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A Model Public Relations Plan for the K-12 Clintondale Community Schools Based on the Results of a Survey of Community Attitudes

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A MODEL PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAN
FOR THE
K-12 CLINTONDALE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
BASED ON THE RESULTS OF A
SURVEY OF COMMUNITY ATTITUDES

by
James Caudill

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December, 1979
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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Confidence in public schools now rests at an all time low in a variety of national and locally-reported public opinion polls. The National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago shows only 28 percent of the public expressing confidence "in those running schools."\(^1\) The annual Gallup Poll on Education, now in its twelfth year, shows a decrease in the number of respondents assigning A or B grades to schools.\(^2\)

This question of confidence and credibility may be due to several problems, both real and perceived. In part, it can be traced to the gap between the concerns of the public at large and the concerns of the elected school trustees. While opinion polls like George Gallup's show the public to be concerned about discipline, falling test scores, vandalism and securing teachers who "care" for their sons and daughters, elected school trustees and appointed superintendents spend school board meeting times discussing tenure, contracts, strikes and inadequate budgets. Improved curriculum and better teaching are mentioned only in passing.

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\(^2\) Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Other studies have demonstrated that a gap does indeed exist. Former National School Boards Association Executive Director Harold Webb commented upon an NSBA study concerning public attitudes toward school boards:

The national picture reveals that the people neither understand the functions of school boards nor believe that they should have most of the legal responsibilities which they now do have.... Fully 63 percent of the people (surveyed) were unable to name one thing their school board had done in the preceding year, and barely half of the parents of public school children could do so.

Formal public relations program have existed in few school districts for two basic reasons: misunderstanding of what public relations is, and lack of finances to carry on such a program. The former can be readily dealt with. The latter is a far tougher problem which must be approached in different ways. A key point that is seldom understood concerns the collective non-verbal messages given off by a school district. With so many people and so much public support involved, it is truly a situation where "you cannot not communicate."

Unfortunately, simply having possession of two of the community's key resources--its children and its tax money--has not generally caused school officials to do much to explain what they do with either. The results of this lack of attention show in the poll results.
The results of this custodianship are believed to be self-evident. Students come home each year better able to read, complete math problems, and spout American history. School buildings are maintained, renovated, and sometimes expanded, all to better serve the students and the community. The teaching staff gains seniority, and therefore experience, and the students benefit from their wise counsel.

Few citizens accept this attitude any more. Scores on student achievement tests have declined continually in the past decade. Declining enrollments have forced administrators and school boards to eliminate advanced programs which served smaller numbers of students, consolidating classrooms to avoid excessive waste. At the same time, tax levies have continued to rise, and school personnel, with the aid of collective bargaining only recently authorized in many states, gained salary increases which frequently outpaced gains made by most workers in a community.

The historical support for the public education system in America has evaporated. It does not exist. Created instead is a chasm of confidence that will not be breached without continuous, planned, two-way communication efforts. Schools are ill-equipped--at this moment--for the task.

Public relations as a planned process has four basic elements: research, analysis, communication and evaluation.
Communication activities alone are counted upon to sway parents and taxpayers to the side of the schools. But the efforts are written in jargon and educational code-words that parents cannot understand. They are sent home with students on the assumption that they will arrive safely for consumption. Adults without children in school, including many parents of older children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews never get a scrap of school information. When they do, it concerns the Friday night Bingo game sponsored by the parent association and not the latest reading program.

In a wry comment on this misguided, mixed-up effort at public relations, former teacher William J. Banach observed:

When I was eighteen and graduated from high school my mother became a non-parent. Although she had been president of the parent-teacher association, a band booster and athletic club supporter, all communications from the school district abruptly stopped. Her name was removed from the mailing lists "to save money" and direct information only at parents of current students. She wasn't asked to serve on committees anymore so that those with a more direct stake in the schools could serve. She was simply eliminated. My mother was 45 when I graduated and it's been 20 years since she heard from the schools. But this year she received a golden ager card from the superintendent. She's reached retirement age and the school district took notice. After 20 years, this card entitles her to come out to the Marquette Warriors football games in November and sit in the ice-cold bleachers and cheer for a team she knows nothing about. How do you think she votes in school elections?
If school officials hope to recapture the former support they once took for granted, they must keep the mothers and fathers and other interested citizens involved, or at least make them feel like the opportunity is available should they want to pursue it. This will take a rethinking of current attitudes toward communication programs. It will require support—human and financial—for increased communication activities.

Without both, public confidence in school officials and the system they've created will continue to erode.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to assess community attitudes toward a local K-12 public school district in Michigan and to develop, based on the information gained through this assessment, a comprehensive public relations plan.

Background of the Study

The Clintondale Community School district is located in northeast Macomb County, about 20 miles north of Detroit. This is a community without an industrial base, and with little land available for further development. It is primarily a community of neighborhoods, of both older established homes and newer subdivisions.
Total student enrollment has been dropping, from 5,569 in 1973 to 5,220 students in September, 1978. The school administrative officers expects further decline in enrollment and in June, 1979 the school board voted to close an elementary school to compensate for this decline.

Clintondale operates a senior high school, middle school, and five elementary schools. A comprehensive transportation program has evolved over the years and today, more than 50 percent of all the students are bussed to school. Parents are not generally happy with this arrangement, according to administrators.

The school district has faced, during recent years, extreme financial pressures and has operated with a deficit budget. This is illegal under Michigan law, and the state department of education has threatened to dissolve the school district and merge it with surrounding districts if the finances of the district are not brought up to standards called for by statute. This has received widespread coverage in the local press, resulting in much discussion among residents of this community.

In July, 1978, a new superintendent was selected to replace the retiring chief executive. This change, coupled with the election of several new school board members, sparked a move to increase the role of citizens in advising the district.
One of the steps taken was to appoint a citizen's task force to examine the declining enrollment problem. Representatives from the community's varied constituencies were appointed to gather and evaluate facts surrounding this problem, and asked to suggest possible alternatives. Although their main focus was declining enrollment, the committee moved into public relations as a necessary part of gaining support for its actions.

To assess community attitudes toward potential alternatives for dealing with the declining enrollment problem, a community attitude survey was devised with the assistance of staff members from the Department of Communication Services, Macomb Intermediate School district. The MISD serves as a regional service agency for the 21 local school districts in Macomb county, and is supported by local, state and federal funding.

An integral part of this attitude survey was the assessment of where citizens gained information about the school district, what kinds of information they were receiving, and conversely, the types of information they would like to receive. In the final survey instrument containing 37 questions, nine questions were related to communication in the school district. This section of the survey was used as the basis for this study.
Significance of the Study

"Methodical, systematic research is the foundation of effective public relations." Public relations is gaining in stature and becoming recognized as an integral part of every organization's operating procedure. For example, most intermediate school districts in Michigan must include a communications component in all new grant applications made to state and federal funding sources. Acceptance of the funds is withheld until this requirement is met.

Hugh Newton, a noted public relations counselor, said the "day is long past when any major issue of public policy can be formed without widespread public support." Marshall Lewis, Director of Corporate Communications for Union Carbide, sees the role of the public relations professional as "making management credible to the public...and the public credible to management." Denny Griswold, publisher of Public Relations News, a weekly newsletter serving practitioners, noted:

Public relations has made major contributions to a change in the business philosophy in America, and for that matter, throughout the world. For more than three decades, public relations has been insisting that it is not enough for industry to make a profit from providing goods and services. It must do more: it must operate in the public interest, identify with the people's hopes and aspirations, and work to provide a better quality of life.
Despite these endorsements of the benefits of public relations programs, school districts have been inept communicators for some time. The significance of this study, and its inherent value, lies in providing a plan for local school districts which could help restore public confidence in public education, at least at the neighborhood level. Pollster Gallup observed that "periodically the public needs to be reconvinced that education is all important. And unless educators take on this responsibility, they can be sure that no one else will."\textsuperscript{14}

The dramatic decline in national polls previously cited lends significant support to the idea that more effective communication plans for school districts must be developed. In the extreme, if educators are unable to rekindle the formerly ingrained support for our universal system of education, serious setbacks can be expected in our national effort to provide educational opportunities to all young people. Lack of support, including financial support withdrawn in the burgeoning tax revolt, could force public schools to cutback programs or perhaps even close.

Assumptions of the Study

The key assumption in this study is that parents care about their children and are interested in what schools are offering in terms of educational programming. It is also assumed that this interest does not cease with graduation.
In addition, since all property owners in a community pay property taxes which in part support school operations, it is assumed that everyone has some interest in the activities of the school district.

Although much has been shown which supports the idea that the public believes the educational system to be failing, other studies have shown that citizens also believe education in the local neighborhood school (the system most school districts still operate under) is continuing on at high standards.1^5

This support for local schools suggests that a public relations plan developed with the attitudes of the local community in mind will have an impact on that individual community. This assumption has been made in conducting this study.

Faith has also been placed in the ability of opinion polling to deliver acceptable results which can be used to create this public relations plan. The dangers in using this approach were reviewed in a National School Public Relations Association book titled Budget/Finance Campaigns: You Can't Afford To Lose. In the chapter titled "Taking the Community's Pulse" such dangers are explained:
Scientific opinion research is a recognized and valuable tool, but bad research is much worse than no research at all; most of the questionnaires used by school districts are amateurish, slanted, and unscientific. Basing a campaign on such poor research is dangerous. Unless the school district can afford competent professional research or has such people in the community who are willing to donate their services, opinion research should not be undertaken.16

The assumption that parents do indeed want information about schools and how their child is behaving within the system is supported in a study of Colorado High School students. After reviewing various techniques of disseminating information in the community, certain conclusions were made. Anderson said:

1. All types of information about schools are desired by parents, but certain types of information are more strongly desired than others.

2. Information of a personal nature about the son or daughter is the most highly sought after by parents.

3. No single source of communication can adequately inform parents.

4. Parents identify specific information sources for highly desired information, yet have no preferences with less desirable information.

5. Data in the study refutes the notion that the child is the best source of information about the schools. Given a choice, most parents would prefer almost any other reliable source of information.17

Clearly, parents expect to know what takes place in the schoolhouse, with an obvious preference for knowing about Johnny's grades and test scores rather than the new bond issue.
Definition of Key Terms Used

In understanding this report of the results of the research, certain definitions of key terms will be needed.

PARENT: an adult with a child in school, grades kindergarten through grade twelve.
NON-PARENT: an adult who has no children in school, grades k-twelve; this would include those with pre-school children, and those who have children already graduated from high school, as well as those who have never had children in schools.
PAROCHIAL/PRIVATE SCHOOL: a school supported without public funds.
DECLINING ENROLLMENT: a process with many causes whereby fewer students are enrolled annually in a given school district.
CONSOLIDATION: taking students from two buildings and putting them into classrooms in one building, eliminating the former location as a classroom center.
BONDS/MILLAGE: funding devices used to secure tax monies to operate school districts.
OPINION LEADERS: persons who tend to speak for many people, including, but not limited to, elected and appointed government officials.
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

While much has been written about schools in general over a considerable period of time, specific studies concerning school public relations have been few and generally narrowly focused. Most target in on campaigning for bond and millage issues, or on specific attempts to successfully disseminate information to the community. There are few handbooks or guidebooks on school public relations available. Those available are primarily descriptive, with sections on improving news media relations, organizing citizen committees and publishing newsletters. They rarely offer guidance on research and planning functions in public relations.

When considering the development of a public relations plan, it seems appropriate to examine the related areas of attitude formation and attitude change, along with information dissemination, electioneering, and public relations. This chapter follows such a pattern.

Attitudes

"Opinions adapt attitudes to the demands of social situations, but having adapted them, opinions appear to become ingredients in the constant, gradual reformulation of attitudes."18
Attitude and opinion are used interchangeably but, in fact, they are distinctly different concepts. There are two basic positions concerning attitude formation:

- man is a rational being with limited reasoning power, and is therefore susceptible to emotional appeals; or
- man is rational, has strong powers of reason and discrimination, and therefore resists emotional appeals and depends instead on discriminating information.¹⁹

Reasons for holding or altering attitudes are found in the essential functions they perform for the individual in enabling him to cope with his situation. Those functions may include ego defense, value expression, knowledge and adjustment. Katz groups these according to their motivational basis.²⁰ Festinger views attitudes from a dissonance reduction function.²¹

Public relations practitioners often use the argument that "people won't support what they don't understand" in urging communication programs which provide clear and indisputable facts and information which create understanding and sympathy for a school or a school's point of view. Holding an extensive series of community hearings before voting to close an elementary school would follow this philosophy.
Current examples of this strategy in industry can be seen in the Shell Oil "Answer Man" series of booklets which are distributed in weekly newsmagazines and at Shell stations throughout the United States; the General Motors consumer information bulletin advertisements which feature product information instead of hard sales pitches; or in the best example of all, the Mobil Oil sponsored print series of columns in Sunday newspaper magazine supplements titled "Observations."

Each of these companies is demonstrating support for the notion of man as a rational being with strong powers of reason and discrimination. Yet, each of these companies hedges their marketing program by also employing a wide variety of emotional appeals in advertisements designed to broaden existing and create new markets for their products. The dilemma was noted by one industry spokesman who said "changing fixed habits and attitudes is not the easy task that those who talk of 'hidden persuaders' think it to be." Another spokesman said the ability to measure public opinion is far greater than the ability to define or manipulate it. "The public relations professional is striving to constantly start, lead, change, speed or slow trends in public opinion."
In a sense, the assignment for public relations is to change or neutralize hostile opinions, to crystalize uninformed or latent opinions in favor of the company, and to conserve favorable opinions. The assignment is the same whether the company is A & P Supermarkets or the Clintondale Community Schools.

Attitudes can be seen as pictures in our heads. What contributes to focusing that picture is determined by four primary mechanisms:

- biology/heredity;
- group membership;
- role: age, sex, social status, class, color; and
- situation, all the accidental things that affect people.  

If an attitude is a predisposition to respond in a given way to an issue or situation, the expression of that attitude, especially on controversial school issues like school closings and tax increases, comes in the voicing of an opinion. Public opinion, says Hennessey, is the "collection of views, measurable or inferable, held by persons who have an interest in that issue."
Parents of small children and parents of children who have completed high school are predisposed to reacting to school in different ways because of their attitudes, supported by varying pre-existing mechanisms. Parents with children who have graduated are far less interested in school issues, except financial matters involving taxes. Parents of young children, concerned about the schools which their children will attend in the future, can reasonably be expected to vote in higher numbers.

Some research tends to support the idea that people seek information which will only support attitudes they already hold. This reinforces those attitudes, making it extremely difficult to change them. This "Closed Circle" theory was supported in a study which found that recent purchasers of automobiles tended to read only advertisements in magazines for the autos they had recently purchased. Sears, after an extensive review of studies completed on the closed circle concept, found that "under some circumstances people seem to prefer information that supports their opinion but under other circumstances people seem to prefer information that contradicts their opinion." Selective exposure and other processes that bar information are prime mechanisms by which people resist influence.
Still another problem in attitude research is the gap between attitudes that are expressed and subsequent behavior. A frequently cited study concerns a series of hotel managers who were asked in the 1930's if they would register Chinese guests. Most said no, yet when the researchers arrived with a Chinese couple and asked to register, lodging was provided.  

This problem can be illustrated by the popular phrase "actions speak lounder than words." Miller asks "to what extent does knowledge of the verbal attitudinal responses of individuals allow for accurate predictions of other kinds of attitudinal behaviors?" Miller agrees with Festinger, who suggests that researchers have perhaps become lax:

What I want to stress is that we have been quietly and placidly ignoring a very vital problem. We have essentially persuaded ourselves that we can simply assume that there is, of course, a relationship between attitude change and subsequent behavior, and, since this relationship is so obvious, why should we labor to overcome the technical difficulty of investigating it?

In a study of fear arousing appeals it was found that certain types of messages were most effective in causing individuals to say that they would be interested in receiving additional information about civil defense preparedness procedures in the event of a nuclear attack.
Yet, when business reply envelopes and information sheets were later distributed to those who said they would like more information "a small percentage of people expended the energy necessary to request further information."\textsuperscript{32}

As an individual is exposed deliberately to new information bearing on a related set of cognitions, he begins to learn, perhaps in spite of himself.\textsuperscript{33} In one voter behavior study, those who thought the question and candidates they supported would win were found to have been exposed to far more campaign information supporting their views than those who thought their side would lose.\textsuperscript{34} This voter posture is often reflected in low voter turnouts, caused by the attitude that it "won't make any difference anyway."

Burhans, interested in modifying behavior by changing attitudes, explained

Most communication researchers operate under the assumption that since attitudes are important determinants of behavior, the more we learn about the nature of attitudes, the better we'll understand peoples' behavior; the better we can measure attitudes, the more accurately will we be able to predict behavior; the more effective we become at changing attitudes, the more successfully can we modify behavior.\textsuperscript{35}

But attitudes have been shown to be poor predictors of behavior, especially in voter research.
Douglas found four basic reasons why information campaigns in support of many issues fail:

1. There is a hard core of know-nothings who cannot be reached.

2. A gain in information doesn't mean a change in attitudes necessarily follows.

3. Only people pre-disposed to change attitudes will change anyway.

4. Media campaigns can only alter social attitudes indirectly, through interpersonal influence (media to influence and opinion leaders to the community).  

Public relations efforts to create attitudes where none existed can be illustrated by the National Safety Council campaign to get motorists to use safety belts. Wisconsin was the first state to require the use of seat belts, and supported that law with an extensive public relations campaign designed to garner support for belt-buckling. Six years after the law became effective, and after millions of dollars in public relations attitude formation advertising and special events, only fifteen percent of those surveyed in the state said they regularly used seat belts.  

The four-step model of public opinion developed by Cutlip and Center has application when preparing a public relations proposal for school systems and other agencies.
In succeeding steps, Cutlip says:

1. A number of people recognize a situation as being problematic and decide that something must be done. They explore solutions, and fact-find.

2. Alternate proposals evolve and are discussed.

3. One course is identified as best. This course is promoted in an effort to raise group consciousness and seek acceptance.

4. Action is pressed until the group gains success or grows weary of the battle and moves on to the next project.38

This is further reinforced by the same authors' in Principles of Public Opinion:

- The message must be stated in terms of the interest of the audience.

- Unless a means of action is provided, people tend to shrug off appeals to do things.

- Unless the listener has confidence in the speaker, he is not likely to listen or to believe.

- To communicate, you must employ words, symbols, or stereotypes that the receiver understands and comprehends.39

Some school districts provide examples. Following a millage campaign which focused on the needs of children rather than the financial matters involved, a survey of likely voters completed by the Grand Rapids Public Schools five days prior to the election found that 67 percent of those surveyed said they were definitely in favor of passage.
Only 13 percent, however, could identify what the ballot question actually was.\textsuperscript{40} When the Macomb Intermediate School district sought additional millage support for special education programs in 1977, a community survey revealed little understanding of the concept of special education and, therefore, little support for increased taxes. However, citizens did understand the phrase "handicapped children" and all campaign material was changed to emphasize the concept of helping the handicapped rather than special education.\textsuperscript{41} The vote was successful because the message was put in terms the community could understand. The same was true in Grand Rapids.

Understanding attitudes, attitude formation and the relationship to potentially modifying behavior is an important first step toward planning an adequate communications effort for a school district.

\textbf{Attitudes Toward Schools and School Public Relations Research}

Roberts developed a model communications plan for the Dallas Independent School District based on a community attitude survey, although his study was specifically used as an assessment tool for the existing program. He examined citizen involvement, ratings given DISD programs, and awareness of DISD communications programs.\textsuperscript{42}
He was particularly interested in the ratings given to each category by different ethnic groups because of a court-ordered desegregation plan the school district is implementing. The model he developed is transportable, providing four criterion are met. The points seem well taken for any public relations effort:

1. The school board must have a commitment to improving communications and community relations.

2. The superintendent must have a strong commitment for public relations.

3. The community and school personnel must be presented basic data to provide a moderate level of awareness of community school relations.

4. Local schools must have a commitment to the program based on broad community-school input and participation.

Macbeth developed a theoretical public relations model that examined the public school district as an integral part of the community and larger systems. Goff studied school districts in Alabama, Georgia, North and South Carolina and Tennessee to determine the extent of citizen involvement in school-community relations. In successful efforts, he found thorough and continuous planning as a prerequisite.

In another study, information dissemination techniques were measured. Hoenes found that four different techniques were all useful in influencing parent attitudes toward a school district industrial arts program, but that a slide-tape program had the most effect in generating knowledge of the effort.
Exhibits, articles in the school district newsletter and newspaper stories also rated highly in the Hoenes study. In a study previously cited (see Anderson, p. 12) information dissemination techniques were also reviewed.

School districts frequently depend on written materials to communicate information to parents. The attitudes which parents form depend, in large part, on the ability of the written materials to be understood by the intended audience. Facos reviewed written materials from 150 randomly selected school districts from throughout the United States and applied the Dale-Chagall Readability formula to determine the equivalent grade level reading score. Handbooks, newsletters, reports and flyers were analyzed. He found that there was no significant difference between the materials designed for students, parents and teachers in the district, and that the level of education in the community at large (taken from census tracts) had little effect on the grade level of the written materials provided to parents in each community. In both cases, school publications were generally written at the eleventh or twelfth grade level.

This means that communities with traditionally designated lower class demographic status were provided materials which may have been more difficult to understand than the community members were individually and collectively ready to comprehend.
Communities with higher collective levels of schooling completed were, in this interpretation, better able to keep informed about their schools.

Other studies have focused on the public relations aspects of reaching potential voters in school elections. Tebbutt sought to learn 1) what proportion of various groups went to the polls, 2) how each group tended to vote, 3) what degree of association existed between voter behavior and selected communications. Various groups were classified by such demographic factors as parent/non-parent, number of children in school, education, income, religion, homeownership and length of residence. Selected communications included articles in the local newspaper and in the district's newsletters and brochures, along with personal contacts by school district officials, friends, and associates.

Tebbutt found surprises concerning renters and negative residents:

- Age of voter's children would be hard to overestimate in terms of the voter's behavior on the referendum;

- A special appeal for support from renters and new residents appears promising for campaign workers;

- The significant concerns about higher taxes among the oldest residents calls for a special approach with this group;

- The striking ineffectiveness of reaching initially negative or uncommitted residents through meetings and mailings urges a reassessment of these techniques by campaign managers.
In a similar study Leman found additional characteristics of school election voter behavior:

1. The typical voter is ill-informed about his school.

2. The study indicated that sex, age, education, and parent status were indicative of levels of knowledge about schools, but occupation was not.

3. Similarly, the same classifications were good indicators of whether or not respondents were actively involved or interested in schools. Typically, those most interested were female parents aged 30 to 50 years old.

4. There is a positive correlation between being actively interested in schools and better informed.

5. Typical voter demographics matched the demographics of those actively interested in schools. Education and occupation were of little value in predicating voter behavior.

6. Those who vote in school elections tend to be better informed about schools.51

Both studies suggest that school districts would be wise to invest heavily in communication related activities. Whitle echoed that finding, saying "clearly, voter understanding does have an effect on annual school elections."52

In the Whitle study a survey instrument was used in two New Jersey townships. Respondents rated school district newsletters and articles in the newspapers as primary sources of information.
Assessing Voter Behavior in School Elections
Problems & Observations

Since much of the literature relates to school public relations as applied to school electioneering, it is important to examine this area. This study is based upon a survey of community attitudes. This section of the chapter examines other investigations of surveys taken in conjunction with school election planning.

Case Study Examples

In March, 1978, Dearborn school voters went to the polls to decide on a millage package which contained several options ranging from renewal of the expiring millage to specific increases for operations of sports programs and the Henry Ford Community College. School officials had conducted the usual pre-election millage campaign and were relatively secure in the belief that Dearborn citizens would again come forward and open their pocketbooks to maintain the image of Dearborn as a community with "good schools." That security came, in part, from the belief that voters would never turn down a reasonable request, having approved millages with great regularity for many years. In fact, since the district was organized in 1835, no millage had ever been defeated. In March, 1978, every ballot question failed. In a follow-up election in June, 1978, three of four questions failed again.
During that same period in spring, 1978, Benton Harbor citizens were also deciding school millage issues. The historical perspective there was far different. Since 1968, voters had defeated 19 millage propositions by massive margins, generally defeating questions by margins of three to one. This 1978 package of proposals appeared no better. During January and February the district suffered through the first combined teacher and secretary strike in Michigan public school history. A federal judge found the school district guilty of de jure segregation and ordered plans drawn up which might include cross-district busing. The superintendent had resigned at the end of the first school semester, and the deputy superintendent resigned at the height of the strike. He was followed by the personnel director, business manager and somewhat later, the public relations director. The community had little reason to view this school district as a stable one deserving of support.

With only three weeks notice, the school board decided to place a millage increase on the ballot to allow the community to decide the future course of school affairs. No one gave the issue a chance of passing, and that prediction proved true. But—with the memory of a bitter strike fresh in the minds of the voters, a staff torn by dissession, and the threat of forced busing in the air—the millage election landed in the loss column by only seven votes.
Both these examples illustrate the value of staying in touch with a community through various means, including the opinion survey. In Dearborn, had the school board been better able to anticipate voter unrest, campaign adjustments could have been made early enough to have a positive effect. In Benton Harbor, knowledge that the mood of the public had changed and that the vote might be close could have altered campaign tactics there as well.

**Predicting Voter Behavior**

Predicting voter behavior is never easy. With school districts this task is even more complex. No institution which has two very important things belonging to the community—its children and its tax money—can expect lukewarm attitudes to be prevalent. Emotion sometimes stands in the way of reason. This is further complicated because every American has had some experience with the public schools. Personal opinions have been formed based on personal experience. Those school memories—some good, some bad—are reinforced and altered as the student becomes adult and later, taxpayer. As society changes and grows more complex, increasing demands and expectations are placed on the schools. The gap between what can be delivered and what is expected grows wider.
School administrators, charged by school boards with the responsibility of gaining support for the schools in millage elections, generally find themselves at a loss. Schools of education do not often contain curricula in electioneering. Millages are mentioned in the classroom only in passing and only as a method of financing public education.

When school elections must be undertaken, few superintendents understand how to organize and run an election campaign. This can result in a chief executive who underestimates the information needs of the community, and overestimates how easy the task of convincing citizens to vote will be. The result can be too little planning time, and too much time spent in inefficient and ineffective methods of communicating.

Predicting voter behavior in school millage elections is hampered for several reasons:

1. Few school districts have adequate records for conducting pre-election research. When such records do exist, financial, technical, or political considerations prevent their effective use.
2. School officials do not adequately understand the processes of communication in a local school district. They do not know what people think of their schools, where the information sources are, and what people would like to have more information about in order to be better informed.
3. School election campaigns often work in directions that create more harm than good, short-circuiting support that existed before the campaign began, bringing out negative voters by exposing them to campaign information.  
4. The state of staff relations has become so disastrous that an attitude of "us versus them" now exists between school board and school employee—an attitude clearly communicated to the public, leaving lasting impressions which frequently surface when requests for additional millage support are made.  
5. Finally, schools are subject to enormous short and long-term pressures that create a constant state of anxiety and controversy that threatens to erupt at any moment, creating "uncontrollables" which cannot adequately be planned for. Too often, administrators and school boards do not react to such events responsibly, compounding the problem.  

Pre-election research  
The best foundation for election success, according to William J. Banach, an elections specialist, is simply a successful school district. Beyond that, Banach and school public relations specialist Cass Franks say "it's not what's up front that counts." Instead, "intelligent advance planning can provide the extra nudge a community may need to support ballot propositions."
Analysis begins with post-election analysis of all school elections already completed. Research of this type is best completed with the aid of a computer, however, smaller school districts still do not have access to such sophisticated technology. When they do, "official returns can be used to achieve a precinct-by-precinct and geographic voting pattern in the school district...and help determine how many registered voters actually showed up at the polls."\(^{58}\)

With this, and other types of voter analysis, three key ideas emerge. Valuable information can be obtained on

- the yes and no vote audiences in each precinct;
- the success or failure of campaign attempts to attract positive voters to the polls; and
- the groups which must be reached to do well at the polls in the next election.\(^{59}\)

An analysis by Banach and Franks of a 1976 Utica Community schools millage election found:

- the higher the voter turnout in each precinct, the lower the ballot proposal's success;
- the total turnout of newly-registered voters was 10 percent lower than the average among all registered voters;
- the employee group vote was 87.5 percent of its registered members and 8.2 percent of the actual voters who visited the polls. The female vote exceeded the male vote by 10 percent and the ballot issue passed in all but one precinct where female voters exceeded males. There was a clear relationship between youth and support for the proposal in every precinct.
- the record of endorsees who voted improved by 6.2 percent over the last election and represented 8 percent of the total vote; and

- the number of previously-predicted potential yes voters who visited the polls was within 10 percent of the actual yes votes received in the election.

The value of data like this for planning future elections is obvious.

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) also believes in pre-election analysis. In the School District Campaign Planner NSPRA advocates knowing everything possible about the citizenry. "Taking the Community's Pulse" is the title of an NSPRA chapter in Budget/Finance Campaigns: You Can't Afford to Lose.

Such analysis can provide the key to things which should be highlighted in the campaign, and which things should be downplayed or avoided.

The financial resources needed to bring in outside consultants are not always there, although many school districts do ask for--and get--help from polling firms and communication professionals. Beyond the problems of securing adequate financial support are questions of politics and ethics. Many school board members are uncomfortable with the idea of conducting what they see as a "big brother" style research, followed by low-profile campaigns which seek to influence only segments of the community.
Most trustees believe that schools are a public responsibility with each citizen required to offer an opinion of the operations of the district at the ballot box. It is to their credit that more and more trustees are putting economic survival of the institution on at least an equal plateau when deciding such questions of ethics.

Getting In Touch With The Community

Piele and Hall made an exhaustive analysis of school election research completed through 1973, and decided "there are almost as many reasons for voting choices as there are individual voters." Many factors influence how a person votes. Some include race, levels of education, age, economic status, personal status, length of residence in a community, and level of knowledge concerning school activities. Other factors which play important roles in partisan politics have little influence on school voters. These include partisan voting habits and party membership.

Knowing the demographics of a community is a major failing of school officials, and another key problem in predicting voter behavior. Declining enrollments have brought rapid and radical changes to the operations of schools. Changing social values also are changing the way citizens look at schools faster than ever before.
Ineffective Campaigning

Jennings found that many school voters oppose millages simply because they oppose high taxes. But he also found that these "tax resisters" form a bloc which vote against any school issues. This suggests that the traditional method of campaigning to get out the vote may well bring out more tax resisters than yes voters. And a corollary of that approach--working to inform voters--is equally dubious. Piele found virtually no research to suggest that "voters grow any more willing to support school finance proposals as they become better informed about them." In fact, there is considerable evidence to suggest that short-term campaigns cannot accomplish much. Hall and Piele found that voters had generally made up their minds about school issues long before campaign flyers and volunteer callers made voter contacts. "How an area voted in the last election was the single best indicator and predictor of school finance election voting." These findings led the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) to adopt several principles of school campaigning:

- schools can no longer assume that the public will support their requests;
- taxes are not the only cause of election difficulties;
- "getting out the vote" must be done selectively, with special efforts to attract likely school supporters to the polls;
- the school election decision is relatively permanent; most voters have already made up their minds how they will vote on almost any school measure;
- schools can no longer count on the support of parents;
- when a measure stirs up controversy or organized opposition, it will usually be rejected; and
- voter alienation is a principal cause of negative voting. 66

Staff Relations

Following a surprising election defeat, a school principal and the election campaign coordinator stopped in a local restaurant for a cup of coffee. Conversations in the restaurant concerned the election defeat. One agitated man said "Now we'll see if those bums really need the money or not." He was a school custodian. 67 This attitude of skepticism, hostility and distrust among staff people is a critical problem in assessing community attitudes toward schools. Statements such as this, repeated widely with the added information that a school employee is the originator, serve quickly to reinforce already negative voters and do little to encourage potential yes voters to come to the polls to support schools.

Internal problems have been created by events which the community is only incidentally aware of in most respects.
Collective bargaining may be the exception, since many communities are discovering the agonies of a teacher strike. But tight budgets, layoffs because of declining enrollments, pressure because of falling academic performance by students and increasing disrespect among some students for teachers have all created a boiling point in the school house which is boiling over where once calm and tranquility reigned. School boards and administrators are frequently strapped in attempting to do anything to solve some of these larger problems. More than that, however, few public relations programs exist which seek to work from the inside out, informing staff first about the problems and successes of the school district so the staff may be correctly informed about school happenings before adding opinions, helping citizens form negative attitudes about their schools.

Coping With Controversy

Although the number of tax resisters in every community may be on the rise, as evidenced by voter support of a variety of tax limiting and tax cutting proposals in recent general elections, the number of permanent tax resisters is rarely enough as a single group to defeat a proposal. It is the unknowns—the controversies—which frequently cause people to choose sides.
School officials do not react well to controversy, as a rule. Near Washington D.C. at Georgetown University an oil-fired boiler burst and dumped 5,000 gallons of oil into the Potomac River. The school officials did not want to create controversy and authorized their spokesperson only to admit that a spill had taken place. As a result, news reporters were forced to seek other confirmation of the details of this accident. Officials at the nearby Navy boatyard told reporters they were "pretty sure" that 30,000 gallons of oil had been spilled. Police officials said the total was "probably closer to 50,000 gallons." Controversy did erupt. As a result, the school adopted a policy which says, in part, "in the event of a press inquiry concerning any campus event, total cooperation and all known details should be immediately conveyed. The truth is generally far less harmful than misinformation." \(^{68}\)

Other research has shown that in most cases, when the public is given the facts it has responded with greater support. In 1962 a poll of President Kennedy's popularity rose 10 percent after he accepted full responsibility for the Bay of Pigs fiasco. In 1960 Eisenhower gained six percent in popularity ratings when he accepted blame for the U-2 spy plane incident. After Ford Motor Company received wide publicity in 1972 for the recall of all Torinos and Montegos for the replacement of rear axle shafts, sales rose on those models 63 and 177 percent respectively. \(^{69}\)
Controversy arouses interest and starts the process of opinion formation. Complete and accurate facts partly determine what opinions and actions will result.

Controversies that plague school election campaigners range from major items like school strikes, board recalls or accidents in the schools, to smaller items like the student who leaves school and crosses through the neighbor's bushes to take a shortcut. Each is seemingly unavoidable.

Key Issues In Passing Millages

In June, 1978, Michigan voters went to the polls to vote in annual school elections. To the superficial observer schools did well--more than 60 percent of the 328 ballot proposals were approved. A second look, however, shows that only 22 percent of the questions requesting additional millage support from communities gained acceptance. What voters approved was the status quo. Faced with double-digit inflation and rising overhead, including employee salaries and benefits which typically account for as much as 85 percent of a school district operating budget, status quo was really status zero.

The pattern of decreasing support for increasing school budgets is now firmly set, but it is hardly predictable. In 1977 voters approved 49 percent of the requested millage increases for school support.
To the losers of 1978, this showed just how ineffective their efforts had been. But in 1976, voters approved only 36 percent of such requests. Charting results like these over a three-year period takes on the characteristic of a rollercoaster.  

Banach posed the question "Winners versus losers--what makes the difference?" and decided that the "difference was diligence." He examined Michigan public school district millage issues in June, 1976 and found certain characteristics among the winners. Essentially, the key was time spent planning the campaigns, and research into past campaigns to determine, when possible, why people in the local community behaved in the voting booths as they did. Unfortunately, few school districts are sophisticated in their ability to conduct public opinion research, and strapped budgets limit their ability to call on outside consultants for outside insight. Even when budgets do permit such assistance, the lack of sophistication stands in the way of recognizing the need for it.  

Others see current school electioneering efforts in another vein. "The salesman's lament of 'If only I had a good product, I could sell a million,' has definite implications for developing school bond issues." Public confidence in education has never been lower, and educators confidence in themselves is in the same low valley. They are unsure about the "product" they are offering the public.
The public and the officials running schools—elected and appointed—seem to be on different wave lengths, with each group feeling the other does not represent the majority. In a National School Boards Association poll, two of every three respondents said they would not want to be a school board member, three of four said they had never attended a school board meeting and could not name the school board president.74

If a citizen did attend a school board meeting the profile of a school board member in attendance would be suburban, white, middle or upper-middle class, and middle-aged.75 Men dominate school boards. In the NSBA poll previously cited, the number of females serving on boards in 1972 was found to be less than 12 percent. In 1978, when the American School Board Journal found things improving, female membership on school boards was still put at 26 percent.76

"Relative affluence and school board membership seem closely linked. While the median family income in the U.S. is close to $10,000 annually (1978 figures) nearly one-quarter of the ASBJ survey respondents earned $40,000 or more. Another 18.7 percent have incomes between $20,000-29,000, only 26.1 percent listed have incomes below $20,000."77
This higher level of income may be linked to equally high levels of education. In a separate NSBA study in 1976 researchers found that 56 percent of school trustees have earned at least one college degree.78

The credibility gap evident in recent polls may be widened by these anomalies in demographics between elected school officials and those who elected them. ASBJ summed it up with a headline story: "What Bugs Board Members About Schools and What Peeves the Public About Them Are Two Different Matters."79 The editors draw these conclusions:

1. School board members have different priorities of concern for management of local school districts than does the general public—considering recent Gallup polls.

2. Male school board members—in most cases—do not differ markedly from female board members in listing their priority of management concerns.

3. Throughout the nation—with the exception of the South—school board members' management concerns are closely related.80

Credibility with the public also suffers because school officials are constantly trying to sell a product which people cannot see. While some things obviously can be demonstrated, like the increasing proficiency of a second-grader at reading, math and handwriting, the relationship of these school-learned traits to life skills needed to succeed later on has never been more difficult to guarantee.
In the past, school election issues were sold on the basis of booming enrollments while today, demographers show enrollments declining at a steady pace. School issues then were supported because parents knew that a high school diploma meant a job, or entrance into college (which meant an even better job). Today, neither is automatic or necessarily true. Perhaps because of tradition or inculturation, Americans still want to believe that the road to success is paved through literacy. This still may be so, but nagging doubts now exist about our ability to travel that road.

While each election succeeds or fails based primarily on local issues at the time of the election, there are additional factors which regularly surface when disappointed school officials try to answer "what went wrong?" Chief among them is staff dissension.

The roots of staff disharmony run deep in many districts, for many different reasons. Why the staff is disgruntled is not so important to those looking for key issues in millage campaigning as much as the simple fact that the staff is indeed angry. This anger is often created by a lack of information, misunderstanding of information, or misinterpretation of information according to extreme biases.
Rubin cited advice that is often ignored:

INFORM YOUR STAFF FIRST. Always meet with employee groups before the campaign begins. Citizens will ask them and even make up their minds on how to vote by listening to staff opinions.\textsuperscript{81}

School employees serve as authorities on the schools where they are employed, and frequently live in the same community. They become, often unwittingly and frequently unwillingly, ambassadors of the schools. Their collective effect is enormous. In a study on the effectiveness of employees as communicators, New Jersey's Opinion Research Corporation determined:

A. An employee is regarded as a reliable source with access to reliable information.

B. An employee knows the listener's individual interests and can talk in these terms.

C. The listener can ask questions, clarify points and gain the conviction that comes through the two-way exchange of ideas.

D. An employee can get and hold the listener's attention, a distinct advantage over more impersonal forms of communication.

E. Talk is more easily remembered than print. An employee serves as a memory for the later recall of information.\textsuperscript{82}

When staff internal problems boil over in public, the harm that is created multiplies and grows. The misinformation is passed along the grapevine and the election is lost. The impact on a general public relations effort is obvious.
For school employees, there is ample reason to support millage election efforts:

The era of school employee collective negotiations and bargaining has mandated a new dimension of employee group responsibility in school finance campaigns. In many instances, the only way that gains in salary and improvements in other working conditions bargained for can finally be realized will be via voter approval at the polls of proposals to raise the school operating taxes. 83

Their support can be critical in the face of the so-called tax revolt spearheaded by Proposition 13 in California and similar efforts in other states. The effect on school elections has been devastating. In 1976, 878 bond issues for $3.43 billion in school construction went before the public with only half passing. The defeated bond issues represented 60 percent of the total funds sought. 84

Taxpayers take school issues seriously, and personally, as Philadelphia superintendent Michael P. Marcase explains:

When steelworkers get a big raise, the solution for auto companies is simple. They raise the price of cars. When clothing workers get similar raises, the cost of clothing climbs out of sight. And when the Teamsters get a similar raise, the markets pay the freight, and quickly pass it on to the consumer.

Yet, when teachers and principals and custodians and teacher aides get salary increases, there is only one place the money can come from, and that's right from the taxpayer's pocket.

So, the taxpayer, already stung by the auto agency and the clothing store and the supermarket and the insurance company, finally has a ready-made target on which to vent his frustration. It's education; a sitting duck, relying on taxes for its very existence and dealing with a taxpayer who's had it up to here with the economy. 85
Add to this the frustration and confusion associated with the problem of declining enrollment, and school campaigners face a difficult situation. For education in general, and school millage campaigners in particular, there are more non-parent than parent voters deciding school issues. In Grand Rapids, post-election analysis of a recent millage election could identify only 37 percent of the voters as parents of school children. In essence, the voters deciding school issues had no direct information source nor concern about school affairs. Cutting taxes—a natural inclination—was a first priority.

**Summary**

There are at least four key issues in school millage electioneering in 1979. Chief among them are the lack of direct community involvement with the schools as a result of a dropping parent population, and a credibility gap that widens and grows deeper through a variety of causes.

The role of internal communication deserves further attention, and the crunch of taxes and double-digit inflation cannot be ignored.

Finally, the unique characteristics of local communities and local politics of the moment create "unknowns" that threaten every election. They vary from serious ones, such as the 1971 riots at Benton Harbor High school two weeks before a new high school was to be voted on, to the arrival
of tax bills less than three weeks before a millage was to be decided in Rochester this past spring.\footnote{87}

When this happens, a single headline or letter to the editor can destroy weeks of hard work and planning. The only possible way to overcome such "unknowns" is to have in place a continuous, two-way communications plan.

The final chapters of this thesis deal with this problem.
III. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The basic premise of this study was to develop a public relations plan for a local school district that accurately reflects the needs, wants and desires of the local community regarding information concerning the schools. To accomplish this, baseline data about public attitudes toward the district were gathered, codified, and analyzed. An extensive review of the literature in public relations was also undertaken. These two actions led to the development of a plan for the district.

Gathering baseline data about public attitudes toward the local school district was important since no national poll provides reliable results at the local level. Studies have shown the public to believe that education in general is failing, while education in the local community continues to be offered with high standards and success standards. In addition, citizens in school district A may feel one way toward the local schools, while residents of school district B, separated only by an artificial boundary line, may feel that A's schools are in fact quite adequate. Each public relations plan, to be effective, must be taken into consideration when developing programs based on local attitudes.
Universe of the Study

For the purpose of this study, the universe was the most currently available school census list compiled by the local school district. For the Clintondale Community Schools, this represented the 1977 census list. This census, essentially a house to house search for children conducted to provide data for enrollment projections, general planning, and state and federal grant applications, contains the same information, in essence, as a commercially produced street directory. It has the added benefit of being generally stored in the intermediate school district computer in the county office where the local school district is located, and is also available for legitimate research purposes authorized by the local school district. The intermediate district for Clintondale is the Macomb Intermediate School District located in Mt. Clemens, Michigan.

All residential households are contained within the listing, whether they have children residing there or not, and so meet the established criterion: all residents have an equal opportunity to be selected.

Sample Employed In The Study

A sample of 1,100 names was drawn from the census lists in the Macomb Intermediate computer. The names were chosen using a computer controlled random number generator. Essentially, the computer drew each individual name on a random basis from the total census list of 20,000 names.
This method of selection presented a totally random sample from the census. The list was broken arbitrarily into three samples of 370 names each. A sample of this size provides reliability of $95/100 \pm$ five percent. Each of the 370 name samples were divided into lists which contained three columns of twenty names each, for a total of sixty names per list.

The larger sample of 1,100 names was drawn to assure completion of at least 370 survey instruments. The larger number was needed to account for not-at-homes, interview refused, wrong telephone numbers, private numbers, disconnected service, and improper listing of information in the original computer program.

Total useable returns totaled 367, confirming the need for drawing the larger sample, but still providing sufficient data to achieve the desired alpha level of $\pm$ five percent.

Composition of the sample is found in Table I, pages 51-52. The composition appears to be representative of the Clintondale population at large, with one exception. The survey is heavily weighted toward females, despite attempts to assure that this would not happen. A better method for reaching males is recommended, perhaps through the use of a systematic random stratified sample.
Table I
Composition of the Sample

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<td>Robbie Hall Parker</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price Drive</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainbow</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Santilli</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunnyview</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade level of children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kindergarten</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents with pre-school or post-school children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with other non-school age children</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without other non-school age children</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**All figures shown represent percentages of the sample. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding off, multiple responses or no response.
Table I
Composition of the Sample

Continued from page 51

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of respondents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>over 65</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54-65</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44-53</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34-43</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under 23</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade levels completed (highest level)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>elementary school (1-6)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>junior high (7-9)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school (10-12)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high school graduate</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical, trade, business school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graduate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some college</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>college graduate</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graduate training</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of residence in district</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than one year</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 or more years</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Owners</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>own</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rent</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**All figures shown represent percentages of the sample. Percentages may not equal 100 because of rounding off, multiple responses or no response.
Instrument Used In The Study

An original instrument was constructed for the purpose of this study, and was used in behalf of the Declining Enrollment Task Force of the Clintondale Community Schools. The instrument contained 37 questions, and required seven to fifteen minutes to complete by telephone. Some one-third of the survey questions concerned communication in the school district, with the balance dealing with various declining enrollment issues. A sample of the instrument is found in the appendix.

The instrument was constructed by relying on these basic resources:

- the "Question Bank" maintained by the communications department of the Oakland Schools; this represents a computer listing of previously used survey questions which researchers have found returned the requested information in studies using Oakland county school districts since 1972;

- the resources of the communications department of the Macomb Intermediate School District, including extensive files containing samples of surveys conducted by school districts throughout the country; and

- original questions developed after consultation with parents and professional educators from the Clintondale Community schools and with staff specialists in survey research from the Macomb Intermediate school district.

A question from the annual Gallup Poll on Education was included in the instrument to compare local findings with national results.
This question asked respondents to rate their schools using a traditional A-E grading scale. This question has been part of the Gallup Poll on Education annually for the past decade.

Several drafts of the instrument were reviewed by a committee of parents and educators representing the Clintondale Community Schools Declining Enrollment Task Force. When a final instrument was tentatively arrived at, it was field tested using four volunteer parents. Calls were placed at random to 10 persons and the survey instrument was administered. Minor changes were completed after this field testing.

**Procedures Used to Administer Instrument**

Citizen volunteers were recruited by the Task Force to complete the survey. Approximately 24 individuals were given inservice training in survey techniques using the resources of the Macomb Intermediate School district communications department. MISD booklets titled "Interviewer's Guide" and "Survey Starter Kit" were distributed to the volunteers.

The survey was completed in a central location in the school district in early January, 1979. All returns were collected during a two-week period with all calls placed between 4 and 9:30 p.m. The central location allowed for monitoring of calls to avoid interviewer bias.
Each interviewer was given a list of sixty names, divided into three columns placed side by side with twenty names in each column. The names had no addresses, but did have telephone numbers. The procedure was to begin with the first name in column a. If that call could not be completed for any reason, the interviewer was instructed to attempt to contact the first name in column b. If that name could not be contacted, the procedure was to move to the name in column c. After failing to contact any of the names in the first slot of all three columns, the interviewer was then directed to attempt to contact the second name in column a, following the same procedure as above. After completely moving down the list one full time, the interviewers were allowed to pick names from the list of 60 at random in order to complete the suggested total of 20 names per sheet. As cited earlier, this procedure resulted in total useable returns of 367.

The census list was found to contain many inaccurate citations, including a high percentage of residents who had moved since 1977. Every effort should be made to obtain a current census list in future research.

Each survey instrument was printed on several typewritten pages. Each interviewer was directed to mark a straight line in red ink through the appropriate response. The returns were hand collected as they were completed.
The survey returns were taken to the Macomb Intermediate school district each day during the two-week period and key-punched into the main MISD computer. When the total return of 367 returns were completed, the MISD data processing department prepared a listing report for all questions. A summary report prepared for the Superintendent is contained in the appendix as Table III. This table includes only those questions directly relating to the communications aspect of this study, and does not include the questions providing information about responses to declining enrollment concerns.

A summary report of all data was presented to the residents of the Clintondale Community Schools District through the community newsletter in March, 1979.

Summary

A broad survey was developed in conjunction with the Macomb Intermediate School District Department of Communication Services in behalf of the Clintondale Community Schools Declining Enrollment Task Force. A survey of 37 questions was prepared and administered by volunteers during a two-week period by calling a selected sample of school district residents by telephone. A total of 367 useable returns were realized. About one-third of the survey directly related to communication concerns of residents.
IV. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Residents of the Clintondale Community School district feel they are well informed, but most say they would welcome additional specific information about the schools in certain broad areas. Parents in the survey said they felt well-informed more often than non-parents, 60 percent to 40 percent. When asked if they felt somewhat informed, non-parents responded affirmatively more often than parents. Non-parents said they felt not too well informed about schools nearly twice as often as parents. Overall, 76 percent of all respondents, parents and non-parents, said they felt well or somewhat well informed about their schools.

Information sources do not vary much between parents and non-parents. The district newsletter was cited as the primary information source by both parents (51 percent) and non-parents (54 percent). Students and other kids were cited as the second source of information for parents, while newspapers were listed by non-parents.

All percentages refer to percent of survey sample responding (N=367)
Other choices for parents, in reported order, include newspapers (15 percent), building newsletters (15 percent), parent groups (21 percent), neighbors/friends (12 percent), school employees (5 percent) and other adults (4 percent).

Non-parent information sources, in reported order, were neighbors/friends (17 percent), students/kids (eight percent), building newsletters (six percent), other parents (four percent) and school employees (two percent).

Non-parents, by a decisive margin, 56 to 33 percent, did not respond favorably when asked "Would you like to know more about the Clintondale Public Schools?" Parents, however, showed an opposite tendency by responding favorably 67 percent to 32 percent.

Those who responded favorably to this question were asked "What kinds of information were of particular interest to you?" Parents listed, in descending order, curriculum, teaching methods, extra-curricular activities, individual child's progress, finances, school rules and special services. Non-parents who desired additional information about schools listed, in descending order, curriculum, extra-curricular activities, finances, teaching methods, school rules and special services.
Clintondale citizens seem relatively happy with the recent performance of their school officials, reflecting those feelings in high rankings on the traditional A-E grading scales. While the most recent Gallup Poll on education shows 37 percent of the respondents grading schools with an A or B, Clintondale survey respondents, as a whole, give an A or B grade 47 percent of the time. Parents gave higher marks to the district than non-parents in each grade category A-E. Parents grades were A (13 percent), B (41 percent) and C (30 percent). Non-parents grades were A (4 percent), B (29 percent) and C (27 percent). Both non-parents and parents had only very small numbers awarding failing grades.

A pair of questions asked survey respondents what they liked least and most about the school district. Parents listed, in descending order, teaching methods/curriculum, discipline (expressed as the lack of), administration/school board, lack of communication, transportation policies and finances as matters they least liked and were most concerned about. Non-parents, on the same question, had nearly identical concerns, listing teaching methods/curriculum as their primary dislike, followed by lack of discipline, administration/school board, lack of communication, finances, and transportation policies.
When asked what they liked most about the district, many of the same general categories that were listed as negatives about the district were listed as positives. Parents, for example, listed teachers/curriculum as their first choice about positive things in the district. Other positive things were kept informed/involved, school facilities, administration/school board, community education/recreation program, and extra help given students.

Non-parents again followed a similar pattern. Teachers/curriculum topped their list, followed by kept informed/involved, school facilities, community education/recreation, administration/school board, and extra help given students.

On one particular question parents and non-parents found complete unanimity. The sample of Clintondale residents was asked "In this survey, the school board wanted to find out your opinion about some important school issues. Do you think surveys of the community are a good idea or a poor idea?" Some 94 percent of the sample said surveys were a good idea, with parents and non-parents listing nearly identical responses.

Although the instrument used in the study contained 37 questions, not all pertained to this study. Table II on the following pages presents all data collected for the study from relevant questions. A complete copy of the questionnaire is found in the appendix.
Table II
Results of the Survey

Q. Do you feel you are able to keep well informed, somewhat well informed, or not too well informed about what is going on in the Clintondale Public Schools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(N = 367)</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well informed</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat informed</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too well informed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. Where do you get most of your information about the Clintondale schools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Source</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building newsletters</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District newsletter</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School employees</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/TV</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors/friends</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students/kids</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTO/parent groups</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NP = non-parent  P = parent
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q.</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you like to know more about the Clintondale Public Schools?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kinds of information would be of particular interest to you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = .205)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methods</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's progress</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School rules</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table II
Results of the Survey

Continued from page 62

Q. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D and E (A being highest, E the lowest) to show how well they are doing in school. Suppose you were grading the Clintondale Public Schools in the same way. What grade would you give the schools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. What do you like least about the Clintondale schools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration/board</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Efficient/finances</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methods/curriculum</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/boundaries</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch program</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table II
Results of the Survey

Continued from page 63

Q. What do you like best about the Clintondale schools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/curriculum</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kept informed/involved</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra help given</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/board</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities/environment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community education/recreation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q. In this survey, the school board wanted to find out your opinion about some important school issues. Do you think surveys of the community are a good idea or a poor idea?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good idea</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor idea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The strength of the response by the survey respondents regarding use of surveys as effective feedback devices would indicate that any public relations plan developed for the district should include regular feedback devices as an integral part of the design. The high attention given by both parents and non-parents to a perceived lack of communication further supports this view, in that effective communication can only occur when the district is providing information that members of the community express an interest in obtaining.

In addition to surveys, other feedback devices relying more on interpersonal interaction are suggested. Both parents and non-parents in the survey showed a high reliance on interpersonal channels as sources of information, with children, other adults, neighbors/friends and various parent meetings all ranking high as places where information about the school was obtained.

Such devices might include regular visits by school officials to the parent meetings, greater participation by citizens in school committees, increased visibility of school officials in community activities, service club presentations, and other public forums.

65
The responses to the "likes/dislikes" questions follow patterns that have been established in recent years in polls conducted by such diverse groups as the National School Boards Association, National School Public Relations Association, Gallup and various educational journals. Citizens, according to the reports of these polls, are upset with falling test scores and taxes that seem to be constantly rising, suggestions that teachers do not care about teaching as much as they used to, and the idea that school boards and school administrators are elitists more interested in erecting school buildings as monuments to themselves than in providing orderly and effective education. As with most generalizations, little of this can be supported by hard fact.

Although the survey respondents clearly echo some of these findings, they also are clearly holding high regard for at least some teachers and for the curriculum offered in this school district. They also contradict themselves by listing communication in the district as both a positive and negative—saying, in effect, that they are kept well informed but perhaps not well enough.

The likes and sense of communication are strengths to be built upon. The most effective program can be built only if the product delivered by the school district is indeed a good one. A significant number of people responding to this survey feel that situation now exists.
Recommendation of a Public Relations Plan

The following plan is based upon the findings of the survey completed for the Clintondale Community school district and an extensive review of the literature pertaining to issues important in the development of school-community communications programs. Although it is tailored for the Clintondale schools, many of its elements are generic, and important elements of any public relations plan. In any district, the most important and effective device in any communications plan is simply the desire to communicate—the realization that to share information and seek counsel with the community will result in greater understanding and, therefore, greater support.

Public Relations Policy

Clintondale residents have demonstrated that they believe a recognizable strength of their school district is the desire to keep everyone informed and involved. This is seen not only in the responses to the direct question about likes and dislikes, but in the listing of things like recreation, community education and community use of facilities as strengths.
This community feeling should be capitalized upon. Rather than hide the communications commitment, the district should announce it through a clear and concise policy statement. The effect of this policy will be to put all citizens on notice that the district takes its communicative responsibilities seriously. It will also establish a code of cooperation that should influence district behavior at all levels. This influence will hopefully be most clearly demonstrated by the employees. With a policy statement encouraging communication, every teacher, principal and administrator can be urged to make this an important component of everyday activities.

Although many policies have been developed, one of the best comes from the National School Boards Association:

The Board of Education is committed to the principle of open, two-way communication with its internal and external publics. In line with this commitment, the superintendent of schools shall have the responsibility for establishing, maintaining and adequately staffing an ongoing communication program. The administrator assigned to direct the program shall report to the superintendent and be a member of the superintendent's cabinet. The Board of Education shall provide adequate financial support for the communication effort and shall annually review the program to evaluate its effectiveness. While the Board of Education recognizes the need for a formally established program of communication, it also recognizes that each district employee should communicate openly and honestly with the public and encourages employees to do so in their respective areas of responsibility.
This policy is a good model because it

- commits the board to a communications program;
- assigns clear responsibilities to both the superintendent and the administrator responsible for the program;
- pledges adequate financial support for the program (which is too often overlooked);
- establishes an evaluation timetable; and
- makes it clear that the organized, formal public relations program is not intended to supplant the individual responsibilities of employees to effectively communicate with the public.

Once adopted and widely disseminated, the school board should sit back and allow the policy to be effectively carried out.

Feedback

The school district should continue to establish procedures to obtain feedback from the community. This should be an integral part of every component of the public relations plan. Feedback should be gathered in both formal and informal manners, using surveys, committees, suggestion boxes, neighborhood kaffee klatches, sound-off sessions at school board meetings and other devices.

It is important to let the community know that these feedback efforts are being made. This will assure some in the community that the effort is being made, even if as one individual they do not choose to participate in the effort. It may also encourage others to actively give advice.
Since 94 percent of those responding to the survey indicated approval of the effort, it should be equally important to report back the results of such surveys to the community. This can be done through special editions of the district newsletter, and in news releases placed with local media.

These feedback efforts should not be concentrated among external publics only. Internal publics—chiefly employees—should be regular targets of such efforts.

It should also be noted that many employees, particularly among the support staff members who generally make up 50 percent or more of the total staff members, live in the community not only as employees but as taxpayers and parents of school children as well.

An outline of such a plan was developed by the North Carolina Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association. It serves as a good basic model:

**IDENTIFYING, DEVELOPING AND UTILIZING INFORMATION GATHERING DEVICES**

A. Grapevine
B. Formal Written Surveys
C. News media stories as they reflect internal sentiment
   1. news accounts
   2. letters-to-the-editor
   3. editorials
D. Personal contacts with news media personnel and community representatives
E. Questions and information directed to the administrative office
1. By letter  
2. By telephone  
3. By person-to-person contact  

F. Visits to schools  
1. Casual observation of activities  
   problems and sentiments  
2. Intentional contact with the  
   various publics in the schools  

G. Attendance at meetings of  
1. Employee groups  
2. Commissioners, legislators, etc.  
3. Board of Education  
4. Staff committees and task forces  
5. Administrative staff  

H. Working with communications advisory  
   committee  

I. Working with identified liaisons in each  
   school or department.93

Establishing Objectives

After a firm policy has been established and  
feedback mechanisms are in place, it is important that a  
formal systems of expectations be in place. This will allow  
the program to continue on a planned course without inter­  
ruption, and allow for the evaluation of efforts at the  
appropriate time. The objectives should be based upon the  
general goals in the policy and the information gained through  
the feedback processes.  

Considering the findings of this survey, some  
immediate objectives for the Clintondale schools might be:  

1. Evaluate current methods of disseminating  
   information to the community to determine  
   effectiveness.  

2. Designing new and improved methods of  
   disseminating information through the  
   newspapers, newsletter, and through  
   interpersonal channels.
Assigning Program Responsibilities

Clintondale, like many smaller school districts, does not currently have any personnel exclusively assigned to public relations responsibilities. The superintendent accepts the major burden of this assignment, supplemented by the community education director. Many school districts find this combination acceptable. It is not, however, the most effective.

The policy statement suggested earlier in this chapter includes a reference to adequate financial support to establish a program. That support should be demonstrated by assigning a specific person for communications duties. This does not have to be an expensive addition to the administrative budget, but the person should have adequate status within the organization to effectively operate and carry out the dictum's of the Board's policy and the superintendent's directives. This can largely come through carefully positioning the person as a member of the superintendent's cabinet, and by allowing the person access to the process of policy development. Influence is a key factor in the success or failure of this program.

This should be an effective response to the survey result findings of support for communication efforts.
In addition to influencing policy development by making sure that communication components are an integral part of all such deliberations, another important function for this position is in-service training. Since the survey demonstrated that Clintondale residents gain much of their information through interpersonal contacts, and the review of the literature further supports that notion by establishing employees as key communicators, effective training programs to improve the communications abilities of the entire employee staff—professional and support members—should be a top priority.

Such training should inform employees of the purpose and the programs of the public relations effort; the role of each individual in the overall communications effort; explain news media relations; effective presentations for parent groups; and the need for orientation of new parents, students, employees and others. Individual training objectives should be established in cooperation with representatives of the employee groups being targeted for training.

In addition, the position would be responsible for such traditional tools of public relations as news releases, various publications, presentations and contact with community groups and the feedback program.
Strengthening The Newsletter

The Clintondale school district newsletter is distributed to all residents of the community and not just to parents of school children. It has been published for several years and has a measure of familiarity for all residents of the community. That is demonstrated by the top ranking it receives as an information source in the Clintondale survey.

This should be looked upon as a major strength and advantage in planning an improved communication program. Although it has a major deficit as a principally one-way communications vehicle, and under most circumstances would not be emphasized because of this, an effective feedback program and the tailoring of the newsletter content according to the results of the feedback program should make it an exceptionally effective vehicle in this community.

The newsletter should focus upon those things listed as primary information needs by members of the community. Although that list of needs will change from time to time, the survey provides a beginning point. Initially, focus should be upon curriculum, teaching methods, extra-curricular activities available for both students and parents, school rules and school finances.
Special features could be developed featuring a different aspect of the curriculum each month. One month the newsletter might be devoted to elementary reading curriculum, the next secondary school human relations. At the same time, individual rules, their developmental background and history, and how they are applied equitably to all students could be highlighted.

A special issue might appear quarterly with information about the extra-curricular and/or community education recreation programs available to both parents and non-parents in the community. From time to time, probably just before the annual budget is adopted, an issue could be devoted to budget matters.

The primary consideration in developing issues relying on a single theme is that they have broad appeal across the varied audience that the newsletter reaches. In addition, special steps should be taken to assure that stories and announcements are not written in educational jargon, and at readability levels that are acceptable to the community. A simple readability test could be applied to various segments of the newsletter copy prior to publication to accomplish this.

Finally, graphics should be improved to help attract readers, and the newsletter length should be expanded to accommodate the demands of additional story space.
Another strength of the Clintondale community is the feeling of involvement and closeness that is possible largely only as a function of size. That strength should also be taken advantage of by encouraging a wide range of community involvement in school affairs through committee work at all levels of the district beginning with school board affairs and ending at the local neighborhood school level. The already extensive community education and recreation programs should be expanded and continued, even if it means charging small fees to help support the program during this era of rising costs.

Recognition of the involvement of citizens should come at every opportunity, and the news of this involvement should be shared in the news media, newsletter and public presentations of members of the school family before various civic forums available in the community.

Developing Program Specifics

Program specifics in public information efforts do not vary much, and are largely dependent upon the talents of the individuals assigned to the effort and the strategies needed to implement the goals and current objectives of the overall communications program. Since those goals and objectives must be constantly updated and evaluated, no attempt is made in this study to outline an extensive list of supporting activities.
However, recommendations can be made for assistance in the development of such specifics. Clintondale is located within the service area of the Macomb Intermediate School district which functions as a regional service agency providing support for local school districts. Its communication services department offers extensive professional assistance in the areas of survey work, staff training, program development and general counseling. The Clintondale staff should take full advantage of this service.

The Michigan School Public Relations Association, the state chapter of the National School Public Relations Association, is also active in providing workshops to update skills of its members and hosts those workshops in the Detroit area at least once annually. The Board members, superintendent and other key members of the administrative team should all belong to MSPRA and take advantage of these training opportunities.

Finally, Clintondale staff members should also take advantage of the wide variety of services available from the national association. The primary service is a week-long annual seminar that offers extensive training programs in all areas of school public relations for both beginners and veteran communicators alike.
Summary

Residents of the Clintondale Community Schools district already feel actively involved and informed about their schools. They find the district newsletter to be a prime source of information about schools, along with interpersonal contacts made through students, parents and other adults involved in a variety of organizations.

The school district needs to formalize the various elements of its public relations efforts and enhance certain functions to take full advantage of these built in strengths. This can be accomplished by:

1. adopting a public relations policy;

2. building feedback mechanisms into all elements of the district's communication efforts;

3. establishing objectives that will allow for orderly implementation of the public relations program, and also provide a basis for evaluation of program effectiveness;

4. assigning a specific individual to public relations duties;

5. further improving the district newsletter and community involvement activities; and

6. utilizing fully the services available to the district from the county regional service office, and the state and national school public relations associations.
FOOTNOTES


6Interview with Gary Davis, Clintondale Community Schools, Clinton Township, MI., 15 February 1979.

7_________Board Reports (Clinton Township, MI.: Clintondale Community Schools, 1979).

8Davis, 16 February 1979.


Cutlip, p. 129.

Ibid.


Cutlip, p. 125.

Ibid., p. 133.  
Ibid., p. 134


Ibid.


34 Ibid.


37 Cutlip, p. 125. 38 Ibid. 39 Ibid.

40 Interview with David Doyle, Grand Rapids Public Schools, Grand Rapids, MI., January, 1979.


43 Ibid.


48 Ibid.


50 Ibid.


53 Interview with Jerome Sherman, Dearborn Public Schools, held during the Mid-Winter Conference, Michigan Association of School Administrators, Grand Rapids, January, 1978.


56 Ibid. 57 Ibid. 58 Ibid. 59 Ibid., p. 7.

60 Ibid., p. 9.


64 Piele, Budgets, Bonds, p. 121.

65 Ibid.


68 Banach, p. 6.


70 Sinn, p. 81.

71 Banach and Franks, p. 10.

72 Ibid.


76 Ibid.  77 Ibid.  78 Ibid.


80 Ibid.


85 Ibid.

86 Interview with Mel VanDeGevel, Grand Rapids Public Schools, held during Michigan School Community Education Association seminar, Grand Rapids, September, 1978.


89 ERIC, p. 4.

90 Roberts.

91 Gallup.

92 Bagin.

93 NSPRA, NC Chapter.
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Eisenberger, Katherine. *A Profound Transformation.*


Greenberg, Robert G. *Concept Marketing of Educational Products and Services--the RDAS Approach.* Portland, Oregon: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1977.


__________ Third & Fourth Annual Surveys of Attitudes Toward The Public Schools of Brevard County, Florida Titusville, Florida: Brevard County Public Schools, 1976-77.


Appendix

Clintondale Public Schools
Community Opinion Survey

98
INTRODUCTION:

HELLO, (MRS. JONES)___________, I'M (YOUR NAME)
a volunteer calling for the Clintondale Public
Schools. We're conducting a telephone survey to
find out what people think about the schools.
We'll be calling almost 400 randomly selected school
district residents during this survey, and would
like just a few moments of your time for some
important questions.

INcIDENTALLY, YOUR ANSWERS WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL--
ALL RESPONSES WILL BE AVERAGED TO OBTAIN A GENERAL
PICTURE OF COMMUNITY OPINION.

****DON'T WAIT. GO IMMEDIATELY TO THE FIRST QUESTION****

1. FIRST, HOW MANY CHILDREN DO YOU HAVE IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH
GRADE 12?
(1) NONE     SKIP TO QUESTION 5
(2) 1
(3) 2
(4) 3-4
(5) 5 OR MORE

2. WHAT SCHOOLS DO THEY ATTEND?
(1) PAROCHIAL/PRIVATE
(2) CLINTONDALE SENIOR HIGH
(3) CLINTONDALE MIDDLE SCHOOL
(4) LITTLE MACK
(5) ROBBIE HALL PARKER
(6) PRICE DRIVE
(7) RAINBOW
(8) JOSEPH SANTILLI
(9) SUNNYVIEW

3. WHAT GRADES ARE YOUR CHILDREN IN?
(1) KINDERGARTEN
(2) 1-3
(3) 4-6
(4) 7-8
(5) 9-12

4. DO YOU HAVE ANY PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN, OR CHILDREN WHO
HAVE ALREADY GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL?
(1) YES
(2) NO

GO TO NEXT PAGE
5. **DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE ABLE TO KEEP WELL INFORMED, SOMEWHAT INFORMED, OR NOT TOO WELL INFORMED ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE CLINTONDALE PUBLIC SCHOOLS?**

   (1) WELL INFORMED
   (2) SOMEWHAT INFORMED
   (3) NOT TOO WELL INFORMED
   (4) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

6. **WHERE DO YOU GET MOST OF YOUR INFORMATION ABOUT THE CLINTONDALE SCHOOLS?**

   **DO NOT READ LIST**

   (1) NEWSPAPERS
   (2) BUILDING NEWSLETTERS
   (3) DISTRICT NEWSLETTERS
   (4) SCHOOL EMPLOYEES
   (5) RADIO/TV
   (6) NEIGHBORS/FRIENDS
   (7) OTHER PARENTS
   (8) STUDENTS/KIDS
   (9) PTO/_PARENT GROUPS
   (10) OTHER: ____________________________
   (11) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

7. **WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE CLINTONDALE SCHOOLS?**

   (1) YES
   (2) NO **SKIP TO QUESTION 9**

8. **WHAT KINDS OF INFORMATION WOULD BE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO YOU?**

   **DO NOT READ LIST**

   (1) CURRICULUM
   (2) TEACHING METHODS
   (3) CHILD'S PROGRESS
   (4) SCHOOL RULES/POLICIES
   (5) FINANCES
   (6) EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
   (7) SPECIAL SERVICES AVAILABLE
   (8) EVERYTHING
   (9) OTHER: ____________________________
   (10) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

9. **FROM WHAT YOU'VE HEARD, WOULD YOU SAY THE STUDENT POPULATION IN THE CLINTONDALE SCHOOLS IS INCREASING, STAYING ABOUT THE SAME, OR DECLINING?**

   (1) INCREASING
   (2) STAYING ABOUT THE SAME
   (3) DECLINING
   (4) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

**GO TO NEXT PAGE**
THE FACT IS, CLINTONDALE IS EXPERIENCING THE SAME KIND OF DECLINE IN STUDENT POPULATION THAT MANY SCHOOL DISTRICTS THROUGHOUT MICHIGAN ARE ALSO FACING. THERE ARE MANY REASONS FOR THIS, AND THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT IDEAS ABOUT WHAT SCHOOL BOARDS SHOULD DO ABOUT THIS DECLINE IN STUDENT POPULATION.

WE'D LIKE TO GET YOUR IDEAS ABOUT SOME OF THESE DIFFERENT ALTERNATIVES.

****DON'T WAIT. GO IMMEDIATELY TO THE NEXT QUESTION.****

10. IN SOME AREAS, TWO SCHOOLS HAVE ENOUGH ROOM TO ACCOMMODATE ALL OF THE STUDENTS WHO ARE NOW IN THREE BUILDINGS. ONE SCHOOL COULD BE CLOSED. IS THAT A GOOD IDEA OR A POOR IDEA?

(1) GOOD IDEA  
(2) POOR IDEA  SKIP TO QUESTION 13  
(3) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE  SKIP TO QUESTION 13

11. WOULD YOU STILL SAY IT WAS A GOOD IDEA IF THE SCHOOL TO BE CLOSED WAS YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL?

(1) YES  
(2) NO  
(3) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

12. WOULD YOU STILL SAY IT WAS A GOOD IDEA IF THE SCHOOL TO BE CLOSED WAS LOCATED IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

(1) YES  
(2) NO  
(3) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

13. ON THE AVERAGE, CLINTONDALE SCHOOLS HAVE 30 STUDENTS IN EACH CLASS. CLASS SIZE COULD BE LOWERED BY HIRING MORE TEACHERS AND USING CLASSROOMS THAT ARE NOW EMPTY. IS THAT A GOOD IDEA OR A POOR IDEA?

(1) GOOD IDEA  
(2) POOR IDEA  SKIP TO QUESTION 15  
(3) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE  SKIP TO QUESTION 15

14. WOULD YOU STILL SAY IT WAS A GOOD IDEA IF IT MEANT PAYING HIGHER TAXES?

(1) YES  
(2) NO  
(3) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

GO TO NEXT PAGE
15. If a school is closed because of declining enrollment, the property could be sold for some other use. Is this a good idea?

(1) Good idea
(2) Poor idea
(3) Can't say/no response

16. The school board could decide to close all schools that are not needed to hold the current student population. This would save money. Is this a good idea?

(1) Good idea
(2) Poor idea
(3) Can't say/no response

17. On the other hand, the school board could decide to keep all schools open and in use, even though this would cause higher school taxes or cuts in existing school programs. Is this a good idea or a poor idea?

(1) Good idea
(2) Poor idea
(3) Can't say/no response

18. All schools could be left open, with unused classrooms put to use as pre-school, day-care, senior-citizen centers, or some similar community use. Is this a good idea?

(1) Good idea
(2) Poor idea
(3) Can't say/no response

19. Should these groups be able to use this space free or should they have to pay?

(1) Free
(2) Pay
(3) Depends on group
(4) Can't say/no response

**********************************************************************************************************************************************

This question is for parents only. Skip to question 22 for all other respondents. Do not read this to non-parents.

**********************************************************************************************************************************************

Go to next page.
20. IF THE SCHOOL BOARD DOES VOTE TO CLOSE SOME SCHOOLS, DO YOU THINK THE SCHOOL YOUR CHILD ATTENDS MIGHT BE ONE THAT IS CLOSED?
(1) YES
(2) NO  SKIP TO QUESTION 22
(3) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE  SKIP TO Q. 22

21. WHY DO YOU FEEL THAT WAY?
(1) RUMORS
(2) ENROLLMENT IS LOW
(3) DECLINING ENROLLMENT COMMITTEE WORKING
(4) IT'S LOCATED NEAR OTHER SCHOOLS
(5) THE BUILDING IS OLD AND INADEQUATE
(6) MAKES SENSE
(7) OTHER: ____________________________
(8) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

22. IN THIS SURVEY, ONE OF THE THINGS WE WANTED TO FIND OUT WAS HOW YOU FELT ABOUT DECLINING ENROLLMENT AND UNUSED SPACE IN THE SCHOOLS. MANY SCHOOLS IN MICHIGAN ARE BEING CLOSED TODAY BECAUSE OF A DROP IN ENROLLMENT. WHAT SUGGESTIONS DO YOU HAVE AS TO HOW VACANT SCHOOL BUILDINGS MIGHT BE USED?

23. STUDENTS ARE OFTEN GIVEN THE GRADES A, B, C, D, E (A BEING HIGHEST, E BEING LOWEST) TO SHOW HOW WELL THEY'RE DOING IN SCHOOL. SUPPOSE YOU WERE GRADING THE CLINTONDALE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE SAME WAY. WHAT GRADE WOULD YOU GIVE THE SCHOOLS?
(1) A
(2) B
(3) C
(4) D
(5) E
(6) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

24. WHAT DO YOU LIKE LEAST ABOUT THE CLINTONDALE SCHOOLS?
25. What do you like best about the Clintondale schools?

FINALLY, WE HAVE JUST A FEW MORE QUESTIONS WHICH WILL HELP US CLASSIFY THE RESULTS OF OUR SURVEY.

26. First, do you live in an apartment, house, or condominium?

(1) HOUSE
(2) APARTMENT
(3) CONDOMINIUM
(4) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

27. Do you own or rent the property where you live?

(1) OWN
(2) RENT
(3) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

28. How long have you lived in your present location?

(1) LESS THAN ONE YEAR
(2) 1-2 YEARS
(3) 3-5
(4) 6-10
(5) 11 OR MORE YEARS
(6) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

29. How long have you lived in the Clintondale school district?

(1) LESS THAN ONE YEAR
(2) 1-2 YEARS
(3) 3-5
(4) 6-10
(5) 11 OR MORE YEARS
(6) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

GO TO NEXT PAGE
30. WHAT WAS THE MAIN REASON YOU SELECTED THE HOME WHERE YOU NOW LIVE? 

DO NOT READ LIST

(1) LOCATION, NEIGHBORHOOD
(2) SCHOOLS
(3) PRICE OF HOUSE
(4) LIKED THE HOUSE
(5) FRIENDS, RELATIVES
(6) IT WAS ALL THAT WAS AVAILABLE TO ME AT THE TIME
(7) CLOSE TO WORK
(8) COMBINATION OF REASONS
(9) OTHER: _______________________________________
(10) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

31. WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD OF YOUR MOVING IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

(1) DEFINITE PLANS TO MOVE
(2) PROBABLY WILL MOVE
(3) PROBABLY WILL NOT MOVE  SKIP TO QUESTION 33
(4) DEFINITELY WILL NOT MOVE  SKIP TO QUESTION 33
(5) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE  SKIP TO QUESTION 33

32. IF YOU DID MOVE, WOULD YOU MOVE OUTSIDE THE CLINTONDALE SCHOOL DISTRICT OR TO ANOTHER HOME WITHIN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT BOUNDARIES?

(1) WITHIN THE DISTRICT BOUNDARIES
(2) OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL DISTRICT
(3) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

33. WOULD YOU TELL ME WHAT YEAR YOU WERE BORN?  DO NOT READ LIST

(1) BEFORE 1912
(2) 1912-1924
(3) 1925-1934
(4) 1935-1944
(5) 1945-1954
(6) 1955 OR LATER
(7) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

34. WHAT WAS THE LAST YEAR OF SCHOOL YOU COMPLETED?

(1) ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, GRADES 1-6
(2) JUNIOR HIGH, GRADES 7-9
(3) SOME HIGH SCHOOL, 10-12
(4) HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE
(5) TECHNICAL, TRADE, OR BUSINESS SCHOOL GRADUATE
(6) SOME COLLEGE
(7) COMMUNITY COLLEGE GRADUATE
(8) COLLEGE GRADUATE
(9) GRADUATE STUDY
(10) CAN'T SAY/NO RESPONSE

GO TO NEXT PAGE
35. Are you married or single?

(1) Married
(2) Single (Includes Widowed, Divorced)
(3) Declined to answer

36. In this survey, the school board wanted to find out your opinion about some important school issues. Do you think surveys of the community are a good idea or a poor idea?

(1) Good idea
(2) Poor idea
(3) Additional comments: ____________________________
(4) Can't say/no response

37. And finally, can you tell me the name of the elementary school nearest your home?

(1) Little Mack
(2) Robbie Hall Parker
(3) Price Drive
(4) Rainbow
(5) Joseph Santilli
(6) Sunnyview

Thank you for helping with the survey. All responses will be averaged and presented in our Clintondale community schools newsletter so that everyone in our school district will know the results.

FOR INTERVIEWER ONLY:

Things I think you should know:

Was this respondent

(1) Male
(2) Female

Interview number________________

Your name ______________________

JC: JMC
1978