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**STRENGTHENING A
SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM
THROUGH STUDENT INVOLVEMENT**

by
Karen Warner

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division
of Rowan University
May 12, 2000

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 5-12-00

ABSTRACT

Karen Warner

Strengthening School-Community Relations through Student Involvement

Thesis Adviser: Donald Bagin
Public Relations, 2000

This study's main purpose was to show the logic and benefits of involving students in school-community relations. The data collection consisted of online and library searches for information about schools that include students in their public relations efforts. Award-winning newsletters from 42 school districts were also examined to determine consistent qualities that lead to excellence in communications.

The study showed that while students are directly and indirectly involved in school-community relations on a continuing, daily basis, little has been documented about structured programs or formal involvement. Research supports the effectiveness of student involvement, yet few districts make a conscious effort to capitalize upon their most valuable resource. Ongoing, cognizant efforts to involve students in public relations opportunities can yield great benefits for school districts.

MINI ABSTRACT

Karen Warner

Strengthening School-Community Relations through Student Involvement

Thesis Adviser: Donald Bagin
Public Relations, 2000

Research shows that students are the primary source of information for parents about the schools, and district newsletters are the primary source for non-parents. Involving students in school-community relations is a logical, beneficial step for school districts. Informed students who are active in public relations activities can yield great benefits for school districts.

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Chapter 1 Strengthening a School-Community Relations Program through Student Involvement

Introduction:

The need for good school-community relations is essential. As the new millennium approaches, laden with a glut of information thrust upon the public in all shapes and from all angles, community members need the simple reassurance that their schools are working. They need to see that their tax dollars are well spent and that today's students are adequately prepared to become tomorrow's leaders. Albert E. Holliday, editor and publisher of "The Journal of Educational Relations" and former public relations director for the Pennsylvania State Education Department, says, "Education must be viewed in terms of a school-community setting, which includes students and teachers, administration, support staff, board members, parents and other citizens."¹ By using students as an integral component in its public relations plan, a school district can maximize efficiency and capitalize upon a valuable resource. "Whether a school system is excellent or mediocre depends upon how those people work—how they communicate, relate, are involved, participate and share," Holliday contin-

¹ Albert E. Holliday, "In Search of an Answer: What is School Public Relations?" *Journal of Educational Public Relations* 11 (2nd Quarter, 1988), pg. 12.

ues. "A public-community relations program is aimed at focusing on the relationships of all those people, with an overall goal of improving student achievement." ² Thus, a student-centered public relations program becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Such a program provides definitive benefits to the school, the community and the students.

All too often, communication within the school district is one-sided. Information is fed to the public with little thought given to community input. Richard D. Bagin, executive director of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), says, "Public relations needs to be in the public's interest. It needs to be grounded in solid two-way communication techniques and used as a vehicle to build trust, confidence and support for doing the best for all children in our schools." ³ Bagin notes that getting started in such a program can be difficult. One criticism is that the program exists to make the administration or school board look good. Using students to tell the community what is happening in schools can help to avoid this perception. Thus, one immediate benefit to the school in allowing students to be involved in public relations is the removal of public suspicion of administrative self-promotion.

Another benefit to the school is a cost savings. Provided that a qualified

² Ibid., pg. 12.

³ <Richard D. Bagin> <"Getting a Public Relations Program Started">
<< http://www.nspr.org/main_schoolpr.htm>> <doc.date> (Accessed<>)

teacher is available to oversee this program, students can be trained to complete tasks (such as preparing camera-ready print materials) that might normally be an extra expense to the school district.

In addition to benefitting the school district, a student-centered public relations program also provides solid benefits to the community. In *School Community Relations*, the authors note that “an impressive number of parents in every community form their judgments of a school system from the comments that are made about it by pupils.”⁴

In *Effective Public Relations, fifth edition*, the authors say

Children are perhaps the most influential of a school’s publics. Much of the information and the attitudes held by the general public is transmitted from pupil to parent to public on the community grapevine. There is no surer route to a person’s heart—or resentment— than through his or her child.⁵

If pupils are involved in the public relations process by planning for and reporting on events within the district, they will be better informed and provide a more accurate picture for parents.

⁴ Donald R. Gallagher, Don Bagin and Leslie Kindred. *The School and Community Relations, Sixth Edition*. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), pg. 3.

⁵ Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, *Effective Public Relations, Fifth Edition*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1978), pg. 537.

The authors go on to say that “the community byproducts of students’ study and involvement in the community are increased public confidence in the ability of these young people, a better understanding of the educational program, and a willingness to support the school system more generously.”⁶ What a win-win situation! Students can improve the public’s confidence in its schools by becoming the communicators who tell them about its successes and challenges.

The authors also note that another important purpose of good community relations is to improve learning. “When schools embark on an effective communications program,” the authors say, “support comes more easily when the people paying the bill recognize that communications is a key component of better learning.”⁷

This idea of better learning through communications is not only applicable to the community, but to the students involved in the program as well. Involvement in school-community relations holds unparalleled benefits for students. In *School Communication: Ideas that Work*, the authors say, “Effective two-way communication should be going on regularly between secondary school

⁶ Ibid., pg. 113.

⁷ Ibid., pg. 7.

students and school officials. The communication must be both verbal and written. It should be honest and helpful.⁸ Involving students in the school's public relations efforts naturally draws them in to a closer, more meaningful relationship with school officials. Students and administrators are working together toward a common goal.

Such a program will unquestionably promote student learning and better prepare them for the workforce. In *The School and Community Relations*, the authors state

when the classroom is extended beyond the walls of the building, the community becomes a laboratory for learning. Students have an opportunity to brush against reality, develop further sensitivities to social needs and problems, and acquire a deeper sense of civic responsibility.⁹

Involvement in school-community relations does indeed extend the walls of the classroom. It provides students with valuable life experience and leads them to deeper awareness of their community.

As Bert Decker says in his bestselling novel, *You've Got to be Believed to Be*

⁸ Don Bagin, Frank Grazian and Charles H. Harrison, *School Communications: Ideas That Work*. (Chicago, Illinois: McGraw Hill, 1972), pg. 37.

⁹ Gallagher et. al, pg. 113.

Heard, "Clearly, the ability to communicate is the single most important skill determining your success in life."¹⁰ A student-centered public relations program provides unlimited opportunity for students to develop excellent communications skills. Thus, by involving students in public relations, schools can benefit themselves, their students and their community.

Assumptions and Limitations:

In his 1994 study, "Introducing Public Relations: A High School Curriculum," William Sleeth Jr. shows that public relations training is a benefit in a great variety of career choices. "Any high school student who aspires to become a leader must understand how to relate to the public," Sleeth says. "From the supermarket manager seeking more customers to the neighborhood organization opposing a nuclear plant...everyone who deals with the public needs to understand the fundamental elements of public relations."¹¹

While Sleeth proposes an actual high school curriculum in public relations, the researcher was unable to locate any high school offering such a course. However, research did show that student involvement in public relations is

¹⁰ Bert Decker, *You've Got to be Believed to Be Heard*. (New York: St. Martin Press, 1992), pg. 4.

¹¹ William Sleeth, Jr., "Introducing Public Relations: A High School Curriculum." (Glassboro State College, 1993), pg. 5.

often accomplished in existing journalism, media and communications classrooms.

In "Starting a P.R. Program in a Small District," John C. Azzatori says, "The P.R. specialist should be knowledgeable about communications that are used effectively in school situations. He should be congenial, friendly, and capable of working with all types of people. His ability to meet the public and to build confidence probably are the specialist's strongest assets."¹² He goes on to list some basic qualities of such a person:

- The ability to communicate clearly, in writing and speaking, to all audiences
- An awareness of the literature and material in the field
- Some knowledge of layout and design
- The possession of maturity: being able to make sound decisions¹³

Certainly, a full-time, trained district public relations person who could make student contributions an integral part of the communications program would be ideal. However, if such a person does not exist within the district for whatever reason, the program can still be attempted. A high school's publica-

¹² John C. Azzatori, "Starting a P.R. Program in a Small District." (Glassboro State College, 1973), pp. 8-9.

¹³ Ibid., pg. 9.

tions adviser, provided he or she has had or can be given the proper training, is a natural choice to lead such a program and may possess many of the above qualities. This person can be invaluable in establishing consistent, accurate communications on behalf of the district.

While the lack of a qualified overseer may be one obstacle to such a program, nearly every district has several teachers who would see the value of the ideas presented here and be willing to help incorporate them. The ideal candidate, however, would have a journalism or public relations background.

Another limitation to this type of program could be lack of support from an understanding principal or other school administrators. The January 1988 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* said that school administrators have the right to exercise editorial control over school-sponsored publications and events. While the Journalism Education Association, a national organization for high school journalism, and the Student Press Law Center greatly discourage this practice, the policy of prior review does indeed exist within many districts. A micro-managing administrator can discourage both students and advisers from involvement in such programs. Again, the value of student involvement cannot be underestimated. In *The School and Community Relations*, the authors say, "The school itself consists of many internal publics, and the pupils constitute the most important internal group. As such, pupils should be given a chance to become involved in the entire educational

community by making suggestions and participating in school planning.”¹⁴ An astute public relations leader will recognize the value of this statement and capitalize upon it. By guiding students in the process and overseeing their work, the public relations coordinator can ensure that the district will be represented fairly.

In “The Youngest Year: A Case Study in School Communications,” Anthony J. Fulginiti points out drawbacks of a part-time public relations person who also handles teaching responsibilities. These include the constraints of reporting to a building at the same time each day to teach a class, demands of consultation time with student editors and possible conflict in continuing to advise student publications, and the idea that a part-time public relations person is often charged with full-time responsibilities.¹⁵ While these are undoubtedly legitimate concerns, every school district needs to find the program that will best serve its needs. What works well in one district may fail in another. In view of the intense variety of programs discovered through research, it seems that public relations programs are often customized to fit the district. The ideas presented in this study can be adapted to many models of school-community relations programs.

¹⁴ Gallagher et al., pg. 109.

¹⁵ Anthony J. Fulginiti, “The Youngest Year: A Case Study in School Communications,” (Glassboro State College, 1973), pp. 9-11.

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of this study is to offer concrete ideas for increasing student involvement in school-community relations, thereby fostering an appreciation for the importance of excellent communication in today's society. After an examination of a variety of school public relations activities, the study will discuss the benefits and the pitfalls of student involvement. Because newsletters are a key communication vehicle between the school district and its external public, special attention will be given to the ways in which students can be involved in these publications. Additional stand-alone lesson plan ideas will also be included, allowing educators the opportunity to increase student involvement at a level that is right for their school. Whatever this level may be, student involvement holds benefits for the students, the school and the community.

Definition of terms:

public relations- management of communication between an organization and its publics

school-community relations- a more recent term used to describe communication between a school district and its publics

internal audiences-in a school district, these would include employees and students

external audiences-in a school district, these would include parents and community members

internal publications- in a school district, this could include board of education notes, an employee newsletter, school calendar, curriculum newsletters, substitute teacher handbook, brochures, student handbook, faculty (staff) manual, the student newspaper, yearbook and literary magazine

external publications- in a school district, this could include the district newspaper and other printed materials addressed at the general public

key communicators- a method of obtaining community feedback by identifying those people in a community who are excellent communicators and asking them to pass along information from the schools to the community

advisory committee-a selected group of laypersons representing a variety of interest groups and used to measure public opinion

conceptualization- goals, objectives, strategies and tactics

goal- an expected result that may or may not be attained

objective- a specific, measurable subdivision of a goal

strategy- the thoughtful, planned general approach to the tactics ultimately undertaken

tactic- a specific way to implement a strategy

operationalization- tasks, activities, agents, costs, time

National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)- a national organization dedicated to the practice of excellent communications within and among school districts

Chapter 2 Review of Related Literature

The backbone for this research was the book *The School and Community Relations* by Gallagher, Bagin and Kindred, sixth edition. It provided solid information about the general nature of the school public relations process as well as the many facets it encompasses.

Literature relating more specifically to student involvement in public relations was gathered from several sources. Research began, using online searches through both an America Online keyword search and the Yahoo search engine, using the phrase "school public relations." After evaluating online data, the most useful website was the National School Public Relations Association site, www.NSPRA.org. This provided a comprehensive list of award-winning "Gold Medallion" public relations programs and school district newsletters. Program descriptions were printed from the Internet, and letters were written to obtain copies of the award-winning district newsletters. These were then reviewed to find specific examples of student involvement in school public relations.

Online searches were also conducted at the Savitz Library of Rowan University using the Lexis-Nexis database. The search terms "public relations," "public relations curriculum," "high school public relations," and "school public

relations" were used. The term "public relations" was too general but "school public relations" was on target. When entered as a subject search, the term "school public relations" produced no matches. As a keyword search, it yielded 91 related sources, including books, theses and dissertations.

From a list of about 30 theses/dissertations that were perused, none contained information about programs that specifically focused on student involvement in public relations, but many of them included information about the importance of student involvement.

In his 1994 study, "Introducing Public Relations: A High School Curriculum," William Sleeth, Jr. proposed a formal course in high school public relations. While such a course is not offered in any of the high schools researched, research did show that many of Sleeth's curriculum goals are met in journalism, media and communications classrooms.

One circumstance in which student involvement would be exceptionally beneficial is in districts where there is not a full-time public relations person. In his 1975 thesis "A Study of Part-Time Public Relations Programs in the Public Schools," Carroll R. Comstock points out that "many public relations programs and practices can be developed from the beginning from within the school district and with available resources."¹⁶ Unfortunately, the study fails to explore

¹⁶ Carroll R. Comstock, "A Study of Part-Time Public Relations Programs in the Public Schools," (Glassboro State College, 1975), pg. 4.

the potential of students as such a resource. The study does list the major problems affecting part-time school public relations practitioners, with "lack of time" as the most frequent complaint. Only 31% of those surveyed felt they were able to accomplish their goals, and only 43% had taken public relations coursework to prepare for their current position.¹⁷ Forty-six percent were responsible for a newsletter of some kind, which is one area where perhaps high school journalism students could be utilized to help the PR person accomplish his or her goals.

Another study which explores the drawbacks of a part-time public relations person is "The Youngest Year: A Case Study in School Communications," by Anthony J. Fulginiti. This study touches on possible conflicts involved with student involvement but does not explore the potential benefits.

The case for student involvement is strengthened by the 1978 research of Phi Delta Kappan, Inc., a study which is documented by Jack Pyle in *Building Community Support for Schools*.¹⁸ When both parents and non-parents were asked what was their best source of information about schools, "word-of-mouth" ranked highest at 70%.¹⁹ Further, when asked to specify the sources of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁸ Jack Pyle, APR, *Building Community Support for Schools*. (Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1993), pg. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

information used to judge quality of schools, *students* ranked first.

In *Promoting Your School: Going Beyond PR*, Carolyn Warner reinforces these findings in her simple statement, "The very best ambassadors for education are students."²⁰ She adds that "educators are often reluctant to toot their own horns. Students will do it for them if you include them in your communications network."²¹ Warner's research and related advice are geared toward school administrators, and it is one of the few studies found that actually offers specific suggestions for incorporating students into daily promotion of the school.

Another publication that specifically included suggestions for student involvement in public relations was "Strengthening School-Community Relations" by Robert Byrne and Edward Powell. "Students both desire and deserve a voice in planning and shaping the education that will have an overwhelming effect on the direction and pattern of their lives," say the authors. "Administrators who demur at the suggestion of faculty involvement in educational decision making are likely to shudder at the prospects of student participation. Nevertheless, the rationale with respect to community relations is simi-

²⁰ Carolyn Warner, *Promoting Your School: Going Beyond PR*, (California: Corwin Press, Inc. 1994), pg. 69.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 70.

lar. The aims of the communications program require student understanding and student support."²² The study then lists specific ways to involve students in school public relations, such as a student curriculum council, community activities committee, assemblies, homeroom representatives, and use of student publications.

In her 1987 thesis, Debbie Garwood adds to these suggestions by including "student greeters," those who will give up a study hall to act as guides, as another student PR opportunity.²³

John T. Holton emphasizes Byrne and Powell's suggestion of making use of student publications when he says,

Even in these days of unfettered student journalism, a good student newspaper adds an extra ingredient to your internal communications program. If proper rights and responsibilities are spelled out, the student newspaper can become a credible 'another point of view' for both staff and students. Treat them like you do other media, send them all news releases, invite them to press conferences,

²² Robert Byrne and Edward Powell, "Strengthening School-Community Relations." (Virginia: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1976), pg. 10.

²³ Debbie Garwood, "Planning Your School Public Relations Program." (Glassboro State College, 1987), p. 19.

and be accessible for interviews.²⁴

One book from the Rowan Library that was particularly helpful in the research was *School Communications: Ideas that Work* by Bagin, Grazian and Harrison. Many of the ideas presented in this book involved or could involve students in good communications efforts. The book *Public Relations for Educators* by Gloria Dapper was also a good resource, as were *You've Got to be Believed to be Heard* by Bert Decker and *Managing Public Relations* by Grunig and Hunt, from the researcher's personal library.

Resources were also made available by the thesis adviser, Dr. Donald Bagin, including the book *Effective Public Relations* and the thesis "Introducing Public Relations: A High School Curriculum," 1993, by William Sleeth, Jr. Dr. Bagin also suggested several other related theses.

²⁴John T. Holton, "Building an Internal Public Relations Program: A Handbook for Educators." (Glassboro State College, 1975), pg. 28.

Chapter III Procedures

A general background in the dynamics of school-community relations came from *The School and Community Relations* by Gallagher, Bagin and Kindred, sixth edition. A knowledge of internal and external audiences and vehicles of communication within a school district is essential to target opportunities for student involvement. Armed with such a background, the researcher then used the Rowan University Library on-line catalog as a research base. The search terms "public relations," "public relations curriculum," "high school public relations," and "school public relations" were used. The term "public relations" was too general but "school public relations" was on target. When entered as a subject search, the term "school public relations" produced no matches. As a keyword search, it yielded 91 related sources, including books, theses and dissertations.

This list was then narrowed to about 30 theses/dissertations associated with school public relations programs, and these were perused for relevance to the topic of student involvement. Some questions naturally emerged that helped to guide and give structure to the research. These include:

- What do some schools perceive as weaknesses in their relationships

with the community?

- What differences exist in districts with full- or part-time public relations personnel?
- Which type of programs integrate student-involvement most successfully?
- What are the pros/cons of student involvement?
- How are districts with successful school-community relations incorporating students into their public relations efforts?

While there was no comprehensive source, program or district which addressed all of these issues, many sources touched on some portion of them. The most helpful were "The Youngest Year: A Case Study in School Communications," 1973, by Anthony J. Fulginiti; "A Study of the Public Relations Programs in the Elementary and Secondary School Districts of Essex County" by Bruce A. Myers; "Starting a P.R. Program in a Small District," 1973, by John C. Azzatori; and "Building an Internal Public Relations Program: A Handbook for Educators," by John T. Holton, 1975.

In addition to the Savitz Library database, the keyword "school public relations" was used to locate information on the Internet and World Wide Web through the Yahoo search engine. This yielded three links, two of which were the National School Public Relations Association website. This site provided a large variety of school public relations resources and also a "Medallion" list of award-winning school public relations programs and publications. This Gold

Medallion competition was also recommended as a valuable resource by Larry and Virginia Decker in their 1998 publication, *Home/School Community Involvement*, published by the American Association of School Administrators.

Using this list, letters were mailed to 70 school districts requesting a copy of the award-winning publication, and 42 responded within one month (See Appendix). These publications provided a wealth of information about specific programs and activities within the districts. These programs were examined specifically to determine how student involvement helped to promote good school-community relations. Nearly all of the newsletters focused on stories and photographs about students. None of the newsletters, however, was student-produced or contained articles written by students. Some of the Gold Medallion ideas will be presented in Chapter Four.

Two books from the Rowan Library that were particularly helpful were *School Communications: Ideas That Work* by Bagin, Grazian and Harrison and *Public Relations for Educators* by Gloria Dapper. *You've Got to be Be Believed to be Heard* by Bert Decker and *Managing Public Relations* by Grunig and Hunt, from the researcher's personal library, provided additional information about public relations as well as some concrete ideas easily adapted to student involvement.

In the midst of thesis research, the Egg Harbor Township School District of Egg Harbor Township, NJ, under the guidance of the Rowan Communications Institute, undertook a public relations campaign to pass a bond referendum within that district. A comprehensive public relations plan

was developed by the Institute, one facet of which was directly student-driven. Journalism and media students were responsible for producing a four-page tabloid size district newsletter and a four-minute video to inform the community about the upcoming referendum. While students could not say vote “yes” on the referendum, they were able to present the facts and illustrate the need for renovations and expansion within the district. This student campaign became part of the research for this thesis.

Additional resources were made available by the thesis adviser, Dr. Donald Bagin, including the book *Effective Public Relations* by Cutlip and Center and the thesis “Introducing Public Relations: A High School Curriculum,” 1993, by William Sleeth, Jr. Dr. Bagin also suggested several other related theses.

Chapter IV Results

While there is a lack of documentation about formal student involvement in public relations programs, many studies support both its existence and its importance. The 1983 NSPRA publication *Learn from the Winners: School PR Programs that Work* reinforces this idea:

It is sad but true that in the rush to put out brush fires or devise the ultimate public relations vehicle, we forget a resource that's always there, always willing, and far more able to tell our message than many of us might think. That resource is the student population of our school, the reason we are all here in the first place, and potentially the best PR agents around. But considering the magnitude of that army, there are not very many documented cases of a district using students in a planned program to improve the image of its schools.²⁵

While formal programs may be sparse, teaching good public relations

²⁵Hymes, Donald L. *Learn from the Winners: School Public Relations Programs that Work*. (NSPRA, 1983), p. 61.

skills to students can be accomplished in most classrooms. In his proposed high school public relations curriculum, William Sleeth shares the wisdom of public relations expert Edward Bernays:

Society is made up of individuals with different ideas, different educations, and different backgrounds. An idea must be presented in a way that society will understand and react favorably to.²⁶

Sleeth contends that for students to learn this, they must be taught the basics of public relations.

Dr. John Wherry of The Parent Institute underscores the merits of Sleeth's contention:

The essence of public relations is a series of principles that comprise a 'blueprint' for socially responsible behavior in a democratic society. On that basis alone, it makes sense to teach high school students about public relations. If students understand the principles of public relations, they can better understand how the public, public officials and

²⁶Sleeth, p. 2.

public institutions (including schools) interact with the people they serve.²⁷

If schools are to train students in the basic principles of public relations, Sleeth suggests four essential steps they should include:

- provide students with basic public relations theory without becoming too technical
- provide as much activity as possible
- take advantage of resources such as guest speakers and publications
- be enthusiastic and encourage “PR awareness,” a sense of knowing good and bad public relations in any situation²⁸

As students are prepared to become public relations ambassadors for schools, research indicates that student involvement in public relations can generally be categorized into three broad channels of communication: face-to-face, print media and electronic communications. Each of these broad categories encompasses a myriad of opportunities for student involvement in public relations.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 7.

Face-to-Face Communications

In a 1978 study, Phi Delta Kappan asked parents and non-parents to identify their best source of information about schools. "Word-of-mouth" ranked highest at 70 percent, with students ranking first as the source.²⁹

Joseph H. Massa's 1974 survey also verified the fact that students are a major source of information for parents. Therefore, Massa emphasized, "it is recommended that students be given accurate information at all times."³⁰ John T. Holton endorsed Massa's suggestion when he said, "a well-informed and involved staff and student body become an army of good will ambassadors for the school system in the community."³¹

The opportunities for deploying this "army of ambassadors" are endless. In their 1974 study, Penny McIlreavy and Rob Alcott call students the "little media with the big impact—all the children who run home and say 'Hey Mom, guess what happened in school today?'"³² The authors advise educators that "research shows parents get their information about schools from their chil-

²⁹Pyle, p. 4.

³⁰Massa, Joseph H. "Priority of School Information Needs in a Public School Community." (Glassboro State College, 1974), p. 37.

³¹Holton, John T. "Building an Internal PR Program: A Handbook for Educators," (Glassboro State College, 1975), pg. 10.

³²McIlreavy, Penny and Rob Olcott. "Warning: This May be Helpful to Your Public Relations," (Glassboro State College, 1975), p. 8.

dren.... The day-to-day classroom impressions you make often end up at the family dinner table at one of your students.”³³ With this in mind, they suggest ways to communicate with students to ensure that the stories going home are positive ones, stories that present the school as a pleasant, desirable place to be. They explain the need to consider various publics and to determine the best channels to reach each. Their advice includes:

- Maximum communication in the daily classroom
- Small luncheons that include parents, teachers and students in the student cafeteria
- Teachers circulating around the building visiting with students to establish positive relationships
- An open-door policy for students and encouragement of others to do the same
- Homework as reinforcement, never punishment
- Participation on citizen-student-teacher advisory committees
- Promotion and participation in small group “rap” sessions
- Staying well-informed about programs and policies to keep students informed

³³Ibid., p. 52.

- Helping students understand school funding, bond referendums and such³⁴

By following these guidelines, teachers are indirectly communicating positive messages to the parent, grandparents and neighbors of their students.

In "Tips for Improving Communication" from *Promoting Your School*, Carolyn Warner agrees that the best ambassadors for schools are its students. She shares the story of her husband, a federal narcotics agent, during a raid in in Yuma, Arizona. In the house at the time was a student of Rancho Viejo, a school that had been honored as tops in the state. In the midst of commotion of searching for suspects within the home, the young boy asked the agent, "Do you know where I go to school?" When her husband replied that he didn't, the young boy proudly displayed the backpack he had received and said, "I go to Rancho Viejo, and we're number one!"³⁵ Warner uses this incident to underscore the important role of school in children's lives. "Educators are often reluctant to toot their own horns," says Warner. "Students will do it for you if you let them."³⁶

Student involvement in public relations can also take a more formal

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Warner, p. 70.

³⁶Ibid.

approach. One example of such a program was the “See for Yourself” campaign, a Gold Medallion winning public relations effort conducted in 1984 by the Fairfax County, Virginia, Public Schools.³⁷ Because of its fluid population, the district believed getting good press in the Washington, D.C. area was vital to the district. Its Office of Community Relations, directed by George F. Hamel, prepared a public relations blitz called “See for Yourself” that included 149 district schools and reached over 50,000 citizens. Some of its components that directly involved students included:

- Students were “paid” fake money for bringing visitors into the schools. Non-parents earned more than parents, and money went to pay for a special event at year’s end.
- Classes wrote personal notes inviting non-parents to visit the schools
- Senior citizens got special invitations to attend school activities
- Non-parents served as judges for art competitions
- “Pen pal” programs were established with local shut-ins³⁸

The district reported that an added benefit in this successful program was increased enthusiasm among students and staff.

³⁷Hymes, p. 51.

³⁸Ibid.

In their advice to high school principals, Byrne and Powell offer suggestions for involving students in school-community relations. "The aims of the communications program require student understanding and student support," they say, and they offer several vehicles to accomplish this.³⁹ These include structures such as a student curriculum council, student management council, community activities committee, assemblies, homerooms and student publications, all of which focus on giving students a voice in shaping their own education and consequently leading to a more positive image of the school.

The student council of Grapevine High School in Grapevine, Texas, also piloted a program involving students in face-to-face community relations. The "Mustang Forum," comprised of students, community members, teachers and administrators, meets every Thursday and alternates between two lunch periods. Anyone may attend as a guest or topic presenter, although presenters must sign up in advance. Students are in charge of sign-ups, presenting speakers, and moderating the discussions. The program is described by one student:

Through Mustang Forum, we have recalled one handbook dress code rule, set up an off-campus lunch pass reward system for those with perfect attendance, and set up a committee to review the procedure and effectiveness of

³⁹Byrnes and Powell, p. 10.

our morning announcements. The student body has learned a great deal about state and local district rules concerning education and the decision-making process one must go through to institute a change in those rules.⁴⁰

Again, involving students in the communications process within the school enhances both the students' and the community's image of the district. By letting students demonstrate to the community what they can do, effective and positive school-community relations are established. While bringing visitors into the schools is an excellent strategy, students can also be taken into the community in a variety of ways. Many schools display student work in local malls or grocery stores. Students can be used to man booths at education fairs. Hymes even suggests setting up a "student speakers bureau" that books the most articulate of the youngsters with local civic and social organizations to discuss the public school systems they represent.⁴¹

Another way students can interact with the community is through inter-generational programs. Media coverage of such events is sure to put the school in a positive light. Some suggestions for such activities include:

⁴⁰<http://taasp.org/topten/mustang.htm>

⁴¹Hymes, p. 61.

- A “Senior Prom,” where high school students host a semi-formal dance for senior citizens. The event can include all the trappings of the traditional high school event, including a theme, decorations, DJ, and proper attire. Teenagers love to plan parties, so this is an idea that generates plenty of student involvement and enthusiasm.
- Shopping with the Elderly, a day in which junior/senior high school students assist senior citizens in their holiday shopping.
- Musical or dramatic productions at hospitals, nursing homes and such.
- Reading can involve positive intergenerational interaction when students read to the elderly as well as to younger students. The NEA’s successful “Read Across America” day garners outstanding media attention and provide students and citizens with endless opportunities to interact.
- Positive communication is established when students serve as tour guides to those who will enter their school the following year. This extends the sense of community within a district and alleviates students’ fears.
- Older students can also reach out to younger ones by hosting special holiday events or by staging skits or puppet shows that deliver good messages.

The students of Mt. Ranier High School in Des Moines, Washington, had an outstanding idea for an intergenerational program. With a \$10,000 donation of software, keyboards and mice from Microsoft and five computers from Boeing, students designed and upgraded the computer lab at the Des Moines Senior Center in their town. Students then tutored the seniors, offering courses in basic computers, the Internet, spreadsheets and desktop publishing. The excellent community relations program won the 1998 Association of Washington Cities Municipal Achievement Award and garnered a great deal of positive press in the process.⁴²

Another worthwhile intergenerational program occurred at Egg Harbor Township High School in New Jersey. Addressing the statistics that high school seniors and senior citizens hold the highest driving accident rate, a safe-driving program was offered to combined groups of teens and seniors to help them review the rules of the road. The course was taught by a representative from the Automobile Association of America and promoted interaction between two community groups while educating them at the same time.

Another face-to-face communications idea that helps school districts and students to interact positively with senior citizens is a Gold Card Program. *The*

⁴² "Seniors for Seniors," *Highline Highlights*, April 1999, p. 4.

School and Community Relations describes its purpose:

Usually, the member must be a resident of the school district and be 65 years of age or older. Each member who registers with the school district is issued a card annually, which entitles him or her to free admission to all athletic events, adult school, concerts, plays and other public school activities.⁴³

One school that successfully implemented such a program is Jefferson High School in Jefferson, Texas. Each year, students host a special day for Gold Card members. They present a fruit basket that includes one apple, one orange, one grapefruit, mixed nuts, mints, and a Jefferson High School calendar. Students issue invitations to this special day, direct traffic, offer school tours, and provide entertainment via the school choir. The program is listed as a "Top Ten" winner by the Texas Association of Student Councils, sponsored by the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals. The success of this Gold Card Program is described at its website:

The response from the senior citizens is wonderful.

After the inaugural program last year, they began asking about this year's program in July and August.

⁴³Gallagher, p. 167.

In December 1989 there were 140 Gold Card members.

On December 13, approximately 70 seniors braved below-freezing temperatures to attend the JHS Student Council Presentation.⁴⁴

Other excellent opportunities for face-to-face school-community relations are described in Chapter Two of *School Communications: Ideas That Work*. Two important events common to most school districts are Back-to-School Night and American Education Week. The authors give good advice for maximizing the public relations potential of these events.

Opportunities to establish good school-community relations using face-to-face student communication are endless. Through proper planning and skillful relations with the media, coverage of these events can provide excellent public relations opportunities for school districts.

Print Media

Another avenue for student participation in school-community relations is through print publications. Students can contribute their talents in writing, photography, design and layout, and even in printing the final product. *The School and Community Relations* says, "If the quality is good, if the teaching

⁴⁴<http://www.tassp.org/topten/gold.htm>

schedule permits, and if students can meet deadlines, using this approach can save money and aid in the teaching process. In addition, the phrase 'printed by students in our printing course' adds a touch of educational reality and budget-consciousness to a school publication."⁴⁵

Such is the case of the Journalism II class of Egg Harbor Township High School in southern New Jersey. For two years, the class has been responsible for producing the four-page, tabloid-size school district newspaper. While each of eight schools within the district contributes articles and photos, students are responsible for designing layout, scanning photos, editing and typesetting the paper. A student editor decides and assigns one or two stories from the high school to be written by other students, and she also contributes an "Editor's Corner" each month. The paper is submitted to the printer camera-ready, providing a substantial cost savings to the district. The professional publication is then inserted into the township's weekly newspaper and distributed to its 11,000 residents. It provides a hands-on learning experience and an excellent addition to student portfolios when they are applying for college or employment. Because this external communication is ongoing, it was a natural way to reach residents in a recent bond referendum campaign.

⁴⁵Gallagher, p. 242.

About 90 percent of New Jersey's school districts submit their budgets to voters for approval.⁴⁶ Egg Harbor Township's ongoing communication with its community kept residents informed about their schools, a strength for the district at voting time. In *How to Tell the School Story*, Leslie Kindred says

Unless the average man on the street has a reasonable knowledge of what schools are doing and the purpose of their progress, particularly as they affect his children, he will not interest himself in their work, nor approve the payment of higher taxes. The generalization is sound that the quality of public education in a community seldom rises significantly above the level of citizen understanding of and confidence in the educational program.⁴⁷

Egg Harbor Township appeared to be on the right track in this regard. Early in 2000, the Rowan Communication Institute was hired to help guide the district through the campaign. Their research indicated that the student-produced newspaper was one of the main sources of information about the schools for residents, so they met with journalism and media students to enlist their

⁴⁶Robert Bols, "New Jersey Public Schools Finance," (Glassboro State College, 1972), p. 14.

⁴⁷Leslie W. Kindred, *How to Tell the School Story* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1960), p. 4.

help in two special projects. One project involved a video that was produced by students and shown at school meetings and the district educational fair.

Students used both video and digital cameras to photograph the building inadequacies within the district. They wrote a script based upon Rowan's research, and combined the two to produce a four-minute video.

The second project was a special bond referendum issue of the district newspaper, the *Eagle Times*. Students brainstormed ideas for articles, researched and interviewed, wrote, edited, and produced final drafts. Along with photographs of building inadequacies and graphs of statistics based upon The Communication Institute's research, the special issue included articles based upon student-generated topics. These included:

- An overview of the proposed new elementary school
- Editor's Column (standing feature)
- A taxpayer's perspective...
- Renovations to the schools
- High school deficiencies
- Additions to the schools
- "What if the Referendum Passes?"
- "What if the Referendum Fails?"
- Man-on-the-street, "What's Important to the Students?"

While students could not legally tell votes to vote “yes” for the referendum, they could present the facts and ask citizens to get out and vote. The newsletter also included the date, time and location of voting places. In their 1974 study, McIlreavy and Olcott note “in most cases, as public understanding of the schools improves, so will their support at voting time.”⁴⁸ For Egg Harbor Township, using the district newsletter in its campaign was a smart, natural move. The special issue provided important information to the taxpayers and an excellent learning experience in honest, accurate reporting to its students. (Appendix A)

While Egg Harbor Township provided the only example of a student-produced district newsletter, many districts are effectively including students within their publications. Of the 42 award-winning newsletters received, all but three featured action photos of students involved in the learning process.

Highline Highlights, the district newsletter of Burien, Washington, is filled with outstanding photographs of students in action (Appendix B). The Pattonville School District of St. Ann, Missouri, highlights its students as well (Appendix C). Every issue of Learning U46 of Elgin, Illinois, features a large color photograph of a student on the cover of its quarterly publication (Appendix D).

⁴⁸McIlreavy and Olcott, p. 50.

The Irving Independent School District of Irving, Texas, pictures students throughout its public information materials. The full-color package is attractively presented in a folder with photographs of students printed on the front and back (Appendix E). While the photographs are “posed” rather than “action,” the overall presentation of the district’s materials—and its heavy reliance on its most valuable resource, its students—is outstanding.

Along with district newsletters, student newspapers can serve as a public relations tool for schools as well. In fact, they can be helpful in alleviating problems before they begin. *The School and Community Relations* says “When student activism erupts into unrest or violence, unfavorable publicity generally results for the school.”⁴⁹ The authors suggest that one way to avoid this student unrest is by allowing them to express their opinions openly in a student publication. “If students are given an opportunity to be heard and be involved,” say the authors, “and if the school officials and the staff convey the idea that they do care about the students, unrest and destructive activism can be minimized.”⁵⁰ The authors also point out that an alternative to free student expression in a school newspaper is an underground press, a vehicle that would unquestionably be detrimental to school-community relations.

⁴⁹Gallagher et al., p. 111.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 112.

Electronic Media

Most recently, electronic communications have added other venues for student participation in school-community relations. One excellent opportunity is a partnership between a school district and its local cable station. For example, Absegami High School in Galloway Township, New Jersey, has been involved in such a partnership for eight years. Media students are responsible for 18 hours of programming each week. These student-produced shows reach the entire Galloway community and give residents a first-hand look at what is happening in their schools.

Students at Gillett Middle School in Kingsville, Texas, began a broadcasting news network called Bobcat Network News Show (BNN). The award-winning idea was backed by the school board and by CENCOM Cable TV. In an evaluation of the program, Texas Association of Secondary School Principals' website says,

The BNN project has been an excellent source of student and teacher recognition. It has taught many communication skills such as writing reports, use of a camera, editing, and use of sound equipment. The technology that CENCOM has exposed our students to is immeasurable for this age group. The self-esteem they have developed by seeing themselves on TV is

remarkable.⁵¹

Student-produced videos go a long way in establishing positive school-community relations. They can be used in a variety of circumstances to accomplish the old adage, “pictures speak louder than words.”

School district websites are another relatively new channel for school-community relations. Links to programs, calendars, curriculum and the like give the community an easy way to gain knowledge about their schools. Given the general aptitude for technology many of today’s students possess, school websites provide another outlet for strengthening school-community relations through student involvement.

One Internet hub for high schools is highwired.com, which calls itself “the world’s largest community of online high schools.”⁵² The website addresses five major areas of high school life: classrooms, guidance office, newspapers, sports teams and student activities. The site began in April of 1998 and is headquartered in Watertown, Massachusetts. It currently brings together 10,424 schools from 50 states and 66 countries—an astonishing amount of communication in little more than two years! Schools can easily become a member of the free network simply by accessing the site and following its instructions. An authorized adult adviser is mandatory for a school site to be created.

⁵¹<<http://www.tassp.org/topten/gold.htm>

⁵²<highwired.com>

Chapter V Conclusions and Recommendations

An analysis of books and academic studies about school public relations and an examination of newsletters from 42 school districts led to several conclusions. While students are directly and indirectly involved in school-community relations on a continuing, daily basis, little has been documented about structured programs or formal involvement. A host of research supports the effectiveness of student involvement, yet few districts make a conscious effort to capitalize upon their most valuable resource. Ongoing, cognizant efforts to involve students in public relations opportunities can result in a winning situation for school districts.

Studies repeatedly show that students are the main source of information for parents. Therefore, arming students with accurate information and providing them with a pleasant, safe learning environment makes good sense. Happy, knowledgeable students are the best possible ambassadors for school districts. Ongoing communication is essential and can be especially important at budget-approval time.

Research also indicates that for non-parents, the district newsletter is the primary source of insight into the schools. Therefore, it is imperative that the newsletter present an honest diorama of what is taking place within the build-

ings. Newsletters should include stories and pictures about students actively involved in learning. *The School and Community Relations* says that

content should focus on people, not buildings and programs. Students learning, teachers teaching, and people involved in the education process can bring the content alive. Emphasis should be placed upon what people in the schools are doing.⁵³

Along with printed materials, face-to-face communications between students and the community are imperative to good relations. Teachers and administrators need to be aware that students are the primary source of information for parents, and they need to make special efforts to arm them with accurate information and provide positive learning experiences in the classroom.

Electronic channels such as cable television-school partnerships and the Internet are yet another outlet for student involvement in school-community relations. The school can capitalize upon these direct lines to the community by allowing students to tell their story.

Educators who are interested in strengthening school-community relations through student involvement should first take a look at existing programs to determine if and how students can be included in the communications

⁵³Gallagher et. al., p. 251.

process. At the high school level, journalism and media programs offer immediate opportunities for student involvement. Under the guidance of a knowledgeable adviser, they can produce print and electronic communications that reach out to the community. They can spread the word about what is happening in the schools in their own voices and be recognized through bylines or credits. Student news bureaus can be established if a more formal structure is desired. Chapter 18 of *Journalism Today!* by Donald L. Ferguson and Jim Patten (fourth edition) provides guidelines for establishing such a bureau.

Not only can district communications be produced *by* the students, they should undoubtedly be *about* them. Newsletters and videos should focus on photos and stories that bring the educational process alive for the reader. This can be accomplished with students of any grade level.

While there is little formal research available about students involved in public relations programs, examples of their involvement are plentiful. The NSPRA website details award-winning programs from across the country. The site also lists award-winning district newsletters. Procuring copies of these can spark ideas and provide excellent models for programs. While this study offers a look at several award-winning programs and publications, many others are available for exploration and replication. Including students in the communications process benefits all parties involved. As Cutlip and Center explain in

Effective Public Relations,

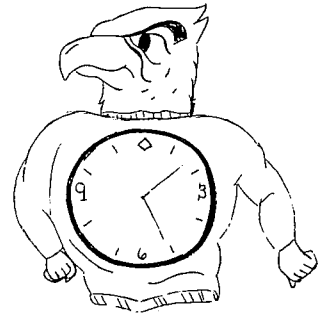
When the program of a school system rests on a foundation of classroom accomplishment, it is a house built upon a rock. Ill-founded criticism will not overwhelm it. The pupil's role as an intermediary is a strategic one. Public relations truly starts in the classroom.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Cutlip and Center, p. 537.

APPENDIX

~ SPECIAL BOND REFERENDUM ISSUE ~
 Produced by the Journalism II Students of Egg Harbor Township High School

Eagle TIMES



NEWSLETTER OF THE EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS MARCH 2000 • VOLUME I, ISSUE 20

Editor's Corner

BY JACKIE STEMPLE



Open a newspaper, and stories about another school shooting flood the headlines today. Kids with guns, angry at the world, are committing acts that years ago would be unthinkable, but today have become commonplace. These children are confused by the messages sent to them in the high-tech world, in which childhood is lost all too soon. They cannot help but imitate the images they see, confusing money for success, perfection for happiness, and sex for love. They are called "the lost generation," but how did they get that way?

A society riddled with contradiction is at the heart of this problem. On one hand, people want to see their children succeed, go on to college, and hopefully be more prosperous than the previous generation. This is the American dream; how can this be a contradiction? Well, when opportunities arise to promote the success of children, through higher education, taxes or approving a budget, the issue of money is often first in the mind of the taxpayers. They ask for compromises: Is that repair really necessary? Do our children need music class? Didn't they get new books a few years ago? What remains after these things are

taken away is a school system that cannot afford to both educate its children and keep up with its facilities. One area must suffer, and administrators will agree that curriculum comes first, so they buy new technology, hire more teachers, and improve the overall education, but at what cost? The price of these advancements in education are overcrowded hallways, portable classrooms, leaking roofs, and outdated heating and ventilation systems. Yes, children are learning, even under these conditions, but how much better would our schools be if every student had the opportunity to learn under improved conditions?

Compromises send a powerful message to the youth of our community, heard in every mobile teaching unit, in every broken door, and in every dilapidated building. While we are educating our children to be scholars, we are also teaching them to be citizens, and we lead by example. If we send this message it will inevitably lead to

Continued on page two



Artist's rendering on the proposed elementary school, which would be built on a 32-acre area northeast of the Intermediate School.

New 1,100-student elementary school proposed for grades three and four

Imagine it's the first day of third grade and you're walking down crowded hallways, only to enter a classroom where every seat is occupied. For a third grader, this scene could be devastating. If the district does not act quickly to build another elementary school, this scene could become a reality. Last year 369 new students entered the Egg Harbor Township School District. Some classroom sizes currently exceed the recommended levels.

To address this problem, the Board of Education is proposing a new elementary school to house grades three and four, which would

be built on a 32-acre area northeast of the Intermediate School.

The plans involves a new "school within a school" concept, according to Gary Bannon, Vice President of E.I. Associates, Architectural Engineering and Planning. This means that each grade would function independently but share one building, designed in a figure eight form.

The two grades would share some common facilities. "They will share a cafeteria/auditorium, gymnasium, administrative office, play fields and undeveloped nature study area," Bannon said.

The "loops" of the figure eight indicate each school. Each school would have its own art room with access to the courtyard, music

room adjacent to the stage in the cafeteria/auditorium, science labs and 24 classrooms. Also, each school would have its own computer lab, media center/library, and large group instruction room.

For safety reasons, students would be bussed to each school separately, and all students and visitors would enter the building through the main office. Hallways would be wider to accommodate handicapped students and population growth.

The new elementary school can offer our students new and exciting opportunities for learning. While the state-of-the-art elementary school will benefit students in many ways, the new school will only happen if question three of the bond referendum passes on March 28.



MARISSA LAPORTE
SENIOR

VOTE TUESDAY, MARCH 28 ~ 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

DISTRICTS 1 & 2 Scullyville Fire House	DISTRICT 6 Zion Methodist Church	DISTRICT 10 EHT Middle School	DISTRICT 14 Farmington Fire House
DISTRICT 3 Swift School Library	DISTRICT 7 Painter Union Hall	DISTRICT 11 Cardiff Fire House	DISTRICT 15 Davenport School
DISTRICT 4 Scullyville Fire House	DISTRICT 8 London Ct. Comm. Center	DISTRICT 12 EHT Intermediate School	DISTRICT 16 PAL Building
DISTRICT 5 EHT Municipal Bldg.	DISTRICT 9 Bargaintown Fire House	DISTRICT 13 W. Atlantic City Fire Hall	QUESTIONS? Call 646-3370

Editor's Corner, continued from page one

a generation that just doesn't care—they won't care about others, they won't care about themselves, and most importantly, they won't care about the community.

At this moment, you as citizens, have a very important opportunity to shape the future of our children, a message that you realize the importance of the improvements, that an investment in education is an investment in the future of your community.

You may be thinking, why act now? What you may not realize is that our township is expanding at an alarming rate. The number of students in the district has exceeded the projections of earlier studies. This year alone, 369 new students enrolled, which means about 15 new classrooms. Our district can accommodate just over 5500 students; current enrollment was at 5525 at the beginning of the 1999-2000 year and is expected to increase by at least 200 more students next year. These new students will have no seats to sit in or classrooms to learn in; therefore, we must act before this happens.

Another reason to act now is that the state will contribute 46.3% of the cost for each bond issue; the community only bears 53.6% if the cost. That means, although the total cost for all three questions is \$56,400,000, our community will only pay \$30,268,132 of the total. The rest will be the responsibility of the state. For a property assessed at \$125,000, the tax impact is \$155 dollars annually over 25 years; that's only \$13 dollars a month. If the bond referendum fails, the same issues of overcrowding will plague our district and will have to be dealt with; however, we cannot guarantee that the state will give the same amount of aid as it will now.

Immediate action must be taken. The problem will NOT go away! The faster we act, the less expensive it will be; and the education of our children will not be jeopardized. Let's give our students the education they deserve.



ROBBIE GILL
JUNIOR

BOND REFERENDUM

What will happen if it passes?

For years, what life would have been like if a certain event had happen been the topic of many movies and T.V. shows.

That's what the citizens of EHT might be asking themselves now. What will life be like if the bond referendum is passed on March 28, 2000?

Imagine the first day of school. Students enter four expanded schools and a new elementary school as they happily chat. No longer are students crammed into the overcrowded classrooms. Teachers are ready to begin the new year with less students, making education more personal. Full day kindergarten sessions will also be able to be offered in the district.

It's now late fall. The leaves have turned and fallen to the ground. EHT is experiencing its first snowfall. The heating is working in all the rooms, providing a comfortable environment for learning.

Now it's spring time when testing takes place. Teachers have prepared all year for students' success. It's hot outside but not inside because all the rooms are properly cool to a comfortable temperature.

Now imagine the last day of the school—report cards are out, GEPA and HSPA results are back, and students are ready for summer. Even though school is not in session, the schools are still in use.

With expanded facilities, the schools can better service the community. The EHT stage is in demand, and community theater groups can bring their shows to our residents.

If the bond referendum is passed on March 28, 2000, the community can look forward to more community events in the district schools, safer schools, a better, more personal education, higher standardized test scores, and a more attractive school system to potential home buyers. We may never know the good that the bond referendum would have done, if it isn't passed.

What will happen if it doesn't pass?



STEPHEN PFIER
SOPHOMORE

I can't tell you to say "yes" to the bond. I can't tell you to pay more taxes. I can't tell you to help support the renovations, additions, and progress of EHT schools. But I can tell you what will happen if you don't. I can tell you about the problems that affect EHT school's ability to educate in the best possible way.

The schools are full. If the bond does not pass, there will be no extra classrooms. This will lead to more trailers serving as classrooms. In the high school, a copy room has already been converted into a classroom due to lack of space. Who knows what will be converted into a classroom next if the bond doesn't pass?

Another option that could face EHT students is split sessions. This means students would "share" a school, some going on an early schedule and some on a later one. This could be a real problem for working parents due to the irregular hours that could occur. It could also mean two children from the same household on entirely different schedules.

Also, old wiring in the schools makes it hard to keep up with new technology. If this isn't upgraded, safety hazards are inevitable.

Leaks in the roofs have already destroyed some existing equipment. We'll need to continue to replace damaged flooring and equipment unless something is done. Our schools are also in desperate need of new heating and ventilation systems. A lot of students have to suffer because they aren't allowed to wear their jackets in class. If the bond is not passed, conditions will only get worse, and students will suffer from an unhealthy environment.

Now, I didn't tell you to say "yes" to the bond. I didn't tell you to pay more taxes or to support the renovations of EHT schools. But after reading this, do you really think the problems will go away by themselves if the bond isn't passed?

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- March 21** Board of Ed. Candidates' Night 7:00 p.m.
- March 24** 7-9 p.m. and
- March 25** 10-2 p.m. District Education Fair at High School
- March 28** Bond Referendum Vote Polls open 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. 8 p.m. Public hearing for Budget School Board Meeting, Intermediate School
- April 18** 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. School Board Elections
- April 20** Half Day Students
- April 21** Spring Break



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Jaclyn Stemple, Student

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The *Eagle Times* is a publication of the Egg Harbor Township Public Schools, dedicated to the purpose of keeping our community informed about what is happening within our district. The paper is published monthly by the EHT High School journalism staff. It is printed by *The Current* under the auspices of the EHT School District.

LIAISONS

- Sue Brutchey
- Debbie Dangler
- Maria Eubanks
- Jody Gowdy
- Dr. Beth Ann Richey
- Julie Ridgway
- Karen Throckmorton

A Message from the Superintendent

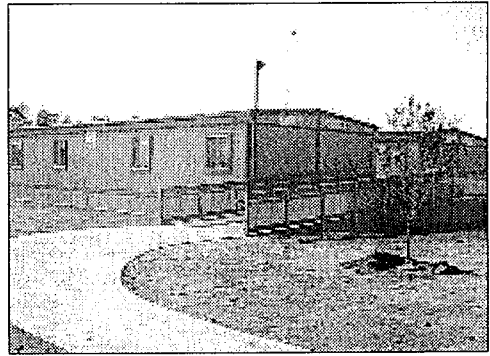
The building renovations, additions and new school program is a three-pronged approach to improving school facilities in Egg Harbor Township. Each project is necessary. I say this because of the far-reaching effects that it will have on the schools. The alterations, renovations and additions to the High School will allow us to maintain and develop programs. It will allow us to address the health and safety concerns in the high school. Air conditioning, roof repairs and electrical repairs will make the building a safer, healthier place for children. The addition to the building will allow us to maintain our current programs while adding new programs for our children. Our class size will remain constant, and our children will have a place to implement the new technology in the school. The new TV studio and performing arts studio will allow us to offer programs in a more diversified setting. Finally, we will be able to maintain our current Advanced Placement

offerings, and, in fact, expand them in the future.

The alterations, additions and renovations to our elementary buildings will also address many health and safety concerns. Furthermore, we will be able to restructure our class size and offer more programs for our children. It is my intention to recommend a full-day kindergarten program to the Board of Education once the additions are completed. However, it is necessary to build the new 3-4 building. By building the new school, our Intermediate School will then house fifth and sixth grades, the Middle School seventh and eighth grades, while allowing us to maintain class size.

The benefits of the projects are obvious and will translate into a school district that will be able to compete on any level with any district in the state. I encourage all residents to vote on March 28.

Dr. Leonard Kelpsh



Trailers are now used at Swift School to house the overflow of students and alleviate some of the overcrowded conditions.

Question two addresses additions to the schools

Although on the outside the district's schools look fine, inside is another story. Students are cramped for learning space every day. The rate at which the student population is growing makes it difficult to maintain a comfortable learning environment for students. Schools are in need of more classrooms and larger work areas, such as the library, gym and nurse's office. Additions to the High School and Swift School promise a better future for students.

When the schools were first built, they had enough rooms, but as time progressed, the schools seemed to become smaller. Many art and music rooms became regular classrooms.



ALEXIS PLOTKIN AND SHEREE NORRIS, JUNIORS

At Swift School, art and music classes are now held in the cafeteria, which limits the nature and scope of projects. "The addition of an art and music room would help show the students better projects to keep them interested," teacher Wendy Montecavo said.

Portable trailers have also been brought in to help with space, but these may legally be used for only two years. "Another problem is that the kids have to go out and in through the rain, snow and all kinds of weather conditions to get to their classes," Principal Don Robertson said.

Plans for Swift School call for the addition of nine kindergarten classrooms. The library also needs to be enlarged. "In the future, if the library does expand, it would help with all of the classes to have an expanded literary section to complement the curriculum," Kathy Gindin said.

Plans for the High School include 20 new classrooms on two floors and a small group instruction room. New locker rooms are proposed for athletic teams, with old locker rooms being converted to physical education and visiting team areas. The passing of question two would also bring two new health classrooms, a new all-purpose performing studio, and renovations to the cafeteria, kitchen and media center. Two media classrooms would be improved and a new television studio would be added.

The problems with overcrowding are addressed in number two of the bond referendum.



MICHAEL MARTIRONE SOPHOMORE



A Talk with a Taxpayer...

If society depends so heavily on those who are educated, isn't our responsibility to help students obtain their education? That is the question that you will have to answer on March 28.

To ensure that students are educated in a secure, modern environment, sacrifices are needed by all residents. In the upcoming bond referendum, you will hold the power to determine whether we will aid our students.

In a three-question ballot, citizens will vote on whether to allot money to improve EHT schools, add on to two schools, and build a new third and fourth grade building. However, in order to achieve anyone of those three proposals, taxpayers must be willing to adapt to a

\$13 a month tax increase (for a home assessed at \$125,000).

Some may worry that \$13 a month is something to be concerned with. However, in a community survey report compiled by Rowan University, statistics indicate that 67% of people polled support the bond referendum.

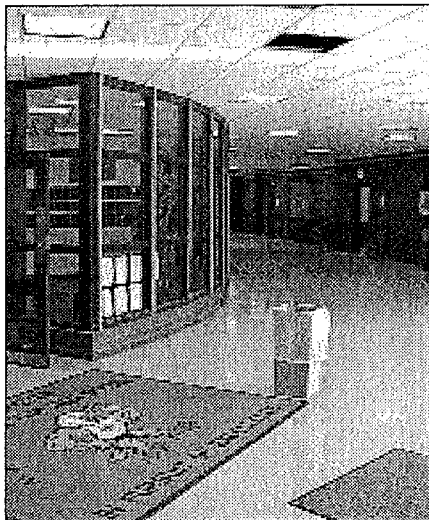
Resident Patti Purelli works out of her home. She has a three-year-old and a seven-year-old who attends Slaybaugh School. As a three-year resident of EHT, Purelli moved here because of acceptable taxes, good neighbors, and the reputation of the EHT schools. As a middle-income taxpayer, she is one of the 72% of EHT residents that recognizes our schools have become overcrowded.

"You don't hear about many bad things going on in the EHT schools," Purelli said. "I believe we should give our students every chance to get their education in the best possible environment." Like many citizens, Purelli is aware of what rising taxes might do, but "it's definitely worth it," she said.

Today's students will be the ones to explore the medical frontier, walk the surface of Mars, and even bring peace to our planet. Education is much like building a house—you need a strong foundation and then you work your way up to the roof. If students today are going to achieve all these great endeavors, shouldn't we provide the best foundation for their future now?

EHT RESIDENT SURVEY

Conducted by
Rowan University
Communications
Institute



While the new floor sparkles in the high school lobby, it is dotted with receptacles catching water from the leaking roof.

High School in need of extensive repairs

Good things are happening at Egg Harbor Township High School. Seniors are getting their college acceptance letters, the wrestling team had a winning season, and the Academic Challenge team qualified for the state semi-finals.

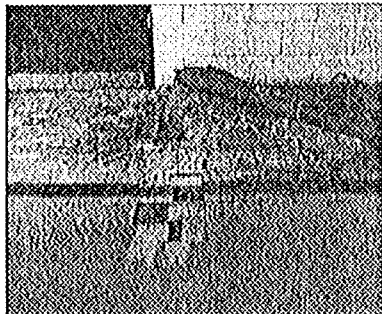
However, while students continue to achieve success, problems lie beneath the surface. The facilities in the school building are preventing students from working to their highest potential.

"One of the major problems is the roof," Health and Physical Education Supervisor Patty Connor said. "Every time it rains hard, puddles of water ruin the gym floor."

The leaky roof is a huge concern throughout the building. "Instead of having to replace everything that gets damaged by the leaky roof, they should just repair the roof," senior Katie Seelso said.

Aside from the roof, the high school is faced with other problems. "Fire doors need to be fixed," said teacher Dan Campbell. "They're supposed to close automatically to contain a fire in case of

The leaky roof has caused extensive damage to the gymnasium floor at the high school.



Question one addresses necessary renovations

All the windows are opened in the classroom. The temperature in the room is very mild, and the fans are turned on. There is just one problem—it's the middle of February.

"The heating and air conditioning systems have so many problems," teacher Anne Marie Mullen said in speaking of her Davenport School classroom. "It is often so hot at times it can be unbearable."

This is just one of the problems the schools currently face. The Davenport, Swift and Slaybaugh schools need new electrical, heating and air conditioning systems, as well as new intercom and security systems. There is also need for a new nurse's office at Swift School.

"In the nurse's office, there are many problems," said Swift School nurse Anne DePursenaire. "I can't help a child in the bathroom because it is so small."

"When we start upgrading our school to modern technology, the school just can't handle it," Swift Principal Donald Robertson said. "The electrical system is bad, and the heating and air conditioning are bad as well."

"Davenport opened in 1976," Principal Lou DellaBarca said. Overloaded sockets are signs that the electrical systems needs upgraded.

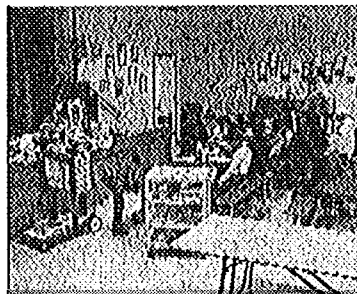
At Slaybaugh, age and population are also taking



JIM BARNISH, JUNIOR AND DAVE SHOLLER, SOPHOMORE

their toll. "The school was built in 1970," said Principal Dennis Byrd. "When you have 800-900 students and faculty each day, things are going to wear out."

If question one of the bond referendum is passed, schools will get the renovations they need.



The cafeteria, art room and music room must all share the same space at the elementary schools.



JANINE ERNEY AND SARAH TERINONI, SENIORS

emergency."

"We need bigger science classrooms with windows," teacher Ken Laible added. "With so many students working in one room, it becomes a safety issue."

The majority of students' concerns are with the Edpac, the school's heating and air conditioning system. "The system is never working right, and I never know how to dress for school," senior Elisa Lee said.

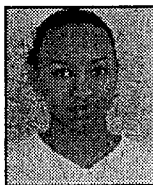
Another facility problem is the plumbing. "In the gym locker rooms, there are only three sinks and toilets for about 100 students per period, and they don't always work," Ms. Connor said. "We teach kids to practice proper hygiene, but we can't even offer them the facilities to do so."

In The Halls



JAMIE WILSON SENIOR

WHAT PROBLEMS PLAGUE THE HIGH SCHOOL?



TIFFANY HOLMES SENIOR

"There's a hole in the ceiling over the auditorium stage that allows water to drip on the Drama Club's very expensive set."



TOM SHERIDAN JUNIOR

"The lockers in the gym locker room are horrible. Most of them are rusty and don't lock."



MIKE LEOPARDI SOPHOMORE

"The windows are broken in my math class, they don't open or shut properly. One is even replaced with a piece of wood."



NOBIE BENGSON JUNIOR

"The carpet in A-wing smells awful and the humidity stained it. I avoid that wing completely."



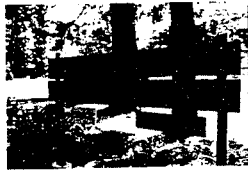
TERI HAMER FRESHMAN

"The halls are packed. I've been late to classes because C-wing is impossible to get through."



KATRINA MIJARES SENIOR

"In the media room, the leak in the ceiling ruined equipment."



Camp Waskowitz. P. 6

Help
plan the plan,

Highline Highlights

A report to our community April 1999

APPENDIX B

Highline goes high-tech

Imagine a high-tech learning center where high school students absorb the latest cutting-edge technology and quickly become job-ready, where the web meets its new work force.

By September 1999, this scenario will no longer be a figment of anyone's imagination. That's because Highline High School is about to join eight other high schools in King County in launching high tech learning centers which will provide training and workers to meet current and projected shortages in the computer industry.

With more than 7,000 information-technology jobs going unfilled statewide today and 60,000 more expected to be created over the next three years, it's no secret that skilled employees are in high demand. Currently, Washington graduates fewer than 2,000

students each year with the necessary qualifications.

"We're very excited to be a part of this," said Highline Superintendent Dr. Joseph McGeehan. "It's a wonderful opportunity for our students to learn skills for 21st century jobs."

The Highline School District was already working on developing its own high tech learning program when the opportunity came to join the consortium, which is fueled by a \$2 million federal grant and is looking to the state Legislature for matching funds.

King County Executive Ron Sims also is an enthusiastic supporter.

"Washington's number one growth industry is high tech, so the shortage threatens to stem industry expansion. Already, losses are being felt in the software industry. In 1992,

Continued on Page 12



Feet first into reading, Valley View students celebrate Dr. Seuss Day. Story inside. See Page 5.

Budget update

As a result of unforeseen maintenance expenses and a revenue shortfall, Highline School Superintendent Dr. Joseph McGeehan recently announced a budget realignment of \$2 million for the next school year to replenish the district's reserve fund. During the coming months, the school board will look at

budget alternatives at several work study sessions. By law, the final budget must be adopted by August 31.

Highlights recently sat down with Dr. McGeehan to gain his insights on the situation.

Why is the budget being realigned at this time, given the approval of the school levy last April?

"Highline School District has had some unexpected emergencies this past year, including the closure and relocation of White Center Heights Elementary due to mold and the recent sewer breakdowns at McMicken Heights, Bow Lake and Mount View Elementary Schools. We've also had to absorb the cost of A Sound Environment for Education,

Continued on Page 3

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Highlights



Board of Education highlights and school news
for parents, residents and staff of the Pattonville School District

Progress

APPENDIX C

For two years, Pattonville has been working with its community to improve student achievement.

Year one saw the development of a district-wide guiding plan, called the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP). The plan targeted improving student achievement by focusing on making sure children are proficient readers; teaching all students to become responsible citizens; addressing critical issues such as airport expansion; developing a plan for updating technology; and creating plans at the school level for improving achievement using the concept of shared-decision making between parents, students and staff.

In year two, two-thirds of Pattonville's schools were trained on using shared decision-making to develop school improvement plans. Under this concept, an equal number of parents and staff come together in councils to formulate plans for improvement. Many schools are including students in the process. The last three schools were trained on the process in early October.

All the training is starting to pay off as the first schools presented their plans for improvement to the Board of Education on Sept. 28. Teams from both Holman Middle School and Carrollton Oaks Elementary School presented their school improvement plans recently. Both schools spent nearly a year formulating, researching and implementing components of their plans. The board approved both plans.

Steps in district's plan to improve are seeing fruition as parents, students and staff work together on school plans



Holman teacher Shelley Berg reads to students. Holman's school improvement plan focuses on reading skills.

The Holman Decision Making Council has targeted reading skills improvement with several programs: a Boys Town Reading program which aids struggling 7th and 8th graders; and an accelerated reader program at 6th grade which uses high-interest books and computer-administered tests to improve reading skills and fluency. In addition, the school developed S.H.A.R.E. (Students Having Adults Read Enthusiastically), a program that brought adult volunteers into the school to read to students while also demonstrating the love of life-long reading to youngsters.

An important part of developing the plan was having input and approval by

the school's community. At Holman, a survey was sent out to all parents to determine whether the school community approved of the plan. Eighty-four responses were received. All but one person responding supported the plan.

Parent Donnette Green said the process of working together to reach decisions that were in the best interest of children "worked very well."

"We had parents, teachers and students all giving input," said Green, who served on Holman's council. "It was great having students on the team because the decisions that we made are decisions that they will be able to go along with because they realize it's for them and

they're part of it."

The team at Carrollton Oaks found similar support for their work. A survey was delivered to all Carrollton Oaks families, and 240 returned the surveys saying they supported the school's plan.

Here's a look at the plan they supported:

At Carrollton Oaks, the school implemented a reading pledge for families in which parents agree to monitor their child's reading or to read to their child for 75 minutes a week. Parents turn in the pledge once a week to signify the 75 minutes have been accomplished. The school also developed take-home math games and study sheets to help make math more understandable for parents and students. The school is also exploring funding for an accelerated math program similar to the successful accelerated reader program it has entering its third year.

In the area of student responsibility, Carrollton Oaks is looking at two new strategies: student planners to help students plan better and make better use of their time, as well as to develop communication between school and home; and a homework lab that will be developed this year and staffed with high school students and supervised by Carrollton Oaks parents.

Other schools are expected to present their school improvement plans throughout this year and next year.

Inside this Issue

District reaches agreement

• Airport will pay \$16.5 million to Pattonville to build a new elementary school.

See back page

PEGS sets open house dates

• The Program for Exceptionally Gifted Students will host a series of open houses for prospective parents and students.

See back page

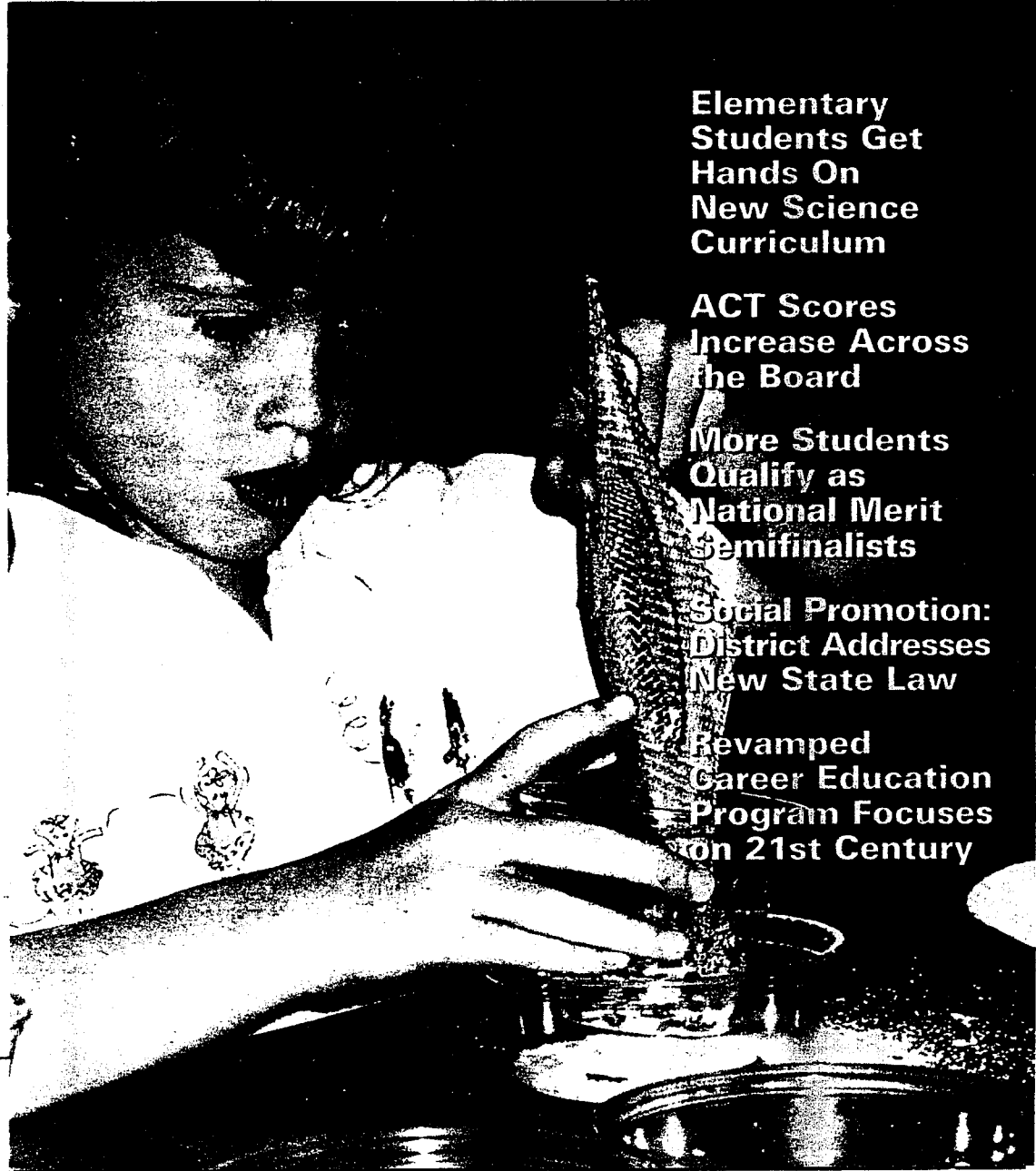
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Learning 473

FALL 1998

APPENDIX D



**Elementary
Students Get
Hands On
New Science
Curriculum**

**ACT Scores
Increase Across
the Board**

**More Students
Qualify as
National Merit
Semifinalists**

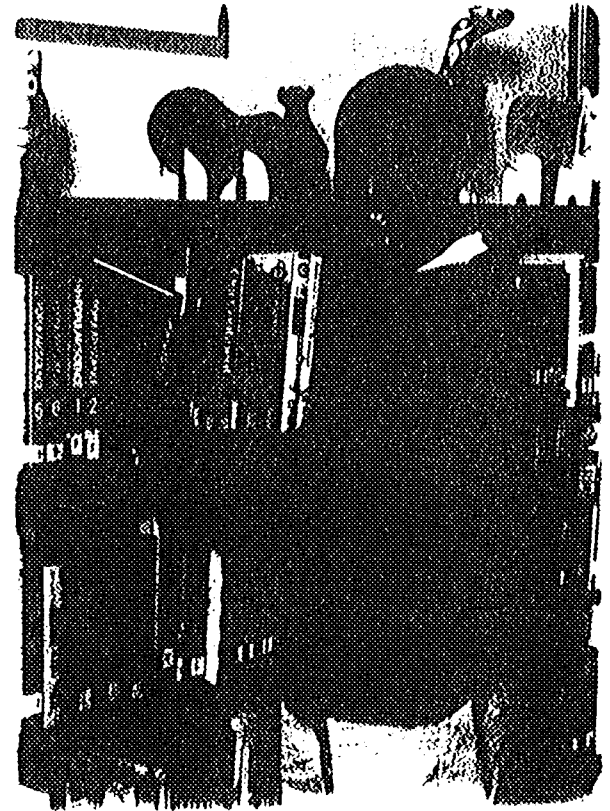
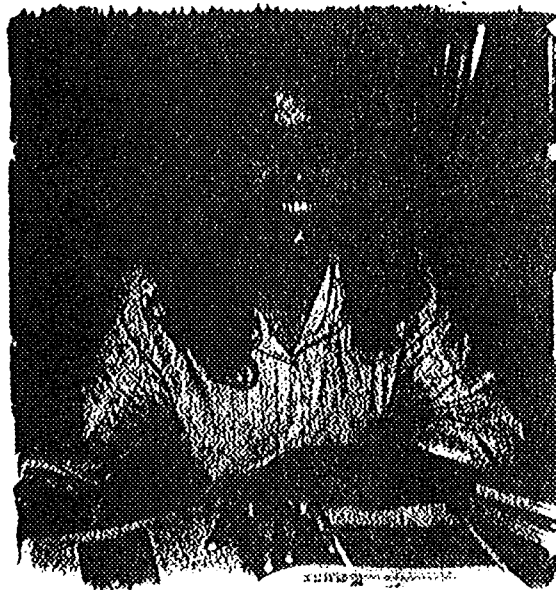
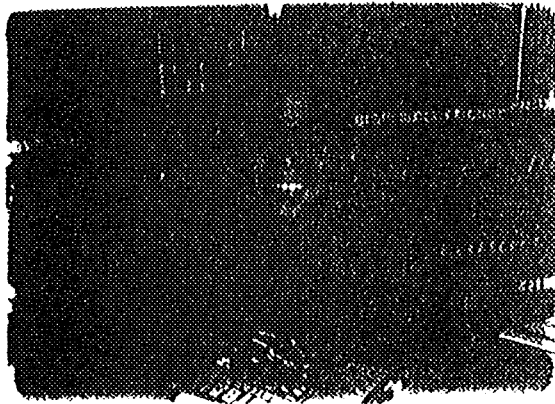
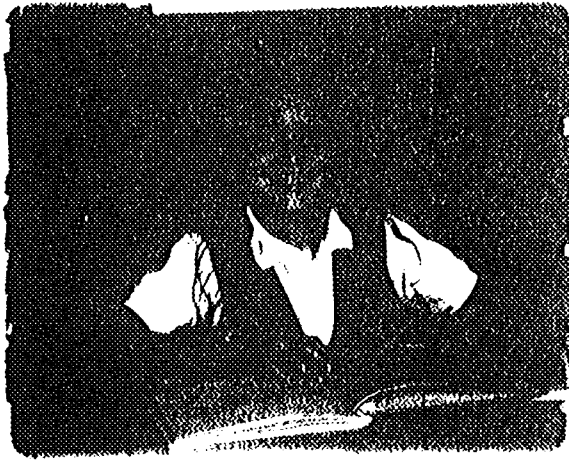
**Social Promotion:
District Addresses
New State Law**

**Revamped
Career Education
Program Focuses
on 21st Century**

APPENDIX E



Inspiring Achievement



Irving Independent School District

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