical and manageable. The public relations plan for the Newman Schools will consist of the statement of an objective, a list of activities to be used to meet the objective, and a short discussion of how the key activities will be implemented. Many of the activities may be used to meet more than one objective but will only be listed once.

Newman Community Unit Schools
Public Relations Program

1. To promote public interest and participation in the operation of the Newman School system
 - A. Use of parent volunteers
 - B. Use of community volunteers
 - C. Establishment of a citizen advisory council
 - D. Establishment of a book review committee

Parents will be encouraged to serve as elementary room mothers, chaperones for elementary and high school field trips, and to help with class projects such as bake sales, chili suppers, and car washes.

Parent and community volunteers will be encouraged to take tickets at ballgames, read to elementary students, listen to elementary students read, give demonstrations, and assist with the library program.

Preparation for a citizen advisory council will start at the beginning of the 1983-84 school year. This author anticipates a need for citizen input when possible "cuts" are considered for the 1984-85 school year. Therefore an advisory council should be active by the second semester of the 1983-84 school year. This council will be expected to provide recommendations only to the New Board of Education.

A book review committee consisting of the school librarian, an elementary teacher, a high school teacher, a parent, and a community member will be established for the 1983-84 school year.

A constant effort will be made to expand the number of activities that will promote public participation in the Newman Schools.

2. To gather public attitudes about the Newman Schools
 - A. Community survey - attitudes about Newman school system and type of information citizens want to receive

- B. Question cards - cards to be used by citizens to ask questions about the schools
- C. Idea cards - cards to be used by citizens to make suggestions about the schools

During registration in August, parents will be asked to complete a questionnaire about the Newman Schools. After school begins, the high school civics class will distribute questionnaires to other members of the community. Since Newman is a small community, this class should be able to contact a large percentage of the citizens.

Question cards and idea cards will be placed in the Newman First State Bank, Red Fox Supermarket, and Kook and Link Pharmacy. The cards will be collected weekly and responses will be mailed to citizens within one week.

- 3. To provide an honest, continuous flow of information about the policies, procedures, programs, problems, and progress of the school system to the Newman community and the Newman school staff

- A. Community

- 1. Newspaper articles
- 2. Newsletter
- 3. Public service announcements
- 4. Annual Open House
- 5. School calendar

- B. Staff

- 1. District policy manual
- 2. Written announcements to staff

3. Faculty meetings
4. In-service programs
5. Board meeting summary

There is a weekly newspaper published in Newman. The newspaper staff is always eager to print school news. However, school news articles must be written by a member of the school staff. This responsibility will be shared by the administration and faculty. These articles will emphasize positive school news but will include a discussion of problems when appropriate. A four page "Back-to-School" supplement will be published by the Newman Independent. The cost of \$300 for 1,150 copies will be paid by advertisers. The administrators will be responsible for preparing material for the "Back-to-School" supplement. During the school year, coaches and sponsors will be asked to prepare articles about their extra-curricular activities. The superintendent will provide a summary of the monthly school board meeting to be Newman Independent.

In October, January, and April, a newsletter will be distributed to all citizens of the Newman community. Information provided in the newsletter will be determined by the results of the survey taken at the beginning of the school year.

Public service announcements concerning the Newman Schools will be given to radio stations in Tuscola, Paris, and Champaign.

Newman Grade School and Newman High School will hold an Open House in October. This Open House will allow parents and community members to observe students' projects and regular classroom work. It will also allow citizens to meet the school staff and observe the school facilities.

A calendar listing all activities for the school year will be printed by the Newman School District. Names of school board members, faculty, and other school officials will be listed along with school phone numbers and other pertinent information. This calendar will be given to all parents and be made available to all community members.

The district policy manual will provide a great deal of information to the school staff. This manual will be updated annually.

Written announcements and faculty meetings will be used to provide current information to the staff. In-service meetings will be used to explain and involve the staff in new programs. An in-service program will be used to emphasize the need for good public relations and explain the public relations program. Another in-service meeting will involve the financial aspects of the Newman School District.

After each monthly board of education meeting, a summary of action taken by the board will be given to all school staff members. This information will be available to all staff members by noon of the day following the board of education meeting.

4. To develop the most effective means of communication with each of the Newman school system's publics

- A. Students

1. Student-parent handbook
2. Happy grams, birthday grams, missing tooth awards
3. Good citizenship awards
4. Athletic banquets
5. Awards assembly
6. Student of the week
7. High school orientation day
8. Letters of congratulations
9. Mini-course on school finance
10. Graduation exercises

Every attempt will be made to make students feel good about themselves and their schools. Students will be considered the most important part of the Newman public relations program.

- B. Parents

1. Student-parent handbook
2. Monthly calendar

3. Parent-teacher conferences
4. Written announcements
5. Special interest nights

In addition to previously mentioned written communication, parents will be given a handbook that explains school rules and regulations, a monthly calendar listing all school activities for the current month, and a school lunch menu. Written announcements concerning new rules and regulations, changes in the school schedule, etc. will be sent home to parents as needed.

Conferences will be held in November and March to allow parents and teachers to discuss each student's progress. Parents of gifted students, Chapter I students, and vocational students will be invited to a special night activity designed to explain their child's special program.

C. General public

1. Displays in local stores
2. Availability of school personnel to speak

D. Business community

1. Letters of appreciation for support

E. Senior citizens

1. Volunteer program
2. Visitation day in April

F. Staff

1. Special folder for substitute teachers
2. Activities listed under objective #3

The staff members will be kept well-informed as they will be considered as an important source of school information to the community.

5. To develop and maintain the confidence of the Newman community in the school board and school staff
 - A. Allow use of buildings at no cost
 - B. Do a good job of maintaining buildings and grounds
 - C. Board of education meetings
 1. Conduct well-organized meetings
 2. Welcome visitors
 3. Provide agenda to visitors
 4. Emphasize good fiscal management
 - D. Publication of budget and annual report
 - E. Publicize accomplishments of staff
 - F. Establish procedure concerning complaints
 - G. Visibility of staff

Any non-profit community organization will be allowed to use the school facilities free of charge.

Custodians will constantly be reminded that the appearance of the building and grounds promotes school pride in the community.

Board members will be encouraged to conduct well-organized meetings. Visitors will be welcomed and provided an agenda. During board meetings, every opportunity to emphasize good fiscal management will be used.

A summary of the budget and the annual report will be published in the Newman Independent. An attempt will be made to simplify them through the use of explanations, charts, and graphs.

Accomplishments such as awards and completion of graduate courses by the staff will be publicized in the newspaper and newsletter.

Parents and community members will be reminded to follow the "chain-of-command" when lodging a complaint. Handling of complaints will be discussed with the staff during the teacher workshop in August. Staff members will listen to complaints and determine if an immediate response is appropriate. All complaints will be handled as quickly and fairly as possible.

The school staff will be encouraged to attend special events, sporting activities, and community events.

6. To encourage the school staff to strive for excellence in the educational program

A. Teacher of the year

The staff will be reminded that a good educational program is an excellent public relations tool. The "Teacher of the Year" will be selected based on contributions to the

excellence of the Newman School District. The selection will be made by the school staff.

7. To anticipate and forestall problems that are brought about by lack of understanding

Implementation of the previously listed activities will help prevent a lack of understanding by the various publics. When a problem is anticipated, additional information will be provided or a public meeting held to explain the situation.

8. To evaluate past procedures in order to make improvements in future communication procedures

- A. Self-evaluation
- B. Evaluative questionnaire

An attempt will be made to evaluate the effectiveness of the various methods and activities used for communication. A questionnaire concerning communication procedures will be developed. Students and staff will be surveyed. The April newsletter will contain the questionnaire in order that parents and community members have input into the evaluative process. The results of this evaluation may result in changes in the communication process and public relations program.

Schedule of Public Relations Activities

The following schedule of activities will be used:

Daily, Weekly, and Monthly

- (1) Question and idea cards, (2) Newspaper articles,

(3) Public service announcements, (4) Written announcements to staff and parents, (5) Faculty meetings, (6) In-service programs, (7) Board summaries, (8) Happy grams, birthday grams, missing tooth awards, (9) Good citizenship awards, (10) Student of the week, (11) Calendar of activities, (12) Speaking engagements, (13) Letters of appreciation and congratulations, (14) Use of buildings, (15) Board meetings, (16) Staff participation in community, (17) Athletic booster clubs, (18) Extracurricular activities

August

1. Survey of parents during registration
2. Place question cards and idea cards in proper locations
3. "Back to School" newspaper supplement
4. Distribute school calendar
5. Distribute district policy manual to new teachers and revisions to all teachers
6. In-service program on public relations
7. Distribute student-parent handbook
8. Teachers develop substitute folders
9. Establish and explain complaint procedure
10. Daily, weekly, monthly activities

September

1. Complete survey of community
2. Begin volunteer program
3. Appoint book review committee
4. Begin work on citizen advisory council
5. Chapter I parent night
6. Daily, weekly, monthly activities

October

1. Publish results of community survey
2. Community newsletter
3. Open house
4. Gifted parent night
5. Reading displays in local businesses
6. Daily, weekly, monthly activities

November

1. Parent-teacher conferences
2. American Education Week displays
3. Vocational Education parent night
4. Athletic banquet
5. Daily, weekly, monthly activities

December

1. Elementary music program
2. Christmas band concert
3. Daily, weekly, monthly activities

January

1. Community newsletter
2. Daily, weekly, monthly activities

February

1. Math display
2. Daily, weekly, monthly activities

March

1. Athletic banquet
2. Science displays
3. Parent-teacher conferences
4. Daily, weekly, monthly activities

April

1. Community newsletter
2. Senior citizens visitation day
3. Band concert
4. Daily, weekly, monthly activities

May

1. High school orientation day
2. Athletic banquet
3. Awards assemblies
4. Teacher of the Year Award
5. Evaluate public relations program
6. Graduation exercises
7. Daily, weekly, monthly activities

Public Relations Responsibilities

For a public relations program such as this one to be effective, responsibility must be shared among several individuals and groups. To increase the effectiveness of the Newman public relations program, the following responsibilities will be assigned:

1. Superintendent
 - A. Insure that the public relations program is implemented
 - B. District newsletter
 - C. Board briefs
 - D. Annual report
 - E. Speeches
 - F. Newspaper articles
 - G. Public service announcements
 - H. Community survey
 - I. Assist board in developing an advisory council

- J. Appoint book review committee
 - K. Question and idea cards
 - L. "Back-to-School" newspaper supplement
 - M. School calendar
 - N. Budget report
 - O. Evaluate public relations program
2. Principals
- A. Newspaper articles
 - B. In-service program
 - C. Student-parent handbook
 - D. Complaint procedure
 - E. Volunteer program
 - F. Parent nights
 - G. Open house
 - H. Parent-teacher conferences
 - I. Athletic banquets
 - J. Special days
 - K. Awards assemblies
 - L. Teacher of the Year Award
 - M. Graduation exercises
 - N. Speeches
 - O. Faculty meetings
 - P. Written announcements
 - Q. Special letters
3. Teachers
- A. Good teaching
 - B. Special awards

- C. Substitute folders
 - D. Displays
 - E. Special evening programs
 - F. Parent-teacher conferences
 - G. Newspaper articles
 - H. Speeches
 - I. Participation in school and community activities
 - J. Cooperate with colleagues
4. Secretaries
- A. Be friendly and courteous to visitors
 - B. Use good telephone communications
 - C. Be aware of school policies, schedules, etc.
5. Cooks and Custodians
- A. Take pride in work
 - B. Be friendly and courteous
 - C. Be able to provide school information
6. School Board Members
- A. Adopt a public relations policy
 - B. Provide monetary support for public relations program
 - C. Conduct well-organized meetings
 - D. Develop district policy manual
 - E. Work with advisory council
 - F. Speeches
 - G. Communicate with staff, parents, and community members

It is the responsibility of every employee and board member to promote good public relations for the Newman Schools. The efforts of all staff members will make this an effective public relations program.

NOTES

¹Don Bagin and others, PR for School Board Members,
(Arlington, Va.: AASA, 1976), pp. 4-5.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

A review of current educational literature reveals that educators feel strongly that school public relations is an extremely important part of a total school program. Informal conversations with other educators also reveal the fact that schools must have a good public relations program. School officials are finally realizing that the public must be well-informed about the schools and involved with the school system. Public support can no longer be taken for granted. During the present times of tighter budgets, declining enrollments, and demand for accountability, the support of the public is a necessity. This support depends on the understanding, confidence, and involvement of citizens in the affairs of a school system. This support can be built through the use of a good public relations program.

The survey of school districts in East Central Illinois conducted by this author reveals that these schools are conducting public relations activities. However, the survey

also reveals that none of these school districts have a written, planned public relations program. Obviously, these school districts are aware of the need for public relations, but are not committed to a written, well-planned public relations program.

There is a great deal of information available to any school district that decides to develop a planned public relations program. Books, journals, and ERIC documents will provide a great deal of information. Special sources of information are the National School Public Relations Association, Illinois Association of School Boards, and the Illinois State Board of Education. This author also finds that other administrators are very willing to share ideas concerning school public relations.

The purpose of this field experience is to develop a written, planned public relations program for the Newman Community Unit School District #303. Such a written program was developed. This author hopes to implement this program during the 1983-84 school year. If the public relations program is too extensive to implement in one year, the total program will be implemented within the next two years. Changes will be made in the program as needed. Once implemented, this public relations program should increase the Newman Community's support and confidence in the Newman Schools at a critical time in the history of the Newman District.

This author hopes that other school district's personnel will examine this field study and use it as a basis for developing a written, planned public relations program for their school district. This author would be pleased for the Newman program to be used as a model for the other school districts.

Recommendations

After an examination of the current literature and national surveys concerning school public relations, it is obvious that little data has been gathered concerning the effects of a good public relations program. This author recommends that an educator conduct further research concerning school public relations programs and attempt to gather data on the effects of a good public relations program on citizen support, teacher and student performance, parent involvement, etc.

Since school district personnel in East Central Illinois are aware of the need for public relations activities, but are not totally committed to developing a planned program, this author recommends that Eastern Illinois University conduct a public relations seminar. This seminar should provide the school districts in East Central Illinois with the information and ideas needed to develop a good, planned school public relations program.

Specific recommendations concerning the Newman public relations program are:

1. The Newman Board of Education should make a commitment to the development of good public relations.
2. The Newman Board of Education should make the public relations objectives listed in this field experience official board policy.
3. The Newman Community Unit School District #303 should become a member of the Illinois Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association.
4. The Newman School District should purchase the National School Public Relations Association's School Communications Workshop Kit. This kit should be used during a teacher workshop in August of 1983.
5. All staff members should be made aware of the Newman public relations program and their role and responsibilities in the program.
6. Members of the Newman Community should be informed that a public relations program has been developed.
7. All newspaper articles should be approved by the building principal.
8. An attempt should be made to provide a staff member two hours per week for public relations activities.
9. The public relations program should be evaluated annually and changes made as needed.

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