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A Rationale and Program for School-Community Relations for the Jenison Public Schools

David E. Bly
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A RATIONALE AND PROGRAM
FOR SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS
FOR THE JENISON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

David E. Bly

A Project Report
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment
of the
Specialist in Education Degree

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
April 1977
The development and writing of a program of school-community relations for the Jenison Public Schools led to a review and search of Board of Education policies, administrative memoranda, books and pamphlets, writing of authorities in the field, and attendance at a one-week seminar in Denver, Colorado sponsored by NSPRA. After a review of these materials, participation in the seminar, and consultation from professional educators and authorities in the school public relations field, a program of school-community relations for the Jenison Public Schools was developed.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In completing this project, I have profited from the suggestions of Dr. William P. Viall, Dr. Rodney Roth, Dr. Gerald C. Martin and Dr. Carol F. Sheffer from Western Michigan University. A special thanks to Mr. David J. McKenzie, Superintendent of Schools, Jenison, Michigan, for his constructive suggestions concerning the actual development of a school-community relations program. Also, I would like to thank my wife and children for their encouragement and patience during the time spent on the project, and Mrs. Jacki DeMeester for typing and reviewing the manuscript. I would also like to express my gratitude to my colleagues for their understanding as I asked questions and sought opinions. Lastly, my thanks to my parents, both teachers, who so valued the field of education.

David E. Bly

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INTRODUCTION

The research, development, writing and implementation of a program of school-community relations is an interesting yet demanding task and process. Review of current literature, Board of Education policy and minutes, proposed guidelines from professional associations, and discussion with the Superintendent as well as experts in the field all contributed to the completion of the task.

This field project is based on a widely publicized Gallup Poll, commissioned by The National School Board Association and quoted in PARAGRAPHS, May/June, 1975, a publication of the National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia. This poll has shown the following information about our local schools: "To substitute facts for impressions in this area of public understanding of public school governance, The National School Board Association commissioned a national study by the Gallup Organization of Princeton, New Jersey, which was conducted during the period December 6-14, 1974". "The study reveals that this report might have been titled 'The People DON'T Look at Their School Boards'.

A. Fully 63% of the people were unable to name one thing their school board had done in the preceeding year ...."

B. 34% of the general public (adult) does not have even a general opinion about their Board of Education.

C. One-third of the people responding said that the school board was only fair or poor in representing the public.

D. Schools only rated moderately favorable on the question of attempts to keep the public informed.

Here is a professional group that has a day-to-day impact on millions of people, and our most important natural resource, but two-thirds of the community adults can't remember anything that its governing board has done in the past year.

The local school board arrangement is a unique form of governance over public schools found in no other country except the United States. Its strength lies in an elected representative body acting in open meetings on the business of making policy, financing, and guiding the educational activities of the district. To accomplish this job, however, the board must be aware and responsive to the best interests of the citizens. There must be an avenue for the systematic review of community concerns.

It has been recognized that improved communication between school and community is essential in order to obtain adequate public understanding and support for the community's education programs. To improve public communication an effort toward citizen participation, feedback, understanding and support is required. The democratic theory of government is based on the premise that citizens have a right to accurate information about public services. To accomplish this, people must be involved in direct and constructive experiences in the program.
For too long it has been assumed that educators can work in a vacuum because they are "professionals" and are given the responsibility of making decisions and developing programs. If schools are to survive in the 70's and beyond, they must spend as much effort and develop as much expertise on school-public communication programs as they have on other important areas. "Thinking" communications must become second nature and be built into every new and ongoing effort. Success or failure may very well hinge on the ability to communicate with the numerous and diverse publics.

The learning which took place during this project was manifold, and it is hoped that it will serve the Jenison Public Schools and others concerned with the problem. A review of the transcript which follows should enlighten one to the problems and difficulties he will encounter with the all important concept of developing a program of school-community relations.
THE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The recent writings on community control of the schools (Belasco and others 1970, Hagood 1969, and Sussmann 1970) and decentralization (Gittell 1967) indicate an extreme community interest in the schools that extends beyond financial referendums. The school is a force in the community that touches almost every person in one form or another, and as such, influences even the future of the community. Residents look to the school to solve many needs, not just as a place to "become educated". As interest in the school grows, so does the desire to have a voice in the direction the system takes. For this reason schools often find themselves in conflict with the community over educational innovations, desegregation, curriculum, and a host of other topics. Add to that the need for increased income to meet demands, and the gap between community and school widens.

Here is where the need and concept of school-community relations begins. With the school often being the community's largest employer, the community's largest tax spender, keeper of its most precious resource, its children, and the most often chosen topic of conversation, can it afford not to have improved communication?

In the publication, Public Opinion, Voter Behavior and School Support, the following information was given:

"Numerous local district survey findings allow several general conclusions to be drawn:"
A. No matter how well informed a person actually is, if he feels informed, the odds are better that he will support the district schools.

B. Persons who believe they have easy access to information tend to be more enthusiastic about supporting their schools.

C. When upwards of 50% of the persons interviewed in a school district survey feel they are only informed 'above average', the district is going to have troubles gaining sufficient voter support for its special levy propositions.¹

The concept must begin with an understanding of the community served by the school. Each community is different and has different concepts of the role the school should play. Those responsible for the operation and direction of the school must know what the school's image is in the community, what the community expects from the school, who speaks for the community and where the community's "power" lies. It is not enough to know what the community expects from the school, but it is also important to know how the school can be a viable leader in the community.

Templeton has said: "In a New Jersey study based on interview responses, Wilder and others (1968) sought to determine the extent to which parents, teachers, and students agree on educational goals. The author's comment: 'School systems are more directly dependent on the good will of their constituents than almost any other governmental agency, but since they

often fail to know what parents are troubled about, their efforts to inform constituents often misfire or are irrelevant.1

The concept of school-community relations also means that school personnel must become more interested and skillful in making their accomplishments and needs known to the public. School personnel can not operate behind closed doors and expect the community to understand the needs and grant its wishes. Every day that the school is in session there is a story to tell, but knowing when and how to tell it is critical. The schools still belong to the people and, as such, they have the right to know more about them. How this is to be done is an important issue worthy of a commitment in time, effort and resources by the school system. To do it right is as important as doing it at all, for inaccurate, misleading, sporadic or half-hearted attempts will only serve to alienate those people to be served.

Atkinson (1971) summarized the major issues involved in the public's need for information as follows:

"While reluctance to increase support for public education need not mean that people have lost respect for public education, it does imply that they are beginning to question administration. They want information before they dig into their pockets for more money. They want to be better informed about education. They want to understand the modern trends, methods and innovations that are altering the schools they attended. They want to know,

1
Ian Templeton, Communicating With The Public, (National School Public Relations Association, 1972) p. 6
too, what the schools are trying to accomplish and the extent to which they are achieving their goal.\textsuperscript{1}

The concept of school-community relations can be accomplished by means of certain tasks. Among these might be the following:

1. \textbf{Interest a greater number of citizens in the public schools.}
   
   This means involving people - parents, grandparents, singles, old and young - in school programs, advisory councils, block parent groups, child study groups, discussion groups, etc.
   
   It means paying attention to what people say and schools acting on what is believed to be the best course for children.
   
   People want the opportunity to become better informed and to have their opinions requested, but their time is valuable.
   
   They will not tolerate being used as "window dressing". The task of school-community relations is to initiate and/or recognize situations where community involvement would be beneficial, and to stimulate interest and participation in these school activities.

Nolan Estes, in his book, "Marshalling Community Leadership To Support The Public Schools" says: "The superintendentshould establish an 'official' or regular relationship with groups that have power, visibility, and organization. There are other groups . . . . and the superintendent ought to involve them all and communicate regularly with them. I believe it is the obligation of the school superintendant

\textsuperscript{1}Keith W. Atkinson, \textit{Communication: Closing the Widening Gap} (Clearing House, September, 1971) p. 27 - 31
to find the disenfranchised groups and bring them into the decision-making process. The superintendent can see that these groups have responsibility commensurate with their interest in the schools.¹

2. To increase the community's financial support as the need grows. People want good schools and they want their children to have the advantages they themselves missed. However, a request from the school is no longer an automatic guarantee of a "yes" vote by the people. The community needs to know why the money is needed, how it will be spent, and what assurance there is that the new funds will produce better results. If this information is provided on a regular basis throughout the year a more knowledgeable and informed public will be the result. The task of school-community relations is to provide the ongoing communications which will foster this knowledge and therefore ultimately their support financially and otherwise.

Mayer says: "Preparation for a school issue should begin many years prior to the vote. If a strong public relations program has been effective over a long period of time, the transition to a campaign should be smooth and merely require an acceleration of activities."²

¹Nolan Estes, Marshalling Community Leadership To Support The Public Schools, (The Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1974)

3. Create a climate in the community and in the schools favorable to an improvement in the quality of education. "The polls conducted over the years show that the public has a great deal of quantitative information about the schools --- information like when the school bus arrives, when the school day starts, the cost of hot lunch, school vacation dates, and the like. But the public doesn't know much about what is really happening in the schools. They're not tuned in to what we are teaching children and why."¹ As automobile owners people are usually dissatisfied with a car that is three years old, much more a Model T. How much more important is it that the educational programs provided by schools fit students for living in the present and future rather than the past. Yet Detroit does a much superior job of selling their product than do educators. The school's product is of prime importance in the family, adaptable to change, important to the welfare and future of the community, and a knowledgeable walking example of the educational system. The combination client-product is a salesman's dream, and schools must sell it. School personnel are charged with the responsibility of providing an educated society, but to do so they must maintain and improve upon the communication system between the school and that society.

The concept of school-community relations could be summed up in one word - SHARING. It means sharing the resources of the school and the resources of the community for the betterment of all. By sharing the school's successes, the failures, the needs and the aspirations a closeness can be developed with those the schools seek to serve.
HUMAN RELATIONS IN SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The most important aspect of school-community relations centers around the human relations theme, for people tend to perceive the school in relation to school people they know. If their children have good teachers the school is doing a good job. If their neighbor is a school custodian and speaks ill of the school then the school may well be viewed in a negative way. All school district employees, from the superintendent to the custodian develop public relations through their interaction with members of the community, particularly in small and medium sized communities. Each is thought of by friends and neighbors as an informed and knowledgeable source of information and opinions regarding the schools.

In fact, Banach and Barkelew have said: "Again and again, the researchers find that kids represent the number one source of information for parents. Next on the list of information sources is a category which includes school employees .... and the public doesn't discriminate between secretaries, principals, teachers, custodians or school board members."\(^1\)

If these employees are truly well informed and possessors of positive attitudes toward the schools, their effect on the community will be positive and will help generate support.

There is a general attitude that Board of Education members are relatively ineffective communicators and that superintendents tend to

talk only to members of the power structure. Although this is a
generalization and not applicable to every school system, it does
point out the need for involving all employees, and not assuming that
people will be informed by reading the published reports of board
meetings.

In the book, "Public Relations For School Personnel", the statement
is made, "The Board must exemplify good public relations techniques
to be in concert with the board-adopted policy on school-community
relations. There must be a continuous two-way communications be-
tween the Board and the school staff and between the Board and the
school community. When the Board acts on policies which affect staff
members or portions of the community the people affected should be
given an opportunity to be heard before the Board takes final action."\(^1\)

To be a positive influence and useful force in the community, school
employees must feel informed and important. This means that the
"system" must be willing to listen to employees and the community.
Too often a breakdown in this communication process has brought about
the downfall of competent administrators. To do a good job in operating
the school is vital, but it is equally important to have that image
perceived by the community.

The human relations aspect of school-community relations is not easily
accomplished, but is brought to fruition through much planning and
forethought. People cannot be programmed like machines nor do they

\(^1\)Frank Mayer, Public Relations For School Personnel, 1974
Pendell Publishing Co., Midland) p. 5
all respond the same way or in the same degree of stimulus. Different methods must be used to reach people, some formal and others informal. For instance when trying to find community attitudes and opinions a survey might be used. However, mail surveys generally are returned by those individuals who are either very pleased with the way things are going or by those who specialize in grinding axes. People in the middle rarely take the time to respond. On the other hand telephone surveys can be more reliable with the sampling of more objectives, and "The commitment of the volunteer is less likely to influence the respondent if the exposure is over the telephone and is brief."  

Thomas, Smith, and Hall, in their booklet "Polling and Survey Research" have tried to answer the question of which method is best by saying: "Perhaps the best answer is to say that true success in survey research involves more than efficiently gathering valid research data. It also lies in tailoring the instrument to the specific situation, setting, and questions that need answering. These factors, along with the stern realities of time and money, underlie the selection of the interview, the questionnaire, or a combination of the two."  

Discussion between school representatives and groups of community members represent a more formalized attempt to create school-community

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2 Ibid., p. 8
dialogue. These can be held in the school buildings, or better yet in the homes of constituents. In face-to-face meetings each party has a chance to reach a mutual understanding through questions and responses. Another benefit is having the feeling that you now know that school administrator or staff member, they are no longer just a name. This then will help generate the feeling that the schools belong to the community, and are not just brick and mortar edifices operated by faceless people in a manner to suit themselves.

In all of these areas it must be remembered that people should not be asked for their opinions unless schools are willing to really listen to them and change can occur. It is equally important that this communications effort be treated as a normal and continuous part of the operation, rather than as a tool to be used when something is wanted.

Gallup, in summarizing the results of his 1974 poll of public attitudes toward education said: "The more respondents know at firsthand about the public schools, the more favorable are their views; the less interested and less well informed, the less favorable. Most important is the fact that persons who depend on the media for their information are most critical of the schools."¹

To summarize, it is important that schools remember that communities are people and that schools are people. If time is taken to think

¹George Gallup, Fifth Annual Gallup Poll of Public Attitudes Toward Education, (Community Education Journal, March-April, 1974) p. 47
about the needs of the groups of people and how the school can best
serve and communicate with them, the support and assistance will come.
"Before a district can enjoy an effective public relations program, it must have its house in order: there must be harmonious working relations among staff members and morale must be good; there must be a public relations-minded administrative staff and Board of Education; a strong educational program must exist. With such a base firmly established, the tools of public relations can be developed ..."¹

There are tried and proven paths in developing a workable school-community communications program, paths that help us avoid pitfalls along the way. Therefore, a first step must be a clear and concise policy statement by the Board of Education showing the need for, and support of a school-community relations program. This act will serve as a firm foundation of support upon which the program can be built. (See p. 22A and p. 23)

Following this policy statement purposes of the program must be developed and delegation of authority stated. Specific purposes can then be developed as goals and objectives, measurable items that can be added to and modified, as well as evaluated, as the program progresses. Delegation of authority is equally important, for someone must be made responsible for the day-to-day operation of the communications program.

When these decisions have been made, the policy must be made known to

employees. This cannot be treated as another central office directive, here today - forgotten tomorrow, but must be viewed as an important aspect of each employee's job.

A commitment on the part of the Board of Education and administration is not complete without being backed by adequate human and financial resources. A half-hearted, faltering effort could be worse than no effort, particularly in the eyes of employees. The program must be given the staff, with tools and image necessary to get the job done. This usually will mean that the person in charge will report directly to the superintendent.

As Mayer said: "Members of the Board of Education must be willing to support a public relations program with enthusiasm and dollars."¹ Professional growth of employees is a key item, and through a sound program of continuous inservice training and development, staff involvement and cooperation can be assured.

Another important aspect of this communications program is research. In no way can it be assumed that tomorrow's needs will be the same as today's, or that a program that was successful last year is relevant to the communities' needs today. Only by continually involving people and assessing ideas and feedback - and continually modifying the programs, can it be said that the school is current and in tune with the time.

¹Ibid., p. 5
A most important factor of the school-community relations program is a sound and effective system of internal communications. Keeping the staff knowledgeable, informed and involved is critical to a creditable operation. Each school employee, no matter what his job or responsibilities may be, is looked on by his neighbor as "the school", and a reliable source of information. If each employee is to be kept informed and is to be made to feel that he is an important and involved part of the system, the image he or she projects is more apt to be a positive force in the community.

In planning the technical aspects of school-community relations it is necessary to analyze the community and decide who the publics are. It is important to identify individuals and groups within organizations with whom continuous communications are required. Then procedures should be developed for determining what kind of information should be supplied with emphasis on its relative importance and the degree of staff and public interest in it. At the same time a variety of means and media for communicating must be considered. Not all groups can be reached in the same way, nor is any one method of communicating always the answer. To publish a good newsletter is important, but not all people will read it.

A weekly interview on the local radio station may reach many people, but not every person will listen. Some people can be reached only through coffees, service clubs, or possibly over the backyard fence. For this reason the school must constantly analyze and utilize the feedback it receives, and faithfully search for ways to reach those
segments of the community not currently being served.

Estes has said: "There are other 'tools for communication' that can be used for different leadership groups. Of course there are newsletters and radio-TV shows; they are commonplace precisely because of their potential for effective communication. But their weakness is obvious; the communication is only one-way, and the open system needs a two-way exchange of information."¹

One most important, most readily available, but least used resource is the communities' human resources. It is important that the many and varied talents available be identified and involved. By the involvement of citizen advisory councils, block parent clubs, mothers clubs and other citizen groups of a similar nature, two-way communication is improved and better use of these human resources is made.

In discussing the technical aspects of communications it must be remembered that a reliable and acceptable program must be ongoing. To seek to communicate with the public just prior to an election or bond issue reinforces the natural suspicions all too prevalent in the community.

We must have a planned program that tells the school's story year-round and never stops asking the community for input. We must, as well, have a long range plan for communications, to eliminate

any chance of being caught unprepared for critical issues or events.

To summarize, we would consolidate the stages of programming into five steps:

1. Definition of needs;
2. Development of goals;
3. Identification of objectives;
4. Organization of appropriate programs and activities; and,
5. Mobilization of school and community resources.
APPENDIX

A. Methods for Reaching the External Public

B. Communication Tips - School Administration

C. Communication Tips - Teachers

D. School Board Policy - Use of School Facilities

E. Sample School Board Policy - School-Community Relations

F. Community Questionnaire

G. Parent Questionnaire

H. Community Survey
SOME METHODS FOR REACHING THE EXTERNAL PUBLIC

1. Adult and Community Education Programs
2. News releases
3. Radio and TV interviews with administrators, teachers and board members
4. TV programs produced by the school
5. Brochures
6. Slide-tape shows
7. Movies
8. Bumper stickers
9. Billboards
10. Citizen Advisory Groups
11. Speakers bureaus
12. Lectures
13. Public forums
14. Surveys and polls
15. Home visits
16. Open Houses
17. Tour of district facilities
COMMUNICATION TIPS - SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

1. Personnel Department - Exit interviews when employees leave.
2. Keep the appearance of buildings up. Some people only see the exterior of the buildings.
3. Encourage neighborhood groups to use the buildings.
4. Reader interest surveys taken periodically regarding school publications.
5. A steady drip is better than a big splash.
6. Editors want to print news that will be of interest to the largest number of readers.
7. Utilize feedback continuously to modify operations.
8. Central office administrators should try to have contact with each staff person at least once per year.
9. Have at least one inservice public relations training course and/or public relations workshop annually.
10. Never allow a question from someone in the community to go unanswered.
11. Have a working relationship with representatives of the media.
12. Have a "crisis-situation" plan.
13. Have a "local education" week once a year.
14. Recognize achievements or exemplary service by all employees either on the job or in the community.
15. One of the prime sources of school information is the child. We should insure positive student attitudes by seeing how the child is treated in the cafeteria, the library, the bus, and
of course the office.

16. Use building bulletin boards to convey a warm greeting.
17. Have inservice for secretaries on telephone etiquette.
18. The building secretary is often the first person new students and their parents meet. Make it a good beginning.
19. Never allow anyone (be he student, teacher or parent) to believe you are not striving for resolution of their problems.
20. Host "visitours" for local businessmen, the people our youngsters see on the way to and from school.
21. Have welcome signs posted that are truly welcome signs.
22. Invite senior citizens to eat with the children.
23. Have an annual "Grandparents Day" in the kindergarten.
24. Send building newsletters home at least once a month.
25. Have school-community relations on each staff meeting agenda.
26. Send welcome notes to new families in the community.
27. Invite parents to have lunch at school.
28. Have a school wide courtesy campaign.
29. Have student small group "rap" sessions with the principal.
30. Keep the door to the principal's office open to students.
31. Have upper grade students adopt a lower grade student.
32. Have periodic visits to classrooms by the principal.
33. Have staff projects: i.e., staff recipe book with contributions from each employee.
34. Follow-up questionnaires to classes as they leave buildings.

(Elementary to Jr. High and Jr. High to Sr. High)
35. Make the school office one where parents feel they and their children are important.

36. Give a traveling plaque each week to class with the cleanest room.

37. Send a team of Jr. High teachers, parents and students to each elementary building in the spring to meet 6th grade students.

38. Send a welcome message in the form of a school calendar or brochure to parents before school opens.

39. Keep the student newspaper on mailing list for school news releases.

40. Hold mini-sessions to help parents understand curriculum areas.

41. Invite parents to be judges for art shows, talent shows, science fairs, etc.

42. Survey students regarding the following:
   a. Is this generally a good or bad year?
   b. What are student priorities at our school?
   c. Are the students dealt with fairly by administrators and faculty?
   d. Are students treated as people or units on a production line?

43. Survey the faculty regarding the following:
   a. To what extent do they have the materials needed for their work?
   b. How adequate are the physical facilities in which they work?
   c. Do they perceive students are being treated fairly?
   d. Do they know what is expected of them?
e. Are they aware of policies and procedures governing employees?

f. Does the school expect too much of students - of teachers?

g. If money were no object what would you add to your program?

44. Survey the parents regarding the following:

a. Is this a good year, bad year, or a so-so year for your children?

b. Are you satisfied with course content, quality of instruction,  
and the standard of achievement?

c. If funds were unlimited, what would you add?

d. Does the school expect too much, too little, just enough of the children - the parents?

e. How are parents treated when they come to school?

f. How do they get most of their school information?

g. What do you like about our schools?

45. Have a school procedure for handling visitors, understood by all employees.

46. Keep newspaper clippings of accomplishments of students. Send them and their parents a note of congratulations.

47. Recognize the community contributions of citizens, especially those who have been involved in the schools. Send official letters of thank-you to each.

48. School sponsored dad's work night to build something the school needs. Senior Citizens can help, too.

49. Principals clip newspaper articles about former students, glue on a piece of paper with the notation, "Hey, this is great!", and send it to the students' parents.
50. Principal can take pictures of school activities and display them at the school, sending them home with students when the display is changed.

51. School sponsored all day parent workshops on various areas of curriculum. Parents come to school with children and leave when children leave.

52. Elementary schools invite a policeman to eat lunch with students on a regular basis.

53. Principal question and answer session in classrooms.

54. Set up teacher exchanges to help teachers at various levels to better understand and support one another's jobs so they can help interpret the entire school system to the community.

55. Encourage civic clubs to hold one meeting in schools per year - meeting teachers, student guided tours, and eat in cafeteria.

56. A "call in" evening every few weeks when the school administrator(s) are available to answer phone calls from parents.

57. New student in your school? Invite the parents in for coffee and a briefing.

58. Instead of just faculty meetings, have occasional "family" meetings involving all personnel.

59. Use a new employee questionnaire after an initial work period (30 to 60 days).

60. Use thumbnail reaction cards after staff meetings, open houses, inservice sessions, etc., as well as with visitors.

61. Analysis of incoming telephone questions during the first week of
school.

62. Encourage teachers to participate in community activities.

63. Administrators must earn a reputation for fairness.
COMMUNICATIONS TIPS FOR TEACHERS

1. Parent participation in class events, open house parties, field trips, etc.

2. Use non-parents as volunteers and resource people, too.

3. Plan special events for special groups - Senior Citizens, businessmen, and organizations.

4. When communicating with parents, be personal.

5. The first rule at a parent conference is to put the parent at ease.

6. Teachers should realize that their first impression will be a lasting one, and people will tend to generalize about all teachers by this impression.

7. End each day with a review of what the students learned that day. At the dinner table the question "What did you learn today" won't get "nuthin" as a response.

8. Teachers must remember they are life models for their students.

9. Too many persons think that; as is the teacher, so is the school.

10. School-community relations suffer when an above average level of personal conduct is not maintained by even one teacher.

11. A teacher must be positive in representing his profession to the public.

12. Sharing a new idea, helping a new teacher to adjust, making the way easier for a substitute teacher and searching our promising future teachers are valuable public relation ideas.

13. Encourage school visitation by parents and non-parents.

14. Develop program to help students understand the total operation
of the school.
15. Happy, enthusiastic, challenged, learning children are the best possible public relations program a school system can have.
16. Send each child a card on his birthday.
17. Make at least one happy phone call to parents each week.
18. Send home notes explaining everything, not just asking permission.
19. Volunteers feelings of worth about themselves and their program can be reinforced through articles in the newsletter.
20. When communicating with the public, use terms universally understood.
21. Weekly coffees or continental breakfasts for parents.
22. Make random home visits.
23. Have a student advisory council.
24. Make classified employees feel that they are part of the team.
25. Provide programs for service clubs.
26. Use a school bulletin board to display newspaper articles and other materials concerning the school, staff and students.
27. Commend fellow staff members for doing things which are innovative, successful and/or outstanding.
28. Communicate with staff, students and parents well in advance of any major change or implementation of new decisions.
29. Participate in community activities.
30. Use parents as tutors.
31. A note by the principal on a student's paper shows he cares.
32. Ask people from the community to come to school to share their
talents.

33. Have a school staff social event often.
34. Constantly seek ways to recognize children.
35. Use pupil tutors (cross age tutors).
36. Publish a student newspaper.
37. Monthly newsletters from teachers to parents explaining events, goals, etc., of the month.
38. A letter to parents which the class composes can explain events, etc.
39. Have English students scan local paper for stories of achievement by local people, and then write letters of congratulations.
40. Ask students if they are being treated fairly.
41. Have a conference with parents of each student on the borderline of passing or failing.
42. Have counselors in their office from 6:00 - 7:00 p.m. on night of home basketball games.
43. Turn people on--be enthusiastic yourself.
44. When you explain something to parents avoid "educationese".
45. Your image is rarely more public then during a field trip.
46. Keep family problems within the family.
47. Video tape the classroom and run tape during open house.
48. Have the custodian talk to the class about his job and keeping the school clean.
ARTICLE I - COMMUNITY RELATIONS

USE OF SCHOOL FACILITIES

POLICY:

*School Property: Use as Community Center; rules, damages, rent

"The Board of any school district in this state, upon the written application of any responsible organization located in said school district, or of a group of at least 7 citizens of said school district, may grant the use of all school grounds and schoolhouses as community or recreation centers for the entertainment and education of the people, including the adults and children of school age, and for the discussion of all topics tending to the development of personal character and of civic welfare. Such occupation, however, shall not seriously infringe upon the original and necessary use of the properties. The Board in charge of such building shall prescribe such rules and regulations for their occupancy and use as herein provided as will secure a fair, reasonable and impartial use of the same.

The organization or group of citizens applying for the use of properties as specified above shall be responsible for any damage done them over and above the ordinary wear, and shall, if required, pay such use or rental fee as may be determined by the Board."


Following is a listing of the rules and forms which are deemed necessary to operate the above policy.

Building and Facility use will be governed by policy set by the Board of Education, and administered by the Community Education Office.

The community school is an extension of its people and therefore serves the educational, social, recreational and cultural needs of all its people, both youth and adult. It seeks to be the center of community action and as such thrives upon the active involvement of its resources to make the community a better place to live through the conscious creation of an environment which stimulates continual learning, maximum utilization of school facilities and worthwhile recreation and cultural programs. The community school
will attempt to cooperate fully with other agencies or governmental units in an effort to prevent duplication of services. The community school shall also whenever possible share facilities with other agencies.

**General Policy**

The buildings and grounds of the Jenison Public Schools shall be used for:

1. Instructional purposes
2. Extra-curricular activities conducted by the regular school staff
3. Activities of school related community groups
4. Other community activities
   a. Community School Director shall reserve one night a week for the buildings to be used by the public except that school scheduled events such as athletic contests, musical contests, other activities affecting more than one school and beyond the control of the Administration will have first priority. In the event that a vacation begins on a day other than a Friday, regular activities that are normally scheduled on Friday may be scheduled on the evening before the vacation begins.

**Non-School Activities**

All buildings under control of the Jenison Board of Education are open for use of residents of the school district free of charge providing extra custodial help is not needed. It shall be understood that any school function shall normally have precedence over other activities.

All use of school buildings and grounds shall be carefully scheduled under the direction of the Community School Director. A building may be scheduled during the day by community groups or the Community School Director with the approval of the building principal. The use of the buildings or grounds at any other time even by intra-school groups shall be scheduled directly through the Community School Director's office.

There shall be two general classifications of groups or individuals using the school facilities.
1. Those who qualify for free use
2. Groups or individuals who are charged a rental fee

Section I

The following criteria will be used in determining free use of buildings:

A. For all use of buildings the sponsoring agent must be located within the school district.

B. Any other recreational group providing the persons in charge and the majority of the participants are residents living within the school district.

C. Any adult or other educational classes if sponsored by a group approved by the Board of Education and any charges made by the group will be to cover costs of the program, and any profits must not benefit any individual.

D. Fund raising activities will be governed by the following rules:
   
   (1) All funds raised by non-school groups must be dedicated to educational, charitable or community purposes within the district.

   (2) Fund raising cannot be undertaken for private or commercial gain.

E. Any use of buildings for lectures, civic and political discussion or other meetings shall be without admission charge.

Section II

For groups which do not qualify for free building use, a charge will be made. The charges will be as determined by the board.

There shall be three general groups or classifications of groups which shall pay rental for use of Jenison Public Schools' facilities:

1. Groups who are renting facilities for private gain.

2. Groups whose activities may cause additional expense to the Jenison Public School District because of extra custodial
help, cleanup, or closing of buildings, or for any other reasons.

3. Religious groups who wish to hold regular weekly devotional services within school facilities.

Religious groups may make application to hold regular weekly devotional services in school facilities under the following conditions and shall:

a. Show proof of property ownership within the district or acceptable proof of intent to build within the district (building plans).

b. Provide a list of members (at least 50% of the active members must reside in the Jenison School District).

c. Assume full responsibility for proper supervision.

d. Furnish a certificate of insurance to the Community School Coordinator assuming the following liability and property damage insurance coverage:

   Bodily Injury Liability
   each person $100,000.00
   each accident $300,000.00

   Property Damage Liability
   each accident $25,000.00

   Medical
   each person $500.00
   each accident $10,000.00

e. Approval shall be for one year and a renewal may be granted for another year.

f. All long term renting groups (religious or otherwise) must work around and cooperate fully with school groups. School property must not be moved without approval of the building principal or the Community School Coordinator. Any long term renting groups upon a one week notice may be asked to cancel their meeting(s) one or more times, should the meeting(s) conflict with a school group activity.
Section III

Building use will be governed by the following rules:

A. School facilities cannot be used by any individual, group, or organization for any activity that is intended to overthrow the government by force, violence or other unlawful means.

B. Games of chance, lotteries or other activities classified as gambling cannot be conducted on school premises.

C. No enterprise, function, or activity that promotes any commercial product or results in any private profit or commercial gain for any business enterprise can be conducted on school property, without the consent of the Board of Education.

D. There can be no activity or program that reflects on, or discriminates against persons of any race, color, creed, or national origin.

E. Use of buildings on Sundays will be limited to religious services.

F. Use of buildings for any purpose by private family groups for weddings or reunions or other similar meetings is prohibited.

G. Use of school facilities by groups located outside of Jenison is prohibited, with the exception of groups from Grandville and Hudsonville, Groups from these communities can rent facilities at 200% of the normal rental charges.

Section IV

Regulations regarding use of buildings:

A. No food or beverage shall be taken into or consumed in the gym unless appropriate precautions are taken.

B. When using the gym floor, proper gym footwear must be worn.

C. The sponsoring agent or person in charge is responsible for any damage or malicious destruction.
D. For auditorium use the gym floor shall be covered to protect the floor when necessary.

E. All youth groups must have adult sponsors in attendance.

F. Any school owned specialized equipment must be operated by a school approved operator.

1. The gym scoreboards and timers will be operated by trained individuals whose hourly wages will be paid by the group using the facility.

G. Smoking is prohibited in school buildings except in designated areas.

Section V

Each building use request, with the exception of those originating within the school system, shall include a list of names and addresses of those expecting to participate in the program activity.

Section VI

The Board reserves the right to accept or reject all requests, etc.

Section VII

Other charges:

A charge will be made when it is necessary to have additional personnel on duty. The charge will be established to meet the expense incurred. Typical charges are:

- A. Elementary Gym $10.00 per hour
- B. Elementary Classroom $2.50 per hour
- C. Jr. High Gym $15.00 per hour
- D. Sr. High Gym $25.00 per hour
- E. Sr. High Auditorium $25.00 per hour
- F. Jr. & Sr. High Cafeteria $15.00 per hour
- G. Pool $20.00 per hour - local group
  $35.00 per hour - outside group

Revised - February 12, 1974
Revised - September 8, 1975
Dist. 1, 2, 4, 6, 8
SAMPLE - SCHOOL BOARD POLICY

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

It shall be the objective of the school-community relations program to inform and involve Jenison School District residents through development of two-way communications with all its "publics" - students, teachers, classified personnel, parents and non-parents. The school-community relations program shall emphasize information as well as advance the education program by aiding in the development of a high morale in an informed and concerned staff.

I. UNDERLYING POLICIES AND PURPOSES

1. To inform and to interpret for residents the districts educational needs and programs in order to earn their understanding, acceptance and cooperation.

2. To identify and evaluate public attitudes and to involve residents in solving educational problems in order to provide them with self-expression and participation.

3. To further understanding and cooperation between and among district personnel.

II. BOARD-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The Board of Education, the Superintendent and his Staff recognize the right of citizens to be informed about how students are being educated and how funds are spent.

III. INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Action taken by the Board of Education and/or the Administration deemed significant or important to the staff by the Superintendent

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of Schools, will be reported through the staff newsletter.

IV. NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS

Every effort will be made to maintain excellent relations with all area news media. The Board of Education welcomes the interest and assistance of all media representatives and will provide the same with all available facts about the school district promptly and courteously.

V. NEWS RELEASES

1. All news releases to the public concerning the schools will be released through the office of the Superintendent of Schools and/or with his designation, through the office of community education.

2. The Superintendent of Schools and/or his designee, is authorized to release and disseminate all material and information he deems necessary or important.

3. All district employees are requested to inform the community education office regarding educational services and programs, accomplishments, etc., that might have news value.

VI. DISTRICT PUBLICATIONS

1. The school district, in an effort to inform, to interpret for, and/or to involve all publics, will develop and publish regularly newsletters and/or bulletins for distribution to staff, parents and all district residents.

2. The Superintendent of Schools and/or his designate will prepare publications needed to keep citizens informed about educational
services, achievements, needs, costs, revenues and expenditures.

VII. PUBLIC MEETINGS
The Board of Education and/or the Superintendent of Schools, in recognition of the right to citizens to participate in educational decisions, will (as the need arises) call public meetings for the purpose of discussing problems pertinent to the school program in the district. Special effort will be made to solicit attendance at such meetings from a cross-section of the community.

VIII. PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS
To obtain valid and accurate information concerning the attitudes and opinions of district residents, surveys may be authorized and conducted by the Superintendent of Schools. The Superintendent of Schools and/or his designate, is responsible for evaluating, interpreting and reporting the results. Surveys will be used to determine community attitudes and concerns, determine needed curriculum revisions, and assist in setting system goals. The Superintendent of Schools and/or his designate, when developing survey questions will use input from employees and members of the community.
COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Jenison Resident:

To assist us in doing a better job of communicating with families in Jenison we need some information from you. If you will take a few minutes to answer the questions below we can have a better idea of community needs and attitudes. Thank you for your help.

1. How are you most likely to find out about the school district's activities?

   ____ A. Newspapers, T.V., or radio
   ____ B. School Newsletter
   ____ C. Mothers' Clubs, P.T.A., or other parent groups
   ____ D. Friends or neighbors
   ____ E. Your children's comments or reports
   ____ F. Other children's comments or reports
   ____ G. Attending school board meetings
   ____ H. Other: (Specify) ____________________________
   ____ I. Don't know

2. How much effort does the school board make to keep parents and other interested citizens informed on its activities?

   ____ A. Great deal
   ____ B. Fair amount
   ____ C. Little
   ____ D. None
   ____ E. Don't know
3. What type of people do you think serve on the school board in this district?
   ____ A. Politicians
   ____ B. Parents
   ____ C. Wealthy people
   ____ D. Average people
   ____ E. Representative of special interest
   ____ F. Community leaders
   ____ G. Professional people
   ____ H. Other: (Specify) ________________________________
   ____ I. Don't know

4. Which of these statements do you think best describes the people who serve on this district's school board?
   ____ A. They are donating their time and effort to serve the community.
   ____ B. They are concerned that children get a good education.
   ____ C. They expect an income from serving on the board.
   ____ D. Anything else: ________________________________
   ____ E. Don't know

5. As far as you can tell, in general, how do things actually work out in this school district when decisions have to be made?
   ____ A. The Board acts as a "rubber stamp" for the administration.
   ____ B. The School Board and the Superintendent come to an agreement that is best for the students and/or school.
   ____ C. The School Board usually tries to have complete control.
6. In your judgement, whose views and opinions have the most influence with the school board in this district?

- A. Teachers
- B. Parents
- C. School Administration
- D. Local government
- E. State government
- F. Pressure groups
- G. Students
- H. Combination of above
- I. Other: (Specify) ___________________________
- J. Don't know

7. How much influence do you think the school board has in this district when it comes to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Complete</th>
<th>Great Deal</th>
<th>Fair Amount</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. School budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>and taxes</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Teacher's salaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>and contracts</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Hiring of teachers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D. Hiring of Sup't</td>
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<tr>
<td>and principals</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Decisions on</td>
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<tr>
<td>subjects to be taught</td>
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<tr>
<td>F. Building facilities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
8. When disputes arise would you say that the school board in this
district works to favor the best interests of:

_____ A. Students
_____ B. Certain community groups
_____ C. Don't know
_____ D. Depends on specific issue

9. If your choice was B or C on question #8, list the groups you
believe the board favors: ________________________________

10. If you were to disagree with a decision made by this district's
school board or school administration, how likely do you think it
is that they would seriously consider an appeal to reconsider the
decision?

_____ A. Very likely
_____ B. Not too likely
_____ C. Fairly likely
_____ D. Not at all likely
_____ E. Don't know

11. When teachers negotiate about their salaries and employment contracts
in this district, with whom do they deal?

_____ A. Board
_____ B. Administration
12. Is most of the information you receive about this school system correct?
   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No
   _____ C. Don't know

13. Are you in agreement with most decisions made by the Board of Education?
   _____ A. Yes
   _____ B. No
   _____ C. Don't know

14. How often do you vote in school elections?
   _____ A. Always
   _____ B. Nearly every time
   _____ C. Part of the time.
   _____ D. Seldom
   _____ E. Never

15. What information would you like to see the school make available?

16. How can your school improve its communications with the people in this school district?

17. What changes should be made in the schools?
18. Personal data:

Age -

___ A. 18-34
___ B. 35-49
___ C. 50 or older
___ D. No comment

19. Education

___ A. High School Graduate
___ B. College Graduate
___ C. Grade School
___ D. No comment

20. Annual Family Income

___ A. $15,000 or over
___ B. $10,000 - $14,999
___ C. $5,000 - $9,999
___ D. Under $5,000
___ E. No comment

21. Do you have children in the public schools?

___ A. Yes
___ B. No

22. How many children do you have, by age?

___ A. 0-5
___ B. 6-12
___ C. 13-14
___ D. 15-18
___ E. Over 18
PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

ONE MOMENT PLEASE . . . . .

That's all of the time necessary to answer the questions. In order to help us keep you completely aware of school policies and programs we need your help. Won't you please take one moment now, to fill in this questionnaire and return it promptly. It will help us provide the information you would like to have about your school system. THANK YOU!!

1. In general, how do you feel about the education children are receiving in the Jenison Public Schools?
   ___ A. Excellent
   ___ B. Good
   ___ C. Fair
   ___ D. Poor

2. In what ways could school operations be improved? ___________________

3. What are your main sources of information about the schools? (Please number in order of importance - 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.)
   ___ A. Your children
   ___ B. Neighbors
   ___ C. School personnel
   ___ D. Grand Valley Shopper
   ___ E. Grand Rapids Press
   ___ F. The Jenison Newsletter
4. Do you feel you receive enough information about the schools to be well informed? No _____ Yes _____

Please check areas in which you would like more information.

____ A. Subjects studied
____ B. Buildings and facilities
____ C. Teachers and Administrators
____ D. Rules and Regulations
____ E. Extra Curricular Activities
____ F. Grading and testing
____ G. Financial Data
____ H. Guidance
____ I. Pupil Achievement
____ J. Other: (name) ____________________________________________

5. How long have you lived in Jenison? ______ years

6. How many children are in your family? ______

Circle each grade

Preschool Pre-K K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 out of school

7. Please check the school activities that you regularly attend:

____ A. Open House
____ B. Mothers' Clubs
____ C. Adult Education classes
____ D. Plays or musicals
____ E. Parent meetings
F. Advisory Councils

G. Athletic events

H. Others: (list)

8. Comments you would like to make:
Hello. This is ______________, calling on behalf of the Jenison Public Schools. As you may have already read in the announcement letter, we are doing a confidential survey in the community to find out how people who live here feel about the schools. We would appreciate a few moments of your time to ask you some questions. (IF A CHILD ANSWERS, ASK FOR AN ADULT MEMBER OF HOUSEHOLD AND REPEAT INTRODUCTION WHEN ADULT ANSWERS.)

1. First—all things considered—how good a job of education is being done by the public schools here in Jenison? Would you say the job being done is: (READ ALL ALTERNATIVES BEFORE ACCEPTING A RESPONSE.)

   Excellent ............ 7-1
   Very Good ........... -2
   Only Fair ............ -3
   Not So Good ........ -4
   Not At All Good ...... -5

   (CHECK HERE IF RESPONDENT SAYS DON'T KNOW) .... -6

RECORD ANY COMMENTS HERE  ____________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
2. What are your main sources of information about what's going on in the Jenison Public Schools? (DON'T READ LIST)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None, don't hear much</td>
<td>10-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My children in school</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom teacher</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Office Administration</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School visits</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Valley Shopper</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Newsletter</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTA meetings</td>
<td>-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area Advisory Council</td>
<td>-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Station (names)</td>
<td>-X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Rapids Press</td>
<td>11-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Stations</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMMENTS:**

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3a. Have you recently contacted any school personnel? (DON'T READ LIST.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Type</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (Respondent called school)</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (School called respondent)</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3b. If Yes, ask - I wonder if you would mind describing the nature of the contact and whom it was with?
3c. If Yes, ask - Were you satisfied with the information or explanation you received?

Yes .................................. 15-1
No. .................................. -2

4. How much say do each of the following groups have now in deciding educational matters here in Jenison? (Read all alternatives before accepting a response.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>More Than Enough Say</th>
<th>It's About Right</th>
<th>It's Less Than They Should Have</th>
<th>NO OPINION</th>
<th>DON'T KNOW</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The School Board</td>
<td>18-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Principals</td>
<td>19-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>20-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>21-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>22-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Mich.</td>
<td>23-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-4</td>
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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School-community communications takes place every day - child to parent, teacher to child, custodian to neighbor, board member to business associate. On and on it goes, usually unplanned, but always there. Only by admitting the need for an established program and giving it the authority and resources necessary can this communications program be effective. Once the commitment by board and administration is made the groundwork must be laid for a consistent and progressive system of inservice for employees. They are the first line communicators and must be made aware of their role. Following this, all of the other facets of the school-community relations can be begun -- and continued week by week, year after year. The school story must be told, and the community must be involved in planning for that story.
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