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ABSTRACT

This report advises school systems of the numerous public relations resources available and challenges schools to put communication ideas into action. The ideas described, based on exhibits prepared by selected school systems at the invitation of the NSPRA, have been developed in many different types of school districts across the country. The cases described include a teacher representative assembly formed in Fremont, California, to overcome the suspicions and mistrust among teachers generated by consolidation; a special campaign in Grove City, Iowa, to promote a successful Federally financed project; an emergency planning program in Minneapolis, Minnesota, that gives individual schools a backup team from the central staff; and an overall effort in the Bronx, New York, to create a true community school within the boundaries of a neighborhood fractured by poverty and language barriers. (Author/LLR)

Communication Ideas in Action

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Published by
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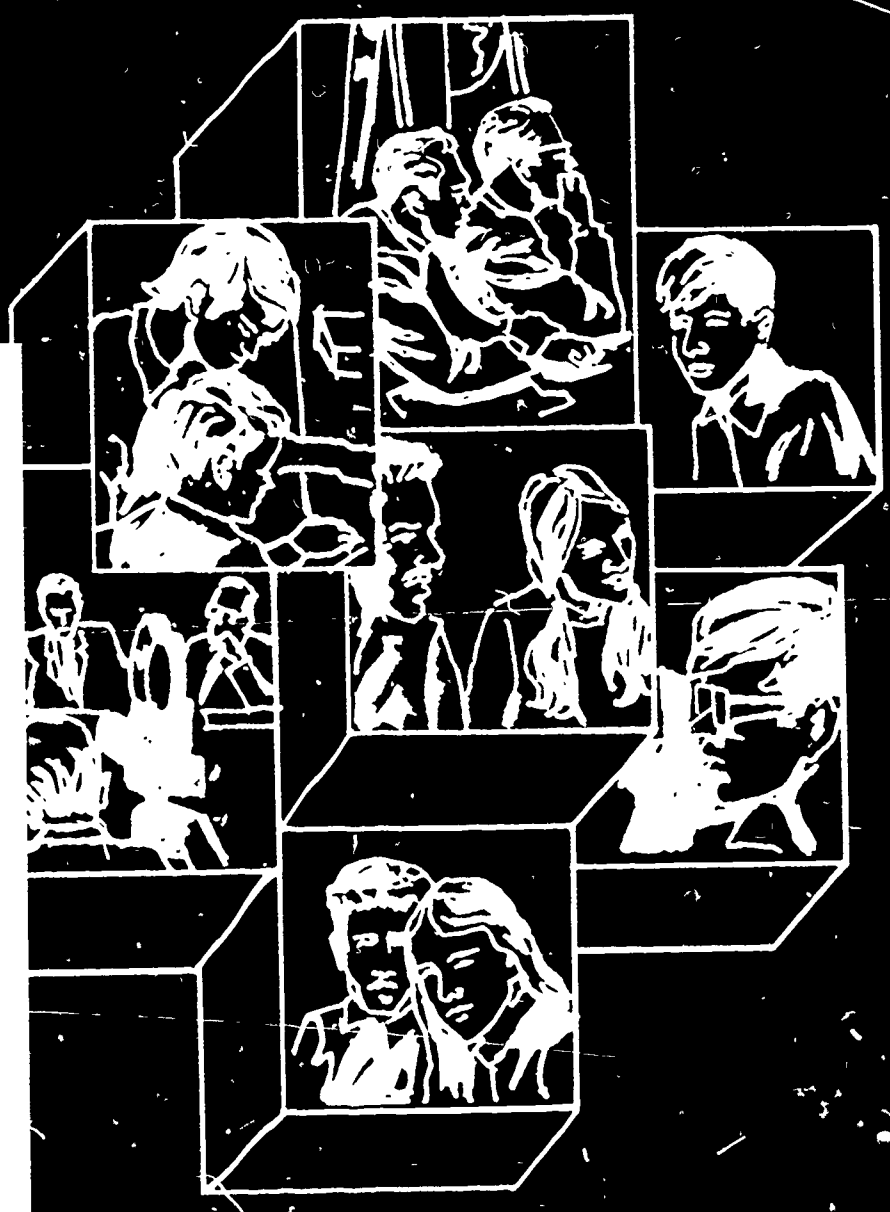
personnel of eight public school systems



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Introduction

The word *communication* implies action. Those responsible for school communication are accustomed to thinking of the major share of their activity in terms of paperwork—news releases, reports, brochures, agenda for meetings. These certainly form the basis for school public relations, but a communication idea in action—as the experiences described in this booklet illustrate—can go considerably beyond paperwork and be much more rewarding for doing so.

Examples of communication ideas in action are a teachers assembly that overcomes the divisions caused by consolidation; a special campaign to promote a successful federally financed project; emergency planning that gives individual schools a backup team from the central staff; or an overall effort to create a true community school out of a neighborhood fractured by poverty and a language barrier.

The communication ideas described in this booklet are based upon exhibits prepared by selected school systems at the invitation of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). They were developed in many different types of school districts across the country. Each district solved its problems in a unique way.

NSPRA's purpose in publishing this report is to inform school systems of the myriad of public relations resources available to them—and to challenge them to put communication ideas into action.


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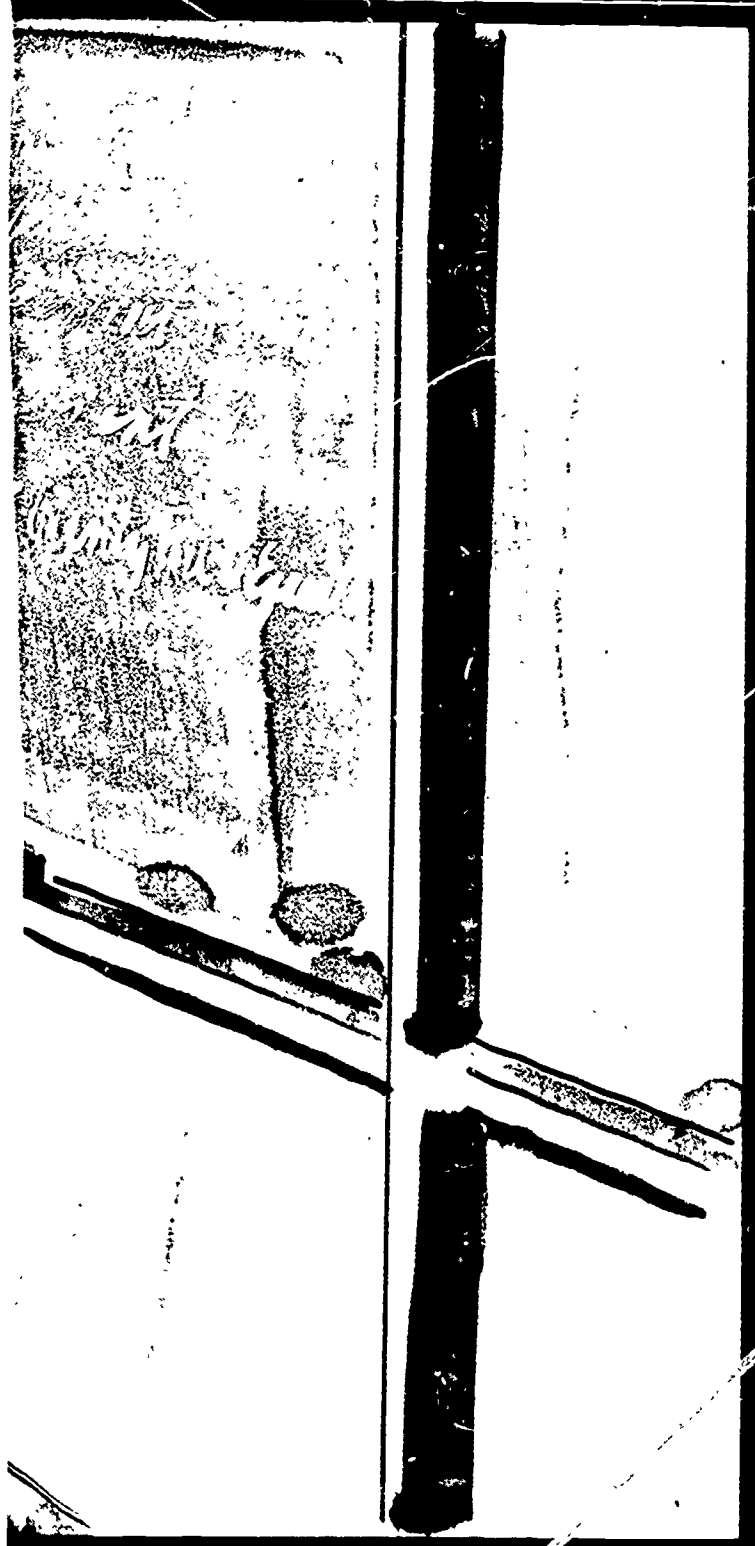
Personalizing a Big System



For many years the American school system has been getting bigger—and smaller. Over the past decade a special effort has been made to reduce the number of school districts in the country. Between 1960 and 1970 the number of district units dropped from 40,520 to 18,904. The move to consolidate districts involves more than economy. Larger school districts, according to administration experts, can provide better quality and a broader range of education for their students. Usually transition to larger units has been achieved relatively easily; often it has meant phasing out tiny elementary-only districts or merely transferring the tax records of nonoperating districts. When consolidation moves to the suburban fringes, however, the problems are greater. Traumatic as the consolidation may seem to parents and students, usually it is the teaching staff which is most directly affected and concerned about its security and role in the new, larger system. As the Fremont Unified District of Fremont, California, learned, transition created a communications crisis—and a resultant long-range solution that is making the school system stronger than ever and truly unified.

Three years after the Fremont school system was created from six formerly separate elementary and high school districts, it was still having morale problems. Fremont, a 32,000-pupil district sprawled over 100 square miles of suburban areas, had not been able to overcome the suspicions and mistrust among teachers that had been generated by the consolidation.

Teachers complained of a "lack of communications." Administrators perceived the problem more as a lack of personal, face-to-face contacts, which perhaps had been the principal virtue of the smaller school districts.

Elementary teachers saw the new school district as being secondary-oriented because high school personnel were given key positions in the newly consolidated system. Several elementary administrators left or accepted lesser positions when the central staff was reduced. Some high school teachers felt they had sacrificed a possible salary increase to permit elementary salaries to be raised in accordance with a newly adopted single salary schedule. School board meetings became angry arenas, where two teacher organizations battled for support by requesting higher salaries and reduced class sizes.

At this point, the major element in the communications program was a staff newsletter, which obviously needed to be improved. It was improved to the point where now the *Fremonitor* is a well-written, concise, and regular link between the central office and the teachers. In addition, the information staff prepared and distributed professional-level materials: recruitment brochures, orientation and teacher handbooks, and explanations of curriculum development. Another prescription called for a "communications committee" of teachers and administrators—12 members chosen from all geographic sections and grade levels—to study the problems. The very first meeting of the committee revealed the depth of teacher concern:

"They dug vigorously into everything from lost records in the personnel office to the formula for figuring class size. Each of these, along with every other irritant, was labeled a communications problem: poor contact with upper echelons, the need for sharing knowledge at and between grade levels, the need to involve all school personnel in policy development, and the value of an organizational chart to spell out responsibilities in the district."

Various recommendations came from the sometimes hot committee sessions. They included more teacher involvement in curriculum planning, strengthening of in-service training, demonstration teaching teams, and a resource file of personnel who could assist other teachers. (A high school botany teacher could help a third-grade teacher with a science unit.) Many of these suggestions were put into effect.

However, the high point of the committee's work was its plan for a teacher representative assembly. This has become the main link between teachers and administration; it has dissipated the mistrust that lingered on from consolidation and brought the entire teaching staff together in an atmosphere of candor and concern for the school district as a whole.

In the representative assembly elected teachers sit down monthly with the superintendent to talk about anything involving district policies and procedures. Complaints against individuals are not allowed. The communications committee established specific guidelines for the assembly, including:

- It is an additional communications channel and does not substitute for, or operate parallel to, employee organization structure.
- It is not a policy-making committee. If action seems appropriate on matters under discussion, a request for such action will be channeled to the proper authority.

The assembly helps to identify concerns; it does not act upon them.

- Members represent their faculties, not organizations. There is one elected teacher representative from each elementary school, two from each junior high, and three from each high school.

The meetings are informal question-and-answer sessions with no written rules. Sitting in a semicircle around the superintendent, the teachers usually fire the questions; sometimes the superintendent brings up a problem for the teachers to consider. About 90 percent of the questions concern personnel problems, and a personnel representative usually attends with the superintendent. Teachers have asked about grievance procedures, types of leave, approval of courses taken by teachers, and curriculum. They have suggested changes in report cards, and asked for the superintendent's reactions to recommendations from committees on which they have served.

Complete minutes of the meetings—multilithed on attention-getting pink paper—go to every teacher and administrator. Questions not answered at the meeting are answered in the minutes; questioners are identified only as "members," not by name. Typical excerpts from some meetings:

Member: Are employees given preferential consideration when other jobs open up in the district?

Superintendent: The board's direction is to get the best person for the position, and preference will be given to people already on the staff.

Superintendent: I'd like to review the recent problems involved with a play, "Little Black Sambo," which was scheduled to be presented at one of our elementary

schools. (There follows a thorough explanation of the complaints and the procedure that was used.) My purpose in bringing this to your attention is to make certain that all teachers are aware of the fact that a policy does exist and is followed when complaints about them and/or materials used are made.

Member: Is there a teachers dress code?

Superintendent: No. Should there be?

In the beginning, teachers were suspicious of both the communications committee and the assembly. Some thought they would bypass the standing teacher organizations and become a rubber stamp for administrative decisions. Officers of teacher organizations turned out for the first few meetings; observers are welcome. The superintendent and communications committee members met individually with leading teachers and organization officers to assure them that the goal was informal communication—nothing more. The superintendent stated that he felt the assembly would strengthen, rather than undermine, organization positions.

Criticism altered to a wait-and-see attitude, and finally almost disappeared. After just one year of the assembly's existence a questionnaire to every faculty member showed the benefits and the trust produced by this communications idea; agreement to continue the asssembly was almost unanimous. In fact, teachers did not want to change it in any way.

Ironically, the only major objections came from some administrators, who, according to another administrator, "view the assembly as occasionally embarrassing, especially when a question arises because someone along the line slipped up on a routine communication practice."

Emergency Planning: A New Necessity

In the old days school systems developed emergency plans for such natural occurrences as fires and snowstorms. There were set patterns for coping with these emergencies and a desire on the part of everyone involved to cooperate and help. But by the end of the 1960's school systems began to face unprecedented crisis situations: hostile students and sometimes aggressive teachers, near-riot situations that could flare up at any moment, confrontations between groups of demanding students and caught-in-the-middle school administrators, and angry parents with their own ideas for solutions. Obviously, the pat emergency planning that served school administrators in the past wouldn't work now. Yet to be faced with volatile student unrest—as more than 2,000 high schools in the 1969 school year were—without some procedures to handle it opens the way to chaos and long-lasting resentment against the school system. The Minneapolis school system developed a unique and well-conceived way of meeting such emergencies. It is a last resort, however, in an overall policy of the school system to prevent such crises through consistent community relations services.

Minneapolis, the larger of the Twin Cities with a school enrollment of 69,000, has experienced a steady increase in its minority student population since 1964. Although it is still relatively small—only about 10 percent Negro and Indian—housing patterns have concentrated more than 90 percent of the minority students in only 25 percent of the schools.

A citizens committee endorsed the school board's established ratio for minority students in 1967. (An elementary school is racially imbalanced if it has more than 20 percent of minority students; a secondary school must not have more than 10 percent.) The school board began to work on ways to achieve these proportions—special transfers, changing boundaries, voluntary transportation of students. It also studied improvements in the organization of instruction, recruitment and placement of teachers, minority history courses, multiethnic materials—all steps to provide greater opportunity for all students.

Superintendent John B. Davis, Jr., appointed an assistant superintendent of schools for intergroup education. Specifically he is to implement the guidelines developed on human relations. He is the carry-through person for programs in minority history, achieving balance in the schools, transfer policies for staff and faculty, and identification of community concerns about intergroup relationships.

In-service workshops began to train new and experienced teachers on a regular basis for core-city schools. Through a Title IV (Civil Rights Act) grant from the U.S. Office of Education, the school district set up a Human Relations Center where professional staff work with community advisers on

curricula for the in-service training, community involvement in the school programs, and preparing materials and speakers for human relations programs. A seminar series on human relations for teachers was instituted for all school staff as the result of the recommendation of a committee appointed to advise the school system on an appropriate memorial to Martin Luther King, Jr.

All these steps were taken with the full knowledge of the Minneapolis community, which was kept informed by the school administration's community relations and information services. News releases report at length on each new program, and "What's New" publications regularly inform parents about a variety of programs going on in the system's 100 schools. Community feedback is an important part of the evaluation of these programs. Public meetings are scheduled to consider long-range building programs and new educational concepts proposed for the schools.

As another step in the "prevention" process, the superintendent supported the establishment of Student Human Relations Councils in secondary schools as rapidly as possible. Long-range plans also call for Parent and Teacher Human Relations Councils.

Teachers and principals in the schools still needed to know, however, what specific policies and steps were being taken to protect buildings and personnel and what to do in case of a real emergency. In spite of a wide range of programs to improve human relations in the schools, a few instances of an emergency nature continued to arise. The school board and administration then developed set policies and circulated them to all staff members.

The Minneapolis emergency plan included these provisions:

■ Every principal was directed to prepare a local building plan for handling emergency situations, and the plan was to be discussed at meetings with all building personnel.

■ Ten observation teams were organized from the central office. These "flying squads" were ready to move into schools where potential for conflict existed, to handle press relations and messages to parents, to patrol the halls, and generally to help maintain order.

■ The school-police liaison program was expanded. Special lines of communication were established with the police department through 15 liaison officers. This was done to provide instantaneous communication between the schools and the police department during emergency situations.

■ The school board agreed to provide legal counsel for any school employee who became a defendant in a law suit resulting from an incident which occurred during the proper performance of duties.

■ It was stipulated that unauthorized persons were not to be admitted to school buildings. All visitors must report to the principal for permission to make contact with students or teachers. Parents and guardians of students enrolled in the schools are always welcome, but they must report to the principal for permission to visit classes.

■ It was pointed out that individuals or groups wishing to express complaints or grievances must not interfere with normal processes of the school. Hearings should be before the principal at times when school is not in session.

- All teachers received a packet of materials detailing school policy and legal responsibilities relating to student control and the maintenance of discipline.

- An emergency telephone system was installed so that all schools could immediately notify the central office in emergency situations. (Special phones in each principal's office.)

On the few occasions when the school district used its emergency plannir_o, situations were kept under control. The "flying squads" are particularly effective. "Our main objective is to communicate directly with parents, supplying them with firsthand information, instead of relying on the news media to carry the message for us," explained Floyd J. Amundson, consultant in school-community relations. "At the first sign of trouble the squads from the central office move into a school. We allow reporters and photographers in the main office of the sch¬ol building, but they are not allowed to travel throughout the halls or take pictures in the classrooms."

The community relations director acts as a liaison and gives statements to the press o.n "change" or "no change" on a regular basis. Another line of communication is afforded by community and parent groups which help with the patrolling; thus they learn what is going on firsthand.

Observers believe that the squads from the central office are one unifying core. They give the principals the reassurance that the central office is in touch and that it is ready, willing, and able to help when a crisis develops.

In one instance, the effort by school administrators to be fair to all concerned in a crisis situation was revealed in a newspaper article. It quoted the school principal's

sympathy for the plight of the students—"Never in all my years in education have I seen students faced with such major decisions." At the same time, spokesmen from the central office assured parents that steps were being taken to keep control and told the reasons for suspending certain students.

Perhaps credit for the fact that no situation in the Minneapolis schools has gone beyond control should go to their emergency planning. As true as this may be,

however, much of the credit must go to the school system's commitment to positive-oriented preventive programs. As the superintendent summed it up:

"Our long-range mission must be to join in a communitywide effort to get at the sources of the problems. We know that no solutions are possible until we provide all people with real equality, real justice, and real opportunity."

Project Fair Share: A Statewide Public Relations Campaign

Adequate financing for the nation's big city school districts is critical. There are multiple problems. Cities must educate an increasingly larger number of low-income and disadvantaged groups—an expensive area of education. Capital resources are dwindling in the core cities. At the same time the state legislatures, most of them with a rural or suburban orientation, have failed to provide a fair share of financial support to the large cities. In fact, in many states the state's financial contribution to large cities has decreased, while urban problems have increased. A few states have tried to correct this imbalance. (Ohio and New York, for example, provide special financial compensation for city schoolchildren.) In other places individual city school systems—Chicago and Minneapolis among them—have taken the desperate move of appealing directly to state legislatures for additional funds by suggesting their own programs and being politically active. In California, the situation is particularly acute; it has five major metropolitan areas, none of which is receiving a proportionately fair share of the state's resources for its schoolchildren. The superintendents of these cities decided to speak as one strong, loud voice.

The five largest cities of California— Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Diego, and San Francisco—are responsible for the education of one million children. California's state support of schools averages about 40 percent, but in some of these urban districts it is as low as 26 percent. The dollar squeeze creates an annual fiscal crisis for the cities—with resultant curtailed educational services, the threat of reductions in staff, and too frequent appeals to the communities for a higher tax rate. And, worst of all, there is never a chance to catch up with urgent problems.

Superintendents of the school districts serving these five urban areas came to the conclusion that their problem (a shortage of financing) was basically a political problem with the Legislature and the governor—and that the solution would likewise have to be political in nature. More important, the solution that they agreed upon centered on a public relations approach designed to make known the needs of California's urban area school systems. In addition, they decided to prescribe an approach to meet these needs.

Spearheaded by the superintendent of the Los Angeles City Unified School District, the group of five superintendents formed an organization known as the Project Fair Share Committee. Its membership later was expanded to include the 30 largest school districts in the state—those with enrollments of over 30,000. Together the districts enrolled two million children, almost half of the school population in the state.

The Project Fair Share Committee established two objectives:

1. To inform the public, the governor of California, and state legislators of the urgent and critical needs of urban area schools.

2. To prepare and introduce legislation for massive emergency aid for big city schools. The formula adopted by the committee called for emergency legislation amounting to $400 in new money per pupil over a four-year period. The gradual increase would cost $173 million the first year and advance to $703 million by the third year.

The campaign methods involved both a mass appeal to the people of the state, asking for their support, and a direct appeal to the governor and Legislature for specific help. To rally public support, Project Fair Share used a massive information program with the communications media—newspapers, radio, and TV—throughout the state. This part of the campaign was kicked off by a unique "flying press conference" held in the three major population centers of the state—all on the same day—by the superintendents from the five largest districts. As an immediate follow-up to this, direct communication sources available to the individual school districts were used. Parent organizations were formed and volunteer groups were created to spread the message of need and support throughout each community in the Project.

What was the objective in massing all this public support? To get the citizens of the state to send one million letters urging approval of the legislation for special urban school aid to the governor and to the members of the Legislature.

The second phase of the public relations campaign was directly targeted at the Legislature. The five big city superintendents, those from the other involved school districts, members of boards of education, prominent community leaders, and representatives of teacher and administrator groups—all were marshaled into making direct contacts with legislators for support of the Project Fair Share plan.

Significantly, the public relations staffs of the school districts were brought into the planning early and at the top level. After the original five superintendents began their work, they called for a meeting with all large school district superintendents and their "public information people or other staff with communications and financial responsibilities." The public relations representatives decided, at the "fly-in" meeting with superintendents, upon a general statewide approach. Each district was to conduct its own information program, using techniques and procedures best suited for it. All agreed upon the campaign theme—Project Fair Share—and selected the Los Angeles schools as the statewide coordinating unit. They also mapped out a rapid-fire kick-off campaign that included in one week—

- The three-cities press conference

- A meeting of the superintendents in Sacramento with the governor and leaders of the Legislature

- A dinner meeting at which all superintendents and staff of the 30 districts which would benefit from the proposed legislation discussed plans for a statewide information program

- A meeting with all legislators representing the areas served by the large districts to point out to them the crisis in the schools. (Invitations to the meeting came from the local school districts.)

Press releases by the public relations staffs followed each phase of the campaign. "Bay Area Legislators Spearhead Campaign for Massive Aid to State Urban Areas" described the bills introduced and comments by the superintendents. Another release went out under the title: "State Community College Board Endorses Massive Aid to Urban Schools." There were releases on testimony presented to the Legislature, on passage of the bill from the Senate committee, and on telegrams sent to legislators by superintendents and others.

The staffs also produced an information kit, which was sent to administrators of schools, colleges, and education groups. It included a news release, a Project Fair Share fact sheet, samples of suggested letters, a sample of a resolution that could be used by organizations in local communities, and a brochure, "California's Crisis in Urban Schools."

The local school districts went even further. In Los Angeles, for example, the campaign followed the organization plans used to provide information during a bond or tax rate increase election. Committees were created to contact community groups, urging them to petition legislators for urban school aid. Each school building had a list of legislators for use as a reference by letter-writers. A memo was sent to all elementary, secondary, and adult school principals and all junior college presidents within the system giving them names and addresses of others to contact—e.g., the governor and chairmen of legislative committees. The schools served as collection points for letters to the Legislature, and the public relations staff set deadlines for the letter-writing campaign.

Through its network of contacts, the information staff kept everyone alert to progress and a few unexpected pitfalls. At one point, for example, the information staff had to quickly squelch reports that the money would be used for busing for integration purposes. An explanation went out immediately to the campaign leaders; the plan included no provisions for categorical aid.

In its first go-round with the Legislature, the urban school aid bill failed to get final passage. But observers believe that the main objective of the campaign succeeded—that the Legislature and the people of the state were informed, in as forceful a manner as possible, of the critical needs of California's urban area schools.

"Before the campaign was initiated, no one really thought much, or perhaps really cared, about the problems of California's big city schools," commented John A. Gillean, head of information services for the Los Angeles schools. "Today, the situation has been

reversed; legislators and politicians consider it a major state issue, and aid for urban schools is the major topic in the halls of the Legislature. In summary, the objective of Project Fair Share was achieved—the financial problems of California schools are receiving serious attention."

Feeling the Community Pulse

"Feeling the community pulse" is a communications technique that has seen a lot of action. It is a standard chapter in the school public relations textbook; the subject of at least one panel discussion at school PR conferences; and one of the goals of any written policies on information services for individual school districts. It will always be a focal point of school public relations because a community's opinion of its school system is the framework within which administrators and teachers must work. The techniques are varied—long-range citizens planning groups, budget hearings, questionnaire surveys, special programs for parents. Any and all may yield the information that school administrators need for planning, budget preparation, bond issues, or the many other activities in which the schools must call upon citizens for support. The important element, though, is never to get out of touch. Columbus, Ohio, which used neighborhood seminars quite successfully a few years ago, resorted to a new round of seminar meetings in the spring of 1969 to tap the mood of the rapidly changing community.

The concept in Columbus is simple enough; if there is a problem to be resolved between teacher and parent, bring them together for a chat. If the problem is between a 109,000-student school system and a community of nearly 600,000, organize a series of chats in 160 schools and call them neighborhood seminars. It worked well for Columbus in 1963, and it seemed good for a repeat six years later.

However, in addition to being a trying experience for some administrators, the neighborhood seminars proved to be no instant cure-all for the problems that face a big city school district such as Columbus. This was shown when the bid for approval of a $63 million bond issue for new construction was defeated by a margin of more than 2 to 1 only four months after the seminars ended. And yet, instead of discarding the seminars as a noble but unappreciated attempt at goodwill, Columbus school administrators began thinking about ways to revive and perfect the seminar approach in order to thrash out with the community the consequences of its action at the polls.

Deterioration in school-community understanding came late in Columbus, a thriving urban center that is still small enough to call itself the "all-American city" while big enough to have the nation's seventeenth largest city school system. The Columbus schools did not begin planning for their neighborhood seminars in early 1969 in a mood of desperation. District voters had just approved the largest tax increase in the system's history, at a time when other school systems across Ohio were failing in far less ambitious bids. Yet, a survey by an Ohio State University commission uncovered serious confusion in the public's mind about what the schools were doing and why. "Despite the generally favorable attitudes of people in Columbus toward their schools,

it would appear that there are matters about which these attitudes might be improved if the facts were better understood," the commission's report warned. One recommendation of Ohio State's report was that the 1963 neighborhood seminars be rescheduled. To both the Columbus schools and the community they represented a calmer era. The early seminars, the most ambitious effort at public involvement undertaken by the schools to that time, had resulted in 1,736 recommendations on curriculum, staffing, and building, many of which set the pattern for school development during the 1960's.

But the six years which elapsed since the early seminars were turbulent ones. In 1963, only hints that all might not be well in those downtown schools enrolling poor black and white Southern immigrants reached the school board. Two years later the board overcame its apprehension and accepted federal aid as a first step toward a solution. At that time teachers still met for tea rather than tactics.

During this period the city was changing rapidly. Population grew by nearly 80,000 and geographical area increased by nearly 30 percent. Thus, in 1969 the school system was to a large extent dealing with a new community, a whole new list of worries, and a completely different public mood.

The basic purpose of the 1963 seminars had been to inform the public about the schools and to find out exactly what changes the community wanted made in the educational program. The second time around, "we were more interested in getting people to consider the issues involved in a big city school system—job training, compensatory education, race relations, and community involvement—issues that nobody had thought much about in 1963," explained a Columbus administrator.

To serve as a citywide coordinating body for the neighborhood seminars, the school superintendent, Harold H. Eibling, established a "Committee of 200," composed of school administrators—principals, school coordinators and directors, and assistant principals. At the local level, each school principal appointed a neighborhood committee of 10 persons to organize the program for that particular school—8 were to be laymen and no more than 5 were to come from the PTA membership. The neighborhood group was expanded to 30; 10 more members were selected by the school committee, and 10 members at large were chosen from those persons who learned of the program through public notices and asked to participate. Any person in the community could attend the meetings as a "participant observer." It was hoped that this arrangement would guarantee each school a working nucleus of interested citizens who would attend the three scheduled seminar meetings and actively participate.

The school board established three goals for the seminars:

1. To provide an opportunity for citizens to express their views on goals for the public schools
2. To provide an opportunity for citizens to explore current issues facing the Columbus schools
3. To provide an opportunity for citizens to become well informed about all aspects of the operation of the schools.

A 57-page study guide prepared for the seminars focused on the new problems: the school system's role in finding solutions to urban problems, effective technology on education, metropolitan area planning, segregation of students along racial and economic lines, and the community's voice in school operation. Seminar

participants received information packets from their local school principal. The packets included the study guide as well as an outline of materials covered in each subject at each grade level; pamphlets on educational opportunities in Columbus, planning of secondary schools, summer schools, class grouping; a pamphlet outlining 55 recent improvements in the education of disadvantaged children; a 1969 digest of school data; a schedule of proposed construction; and a brochure on vocational education courses available in the schools.

In addition, principals were to prepare information sheets on their particular schools, including such topics as school activities, the guidance and testing program, teacher assignments, extracurricular programs, and other data of local neighborhood interest.

A two-hour training session was held at one city high school a week before the first seminar for some 300 discussion leaders and recorders. The orientation session was sponsored by the League of Women Voters as a contribution to the seminar program. Central office administrators, including the superintendent and members of his cabinet, were to be at their office telephones the night of the seminars to answer any questions not covered in the prepared literature.

The neighborhood seminars, which brought out 5,000 Columbus citizens, proved to Columbus school administrators that the community's confusion was real. Some questions were cautious, some were angry, some bold. The community's feelings were out in the open.

Some principals complained that the seminars constituted "an ideal forum for right-wing elements." To one school administrator, appearances by pressure groups were tiring but educational: "It gave the sincere

parents an opportunity to hear some of the people who are constantly running off at the mouth." One elementary principal expressed the view of many—that the seminars were helpful because they made the school people more aware of personalities and public concerns in their area. For some school officials neighborhood seminars were the first taste of community contact outside of the traditional PTA.

The recommendations received from the 5,000 citizens in 160 different schools reflected common support for the seminar idea. Many urged that the meetings be continued in some form.

Participants were co[illegible]ned about taxes and student discipline. They wanted to see their schools offer more job-oriented vocational courses, smaller classes, and more programs for children with special learning or physical handicaps. Support was also indicated for paying teachers more, giving them more free time to talk with parents during the school day, and reappraising the operation of traditional "parent-teacher" associations.

Seminar groups tended to view racial segregation as a housing and economic problem for the community rather than a school problem to be met by such means as busing. At the same time, neighborhoods expressed great interest in strengthening their voice in school operation. To this end, they called for permanent advisory committees of laymen.

Many suggestions on the lengthy list of possible school reforms were too general to be useful, and the administration considered sending a follow-up questionnaire to participants.

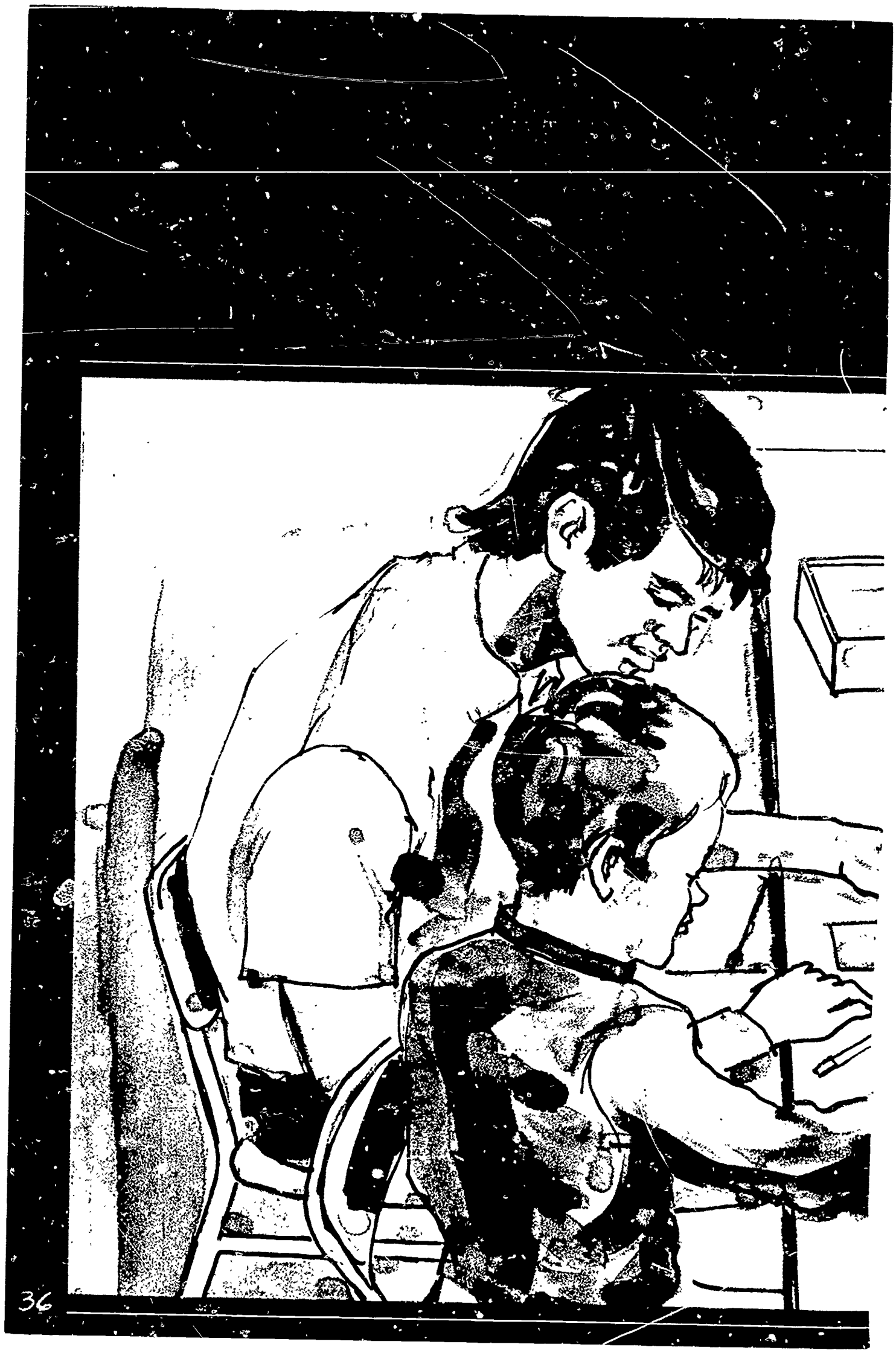
The fact that the school bond issue was badly defeated the following September made it even more imperative

that school planners determine in more detail what the public wanted and was willing to pay for. One change would be to make the seminars more specific—e.g., a series devoted to special education, new buildings, or disciplinary rules. Also, the staff decided that the announcement of the upcoming bond issue, which coincided with the seminar planning, was unwise timing—giving the seminars a propaganda tinge.

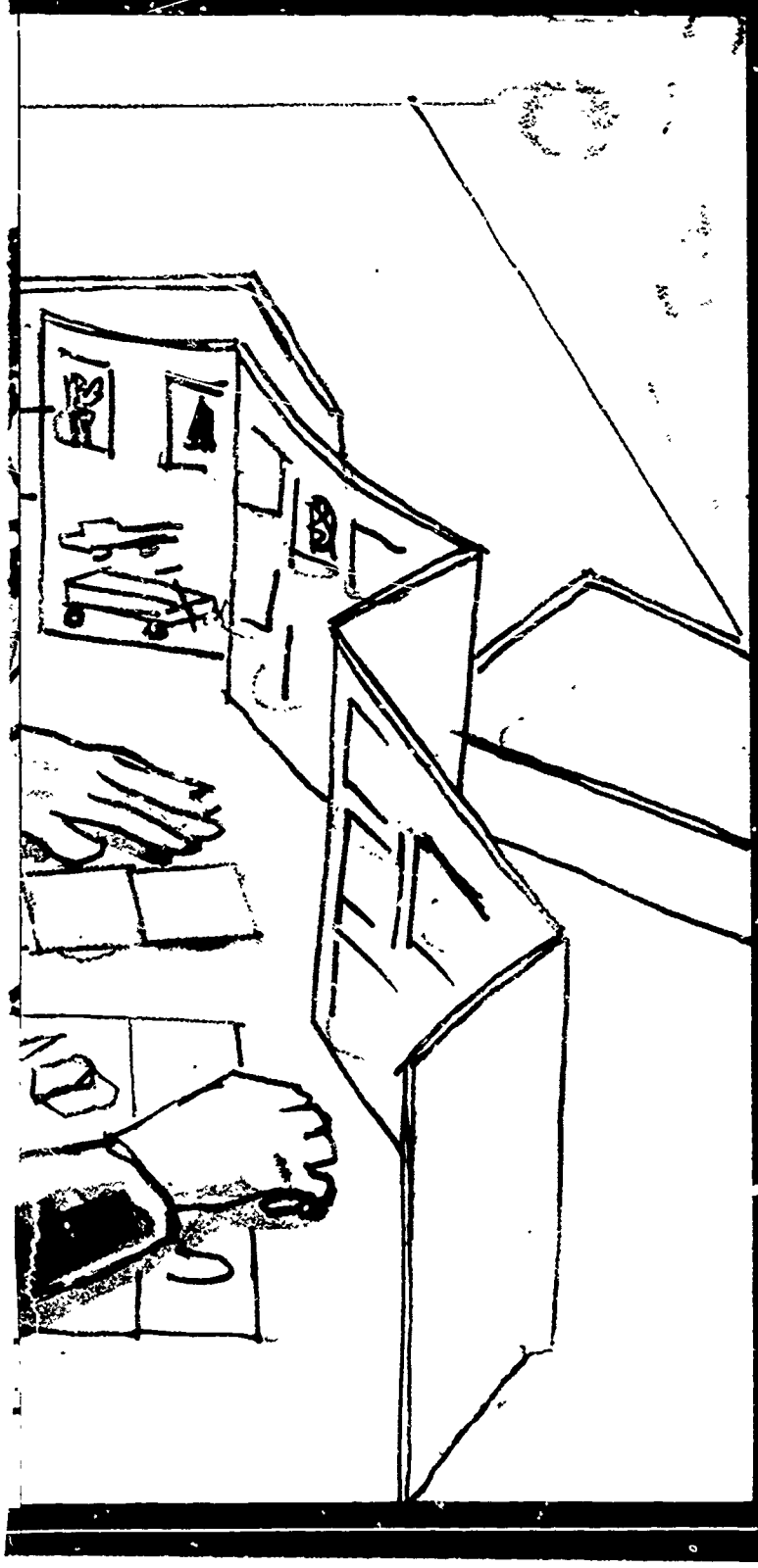
Even if they don't always like what they hear, school administrators in Columbus know they have to keep tuned in. If the first round of seminars fails to quiet the old critics or prevent the birth of new ones, the answer is to refine the tool rather than discontinue it.

"I wouldn't advise any board to enter into seminars of this sort unless it really wants to know what the public is thinking and is ready to give attention to what the public says," commented Joseph L. Davis, Columbus' assistant superintendent for special services. "It can't be a veneer or a sham—you have to go into it for real."

The question in most school districts across the country is not whether educators will talk with the public. It is rather how these talks will take place. This is an era of participation, and seeking citizen advice through neighborhood seminars is one way of accommodating that mood.



How To Push a Good Thing



The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 freed the imagination of thousands of educators across the country who had good ideas but never the funds to put them into action. Through its various Titles, school systems have been able to innovate, experiment, and evaluate programs designed for local needs. Because schools share so many common problems, these projects form a great national resource. They provide answers about which ideas succeed and how—and which fail and why. Yet information about the projects has been slow to get around ("dissemination" is the official word). A few are singled out for exposure by national publications: all are reported on and the reports filed away—but usually too far away from the hands of busy teachers and administrators. The South-Western City Schools of Grove City, Ohio, decided that their project deserved better treatment, and they borrowed some ideas from Madison Avenue to ensure that this would be the case.

As federal projects go, Grove City's Title III plan is a modest one. With a planning grant of $17,500 and an operating grant of $57,710, it began in February 1967 a Teen Tutorial Program. At the time, it was the only such program in the country.

The purposes of the program are twofold:

1. To provide classroom aides for compensatory education at the preschool level—a very special immediate need of the school system
2. To give teen-agers more than "busy work" with the young children.

Participating teen-agers learn, through study-discussion activities, about human relations and child development, thus preparing them to function as more adequate parents when they reach adulthood. A prime objective is to work at breaking the cycle which appears to keep the offspring of poor families in the poverty classification for generation after generation.

Seventh graders are the target group. The 75 Teen Tutors, chosen from volunteers who have their parents' permission, work with children in three kindergarten classes at an adjacent elementary school. They are supervised by a six-member team—a home economics teacher, a social studies teacher, the three kindergarten teachers, and a counselor. The course for the Teen Tutors includes human relations and child development, integrated with guided observation and supervised tutorial experiences with the young children. The teen-agers plan their activities with the kindergarten teachers and are frequently used to help a kindergartner overcome special problems—with speech, visual perception, or muscular coordination. Each tutor has a particular kindergartner whom he studies in depth.

Parents of both the seventh graders and the kindergartners are urged to participate fully in the project. Many activities are planned especially for parents; members of the staff make home visits, and parents are encouraged to visit classrooms in both the junior high and the elementary school.

Early evaluations of the project showed that it was succeeding very well in its two purposes. Enthusiasm was high. (The first full year of the program brought 200 volunteers from the seventh-grade classes, although only 75 could be selected.)

After the first year, outside educators were invited to visit and observe the program. The response, however, was disappointing. Although the school system is not small—student enrollment is 15,000—it is overshadowed by nearby Columbus. The community relations staff is a one-man office—Paul Noblitt, helped by one secretary. Nevertheless, the school administration backed Noblitt's plan to use some public relations techniques more often used in the domain of business and industry than in school systems. The administrators were convinced that the Teen Tutorial Program was a good thing—and that the idea should be communicated to as many educators as possible.

The plans included saturation of various audiences with information, multimedia presentations, and more effective use of opportunities to communicate the project.

The public relations effort entailed more than publicity about a project. It also strove to "better present both to the profession and to the public the records of progress and experiences, and to present lasting evidence of the contributions being made," according to a report by Noblitt. An offshoot of the effort hopefully will be enhancement of the image of the school

system as one willing to innovate and able to handle responsible research.

The community relations office used the following approaches:

■ Professionally designed publications about the project. These included a major, overall brochure and two handbooks. The brochure, brief but well illustrated with all information necessary for arranging visits, received saturation distribution. It was sent by direct mail to members of the Ohio State Department of Education, the Ohio Association of School Administrators, and other persons included on a special list developed by the Department of Community Relations.

■ Development of a filmstrip with tape-recorded narration. Copies were circulated to teacher-training institutions, to child-study institutions, and also to public relations outlets. Excerpts were prepared for both TV and radio presentations. There were 10 copies of the filmstrip made. The excerpts were rated by the staff as the "most effective explanatory piece." A 16mm motion picture was produced as a teacher-training tool by Ohio State University writer-photographers who "lived" in the school during the first year of the program. It is being used as a public relations piece as well. National distribution has been arranged through the University.

■ Still photographs and slide-show materials supplied by staff and students. Automatic electric-eye 35mm cameras were available to both staff and students and they were urged to make "candid" photography a major part of the project.

■ Special material for radio broadcast. This was developed by project personnel and presented on both AM and FM outlets for two broadcasts of each item. The total was 20 broadcasts over a six-month period.

■ A portable photographic exhibit. This was displayed at such places as the Ohio Education Association building lobby, professional meetings, universities, and buildings of other school systems—any place where teachers pass by.

■ A full-page advertisement in *Ohio Schools,* the official organ of the Ohio Education Association, with a press run of 110,000 copies. "We're not sure whether this has ever been done before," Noblitt commented about the ad, "but it meant that over 100,000 people had the opportunity to read about the program. Hopefully, it reached some who will be interested in coming and observing."

In addition, when school officials attended professional meetings—no matter what the purpose of the meeting—they took along brochures and filmstrips for distribution. The handbooks, one prepared for parents of Teen Tutors and the other for parents of kindergarten children, were popular items outside the school system as well as within. In fact, the kindergarten folder became the public relations piece "most requested by professionals."

After the saturation program began, press coverage was excellent. The school system kept a continuous copy and photo service for the local press on the progress of the project and arranged special visits for representatives from the press.

Did the public relations effort succeed? Statistics tell the story.

After the crescendo of publicity, visits to the project each week increased by 33 percent. During the first year of the project, requests for material were almost nil. In the second year, the average was three requests a week. In the third year, after the publicity efforts outlined above, requests for written material increased 200 percent.


JAIME'S FOX

Tender, Loving Care of a Community School

What makes a community school? Is it a regular neighborhood school that keeps its doors open for longer hours? Is it one that gives substance to parents associations and support to teachers who want closer ties with the home lives of their pupils? Or is it mostly rhetoric—a semantic update for the local public school? None of these explanations is complete or completely correct, for the community school entails a variety of activities and an overriding philosophy that dictates that the school reach out and be sensitive to the aspirations and needs of the surrounding neighborhood. Educating the child is still the primary aim of the school, but in many areas, urban as well as rural, that aim can be accomplished only by educating the community. P.S. 150, Bronx, New York City, has overcome its anonymity and become one with its community, a neighborhood which most educators in the past would have found too frustrating and difficult to define.

P.S. 150 is a fairly new school. It opened in 1960, but quickly outgrew its facilities. An annex of 12 portable classrooms was added across the street in 1966. Of its 1,800 pupils, 48 percent come to school unable to speak English adequately. The ethnic distribution is 73 percent Puerto Rican, 26 percent Negro, and 1 percent other.

In addition to language problems, Principal Barney Grossman has to deal with a fluid neighborhood population and, as in most big cities, the need for constant in-service education of teachers due to growth of staff and maternity leaves. Yet P.S. 150 has become the foundation that holds the community together—an open, responsive place that obviously belongs to the pupils and parents that it serves.

Overcoming the language difficulties is part an educational task, part a matter of sensitive public relations. Flexible placement in the reading program groups all children in the school according to their reading ability—with constant evaluation to allow them to move to higher groups as they progress. There are two corrective reading teachers, and pupils are given individual assistance and extra help by teachers, paraprofessionals, adult volunteers, and, at times, junior high school student volunteers. Two special classrooms are set aside for children in grades two and above who have just come from Puerto Rico; they move out to other classes after a special orientation period. Another specialist, trained in teaching English as a second language, guides both teachers and individual pupils.

Adult English classes are held at the school twice a week, with the emphasis upon practical situations in everyday life or the current events in newspapers.

School goals, worked out by both staff and parents together, place the highest priority upon learning basic skills. The specific goal is to improve basic skills to a point where at least 50 percent of the pupils score at or above the national norm, a truly ambitious plan in a school where almost that many pupils speak little English. Teachers are committed to a total language program, involving numerous reading approaches and a stress on vocabulary. (Word lists are sent home regularly with pupils, and parents are encouraged to learn with them.) The school library is integrated into classroom planning. Books are checked out at a rate of 1,000 a week. Every class has a class library stocked with an average of 100 books, but ranging up to 400. Many classes visit the public library, and all children are urged to join the library. Under the "Books in the Home" project, the principal sponsors a weekly essay contest in which pupils write him letters, explaining why they would like to win a particular book. He selects the 12 best letters and their writers receive the wanted books. Donations come from the Parents Association, staff members, and friends in the community.

Additionally, *every* written contact with parents is bilingual—the school handbook, calendar, announcements, regular bulletin for parents, and warm invitations to the myriad events sponsored by the school.

Also high on the list of school-community goals is "image-building" with the students—to "help the children understand and appreciate themselves and their contributions; understand their relationship to others; understand the curriculum as it pertains to their lives."

Achieving this goal involves building on the cultural heritage that the children bring to school. Under an Operation Understanding program, a visiting teacher from Puerto Rico sometimes is obtained to provide instruction in Spanish and on the culture of Puerto Rico. The visiting teacher's work supplements the regular cultural program of a bilingual teacher and a specialist in Afro-American and Puerto Rican culture. The children have a pen pal correspondence with a school in Bayamon, Puerto Rico. (On a visit to Puerto Rico, the principal once took 1,000 letters there from his pupils.) The librarian works closely with teachers to direct children to books related to Puerto Rican, Afro-American, and Latin American culture and heritage. The staff does not shy away from the problems—e.g., the pervasiveness of racism in American history and life has been explored. Parents are invited each year to assembly programs prepared by the children on Puerto Rico Discovery Day—a celebration which climaxes a week of activities, events, and assemblies—and Brotherhood-Negro History Week.

Participation is a key word. Students plan activities and discuss school problems through their student council. A local school board member serves on P.S. 150's school-community council. The Parents Association is active both in the usual programs of such a group (regular meetings, bake sales, etc.) and in more ambitious activities. Frequently it sponsors a variety of workshops for parents. Recently it sponsored two in one year on the school's reading program. At these workshops staff members presented the materials, tested samples, demonstrated a lesson with children, and discussed the role of the home in developing reading skills.

Every opportunity is used by the school administration to invite parents and the community inside to observe what is going on. A limited sample from one year's calendar:

- Open School Week—made more meaningful because each parent was individually assigned to observe a reading lesson and then invited to stay and discuss the class work with the teacher.

- Science Fair—experiments from every class on exhibit for a week.

- Art and Music Festival—each class contributes to the Festival by performing a dance, and art work from each class is on display in the lobby and halls around the auditorium.

- Grade Teas—held during the spring on separate days by all grades for parents in order to give them a picture of curriculum achievements over the school year.

- Mother's Day Fiesta—at which children honor their mothers and grandmothers at special assembly.

- The school is open for study and recreation until 5 P.M. every weekday.

- An open invitation to parents—to attend the weekly assemblies.

The scope of activities for parents and others in the community, the direct involvement of adults in school life, the "open door" policy of the school—all contribute to making P.S. 150 a community school. Equally important, however, is the tone of the effort. Behind the techniques —educational and public relations—there is genuine

sincerity, as this excerpt from a special message to parents illustrates:

"On Friday, April 25, 1969, at 10 A.M. while those concerned with education at every level were concerned with where the next fire bomb or student revolt would explode, several hundred pupils from P.S. 150 Bronx gathered around the front lawn of the school . . . to watch Minerva Gonzalez, president of the student council, and Barney Grossman, school principal, plant the last of hundreds of flowering plants in an 11-foot diameter circle. One little girl asked, 'Who's being buried?'

"When the planting was completed, Grossman reminded the assembled children and parents that the primary reason for the planting was to bring pleasure to all the people of the area. Mrs. Bea Williams, president of the Parents Association, echoed Grossman's words. Sergeant Vincent Savino of the 41st Police Precinct quietly expressed the opinion that anyone would have to be 'nuts' to disturb that beautiful planting.

"Throughout the rest of the day, schoolchildren and community people stopped to admire the lovely circle of flowers. Within classrooms children and teachers were now learning the names of the flowers. . . .

"And so a school community had a good feeling, a feeling of pride and self-respect. An interest in beauty and nature was awakened or enhanced. The little girl who heretofore had associated flowers only with death had learned a new lesson."

As a postscript to the flower planting ceremony, the school sent a potted flower with a note to the nearest public school, to symbolize "our sharing of our floral display with our good neighbors."

The resources of P.S. 150 are limited—it is one school out of 900 in a city where problems often overcome performance. Its publications are not slick. Its most ambitious writing project is an annual award-winning literary magazine, written, illustrated, and produced by students, staff, and parents. Everything else comes from the office mimeograph machine. Yet these efforts, coupled with inspiration and enthusiasm from the staff, have thoroughly convinced parents and the rest of the community, according to Grossman, "that they are welcome at P.S. 150 and that we are working for the best interests of their children."

Creative Shoptalk

Staff newsletters, superintendent's memos, closed-circuit TV programs, in-service training, building and area meetings—all trappings of decentralization—are among the growing range of staff communication techniques used by urban school systems. The "need to know" is acute in city school districts in their present climate of crisis. First of those who need to understand what the schools are trying to do are the staff members who work there. Unfortunately, there are short circuits in communication. The problems that cause them grow out of the size and complexity of the modern urban school system—the diverse interests of various staff groups, the specialization of responsibilities, the proliferation of new programs, the uncertainty of finances, the crisis atmosphere itself. The Hartford, Connecticut, school system has been exceptionally alert to these problems. In view of its "bigness" and its desire to be a better educational system for its students, Hartford knew that communicating with teachers was essential and that new approaches would be required.

To facilitate "creative shop talk" among 2,400 employees, the Hartford schools increased publication activity greatly—with two goals in mind:

- Simply to be interesting. Teachers must be willing to read about their school system.
- To build a sense of unity and common purpose. Hartford, like other urban school systems, was going through a period of deflation and self-doubt, which undermined the unity of the teaching staff.

With a superintendent who readily pursues methods and financing of innovations suitable for the Hartford school system, the emphasis in the publications program has been on new ideas—those that are helping Hartford's children become "self-directed learners." This approach puts more responsibility upon the teacher, "who must leave the platform and give more individual assistance than ever before to pupils. The teacher must also use the resources of many different instructional media that are becoming available."

Responding to this trend, Hartford school system's informational services highlight curriculum innovations. Teachers prepare instructional packets and are encouraged to create materials on their own or work on other materials for distribution to all the staff.

Three of Hartford's publications are concise staff newsletters, written "so that those who run may read." They avoid educational lingo (all are distributed to people outside the school system). Also, the editors believe that the special language of one field shouldn't interfere with understanding by someone in another.

- *Chalk Dust* is a monthly four-page publication for all employees, and it is also read by several hundred

community people and public officials. It is the "house organ"—with names, events, and feature stories covering new developments.

■ *Superintendent's Tell'n Type* is a newsletter posted on bulletin boards. Its limited circulation permits quick production. In it, staff members can make direct reports on events with which they are concerned. For example, teachers describe such projects as newspapers in the classroom, new approaches to teaching drafting, and special commemoration of literary figures.

■ *Action Report* is a periodic report highlighting functions of various departments or particular programs (e.g., psychological services, vocational education, Hartford's busing program to suburban schools). This newsletter has a considerable outside circulation list.

The Hartford Instructional Packets (HIPS) are the most ambitious publishing activity of the instructional staff. These are written by Hartford classroom teachers in order to individualize instruction. (Groups of teachers have worked on such topics as introduction to cells, Egypt today, Africa, the Negro in Reconstruction, the nation's minorities, business studies, music, and health education.)

However, these weren't just passed out at teacher orientation and left to the imagination of the staff. Along with the instructional materials, the curriculum staff developed materials to help teachers use the new projects. These included suggestions for use of the packets, a guide to the organization of the packets, learning goals for individualized programs, and a humorous guide to the guides. The introduction to the last item says, in part, "Teachers have to read volumes of hyperbolic sesquipedalianisms. For this reason we have distilled some of the terms associated with packets." Examples: Multimode is defined as "style of learning . . . does he

learn best through eyes, ears, hands, seat of pants . . . ?" Recycling means "the kid is sent back to do the same assignment over again because he missed the point when he did it the first time." Lockstep is "whole class doing the same ole thing, at the same ole time, with the same ole teacher."

The curriculum development staff uses other methods for giving curriculum information personally to teachers. Large- and small-staff group meetings are held in different schools. A flannel-board presentation describes the packets; a filmstrip is used to invite discussion by the teachers on objectives in their work with children. The curriculum office also supplies digests of longer curriculum guides and gives teachers a list of the topics for which HIPS need to be written.

One of Hartford's elementary schools is a Library Media Demonstration Center. The Center was introduced in an issue of *Chalk Dust* and was the subject of an *Action Report.* Each of Hartford's elementary schools sent a teacher to the demonstration school to spend a day in the Media Center and in classrooms using various instructional materials from the Center. These teachers reported back to their own schools. The Center is regularly open to visitors from within and outside the Hartford schools. Visitors receive background material (what to look for, staffing patterns, activities). Teachers are asked to give a written evaluation of their observations to the Media Center.

Hartford's multimillion dollar school building program is bringing another concept of educational organization into prominence. The MIA (Multi-Instructional Area) is a topic of much discussion and explanation in current publications in Hartford.

Another type of informational booklet for Hartford teachers—and interested outsiders—is a directory of "Partnership Programs," those involving the Hartford schools with nearby colleges and universities. They describe the program and list the personnel for such projects as teacher training, use of VISTA volunteers in classrooms, research on special education, and advanced placements. A section of this booklet also describes projects that are being planned. The importance of the partnerships is stressed; they "must exist if teacher training programs and innovative instructional strategies are to be responsive to the educational needs of our cities."

Putting out this myriad of publications is a joint effort. Joining with the informational staff of the superintendent's office are the curriculum office and the instructional staff, plus the school system's two graphic artists.

According to an evaluation by the information staff, the publications appear to interest a wide range of readers. Teachers, principals, and department chairmen increasingly share news through staff publications. In the first year 31 HIPS were written and produced by teachers and tried out extensively in classrooms. The summer following the first publications, more than 100 teachers signed up to take part in workshops concerned with individualizing instruction. After publicity, the Media Center figures showed both increased use of the library and a large number of visitors.

The Public Makes a Choice

No school communications task is more difficult than persuading taxpayers to spend money on their public schools. There are those who will argue against any increases in the budget. (If a school district has a majority of these citizens, it may experience what was termed the "Youngstown phenomenon" in the late 1960's—the total shutdown of a school system because voters refused to approve adequate tax income.) On the other hand, there are citizens who are always willing to spend more money—on their specific programs. And there are those who will support budget increases willingly—until they see the price tag. Too often school administrations seek the easy way out and conduct budget decision making with as little public fanfare as possible. Those who meet the issues and the public face-on must be skillful, candid, and willing to compromise. Montgomery County, Maryland, brought the public into budget decisions at the very beginning, via a uniquely conceived citizens handbook that spelled out the consequences of each budget consideration.

A state law passed in 1968 required the Board of Education of Montgomery County, an affluent bedroom suburb of Washington, D.C., to negotiate with the teachers association on "all matters pertaining to salaries, wages, hours, and other working conditions." Essentially this meant that about 75 percent of the school district's operating budget would be decided through teacher-Board negotiations.

In a county where interested and knowledgeable citizens pride themselves on scrutiny of and support for school budgets, many saw the closed-door negotiations process as drastically altering the parent's supportive role in school decision making.

Under Maryland state law, the public has no direct control over school operating funds or tax rates. Final decisions are made by the County Council, acting on recommendations from the Board of Education. Strong public support of the school budget is necessary before the Council acts on the requests. The school administration felt this would be achieved by having the public participate in the budget process from the very beginning—before the teacher negotiations began.

It is obvious that for the public to be able to contribute positively to the creation of an operating budget, it would have to understand first what its suggestions would cost. The vehicle chosen was a handbook for citizen participation, listing the various types of improvements that could be made in the school system along with cost estimates. Explained information officials: "Each citizen, therefore, would be able to make his own choices with full knowledge of how much his proposal would increase the budget or how much money would have to be cut from other proposed improvements lower on his priority list." The handbook was appropriately titled *Choices for Our Children.*

The handbook was distributed as widely as possible. More than 20,000 copies were printed, and each school received a supply for its staff, members of its PTA executive board, and any interested parents. Copies were sent to persons on various mailing lists of the information office and to all persons who requested them. So many requests came in that a second printing was necessary.

Choices for Our Children basically served as resource material for a series of four "town meetings" scheduled in different areas of the county. Administrative personnel and teachers were on hand at the meetings to answer questions in small discussion groups. The town meetings, which attracted about 1,200 participants, not only helped to answer the public's questions, but also gave the staff an indication of public sentiment about the budget. Through written reports on each discussion group, supplied by recorders assigned by the PTA Council, the administration and School Board had a early input for the budget-making process.

The third step was the scheduling of public hearings. The impact of the campaign to interest citizens in budget making was evident; there were so many requests from would-be speakers at the initial hearing that another one had to be scheduled. Although each speaker was limited to five or ten minutes, both meetings went into the early hours of the morning. According to veteran staff members, the speakers' comments for the first time were directed at real problems and real programs. Their testimony was generally much more in support of specifics than at any previous budget hearing. This, in turn, made it much easier for the School Board and the superintendent to determine the public's priorities—what the public would support in the final decisions.

In the second year of the new involvement process, discussion sessions were held on a single night in each of the district's 180 schools, rather than in four town meetings. The sessions began with a half-hour program over the local ETV channel. The program featured the School Board president, the superintendent, and the teachers association president. Following the TV program, more than 6,000 citizens and staff members discussed the "Choices" under the chairmanship of principals and PTA officers in each school.

Not only was there a 500 percent improvement in attendance at the discussion sessions in the second year, but the public hearings that had attracted 81 speakers on two nights in 1968 drew 152 speakers on three nights in 1969.

Did this public campaign work? Although Montgomery County was as much a part of the "taxpayer's rebellion" that year as any other part of the country, the public rallied behind the school budget in the face of strong budget-cutting sentiment on the County Council. Vigorous testimony before the Council by citizens and well-organized PTA groups can be credited with keeping budget cuts to a minimum. Of the $125 million operating budget proposed by the School Board, less than 1.5 percent was cut by the Council.

How did the budget discussion guide develop? The school administration early set several goals. Areas needing improvement must be reduced to manageable proportions; they must reflect the real needs felt by the professional staff and the community; and they must be practical.

The first step, therefore, was to involve the professional staff in drawing up alternatives. This was done through 33 "task force" committees assigned to work on specific areas

by a committee of principals and administrators. A majority of each committee was made up of classroom teachers, and the chairman was a school-based staff member. Because the information staff wanted terse, hard-hitting reports, the committees were given little more than a week to complete their work and were limited to two typewritten pages for their reports. They were told "to pull no punches—to recommend whatever they felt was needed—using the child as the focus."

These reports were returned to a two-man writing team that condensed them, put them into an organized format, and, with the help of the budget office, figured out the price tag for each recommendation. The final step, before the actual writing began, was a screening by the superintendent and his executive staff to eliminate recommendations that were impractical or which the superintendent would not support. There were, surprisingly, very few of these.

The final handbook was quite readable and well illustrated with photographs. The recommended improvements, including the price tags, were printed in bold face to set them apart from the general discussion of each topic. No attempt was made to add up all the recommendations—these were choices and many were mutually exclusive. The areas for improvement were divided into five major groups:

1. Staff (salaries, fringe benefits, staff development)

2. Elementary program (organization patterns, curriculum planning time, special needs of small schools, counseling)

3. Secondary program (school organization, curriculum, counseling)

4. Extending the school frontier (early childhood education, the disadvantaged, special education, summer school and adult education)

5. Helping the teacher (teacher aides, substitutes, new school staffing, instructional TV, instructional materials, and maintenance).

Looking back, the information staff was able to single out from its experience pitfalls for others to avoid in preparing a similar handbook:

■ Remember that it is being written for the general public, which understands little about the educational process and even less about finance. Keep it simple.

■ Do not assume that the public wants to know everything about every subject. Skim the cream off each subject area and stick to that.

■ Avoid the appearance of an expensive document. Tone down the brochure so it is attractive and readable, but not rich looking. Have it printed in-house if at all possible. Photographs, especially of children, are effective, but the use of color and fancy paper will have a negative effect on the money-conscious public.

■ Be honest. Admit the school system's weaknesses—"not only for this type of campaign, but for the year-round publicity effort. You can't brag for 11 months a year and then plead poverty in the twelfth."

Choices for Our Children, from the very first, emphasizes candidness: "It would be difficult to characterize this brochure except, perhaps, as a compilation of goals—ways in which the school system could improve the education of the children of Montgomery County. The word to emphasize is could. Every one of these possible improvements has a price tag—a price that must

be paid by the taxpayer. . . . We have attempted to give you, the taxpaying public, a comprehensive view of our school system, along with a road map showing where we can go from here. We seek your advice as we decide which roads to take and how far to go. . . ."

Thanks

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