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A Comprehensive Community Relations Plan for the Sunnyside School District

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A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY RELATIONS
PLAN FOR THE SUNNYSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Project
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
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by
Gary Street
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COMMITTEE CHAIR

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An action planning team, composed of fifteen Sunnyside community members and school district personnel, created several comprehensive action plans designed to improve public relations within the district boundaries by increasing the interaction/involvement between the school district, parents, and community. The process for developing the plan was divided into five steps: 1) Strategy Analysis; 2) Information Gathering; 3) Action Plan Writing; 4) Cost Benefit Analysis; and 5) Presentation of the Action Plans.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Effective school public relations is being recognized by more and more school districts as the link needed to facilitate parental and community involvement in the process of educating children. Parental/community involvement ultimately results in tremendous rewards for school districts as well as the communities they serve.

Statement of the Problem

The Sunnyside School District is in need of improving, adjusting, and changing the many facets of it's public relations with the Sunnyside community. The need for improved public relations in the Sunnyside School District is manifested by: 1) The demographic changes in the Sunnyside community in the last ten years. The Hispanic population in Sunnyside has increased by 93% between 1980 and 1990 to approximately 6,405 out of the total population of 11,328 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1990). Many Hispanics that have contributed to the above increases are monolingual Spanish speaking; 2) The lack of parental involvement in the educational process as evidenced by low attendance at P.T.A. meetings, and parent advisory meetings; 3) The technological

changes in communications that are available to school districts for the purpose of improving public relations; 4) The district's commitment to excellence. The Sunnyside School District recognizes that districts that have good public relations are viewed by their communities as being "good." By committing itself to improving public relations, the Sunnyside School District also believes parents and community members value education and are willing to participate in the education of children.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to provide the Sunnyside School District with several comprehensive action plans designed to improve public relations within district boundaries and to increase the interaction/involvement between the school district, parents, and community. The action plans are guided by six broad objectives. Each objective addresses a specific public relations need in the Sunnyside School District. The broad objectives are as follows:

- 1) To develop a public relations program,
- 2) To improve written communication with the community in both English and Spanish,
- 3) To develop a parent involvement program,
- 4) To improve visual communication with the community,

- 5) To help all district personnel become good spokespersons for the school district,
- 6) To develop an annual performance report.

Significance of the Project

This project is designed to improve the public relations in the Sunnyside School District. The importance of improving public relations is recognized by more and more school districts throughout the country (Kindred, Bagin, and Gallagher, 1990). School districts are now seeing that by improving and maintaining public relations with their respective communities, their image improves. Once a community views a district as being "good," the parents and community are more willing to support and help the district in promoting student achievement.

Definition of Terms

Community. "Of...the general public" (Neufeldt, 1989).

Public. "Of...the community at large" (Neufeldt, 1989).

Public Relations. "Educational public relations is a planned and systematic management function to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. It relies on a comprehensive two-way communications process involving both internal and external publics, with a goal of stimulating a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization. Educational

public relations programs assist in interpreting public attitudes, identifying and shaping policies and procedures in the public interest, and carrying on involvement and information activities which earn public understanding and support" (National School Public Relations Association, 1985). Public relations, community relations, and communications, shall have the same denotation in this paper. "Whether a school chooses to call it (the program) public relations, community relations, or communications, is relatively unimportant" (Kindred, Bagin, and Gallagher, 1990, p. 3). Since most of the educational journals and books refer to the school-community relations program as "public relations," this writer will do the same.

Communications. "Communication means sharing messages, ideas, or attitudes that produce a degree of understanding between the sender and receiver. In everyday usage, communication implies an attempt to share meaning by transmitting messages among people. Communication does not take place unless the receiver correctly or accurately interprets the information being transmitted. Understanding, however, is a highly relative matter. Low levels of understanding can develop between people who do not speak the same language" (Hoy and Miskel, 1987, p. 358).

Action Plans. Action plans are detailed descriptions of the specific actions required to implement an objective over a specified period of time (Gibbs, 1989).

Monolingual Spanish. A person who uses or knows only the Spanish language (Neufeldt, 1988).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much has been written about the program of school public relations and it's effect on parent/community involvement and support. All the literature this writer reviewed suggests that a high correlation exists between effective public relations in a school system and strong parent/community involvement and support. Furthermore, the literature clearly suggests that the degree of parent/community involvement and support correlates with higher student academic achievement.

The review of literature was three dimensional. First an emphasis was placed on literature that reported the value of involving parents in the school. Second, the literature reviewed was directed toward the principles and various characteristics of a school public relations program that make a school system successful. Lastly, the emphasis was placed upon those educational studies in the literature which reported on the involvement of parents from a multicultural perspective.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

The personal involvement and commitment that parents can offer help a school system as a whole and increases the effectiveness of the school's public relations program (Johnson, 1986).

Parent involvement in education is "hardly a novel concept" in the United States (Pyszkowski, 1989, p. 288). According to Pyszkowski (1989):

Before traditional education as we know it, existed in this country, education was largely the responsibility of home and church. As education became more institutionalized, parental influences still prevailed. Since parents were financially responsible for the salary of teachers and the maintenance of the school, parents had a strong voice in hiring of educators...As schools became more independent institutions, the influence of parents declined but did not disappear (p. 289).

In the last decade, parental pressure for more significant involvement in the schools has increased. The reason: parents and teachers are now seeing the merits of involving parents in the process of educating their children. According to Bennett (1986), the importance of parental involvement is clear; parental involvement has a major impact on the total development of the child and helps children

learn more effectively. Kindred, Bagin, and Gallagher (1990) report that because of this, a large portion of the school system's public relations program should "encompass the concept of a partnership between the school and the parents...this partnership calls for the free and continual exchange of information between parents and teachers and the involvement of parents in the school affairs" (p. 142). Both the previous educational theorists agreed that the bottom line of any school public relations program is to help children learn better, and children learn better if parents are involved (Bennett, 1986; Kindred, et al., 1990).

When a strong parental involvement program is in place in a school system, parents feel proud about their children's school and view the school as successful (Heller and Lundquist, 1990). Heller and Lundquist (1990) conclude that:

Concrete achievements, like test scores and honors, are commendable, but parental support for a school and it's programs is often a matter of perception and attitude. A school that is not in the top ten may still be excellent if the parents believe that it is (p. 42).

Inherent to the successful involvement of parents in a school system, is that administrators and teachers recognize the positive public relations role informed parents can assume. Johnson (1986) sketches the above necessity in the following way:

"...informed parents are in a unique situation to send a positive message about the school throughout the community...these parents represent the satisfied customer. Enough people today are pointing at the ills of our educational system, but few could argue with the voice of a parent who says his or her child received a high quality education at a particular school. Since that endorsement is often voluntary (i.e., parents are not school employees), their approval carries a somewhat different, and perhaps more far reaching message about the school (p. 20).

AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM

Parents and community members are no longer willing to simply accept one-way information given to them by the school system without asking questions. Schools were established by the community and parents, the community and parents pay for the taxes that keep the school system continuing; therefore, it is the school system's responsibility to develop new ways to communicate with them. Better communication will allow all - community members, parents, and teacher - the opportunity to participate in the educational processes and functions of the school system. The vehicle to achieve better communication is a comprehensive school public relations program. A school system that adopts a proactive stance to effective public relations will "enhance their

chances of getting better public support, minimizing criticism, and receiving many functional ideas that will help them educate students better" (Kindred et al., 1990, p. 133). Walling (1982), summarizes some of the benefits a school system can expect from an effective school public relations program:

1. Greater knowledge of community concerns.
2. Better internal communication.
3. Increased citizen participation in school functioning.
4. Higher interpersonal regard between school and nonschool people.
5. More acceptance of new or innovative educational programs.
6. Better public understanding of school goals.
7. Increased interest in education among nonparents as well as parents (p. 29).

PRINCIPLES OF A SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM

A school public relations program is planned and systematic; it is a two-way process of communication between an educational organization and the community it serves (Armistead, 1982). "A school public relations program is a team effort, an effort which requires the cooperation of the entire staff, each aware of the system's program, and

understanding their part" (Bitter, 1977, p. 7). A school public relations program is honest in intent (Armistead, 1982).

Planned Team Effort. School public relations should be well planned. According to Kindred et al. (1990), in order for a school system to have a successful public relations program, it must first look at the various ways their "needs, wishes and aspirations may be interpreted best to the school, and how citizen involvement may be included in the task of educational improvement and social change and institutional adjustment to social change" (p. 16). Too often school public relations programs are not well planned. Poor planning often results in a negative public image. A negative public image does not solicit support from parents and community members. According to Armistead (1982), positive public relations is that which is planned; negative school public relations is that which just happens.

The key to successfully planning a school public relations program is social responsibility; involving staff, community members, and students in the process (Wherry, 1986). Wherry (1986), suggests several ways individual schools can involve staff, community members and students in the school public relations planning process:

1. Establish a building Public Relations Committee composed of representatives of all staff groups.

2. Name a staff member to be the building public relations coordinator.
3. Form specific public relations task forces to accomplish specific jobs.
4. Consider a school public relations advisory committee including members of the staff as well as interested community members. Committee members should have definite terms of office, generally one year.
5. Students can also be included in school public relations activities. They have great credibility in the community and among staff. Their energy and good ideas can enrich anything we do as a staff (p. 13).

Two-Way Communication. Two-way communication - school and community - is critical to an effective school public relations program (Armistead, 1982). Kindred et al. (1990) gave perspective to the importance of two-way communication in the following way:

The communications program must be a two-way process. Acquiring feedback allows school officials to know how the community or staff will react to a decision. It is appreciably easier to lead a school district when the thoughts, aspirations, and commitments of the leaders are

known. When people are asked their opinion, they feel better about the person who asks for it - especially if it's made clear that the opinion will be considered (p. 7).

One-way communication from a school, i.e., sending parents written notification, is not effective in itself and often will result in reduced parent involvement (Greenberg, 1989). A good school public relations program, Armistead (1982) maintains, listens to the community and listening results in parental involvement.

Honesty. "School public relations must be an honest activity" (Armistead, 1982, p. 7). School systems have no problems admitting their strengths. In the statement below, Armistead (1982) suggests that school systems must also be willing to admit their weaknesses as well:

We should be willing to admit our weaknesses and to openly discuss the constraints that we face in education. This goes hand in hand with communicating what we do well. In discussing weaknesses or problems we should always emphasize where improvement is necessary, what steps are being taken to improve, and what parents and the community at large can contribute to the improvement efforts. For example, if people are

asking for more programs when funds are dwindling, educators should mention the budgetary situation and discuss ways to obtain the necessary money for the desired additional programs...Problems cannot be hidden (p. 7).

Parents also resent being given slightly distorted thoughts about school related occurrences or situations in order to make the school system look good (Ordolvensky, 1986). There should be no conspicuous differences in truth, whether the truth be good news or bad news concerning a school. If the public perceives a school system as being dishonest, then that school system is likely to lose public support. Schools need to adhere to an honest and open approach to communication, an approach that accurately conveys information, if they are to be successful in their public relations endeavors (Ordolvensky, 1986).

MASS COMMUNICATION VEHICLES FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS

An abundance of literature written about school public relations approaches exists. The following is an accumulation or summary of effective public relations approaches school systems can use.

School communication with the public should be clear and understandable. Any school information, written, or spoken, that can't be understood by the public "has a built in booby

trap and is bound to blow up" in the school system's face sooner or later (Hilldrup, 1982, p. 93). Hilldrup (1982) poses the following question when addressing the need for clarity in school public relations:

How often do school publications seem to be written only for those who speak a foreign language, that of the educationist? The barber, mechanic, and elevator operator are the people who pay the taxes, and who furnish the children for the public schools (p. 193).

It is the schools responsibility to communicate with all publics, the barber, mechanic, etc. Hilldrup (1982) maintains that information that can't be understood by all publics should be changed until it can be. He warns though, that even though communication should be clear and understandable, it should not patronize the public by being too simple or vague. Talking down to the public, Hilldrup (1982) concludes, will be recognized by them and they will be "certain to resent it" (p. 93).

Some of the mass communication vehicles this writer investigated were newspapers, newsletters, television - both videotapes and cable - radio, telephones supported by computer technology.

Fredericks (1990), in affirming the need to flood parents with information, states:

...parents should be flooded with lots of written communication and visual information over an extended period of time. One shot publicity campaigns are not sufficient to provide parents with the information they need to become involved and stay involved...(p. 424).

Newspaper. A common and effective vehicle for flooding parents with information is the local newspaper. Walling (1982) notes that:

Despite the advances of television as a medium of communications, newspapers remain primary sources of news. In part, the newspaper's success can be linked directly to its ability to present in-depth coverage. In some small communities the newspaper serves as the only vehicle for community information...In addition, newspapers have the elements of...extended usability (pp. 155-156).

What makes a good newspaper story? According to Armistead (1982), "reporters are looking for something that is timely and new" (p. 16). Potential stories may include: student awards, new trends in instruction, how the school system is responding to state or national trends, everything visual, peer tutoring, parent and community involvement, foreign exchange students, concerts, sporting events, vocational education, unusual instructional programs, student involvement in the community, etc. (Armistead, 1982).

Newsletter. Another vehicle for providing parents with information is the monthly school newsletter. Armistead (1982), claims that the monthly newsletter has proved to be an effective means of informal communication. Gold (1990) takes the concept of school newsletters one step further - into the classroom. She suggests that the best way for a parent to know what is being taught in individual classrooms and classroom events, is through a classroom newsletter. She concludes that this form of mass communication is also interpersonal in nature.

Television. "Television" Walling (1982) suggests, "is not actual personal contact but it is sometimes an admirable substitute" (p. 153). Kindred et al. (1990) contends that television has a greater impact than many other forms of school public relations, i.e., radio, because "people see the news and other events in action" (p. 254) and because of this, television "adds credibility to the reporting of the event" (p. 254). Walling (1982) suggests two ways to use television as a school public relations tool: 1) school or district made videos to inform patrons of programs, educational concepts, parenting, etc. The advantage of these videos is noted by Kindred et al. (1990):

The school made movie or videotape production is an effective audiovisual device for furnishing information to the public. It permits the showing of actual conditions and practices and effectively

captures motion - something that slides cannot do...Movies and videos play an important role in the community relations program (p. 266).

2) Cable antenna television, (CATV) can be used to disseminate information about school events, news, etc. Another way to make use of television may be to invite the television media in for a tour of the school or a classroom (Wherry, 1986). Television stations "give a percentage of their broadcasting schedule to public affairs programs" (Kindred et al., 1990, p. 254). School systems that use public broadcasting time effectively will find that more personal relationships are established with the communities they serve (Kindred et al., 1990).

Radio. Radio has many advantages over other forms of media. Radio stations, like television, give a percentage of broadcasting time to public affairs. Armistead (1982) makes several suggestions for appropriate public service time:

"...upcoming events, deadlines for scholarship exams, important meetings at the school, ways that the community can become involved in the school, and adult education opportunities...all of these would be potential public service time (p. 17).

"Radio can be especially helpful to educators, because most radio stations feature short hourly or even twice hourly news segments that include some local news" (Armistead, 1982, p. 17). According to Walling (1982) educators should take full advantage of the school public relations benefits radio has to offer.

Computer Assisted Telephones. In the 1990's the application of new technologies are opening links/lines of communication between schools and the communities they serve (Bauch, 1989). Jerold P. Bauch (1989), Professor of Early Childhood Education, George Peabody, College for Teachers, Vanderbilt University, propose the need for schools to try a new form of communicating with parents developed by him: "computer assisted telephones," named the "Transparent School Model" (p. 33). Bauch (1989) declares that the "Transparent School Model can literally open the classroom to home on a daily basis and in very little time...the telephone becomes the channel for routine communication" (p. 33). The "Transparent School Model" is essentially two things. First, it is an answering machine or electronic mailbox that allows teachers to enter one to three minute messages "that describes learning activities, homework, and how parents can support the child's study at home" (Bauch, 1989, p. 33). Parents can call in and get the messages anytime. Second, Bauch explains, "the Transparent School Model is a computer

based system called Compu-Call" (p. 33).

Bauch (1989) sums up Compu-Call in the following way:

Teachers use Compu-call to store messages in a computer and direct the autodialer to place phone calls to all parents or specific groups of parents. The next morning they can use the system to run a printout of the calls completed. Compu-call also has an integrated attendance management program, which invites parents to become actively involved in helping to improve school attendance (rather than simply reporting absenteeism as earlier calling machines have done (p. 33).

According to Bauch (1989), since the "Transparent School Model" has been used in several pilot schools, twice as many parent/teacher contacts have been made. This writer researched other computer assisted telephone devices, but the "Transparent School Model" was the most current device.

INTERPERSONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

According to Jackson (1986), information in itself (i.e., newsletters) does not improve public relations in a school system. The key to good public relations is involving teachers, administrators, students, and community members in the process of promoting the school (Jackson, 1986). Hilldrup (1982) contends that school personnel "should never

allow printed materials or broadcasts to take priority over personal contacts with parents" and other community members (p. 200). Hilldrump (1982) suggests several "personal touch" strategies for building/improving school public relations:

1. Home Visitations - once a common phenomenon of behavior by good teachers, home visits have lost fashion...teachers feel such visits are outside the scope of their contract. However...such visitations...can more than return the dollars invested.
2. Use of Student Displays at Public Meetings - The display of student art and crafts...is a relatively easy (and effective) public relations technique to master.
3. Recognizing Teacher Upgrading - Teachers who earn graduate degrees should have that fact called to the attention of the community (p. 203).

Jackson (1986) suggests other personal touches necessary to build/improve school public relations:

1. Open Houses - Dozens of kinds of purposes to choose from. Be creative. When they are well planned and details are attended to, no activity can surpass them.
2. School PR Teams - Call them CR (Community Relations) if you prefer. Members can take an active role in identifying and reaching out to opinion leaders...

3. Neighborhood Relations Visitations - Where principals or CRT team members meet with major opinion leaders...
4. Localized Surveys - For letting local people know by action that you care about their views and suggestions.

Bruce Davis (1989), principal of Ralph Waldo Emerson School in Rosemead, California, in discussing interpersonal communications, contends that no detail is too small when it comes to communication. Davis (1989) uses many interpersonal methods in his school, some of which are listed below:

1. Sending thank you notes and letters of praise to parents and students constantly - but only when they are deserved.
2. Write to parents asking them what they think about the school's service to them, encouraging them to write back.
3. When a child receives an award of excellence, the parents are called, congratulated, and told why their child received the award (p. 22).

Another somewhat unique approach to interpersonal communication is inviting parents to school to swap places with their children for the day. Wherry (1986) sums up the SWAP program as follows:

SWAP Day is rapidly becoming a tradition in secondary schools. The idea is for the students to swap places with a parent for the day, with parents attending classes and the student staying home. If a parent can't attend, the student can borrow an adult from the community instead. There is nothing like firsthand experience in your school to give the parents and community an excellent look at education today (p. 10).

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

FROM A MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Administrators, teachers, and parents all favor parental involvement in education (Chavkin, 1989). With this in mind, it would seem reasonable that parent involvement would take place, "however, this is not always the case, particularly with minority students" (Chavkin, 1989, p. 276).

Public relations programs that reach out to minority parents and facilitate parental involvement in the process of education, is lacking in many U.S. school districts. The effects of the above lack of parental involvement is evidenced by the lower academic performance and the lower number of minority students who graduate from high school. According to former Secretary of Education, William Bennett (1988), the high school completion rate for black youth is 10% lower (65%) than that of the national average of 75% and the high school completion rate for Hispanic youth is 20%

lower (55%).

Even though prediction based on census figures suggest that minorities become the majority population in some states by the turn of the century, some school districts simply do not, or will not take a proactive stance in designing the appropriate strategies, structures, or programs for involving minority parents (McLaughlin, 1987). According to Sergiovanni (1989), the above challenge to involve parents in the educational process must be met by school districts if they are to be considered successful. It is Sergiovanni's (1989) contention that:

"...parents want a complete education for their children...Indeed our society requires a complete education for it's youth if it is to survive and flourish. What is needed is that our young become cultured and educated citizens, able to participate fully in our economic and social society...These aspirations include all of America's youth including urban and rural poor and minority students..." (p. 32).

Congruent with providing all youth with a successful education is involving all parents in the process; it is the schools responsibility to bridge the gap between it and the parents via a successful public relations program. Involving parents must transcend all races. Parents of all races want to be involved with their children's education. Chavkin and

Williams (1985) surveyed over 3,000 parents and 4,000 educators in the southwestern region of the U.S. about their attitudes regarding parent involvement. One third of the parents were either Black or Hispanic. They found that:

"...more than 95% of both parents and educators expressed strong support for the idea of parent involvement in education. Their results clearly demonstrated that all parents regardless of ethnicity or minority status are concerned about their children's education. In addition minority parents wanted to assume active roles in their children's schooling" (p. 278).

Clearly, inherent to the success of a school district is it's ability to adapt and change to the reality needs of minority parents. These school districts are confronted with many obstacles when attempting to meet the above needs of parents. Consequently, many school districts have in place latent or semi-developed parent involvement programs geared toward minorities. According to Chavkin (1989) some of the obstacles encountered by school districts when attempting to involve minority parents are:

1. Minority parents often feel awkward about approaching a school,
2. Minority parents sometimes are intimidated by the staff and structure of a school, and

3. Many minority parents lack a high school education themselves.

Lynch (1987) maintains that linguistics play a major role regarding parent involvement. Many minority parents do not speak the same language and are therefore hesitant to become involved in school. Compounding the problem is the need for quality translation. Often, in many schools, "the translators available speak a 'textbook' language that is unknown to the families they are trying to serve" (p. 106).

Greenberg (1989) points out another reason minority parents often will not get involved; and more specifically, "will not come to school" (p. 70). Stereotyping, Greenberg (1989) maintains:

...influence the efforts - or lack of real efforts - of many educators when it comes to the matter of parent inclusions. Naively, many well-meaning professionals who are not personally prejudiced pass on society's institutional prejudices.

Until we acknowledge the problem - that many teacher education institutions and many school districts have the same subtle race...as do the rest of America's institutions and systems and have a bad attitude toward parents and teachers working together as equals - we will not solve it (p. 71).

According to Chavkin (1989), schools not only face obstacles when attempting to develop programs geared toward

involving minority parents, they face many barriers; circumstances indicative of particularly low income minority parents that hinder their participation. Below is a summary of what Chavkin (1989) refers to as minority parent involvement barriers:

1. Parents of low income often lack transportation to and from school making it almost impossible to get involved,
2. Parents of low income often work long hours and therefore find it very difficult to get involved,
3. Parents of low income often cannot afford child care and therefore are hesitant to come to school.

Lynch (1987) contends that low income minorities also face the following additional barriers: 1) lack of resources to communicate with school personnel, and 2) lack of knowledge on how to communicate with school personnel.

In order for school districts to successfully develop programs geared toward involving minority parents and solving the above problems, districts must supersede the aforementioned obstacles and barriers; designing programs that are inclusive for all parents, not just white middle class parents.

Based on the research from many educators, this writer suggests that in order to solve the problem of minority parent exclusion from schools, the following must take place: school systems must acknowledge that a problem does exist (Greenberg, 1989); school systems must develop a

comprehensive public relations plan that is directed at all parents, not just white middle class; districts must educate teachers about "the merits of involving (minority) parents in their children's education as well as educate them about specific models of parent involvement that have proved successful/effective" (McLaughlin and Shields, 1987, p. 159); parents must be made more aware of Parent Advisory Committees (Cochran and Phelps, 1980); school communication sent home to minority parents must be in a "simple, readable, jargon free language spoken by the family whether in print form, computerized phone messages, local cable television, radio, or in other ways" (Brandt, 1989, p. 25); when necessary, provide transportation to and from scheduled meetings (Lynch, 1987); "provide child care" when needed (Lynch, 1987, p. 109). In addition, Chavkin (1989) suggests that: "schools devise clear mechanisms for parental involvement" (p. 279); "educators collaborate with parents to develop clear statements about the goals of parent involvement" (p. 283); "minority parents are asked how they would like to be involved with their children's education" (p. 283); schools offer a variety of involvement opportunities to minority parents; educators are sensitive to parents' skill levels, estimates of available time, work schedules, and individual preferences; schools provide quality translating services for meetings.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study is to provide the Sunnyside School District with several comprehensive action plans designed to improve community/public relations within the district boundaries and to increase the interaction/involvement between the school district, parents, and community.

In September, 1991, the Sunnyside School District committed itself to Long Range Strategic Planning for the purpose of growth, improvement, and expansion. The planning was to be guided by the Sunnyside School District Belief Statement (see Appendix A), Mission Statement (see Appendix B), and Strategic Parameters (see Appendix C).

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic Planning defines a vision of where a school district wants to be in the future and uses that vision to guide decision making (Gibbs, 1989). Strategic Planning is a process used for producing change; it yields a results product, a strategic plan, which is a blue print for action. It points the school district toward needs and draws energy and capital together to meet the district's needs.

STRATEGIES TO BE DEVELOPED BY ACTION PLANNING GROUPS

A cross section of thirty community members, led by the school district, met for three days to discuss and propose, in draft form, a Belief Statement, a Mission Statement, Strategic Parameters, and finally, based on the aforementioned draft, Broad Strategies/Goals to be implemented by the Sunnyside School District over a five year period of time. The strategies were to be developed by smaller community based "action planning groups." Each group was chaired by either a school district or community leader. The strategies were as follows:

1. To develop a program that allows at risk students to succeed.
2. To reduce the dropout rate.
3. To pursue all sources of funding for facilities and programs.
4. To develop and implement a program of recruitment and hiring of quality staff.
5. To assess and improve student achievement.
6. To develop a proactive district discipline program.
7. To develop a lower valley skills center.
8. To develop a program that will increase the interaction/involvement between the district, parents, and community.

This writer chaired the "communications committee," to develop strategy number eight: Develop a program that will increase the interaction/involvement between the district, parents, and community. The abbreviated name, "Communications Committee," was agreed upon by the group.

All committees met in October to begin the planning process. The process was guided by suggestions/guidelines from the "Cambridge Management Group" - a strategic action consultant group hired by the district, and from the Sunnyside School District's central office personnel.

STEPS TO THE PLANNING PROCESS

STEP ONE - STRATEGY ANALYSIS

The "communications committee's" first two meetings were in October, 1990. The purpose of the first meeting was to get acquainted with one another and informally discuss the assigned strategy. The second meeting's purpose was to interpret the key words in the strategy organized through various ways such as: brainstorming, group discussion, and consensus making. Each key word's definition, as it relates to the strategy, was agreed upon.

STEP TWO - INFORMATION GATHERING, QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STRATEGY

At the third meeting in November, the action planning team identified questions that would need to be answered in

order to develop the strategy. The main question the "communications committee" centered on was "What is currently being done in the Sunnyside School District concerning the strategy?" Individual committee members were assigned to answer the above question prior to the next scheduled meeting.

At the fourth meeting in December, those individuals who were assigned the task of determining what was being done in the district, reported to the group. The group then, through discussion and consensus, determined from which resources, information would be gathered and how it would be gathered. The "communications group" decided to break into two groups to gather information. The first group asked patrons and school employees what they wanted out of the Sunnyside School District regarding communication and community-school relations. The second group examined what other school districts throughout the country were doing in community relations. During the information gathering process, this writer investigated educational journals, educational pamphlets, educational books on public relations, other related material, and discussed with colleagues, ideas for improving community relations in the Sunnyside School District.

After more than six weeks of investigating, the team met in January several times to compile, analyze, and summarize the gathered material. From these meetings, ideas were gathered that could be used in the action plans.

STEP THREE - ACTION PLAN WRITING

Based on the ideas generated from the previous step, broad objectives followed by succinct action plans were written to develop the strategy. The planning team, during the month of February, 1991, divided into four groups; each group working on the development of a specific objective. The objectives were then presented to the entire planning group for approval.

STEP FOUR - COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

In March, 1991, the planning team completed a cost benefit analysis (see Appendix D) for each action plan written. After more than thirty hours of meetings, writing the benefits was an easy task. The costs were, for the most part, estimated.

STEP FIVE - PRESENTATION OF THE PLANS

This writer presented the final draft of the action plans to the thirty member strategic action committee in April, 1991. The committee enthusiastically approved the action plans developed by the planning team.

At a special board meeting held on May 2, 1991, the final draft of the strategic plans were presented to the Sunnyside School District Board for approval. The Sunnyside School Board approved the plans at the next scheduled meeting on May 30, 1991.

CHAPTER IV

PROJECT REPORTS

The following is a presentation of a comprehensive community/public relations plan designed by a fifteen member action planning team, to increase the interaction/involvement between the Sunnyside School District, parents, and community members. The plan is divided into seven broad objectives. Each broad object is followed by succinct action steps aimed at achieving the objective. The public relations plan represents over thirty team hours of discussion, information gathering, and blending of ideas. As a result of the following action plans, it is hoped that public support will increase for education in the Sunnyside School District and, because of increased support, parent/community involvement will increase. If parent/community involvement increases, optimal levels of student achievement should be realized and maintained.

ACTION PLAN NUMBER ONE:
DEVELOP THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM

Action Steps

1. Promote and coordinate the development of the action plans.
2. Promote and coordinate other activities, events, etc., that would increase the interaction/involvement between the district, parents, and community.

ACTION PLAN NUMBER TWO:
TO IMPROVE WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATION
WITH THE COMMUNITY IN BOTH ENGLISH AND SPANISH

Action Steps

1. Make all oral and written communication with the community in both English and Spanish. Communications will include, but not be limited to: radio, school videos, public announcements, school phone message services, public events, home visitations, etc.
2. Provide for each school building effective written and oral translating services.
3. Enhance the current District Patron Newsletter by doing the following:
 - a. Produce monthly issues
 - b. Make the outward appearance colorful

- c. Continue to have teacher produce feature articles
 - d. Recognize student and parent volunteers.
4. Provide patrons of the school district with a yearly event/informational calendar. This calendar would include some or all of the following:
- a. Basic facts about the district, i.e., size, number of students, number of staff, etc.
 - b. Pictures of the administration, school board, buildings, programs, people and things that represent the Sunnyside School District, etc.
 - c. School and District policies.
 - d. Holidays, conferences, etc.
 - e. Advice to parents about helping their children's education.
5. Each school provide parents with a handbook which includes basic facts about the school, it's programs, and other pertinent information.
6. Provide school district patrons with an informational brochure describing functions of the school board. At school board meetings, provide for citizen input at the beginning and end of the agenda.
7. Provide to district personnel standardized written communication in Spanish and English for frequently used messages. Below is an example:

SPANISH

Su hijo no esta completando
las tareas.

ENGLISH

Your child is not completing
his/her assignments.

8. Communicate with the public by using KREW (English/Spanish) and KDNA (Spanish) radio stations' Public Services Time. Some suggestions for programs are as follows:
 - a. Have the radio stations conduct weekly interviews with district personnel. The interviews may include some of the following suggested topics: things of interest to the community, positive news, classroom activities, student or classroom accomplishments, new concepts in school or home education, sports, testing, "why reading to your children is important," etc.
 - b. "Radio Shorts" that would inform community members of pertinent information such as schedules, lunch menus, sporting events, concerts, plays, etc.
 - c. Recognition of volunteer community members.
 - d. Recognition of teacher accomplishments.
 - e. Recognition of student accomplishments.
9. Purchase four closed circuit FM systems with headsets for simultaneous translating at public meetings.
10. Designate one or more district translators to operate the closed circuit FM systems.
11. Provide additional telephones to teachers for the purpose of communicating with parents, other teachers in the building, and office personnel.

12. Provide each school with a computer assisted phone message system. This system would include pre-recorded information in both English and Spanish about such things as:
 - a. School events.
 - b. Pertinent school information.
 - c. Attendance.
 - d. Learning Activities
13. Continue the use of Parent Advisory Committees. Provide appropriate training to PAC leaders.

ACTION PLAN THREE:

TO DEVELOP A PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

Action Steps

1. Arrange for parents to attend regional and state parent involvement conference such as the regional PTA conference.
2. Schedule "neighborhood public meetings" to dialogue with parents and community members as well as to discuss their concerns with district personnel.
3. Conduct an opinion survey of parents, students, community, and staff at least every two years.
4. Develop a district-wide recognition plan for parents, staff, students, and other community members.
5. Principals will be encouraged to schedule monthly

- a. Before open house, conduct a parent meeting for the purposes of explaining and discussing such things as policies, procedures, classroom practices, testing, grading, etc.
- b. "Showcase" student achievement.
- c. Recognize parents who attend by giving them a pen, bumper sticker, certificate, etc.
- d. Provide translation for monolingual Spanish speaking parents.
- e. Provide transportation for parents who otherwise could not attend.
- f. Provide child care for parents who otherwise could not attend.
- g. Encourage teachers to present a "Teacher Profile" to parents which would include information about the teacher such as: college attended, degree, interests, family, hobbies, etc.
- h. Have teachers give an overview of classroom activities and student expectations in the form of a group presentation.
- i. Present parents with a comprehensive parent handbook which may include information on attendance, insurance, sports, school hours, curriculum, staffing, the school layout, discipline, inner school organizations, student opportunities, graduation requirements, school policies and procedures, a calendar, etc.

insurance, sports, school hours, curriculum, staffing, the school layout, discipline, inner school organizations, student opportunities, graduation requirements, school policies and procedures, a calendar, etc.

7. Principals will provide new patrons to the school district with the following:
 - a. A tour of their respective buildings.
 - b. A printed informational handbook.
 - c. Information about parent involvement.
8. Provide parents with educational opportunities to develop skills in such areas as:
 - a. Parenting skills.
 - b. Literacy.
 - c. Drug abuse prevention.
 - d. Self esteem.
 - e. Early childhood development.
 - f. Importance of parental involvement.
9. When appropriate, provide child care when parents are involved in meetings or volunteering.
10. Encourage teachers to make home visitations.
11. Invite parents to swap places with their children for a day.

ACTION PLAN NUMBER FOUR:
TO IMPROVE VISUAL COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

Action Steps

1. Coordinate with local television stations to provide, but not limited to the following:
 - a. Frequent positive news coverage: academic successes, recognition of accomplishments by staff and students, innovations in instruction, upcoming events, other pertinent information.
 - b. A Public Service Announcement Program that will include the above information - suggested title "What's Happening in the Sunnyside Schools."

ACTION PLAN NUMBER FIVE:
TO HELP ALL DISTRICT PERSONNEL
BECOME GOOD SPOKESPERSONS FOR THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Action Steps

1. Provide an informational orientation for all staff at the beginning of the school year. At this meeting furnish staff with a folder containing information about programs in the school district, facilities available to the public, schedules, goals, milestones, expected curriculum changes in each school, district personnel,

programs available for parents to get involved in education, communication tips, news release forms and procedures, etc.

2. Orally review with all staff the above information at the beginning of each school year.
3. Provide for the development of staff members to effectively communicate with the public.

ACTION PLAN NUMBER SIX:

TO DEVELOP AN ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

Action Steps

1. Produce and provide to school district patrons, an illustrated district annual performance report which includes, but is not limited to, the following information:
 - a. District goals achieved - plus new goals.
 - b. Student performance - test scores, achievements, etc.
 - c. Curriculum and instruction changes and other related information.
 - d. Organization and management - i.e., cost saving efforts, facilities, finance, etc.
 - e. Parent and community involvement.
 - f. Projections for the future - i.e., district enrollment, staffing, new programs, etc.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

The purpose of this project was to provide the Sunnyside School District with several comprehensive action plans designed to improve public relations within the district boundaries and to increase the interaction/involvement between the school district, parents, and community.

The action plans were developed by a fifteen member "action Planning group." The group consisted of a cross section of community members and school district staff. The process the group used for developing the plans was divided into five steps: 1) Strategy Analysis; 2) Information Gathering; 3) Action Plan Writing; 4) Cost Benefit Analysis; and 5) Presentation of the Action Plans. Guiding the planning process was a strategic planning consultant group and the district's central office personnel.

The Sunnyside School District's Board of Directors accepted the action plans on May 31, 1991.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this writer contends that all students, parents, patrons, teachers, and administrators, will benefit from an effective school public relations program. The central purpose for improving, enhancing, and maintaining it though, is to bolster student achievement; or in simpler terms, to help kids. In order to help kids, parents must get involved. To facilitate parental involvement, the school system must reach out to parents through new and innovative ways; informing them clearly about their children's education and the school system's purposes. Continued understanding of a school system will result in continued support for the system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. All school districts, regardless of demographics, should strive to improve, enhance, and maintain their school's public relations programs.
2. In order to "help kids," parents and community members must get involved with the educational process.
3. All the action plans designed by the "Communications Action Planning Team" should be developed by the Sunnyside School District in the near future.

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APPENDIX A

BELIEFS OF THE SUNNYSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

BELIEFS OF THE SUNNYSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

1. We believe that the development of individual potential is the key to success.
2. We believe that every person is responsible for their actions and destiny.
3. We believe that everyone has the responsibility to be a contributing citizen in our society.
4. We believe that every person is entitled to an equal opportunity to pursue their potential and achieve their highest level.
5. We believe in the worth and dignity of each individual without prejudice.
6. We believe that self-esteem enhances learning.
7. We believe that a family's commitment to quality education is vital to student success.
8. We believe that fair competition accelerates achievement.
9. We believe we must adapt to a changing world.
10. We believe that the ideals of democracy, honesty, patriotism, citizenship, and respect for the rights of others are fundamental to our society.
11. We believe that quality education is the shared obligation of the school, students, family, and community.

12. We believe that by increasing expectations, student performance will increase.
13. We believe that school officials and staff are accountable to the public.
14. We believe that creativity and innovation promote growth.
15. We believe that we are entitled to a safe, caring, and orderly school environment.
16. We believe that the on-going evaluation of the educational system is essential to the continuing development of a quality educational program.

APPENDIX B

MISSION STATEMENT OF SUNNYSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

MISSION STATEMENT OF SUNNYSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

The mission of the Sunnyside School District, a rural, multicultural community, is to produce responsible, productive, critical thinking citizens capable of adapting to an ever changing world, by providing a system of quality education based on appropriate curriculum, effective instruction, community support and family commitment.

APPENDIX C
PARAMETERS OF THE SUNNYSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

PARAMETERS OF THE SUNNYSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

1. We will never discriminate against any individual or group.
2. No program will be initiated unless it survives cost/benefit analysis and sets in place evaluation procedures.
3. We will always hire the best person for the job.
4. Educational decisions will be made in the best interests of students.
5. Community use of facilities will continue.
6. Our yearly ending fund balance will not fall below 5% of our budget.

APPENDIX D
COST/BENEFIT ANALYSES FOR ACTION PLANS

COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR ACTION PLAN NUMBER ONE

STEP-COST	BENEFITS
1. One PR person: \$40,000-\$50,000 year.	<p>It develops a sense of pride in the community.</p> <p>It improves the district's image.</p> <p>It solidifies a network between the district, community, and various news media.</p> <p>It enhances two-way communication between the district and community.</p> <p>It facilitates better planning in the district.</p> <p>The community will have a better perception of the district.</p>

COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR ACTION PLAN NUMBER TWO

STEP-COST	BENEFITS
1. Bilingual Staff: \$14,000-\$50,000 per year per staff member.	Monolingual Spanish speaking community members will be encouraged to become full partners in the education of their children.
2. Bilingual Staff: \$14,000-\$50,000 per year per staff member.	There will be increased interaction between community, teachers, admini- strators, parents, students, etc.
3. Four extra Issues: Cost will vary.	Patrons will be better informed of district news.
4. One Calendar Per Family: Approx. \$10,000 per year.	Quick access to information for parents.
5. One Handbook per Parent per Year: Approx. \$600.00 per school.	Better informed parents will be more willing to participate in the process of educating their children.

6. 500 Brochures: Patrons will have an increased awareness of the school board's purpose.
Approx. \$250.00 per year.
7. One Standardized Reproducible Pad per Teacher: Initial cost per school - Approx. \$100.00. There will be interaction between a child's teacher and his/her monolingual Spanish speaking parent.
8. PS Time: No cost - Radio Shorts: Costs vary. Dissemination of information to parents who cannot read - Patrons will be better informed - Radio brings the school to the community in a different, and sometimes better way - Parents/patrons that are recognized will be more willing to get involved.
9. FM System: \$4,000 per transmitter Monolingual Spanish speaking community members will attend more public meetings.
10. Staff to Translate: \$14,000-\$50,000 per year. Monolingual Spanish speaking community members will attend more public meetings.

11. Telephone in Each Room: Approx.
\$4,500 per school year.

Parents will develop a personal relationship with the teacher - Increased interaction between the teacher and parent.
12. Phone System:
\$2,000 per school

There will be quick access to information for parents, students, and patrons.
13. PAC Training:
Costs vary.

There will be increased responsibility for parents in the educational process - parents will feel more like they are partners in educating their children.

COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR ACTION PLAN NUMBER THREE

STEP-COST	BENEFITS
1. Conference: Costs vary.	Parents will take ownership in the education of their children.
2. Meetings: No cost.	It will make parents/patrons feel more comfortable with what's going on in the district.
3. Survey: \$1,000 every 2 years.	Parents/patrons will readily support the district.
4. Recognition Pins, Stickers, etc.: \$1,000 per year.	Parents/patrons will feel like their efforts are worthwhile.
5. Meetings: No cost.	It will make individual schools more visible - increased parent awareness.
6. Open House: No cost.	It will make individual schools more visible - increased parent awareness. •

7. Tour: No cost. It will help new patrons feel comfortable with the school, environment, teacher, principal, etc.
8. Educational Opportunities: No cost. Parents will place a higher value on education if they are educated - parents will learn parenting skills - parents will get involved in the process of educating their children.
9. Cost of Child Care: Cost will vary. Some parents will be more willing to: Attend conferences and meetings, volunteer their time, etc.
10. Home Visitations: No cost. Parents will feel more comfortable with their child's teacher and be more willing to participate.
11. Swap Day: No cost. Parents will feel more comfortable with their child's teacher and be more willing to participate.

COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR ACTION PLAN NUMBER FOUR

STEP-COST	BENEFITS
1. Public Service Time: No cost.	School information will reach people that are not receptive to other forms of communication - sometimes information can be presented more effectively through TV - TV brings the school to the community.

COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR ACTION PLAN NUMBER FIVE

STEP-COST	BENEFITS
1. Folder: \$200 per year.	The staff will be better informed and therefore communicate information better to students, community members, and parents.
	A less likely chance that misinformation will be communicated by staff members.
	Better public relations will result.
	All staff will communicate the same thing about the same topic - continuity and congruence in thought, policies, mission, etc.

COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR ACTION PLAN NUMBER SIX

STEP-COST	BENEFITS
1. Report: Printing staff time - \$5,000 to \$10,000 year.	<p>It will provide a track record of the school district.</p> <p>It will promote a positive image of the school district.</p> <p>It is a selling tool for recruitment and grants.</p> <p>It shows that the district focuses on it's goals and mission.</p> <p>It shows that the district cares about it's performance.</p> <p>It is a catalyst to keep the district on track in the future.</p> <p>It reinforces the importance of the district in the community.</p>

COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR ACTION PLAN NUMBER FIVE

STEP-COST	BENEFITS
1. Folder: \$200 per year.	<p>The staff will be better informed and therefore communicate information better to students, community members, and parents.</p> <p>A less likely chance that misinformation will be communicated by staff members.</p> <p>Better public relations will result.</p> <p>All staff will communicate the same thing about the same topic - continuity and congruence in thought, policies, mission, etc.</p>

COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR ACTION PLAN NUMBER SIX

STEP-COST	BENEFITS
1. Report: Printing staff time - \$5,000 to \$10,000 year.	<p>It will provide a track record of the school district.</p> <p>It will promote a positive image of the school district.</p> <p>It is a selling tool for recruitment and grants.</p> <p>It shows that the district focuses on it's goals and mission.</p> <p>It shows that the district cares about it's performance.</p> <p>It is a catalyst to keep the district on track in the future.</p> <p>It reinforces the importance of the district in the community.</p>