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# Public Relations Perceptions of School Superintendents and School Board Presidents

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**FIELD PROJECT PROPOSAL**

**PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS**

**AND SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENTS**

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty  
University of Nebraska  
at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Specialist in Education

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Raymond Dean Chase

November, 1985

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## FIELD PROJECT PROPOSAL ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the Graduate Faculty, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Specialist in Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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Lastly, a special thanks to my parents, Fern and Ray, who taught me long ago that success lies not in being the best, but in doing your best.

R.D.C.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

		<b>Page</b>
<b>Chapter</b>		
<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
	Statement of the Problem	4
	Statement of the Purpose	4
	Procedures	4
	Definitions . . . . .	6
	Organization of Project	6
	References	7
<b>II.</b>	<b>REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</b>	<b>8</b>
	References	. 15
<b>III.</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>. 16</b>
	Preparing the Questionnaire	. 16
	Developing the Cover Letter	. 17
	Contacting the Participants .	. 18
	Tabulation of Returns . .	. 19
<b>IV.</b>	<b>PRESENTATION OF DATA AND FINDINGS</b>	<b>. 20</b>
	Presentation of Data .	. 20
<b>V.</b>	<b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND</b>	
	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS .</b>	<b>. . 30</b>
	Summary	. 30
	Conclusions . .	. 30
	Recommendations	. 31
	<b>APPENDIX .</b>	<b>. 34</b>

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A school's public relations program should involve all the employees of a school system. The superintendent, however, should be the leader in the group. The superintendent, as the chief executive of a school, should have school-community relations as one of the top priorities on his/her daily agenda. A complete public relations program can be the determining factor in how well a school system is understood and accepted by the publics it serves. (Gower, 1983) The superintendent can, by employing a comprehensive public relations program, help the school system reach its goals by using the community itself as a partner in this endeavor.

Studies have shown that 90 percent of successful superintendents see public relations as a vital area of concern and that 60 percent of them work on public relations activities weekly. (Chand, 1984) Current articles which deal with the superintendent and public relations continually cite the fact that public relations must be a priority item of chief school administrators. Superintendents must have an effective public relations program if they are to avoid misinformation and rumors. Public relations exists, regardless of a superintendent's awareness or desire to have it. Since it is a part of schools, superintendents should work to provide a planned public relations program. If this is done, public relations can provide many positive experiences for the school personnel as well as the publics those personnel serve.

There are a number of characteristics which help a superintendent to develop an effective public relations program. Clear, honest and factual communication is important. Superintendents should have a human approach in working with

the publics they serve, one which allows them to listen well and show that they care about the school as well as the concerns a parent or taxpayer may have with regard to its operation.

The publics which the school serves also want to be informed and often want to take an active part in the schools they support. Over and over again this fact continues to appear in the literature: parents are interested in the schools and wish to take an active part in decision making roles of these institutions. Whether it be as a volunteer aide, an evaluator of new textbooks or participant in the selection of a school administrator, parents and other publics wish to participate.

Parents who have been involved in schools and their operation generally hold schools in higher regard than those who haven't been involved. (Marx, 1981) Keeping this point in mind, how then can the school superintendents most effectively involve the publics with whom they work? What public relations techniques do superintendents use to involve the people in the school districts? What techniques seem to be effective from his/her point of view as well as from the publics' points of view?

There are many public relations techniques available for superintendents to use for improvement of the image of the school as well as communication to the publics. The use of a school newspaper or a monthly letter to all the people in the district is a way to keep everyone informed about the school and its objectives. In many communities the school uses the local newspaper to keep parents and district patrons informed about the schools. Providing an evening conference schedule for working parents, in-service programs for support staff, curriculum calendars, and parent-superintendent coffees are other examples of public relations techniques that are currently used in some school districts. The use of committees and advisory panels to assist the school in its decision mak-



ing roles can carry the message that the public's views are important. The visibility of the superintendent can also have a positive effect on school community relations. Superintendents' membership in community clubs shows the public that they are interested in the community they serve and also makes them available to the public in a more informal atmosphere than the school.

A good public relations program does not just consist of meetings and articles which appear in a newspaper. The person in charge of the school district must be aware of all the techniques available which convey the feeling that he/she cares about the students, teachers, curriculum and all other aspects of the school. The public relations director must be able to listen and respond to all the public in the district in a way that demonstrates his/her knowledge and confidence in the job that the school is doing. Pride in the school can be demonstrated in the way a custodian takes care of the lawn at school, how well a bus driver takes care of his/her bus, how the secretary answers the phone and how the public is greeted when they enter the school. School employees should show confidence and pride not only in their work, but in the institution that employs them. Sharing this feeling with the students and other public can be the first step to receiving it in turn from them. (Murphy, 1984)

In today's society the schools may be looked on as being ineffective and in need of complete reform by members of the community. Although it is not new, criticism about schools and the job they are doing can be found in major magazines, national news broadcasts and in local newspapers almost on a daily basis. Because of this criticism, public relations should be a priority item of the school.

The need to communicate with the public should be a vital concern to all schools. Knowing what is perceived as being effective tools in school community relations can be a valuable asset to school superintendents. Of the techniques used

by school superintendents, which are seen to be effective by the publics they serve?

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The problem is to survey superintendents' and school board presidents' for their perceptions of successful public relations techniques utilized in selected class III school districts in Nebraska.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to identify superintendents' perceptions of selected effective public relations techniques, to identify school board presidents' perceptions of effective public relations techniques and to examine data from those two perceptions.

### **PROCEDURES**

The gathering of the data to determine effective public relation techniques, will be done by using a questionnaire. The people who will judging effectiveness will be selected superintendents and school board presidents from class III schools. One hundred superintendents of class III schools will be surveyed. Each will be asked to judge the degree they currently use various public relation techniques. They will also be requested to describe other techniques which they have found to be effective in their school districts.

One hundred school board presidents serving class III school districts will also be given the same questionnaire. The school board presidents will be asked to complete the questionnaire and to describe which public relations techniques are currently being used and which of these are seen to be effective. They will also

be asked to describe any other technique which may not be listed which they feel would or could be used effectively in this school district.

The questionnaire will be developed in the following manner: specific public relations techniques which are currently being used will be compiled from a search of the literature as well as information received from public relations personnel from various school districts. Those techniques which pertain to the smaller school districts will be listed on the instrument itself. Following each listing will be 7 columns for variable choices by the respondent. The first 4 will allow the person completing the questionnaire to categorize the school's use of the various techniques listed. They will be able to select from 1 of 4 choices: 1. Often Used, 2. Sometimes Used, 3. Seldom Used, and 4. Not Used. Following these columns will be 3 more columns which will allow the person completing the questionnaire to rank the effectiveness of the technique listed. They will be given the choices of: 1 Very Effective, 2. Effective, 3. Not Effective. (See Appendix A)

To test the initial questionnaire draft it will be sent to several class III school superintendents who will be asked to evaluate it and make suggestions which would make it more effective and easier to administer. When their responses have been received and evaluated, the final form will be constructed. The superintendents and school board presidents selected will be a random sample provided by the Nebraska State Department of Education Office of Administrative Services. The questionnaire will then be sent to these selected people with a brief cover letter explaining the purpose of this study.

Two weeks will be allowed to elapse before another questionnaire is sent to those who have not completed and returned the original questionnaire. An additional 2 weeks will be allowed to pass before the final tabulation of the results begins.

After these surveys have been completed and returned, the results will be compiled in several ways. First, the data from the superintendents' point of view will be analyzed. The data gathered from the school board presidents' surveys will also be compiled. The data of the surveys will be displayed with a discussion of the data.

## DEFINITIONS

1. **Class III School District:** a class III school district shall include any school district embracing territory having a population of more than 1,000 and less than 100,000 inhabitants that maintain both elementary and high school grades under the direction of a single board of education.

2. **Public Relations:** the formal process of improving the relations of a school or college with its special public or with the general public.

3. **Superintendent of Schools:** the chief executive and advisory officer charged with the direction of schools in a public school district.

4. **School Board Member:** a citizen elected or appointed in a manner prescribed by law to serve a limited number of years on a the governing board of a public school district.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE PROJECT

Chapter I — Introduction

Chapter II — Related Literature

Chapter III — Methodology

Chapter IV — Presentation of Data and Findings

Chapter V — Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

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- Murphy S. (1984, January). Communicating in the bush. *The School Administrator*, pp. 239-242.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In today's society a school's public relations program can mean the difference between the success or failure of bond issues, school conferences, how parents view a school's educational program and even whether or not a superintendent's contract is renewed.

Establishing close ties between parents and schools is a lot like gardening. Both require a certain amount of tender loving care if a public relation program expects to bear fruit. (Barron, 1983)

In the review of the related literature, which deals with the superintendent's perceptions of public relations compared to what the public views as an effective public relations program, one key fact continually surfaces! Public relations must be a priority item of superintendents. The superintendent's view of the importance of public relations will affect the school, its students and the publics it serves. (Gower, 1983)

The superintendent must deal with the community he/she serves. Since schools are public institutions governed by representatives of the community, a superintendent is required to deal effectively with the community. The size and social make-up of the community influence community perceptions of the superintendent and his/her role. In large school systems the superintendent generally has a large staff of advisors as well as access to the public via mass media. The superintendent who serves the rural school, however, must assume the responsibility of meeting with all the publics he/she serves as well as being able to explain or describe all the educational programs the school provides. He/she must also become familiar with all the leaders in the community and be able to deal

effectively with each of them. (Kruzner, 1965)

Because a good public relations program can make a positive difference in how a school system is viewed, most superintendents see public relations as a priority item. In a recent national study, it was reported that almost ninety percent of school superintendents view public relations as being very important and that sixty percent of these spend a great deal of time maintaining these relationships. The majority of the superintendents have a positive view of their status as superintendents in their community. (Chand, 1984)

Superintendents should include public relations as a very important item on their daily agenda. Along with this priority there must be a number of skills developed by superintendents which allow them to effectively carry out a successful public relations program.

Public relations exist within a school district whether superintendents are aware of it or not and whether they want it or not. Generally, without a planned public relations program, a great deal of misinformation will exist. Therefore it is important for a superintendent to develop a well-planned public relations program. To be able to do this, the superintendent must display leadership and be able to communicate with all the publics — both orally and in writing. The superintendent must be aware of the many pitfalls which numerous educators today have faced. He/She should avoid linguistic subterfuge. Linguistic subterfuge is a synonym for administrative jargon. The superintendent must be concerned with the understanding the publics have after reading a newsletter or after listening to a speech. Administrative jargon puts distance between the superintendents and the publics they serve. He/She should be concerned with using language honestly and responsibly. (Kersting, 1984)

The superintendent also should be aware of his/her capability of having

a human touch. Having a pleasant and warm personality is an important asset. Person-to-person communication is a daily occurrence in the office of the superintendent. Many public relations activities require face-to-face contact with the public. Although time consuming, these one-to-one meetings often have a ripple effect in the community. Information is passed by word of mouth to other citizens and patrons of the school. Superintendents who have a good understanding of human relations will leave a positive image with those people with whom they deal. Being a good listener is another important tool in dealing effectively with the community. Showing an interest in the problems of parents, teachers and the general public is important. Honesty and openness in his/her response to them can also build confidence in how the public views a superintendent. Their responses to citizens should show a true picture of the district. Although painting a rosy picture may temporarily avoid community criticism, the true and whole picture will eventually be shown. Being honest and open can save many headaches later. (Mayer, 1972)

Communication with the public at large is very important, yet communication with school staff is equally important. A good public relations program involves all staff members including custodians, bus drivers, cooks and all other personnel who work for a school district. If the staff does not know what is going on, if it doesn't feel like a part of the process, morale will be low and this negative feeling will be communicated to neighbors and eventually the community as a whole. Ingredients which make a good public relations program are similar from one district to the next. One common factor is doing a good job and then telling people about it. Nearly everything that is done in schools such as how a teacher greets the public, how a secretary answers the telephone, how the custodian does his/her job, conveys an image to the public. This image



must result in understanding, pride and trust in the schools. (Murphy, 1984)

As stated earlier, the superintendent is the key to a successful public relations program. Their visibility in the community has a direct bearing on how successful his/her public relations program will be. Superintendents cannot afford to lock themselves in their office. They must find time to spend with staff, students, and the community. Being an active participant in community affairs, organizations and clubs is another way to show the public that they are interested and cares about the community they serve. (Mayer, 1974)

Finally, one characteristic of an effective superintendent and a good public relations program is confidence. It, like charity, begins at home. A good teacher, businessman, or welder is enthusiastic about his/her work. Sharing this enthusiasm at school can have a contagious effect on the people with whom a superintendent works.

He/She should be positive about criticism. As an educational leader, the superintendent is the one who should provide inspiration for staff, students and community. Sharing that spirit of confidence might be the first step to receiving it.

Parents view schools from a considerably different perspective than the people who work within the school. Recently a great many articles have been written which question the effectiveness of the schools in our country. A parent's view of our school is critically important to the superintendent and must be taken seriously.

Of all the tools which can be used for implementing change in schools, public action is the most powerful. With the many studies and debates about schools today, now is the time for community action. Some questions the public is currently asking deal with the following topics. Are board members and school

staff interested in all children, not advocates of any one group? Are they listeners, hard working, patient, open, inquisitive, curious, eager learners, modest, wise, temperate, and steady? Lay people should hold the professionals responsible for getting results. Products, not processes should be evaluated. (Lee, 1983)

Some parents see the school as an antagonist, as an institution which demands attendance, consolidates its power and questions their motives and abilities. Other parents see schools and their staffs as a group of people who castigate low income citizens because of sloth, negligence and lack of interest in educational advancement for their children. Another group of parents may view its role as serving two main purposes: to produce the clientele and to pay for the system. (Roper, 1977)

A recent study states that parental involvement in schools can be important for improving schools, but that very few parents are involved. The study deals with a cross check of attitudes about parents' involvement in schools. It found that school board presidents', superintendents', principals' and teachers' responses were similar. These groups support the general idea of parental involvement but only in the traditional ways. There was considerably less support for sharing power and decision making roles. (Stallworth, 1983)

Yet, with this study in mind, many school superintendents and parent groups agree that the more involved parents are with their children's education, the more successful that education will be. Many people state that school problems are also parental problems. Some feel that schools need the commitment of parents to help solve the many problems that face schools today. Schools should encourage parental involvement in curriculum reviews, textbook selection, teacher selection, administrator selection and evaluation, and in the

establishment of educational and economic priorities.

The importance of parental involvement in schools ranges from one of highest priority by some to one of no importance by others. The National Parent-Teacher Association cites studies which point to the fact that all other things being equal, a school with an active Parent-Teacher Association will have students who achieve better than the school without a Parent-Teacher Association. When parents have a strong interest in their children's schooling, there is also a atmosphere at home which helps children achieve. They encourage school personnel to solicit parental involvement. If parental involvement is solicited, a great many eager, but inexperienced parents, will be found. Parental involvement is one key to excellence in education. (Leveridge, 1983)

Dr. George Gallup was interviewed by the American Association of School Administrators in 1981. What follows are some of his thoughts. People in America consider their schools important but, by and large, the American public does not appreciate the importance education will play in the future of our nation. Education will be more important than any other institution we have. Evidence bears out that people who have been involved in schools hold them in higher regard than those who haven't. It, therefore, is important that schools tell people what they are doing and why. If schools are able to do this, the public will have a greater respect for them. Parents should take a greater interest in schools, but on the same note, educators should play a more important and active role in the community. They should sell education to the community at all times. Training for communication should play a greater part in the training of teachers and administrators. To be successful, a school should go to the people, tell them what the school would like them to do and why, and then listen to their recommendations and suggestions. Parents must be considered part of the educa-

tional team. Improvement in education will depend upon how well parents are fitted into the educational program. School administrators must get in touch with the leaders of their community, survey their ideas about the schools and then use their ideas in helping to solve the problem. (Marx, 1981)

In conclusion, parents need to be a part of the schools they support. School officials must develop innovative ways to reach out to parents who don't feel a part of the school system. Community support is a key element in a school's success; the school, therefore, needs the support, cooperation and interest of its parents to be effective. (Mayer, 1974)

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## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to identify superintendents' perceptions of selected effective public relations techniques, to identify school board presidents' perceptions of effective public relations techniques and to examine data from these two perceptions.

#### **PREPARING THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

It was determined that this study could best be developed with the use of a questionnaire. Numerous public relations techniques were found through a search of the literature and 32 were listed in a questionnaire format. The development of the questionnaire was completed with the assistance of two professional public relations specialists: Mr. Ralph Bradley who currently serves as the Director of Public Relations for the Omaha Public Schools and Ms. Nancy Holleran who is the Director of Public relations for the Millard Public Schools. With the help of these two professionals, a list of public relations techniques was studied and revised. From the initial list of 32 questionnaire items 12 were deleted and two general questions were added. The format of the questionnaire was determined and the contents arranged in a fashion that was thought to be easily read and understood.

Each respondent was allowed to rank the effectiveness and the use of each public relations technique. Columns were made for the respondent to rank its effectiveness in one of three categories: Not Effective, Somewhat Effective, or Very Effective. The respondent could rank the use of the technique in one of four categories: Not Used, Seldom Used,

Sometimes Used, and Often Used. The techniques were then arranged into a presentable format considering the appearance of the questionnaire, its length, and the ease with which it could be completed by the respondents. The questionnaire was then typed and printed for distribution to several school superintendents for their comments. After their comments were returned, adjustments were made to accommodate the suggestions made by this test group. The final questionnaire included 22 questions. Twenty questions dealt directly with public relations techniques, one question dealt with whether or not the school had a planned public relations program, and one question asked if the public relations program was effective.

After the final format and questions had been decided upon, attention was given again to the appearance of the questionnaire and ease of its completion. It was felt at this time that the success of this project would, to some degree, be determined by the first impressions that potential respondents had with the questionnaire's appearance. It was decided to have the questionnaire printed on a cream-colored paper with matching envelopes. It was determined that by using this color and with the professional printing of the questionnaire that the first impressions of possible respondents would be positive and result in a better return. A printed envelope of a smaller size that did not have to be folded inside the original envelope was also decided upon for ease of return of the questionnaire. (See Appendix A for the completed questionnaire.)

### **DEVELOPING THE COVER LETTER**

After the completion of the questionnaire work began on the cover letter and the information it should contain. It was felt that the cover letter should be short and to the point to avoid the possibility that prospective participants would not

take the time to read it and therefore not complete the questionnaire. It briefly explained the project and its purpose. Because school boards in Nebraska elect their officers at the January meeting and due to the fact that the list of presidents that was furnished were the 1985 board presidents, a change was made in the cover letter to allow either the 1985 or the 1986 school board presidents to complete the questionnaire. The cover letter was written in a way to allow one form of the letter to be sent to both groups. The questionnaire, cover letter and envelopes were then printed. (See Appendix B for the completed cover letter.)

### **CONTACTING THE PARTICIPANTS**

The size of the group to be involved in this study had been determined during the course of the writing of the proposal. One hundred Nebraska Class III school superintendents and 100 Nebraska Class III school board presidents were to be involved in the study. The names of these prospective participants were gathered with the help of the Nebraska Department of Education Office of Administrative Services. This office compiled a random sample list of 100 Class III superintendents and 100 Class III school board presidents and provided that list for use in this study.

Due to the fact that December and early January are times of the year that involve a holiday and the ending of the first semester of the school year, it was determined that the questionnaire should be sent at a time which would avoid them and thus enhance the possibilities of a good return. January 23, 1986, was chosen as the date to send the questionnaires to avoid these possible conflicts. A return date of February 7, 1986, was chosen to allow for a two-week period for their completion and return. On February 8, 1986, post cards



were sent to those who had not returned the questionnaires to remind them of the deadline and encourage them to complete the questionnaire and return it. The date of February 21, 1986, was selected as the date to begin tabulation of results and as a deadline for accepting returns.

### TABULATION OF RETURNS

On February 7, 1986, 144 questionnaires had been returned. A post card was then sent to the remaining 56 persons that had not returned the questionnaire. Four more persons returned questionnaires by the February 21, 1986, deadline. Four additional questionnaires were returned after the February 21st deadline and were not used in the study. Of the total 148 returns, 92 were from superintendents and the remaining 56 were from school board presidents. The 92 percent superintendent return and the 56 percent school board president return combined for a total 74 percent return of the questionnaires which were sent.

The returned questionnaires were divided into superintendent or school board president classifications and the results tabulated. All responses on the questionnaire were tabulated one question at a time. Responses were arranged and counted according to the categories chosen by the respondent. A percentage was figured for each of the 'Effectiveness' sublistings. The same was done for the 'Use of Technique' sublistings. Each was given a percentage figure which corresponded to the number of responses it received. The final two questions on the questionnaire were also tabulated and each given a percentage figure which corresponded to the number of responses each received. (See Appendix C for completed data sheets.)

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION OF DATA AND FINDINGS

This study was undertaken to determine the perceptions of various public relations techniques by superintendents and school board presidents of Class III schools in Nebraska. The questionnaire that was used to provide the data which follow consisted of 22 questions. The questionnaire was sent to 100 school board presidents and 100 school superintendents of Class III schools in Nebraska. A total of 148 questionnaires were returned, of which 92 were from superintendents and the remaining 56 from school board presidents.

The raw data which was derived from the questionnaires is listed in Appendix C. The data is presented in percentage form and by exact count by question.

### PRESENTATION OF DATA

Question number one dealt with the use of a school newsletter. Returns indicated that this is a popular public relations technique. Responses indicated that both groups use this technique often. The superintendent group ranked this technique fourth in popularity while the school board presidents ranked it third. This technique was found to be used in nearly 90 percent of the schools which responded to the survey. It was seen to be effective, with 66 percent of both groups ranking it 'very' effective.

Question number two pertained to the use of activities which highlight senior citizens. Twenty-three percent of the schools that reported did not use this technique. Of all the techniques listed in the questionnaire the superintendents marked the 'often' category least for this question. The school

board presidents ranked its use in the same manner. The respondents from both groups reported that it is not considered an effective technique. The superintendents ranked it nineteenth lowest in the 'very' effective category while the school board presidents ranked it twentieth in the same category.

The third technique in the survey dealt with administrator/parent coffees. This was found to be used in fewer schools than any of the other techniques. More than 50 percent of the respondents reported that this technique was not used in their schools. Only 3.2 percent of the superintendents reported that this technique was used 'often' while the school board presidents indicated just a slightly higher ranking at 3.6 percent of them reporting in the 'often' column. This technique also received the fewest votes in the 'very' effective category by the superintendents while the school board presidents ranked it only one position from the bottom in the same column.

Question four asked respondents to rank the use of local news media for coverage of school events, activities and actions. Their responses showed that this technique was the most frequently used of the techniques listed. All the superintendents who reported said that they used the local news media while only 3.6 percent of the school board presidents said it was not used. More than 87 percent of the superintendents said that this technique was used 'often' and nearly the same percentage of school board presidents reported the same use. Both groups ranked this technique as the second most effective technique on the questionnaire. More than 70 percent of the school board presidents reported that this technique was 'very' effective and more than 77 percent of the superintendents reported the same thing. This was the only technique that did not receive one vote in the 'not effective' category by either group of respondents. Comments were written by both superintendents and school board

presidents about this technique. All noted that effective use of this technique was determined by aggressiveness of the local media and the administration of the school. Several mentioned that they felt that the use of cable television was providing the most effective media coverage.

The fifth question asked about the respondents perceptions of the use of school clubs working on community projects. Only a little more than 7 percent of the respondents from both groups reported that this technique was 'not used' in their schools. This would rank it fourth in that category. The same groups, however, reported that this technique was not used often. In the use column entitled 'often,' this technique was ranked eighteenth and seventeenth by the superintendents and school board presidents respectively. The technique was seen to be somewhat more effective by the superintendents than the school board presidents with them ranking the technique thirteenth and seventeenth respectively.

Question number six dealt with the use of writing letters to parents as a means of recognizing good student performance. The use of this technique was ranked twelfth by the superintendents and ninth by the school board presidents in the column marked 'often.' It is interesting to note, however, that it is seen to be effective by both groups. Superintendents gave this technique the fourth highest number of votes as being 'very effective' while the school board presidents gave it the sixth highest number of votes in that category. Six superintendents marked this technique as 'not effective' while all the school board presidents marked this technique either as 'somewhat' or 'very' effective. This technique was marked as 'not used' by 21 percent of the school board presidents who returned the questionnaires. A comment from one of the administrators who responded noted that this technique is the best proven public

relations technique employed by his/her school system. That person also noted that the school board sends letters to parents about the outstanding achievements of their child.

The seventh question on the questionnaire dealt with the use of an outdoor bulletin board. This was a technique that was rated on the basis of whether or not the school had a bulletin board displayed outside its building. The technique ranked eighteenth in use out of the twenty techniques which were listed. Of the schools that used an outdoor bulletin board, however, 47 percent of the school board presidents ranked it as being 'very' effective, which placed it tenth on their list of most effective in this category. The superintendents did not see the outdoor bulletin board as being as effective as the school board presidents did. Just over 26 percent of the superintendents gave this technique a 'very' effective rating which allowed it to rank number seventeen on their list.

Question number eight asked about the use of administrator membership in civic organizations. Superintendents felt this was an important technique and gave it the fifth highest number of responses in the category marked 'often' used. School board presidents also saw this as an important activity, and they gave it the sixth highest ranking in the 'often' used category. Both groups felt that administrator membership in civic organizations was effective. In the 'very' effective category the superintendents ranked this technique sixth highest and the school board presidents ranked it fifth highest. One respondent wrote that the key to any public relations program in a Class III school is the willingness of the administration to get involved in the community they serve.

Question number nine was similar to number eight in that it asked about the use of teacher membership in civic organizations. Although similar in nature, the responses from both groups are considerably different with regard to teacher

membership in civic organizations. Only 16 percent of the superintendents marked the use of this technique in the 'often' category. The school board presidents responded in a similar way with just more than 14 percent of them ranking the technique in the 'often' category. This response puts this technique in the bottom quarter of the techniques listed. Both groups do feel that it is an effective technique. Nearly 40 percent of both groups see this technique as 'very' effective although this percentage allows for only a fifteenth place ranking in both groups. One administrator noted that the public relations program in his/her school would be more effective if teachers took a more active role in community organizations.

The tenth question considered the school's support of a parent-teacher organization. Almost 40 percent of the respondents in both groups did not use this technique. Of the respondents who had a parent-teacher organization, support of it was not ranked highly. This technique was ranked fourteenth by both groups in the 'often' used category. Its ranking on the effectiveness columns was similar as it received a fifteenth place ranking by the superintendents and a thirteenth place ranking by the school board presidents. Of the techniques listed, this one received one of the lowest rankings in the 'not' effective column. Nearly one fourth of the respondents saw this technique as being 'not' effective.

When these groups were asked to rank the use and effectiveness of volunteers in the school, both groups felt that their use was important as well as effective. While superintendents gave this technique a tenth place ranking in the 'often' used category, the school board presidents ranked it in the eighth place in the same column. Both groups scored this technique in the top ten in effectiveness. Both showed it seventh in effectiveness more than 50 percent of the groups ranking it as 'very' effective. Almost a tenth of the respondents

felt that this technique was 'not' effective.

Providing an evening conference schedule for working parents was the twelfth question on the questionnaire. Both groups responded in a positive way to this question. The school board presidents reported that this is the most effective technique in the questionnaire by giving almost 80 percent of its effectiveness marks in the 'very' effective category. Superintendents also felt this was an effective technique and it ranked first in the number of responses in the 'very' effective category. Both superintendents and school board presidents reported that this technique was used 'often' and it ranked second in this category.

Question number thirteen dealt with the use of parents on committees and advisory panels. School board presidents seem to feel that this technique is more effective than do the superintendents. Superintendents gave this technique a seventh place rating in the 'often' used category, and the school board presidents ranked it fifth in this category. The school board presidents who responded to this questionnaire ranked the effectiveness of this technique very high, fourth from the top. Superintendents ranked it eleventh in the 'very' effective category. Several respondents wrote notes about this question. One superintendent wrote that having advisory groups list ten positive things occurring in the district and then listing ten ways to make them more positive has proven to be a help to their schools and community relations. One comment from a board member stated that during her tenure on the board of education she has seen many parent advisory groups participate in the school. She noted that parents often felt that the administrator, who was also serving on the committee, would oftentimes push his/her suggestion through the committee. This often resulted in the feeling that the administrator was there to

do what was outlined to be done and not what the committee itself might decide to do. This type of committee meeting resulted in negative feelings from the community members. It should also be noted that slightly less than 95 percent of the respondents said that this technique was used in their districts.

The fourteenth question dealt with the public relations technique of providing a year-long calendar to the parents of the school children. Both groups ranked the use of this technique very high. More than 70 percent of the superintendents felt that this technique was used 'often' which placed it third on their list in the category. The school board presidents ranked this technique in fourth place in the same category. The effectiveness of this public relations tool was also seen as positive by the superintendents. More than 50 percent of both groups marked this technique as being 'very' effective; yet, almost one fourth of the school board presidents said that this technique was 'not' effective.

The fifteenth question concerned having the school gymnasium available for 'open gym' on weekends. The use of this public relations technique was ranked just below most of the other techniques. It was ranked thirteenth by the superintendents, and it was tied for twelfth by the school board presidents when the marks in the 'often' used category were tabulated. It was rated somewhat higher by the school board presidents in effectiveness with more than 44 percent giving it a 'very' effective rating. The superintendents gave only 26 percent of their votes in the 'very' effective category, and it ranked sixth least effective when the 'not' effective votes were counted.

The sixteenth question dealt with the use of the school facilities for community events such as church activities and beauty pagants. The superintendents ranked this technique as the sixth highest in the area of 'often' used. The school board presidents ranked it in the tenth place in the same



column. The superintendents also ranked its effectiveness higher in the 'very' effective category in comparison to the school board presidents who ranked it in the fourteenth place.

Question seventeen asked the respondents to rank the technique of having special days for grandparents, business personnel and others to have lunch at school. Both groups ranked this activity in nearly the same manner. Both ranked it in the middle as to effectiveness and use. One comment by a superintendent stated that this technique is an effective one in his/her school and allows for people to get into the school who normally might not be inclined to do so.

The use of booster clubs was the topic of the eighteenth question. From the two group's responses, it was learned that the superintendents and school board presidents both rated this technique well below average in effectiveness and near the middle of the 20 techniques in use. Between 35-40 percent of the respondents reported that their schools did not use this technique. Three of the school board presidents wrote comments about the use of booster clubs. Two of these stated that they have had a positive effect on the public relations between the school and the community. One commented that they have raised money that was used to purchase needed equipment which allows the schools to use their tax money for academic areas. One commented that this technique had been tried on several occasions, but the booster club had failed due to poor leadership and lack of success by the various athletic teams they were to support.

The nineteenth question dealt with the use of local civic organizations to help at athletic events. This was the second least used public relations technique of the twenty that were listed in the questionnaire. More than 40 percent of the schools which reported did not use this technique. Even when schools

did use this tool they rated it low. It was ranked sixteenth on the 'often' used section of the questionnaire by the superintendents and fifteenth by the school board presidents. Effectiveness was not the strong suit of this technique either. It was ranked sixteenth and eighteenth by the superintendents and school board presidents respectively. A comment written by a school board president stated that when this technique was used in his/her schools, it allowed for very little interplay between the teachers and the club members helping at the event. Therefore, this particular board president saw it as an ineffective tool.

The last question on the questionnaire that could be rated by use and effectiveness dealt with the use of senior citizens in the regular classroom. This technique was ranked low in the 'often' used category by both groups. It ranked eighteenth with the school board presidents and fifteenth with the superintendents. It rated higher on the effectiveness scale. Superintendents ranked this technique fifth in the 'very' effective category while the school board presidents ranked it ninth on their scale.

Questions twenty-one and twenty-two dealt with whether or not the school had a planned public relations program and then whether or not it was seen as very effective, effective, or not effective. The first question was answered either by a 'yes' or 'no'. Superintendents indicated that they had a planned public relations program 40.2 percent of the time while the school board presidents were slightly lower with a 32.1 'yes' response. Both groups answered no the majority of the time with about 60 percent of the superintendents responding 'no' and the school board presidents saying 'no' almost 68 percent of the time.

The last question asked the respondents to rate their public relations program. The superintendents rated their public relations program 'very effective'

17.8 percent of the time, 'effective' 76.7 percent of time and 'not effective' 5.5 of the time. School board presidents tallied a 9.4 'very effective,' 77.4 'effective,' and 13.2 'not effective.'

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### SUMMARY

This study was undertaken in order to determine what perceptions school board presidents and school superintendents have about certain public relations techniques. One hundred school board presidents of Class III schools and 100 superintendents of Class III schools were sent a questionnaire which listed twenty public relations techniques. One hundred and forty-eight of these 200 returned the completed questionnaire. Respondents ranked each of the public relations techniques on its effectiveness and then by its use.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were derived from this study.

1. Use of the local news media and providing parents with an evening conference schedule were selected by both groups as the two most effective techniques and were also selected by both groups as the most often used of the techniques listed.

2. The use of administrator/parent coffees was the least used public relations technique listed. It was seen as the least effective technique on the questionnaire when the superintendents' responses were averaged with the responses from the school board presidents.

3. The use of letters to parents for recognition of good student performance was seen by superintendents as an effective technique but was not used as often as this rating would indicate.

4. Both groups ranked the effectiveness of using local citizens' expertise in the classroom in the top ten techniques yet ranked its use near the bottom of the twenty listed techniques.

5. Using parents on committees and advisory panels was seen as a considerably less effective technique by the superintendents than by the school board presidents.

6. Having the school available for open gym activities was seen as considerably less effective by superintendents than school board presidents.

7. Superintendents felt that the school facilities were used more frequently by community groups than did the school board presidents.

8. The use of an outdoor bulletin board was seen as more effective by school board presidents than by superintendents.

9. Those respondents who replied that they had a planned public relations program were also more likely to say that their public relations program was very effective.

10. School board presidents replied more than twice as often as school superintendents that their school's public relations program was not effective.

11. School superintendents ranked their schools' public relations programs as very effective almost twice as often as school board presidents.

12. School superintendents reported more often than the school board presidents that their schools had planned public relations programs.

13. The majority of the respondents in both groups reported that their schools did not have planned public relations programs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. It can be seen from the generated data that school board presidents and

superintendents agreed about the effectiveness and use of the majority of the public relations techniques listed on the questionnaire. They disagreed on several of those listed. It would seem that these two groups view public relations through somewhat different eyes. Because of the differences seen in in the last question which asked respondents to rank the effectiveness of their schools' public relations programs, it would be appropriate for superintendents to discuss the public relations programs with their boards of education. This would reduce the possibility that superintendents assume that boards of education know and understand what their public relations programs are and that they are aware of the techniques currently being used by their schools. It will also allow for the boards of education to let the superintendents know how they perceive the effectiveness of the public relations programs in their school districts. Simply discussing this aspect of the school will allow all parties involved to understand each other and then move toward making the appropriate changes in the public relations programs to allow them to be more effective.

2. Several of the public relations techniques listed on the questionnaire were ranked high in effectiveness yet were also ranked as not being used. One example of this was writing letters to parents to recognize students for their good work. School boards and superintendents should evaluate these effective techniques and then employ them. If they see a technique as being effective, they should find out why it is not being used and determine the best way to use it in their schools.

3. Superintendents and school board presidents who reported that they had planned public relations programs were much more likely to also report that they were effective. On the other hand, those who reported that they did not have planned public relations programs were more likely to report that they

were not effective. This would indicate that effectiveness of the public relations program is directly related to whether or not the public relations program is planned. The current literature on this topic would concur with this viewpoint. Therefore, it would be recommended that a school's public relations program be a planned one, one in which both the board of education and the superintendent take an active role.

4. Several school board presidents wrote comments about the effect of the current agricultural crisis on patrons of the district, on the school, and on public relations. It was noted that rifting staff and reducing budgets were actions that resulted from the agricultural crisis. They noted the need for further planned communication at these times which allowed the publics to be better informed. As a result of these comments, it would be recommended that the school and its administration be aware of changes which occur within a school district and develop public relations techniques which allow both school and community to understand each other during these trying times.

5. Comments from both school superintendents and school board presidents indicated the importance of a school having a quality staff. Their comments clearly indicated that a good staff that does its job well is the most important public relation technique a school can employ. From comments like this one, school superintendents and board presidents should take into account that other decisions which they make will have an effect on the public relations of the school. They should take into account the reactions that the patrons of the district might have to major decisions. It would, therefore, be recommended that citizen involvement be used in these major decision-making processes.

## **APPENDIX A**





## **APPENDIX B**

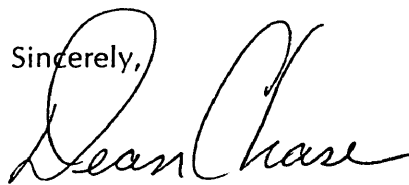
Dear Sir/Madame:

Please find enclosed a questionnaire which is being sent to one hundred randomly selected class III school superintendents and one hundred randomly selected class III school board presidents (1985-86). The questionnaire lists various public relations techniques that could be used in class III schools. It is intended to gather data about how superintendents and school board presidents perceive the use of these public relations techniques and their effectiveness.

I am using this project as the culminating activity for completion of a specialist degree in educational administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I would like to thank you in advance for taking the ten to fifteen minutes to complete this form. Please use the self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed to return the questionnaire to me by February 7, 1986.

Please be assured that individual responses will be kept confidential and that only group statistics will be used in this study. Each questionnaire has been assigned a code number for the sole purpose of keeping track of who has returned his/her sheet. This will also make it possible to replace questionnaires that may be misplaced or lost.

Thanks for your help and cooperation.

Sincerely,  


Dean Chase  
*Elementary Principal*  
*Tekamah-Herman Schools*

## **APPENDIX C**

## Superintendents' Responses Per Item

### *Superintendent-School Board President Public Relations Questionnaire*

Please complete the following questionnaire by ranking each public relation technique: (1) by how often it is used and (2) by how effective it is.

USE OF TECHNIQUE			
Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Not Used
63	18	5	6
3	38	31	20
3	23	19	47
80	9	2	1
8	53	24	7
28	49	12	3
31	8	4	47
63	21	5	3
15	48	19	10
27	20	7	37
31	28	10	22
70	14	1	7
40	37	10	5
67	5	4	14
27	22	12	29
41	27	12	12
28	35	11	16
35	14	6	37
16	20	14	42
24	48	15	4

1. Use of a school newsletter (weekly, monthly, etc.).
2. Use of activities which highlight senior citizens.
3. Administrator/parent coffees.
4. Use of local news media for coverage of school events, activities and actions.
5. School clubs working on community projects.
6. Recognition of students by a letter to parents.
7. Use of an outdoor bulletin board.
8. Administrator membership in civic organizations.
9. Teacher membership in civic organizations.
10. School support of a parent-teacher organization.
11. Use of volunteers such as library helpers, classroom party organizers, etc.
12. Providing an evening parent-teacher conference schedule for working parents.
13. Use of parents on committees and advisory panels.
14. Providing a year-long calendar to parents.
15. Having the school available for "open gym" on weekends.
16. Use of school facilities for community events such as church activities, beauty pageants, etc.
17. Special lunch days for grandparents, businesses, etc.
18. Use of booster clubs for athletics.
19. Use of civic organizations to help at athletic events such as taking tickets, helping to park cars, etc.
20. Use of local citizens' expertise in actual classrooms when appropriate.

EFFECTIVENESS		
Very	Somewhat	Not
58	28	1
20	51	7
12	36	19
70	20	0
31	50	6
51	32	1
18	30	20
50	35	4
31	44	6
20	30	18
43	26	8
70	15	3
42	48	0
41	3	4
20	41	16
40	37	8
40	31	6
21	32	15
18	29	17
49	35	1

21. Does your school have a planned public relations program?  
 Yes 35                       No 52

22. Do you feel your current public relations program is:  
 Very effective 16    Effective 69    Not effective 5

## Superintendents' Percentage Of Responses Per Item

### ***Superintendent-School Board President Public Relations Questionnaire***

Please complete the following questionnaire by ranking each public relation technique: (1) by how often it is used and (2) by how effective it is.

#### USE OF TECHNIQUE

Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Not Used
68.5	19.6	5.4	6.5
3.2	41.3	33.7	21.8
3.2	25.0	20.7	51.1
87.0	9.8	2.2	1.0
8.7	57.6	26.1	7.6
30.4	53.3	13.0	3.3
34.5	8.9	4.4	52.2
68.5	22.8	5.4	3.3
16.3	52.2	20.7	10.8
29.6	22.0	7.7	40.7
34.1	30.8	11.0	24.1
76.1	15.2	1.1	7.6
43.5	40.2	10.9	5.4
74.4	5.6	4.4	15.6
30.0	24.4	13.4	32.2
44.6	29.4	13.0	13.0
31.1	38.9	12.2	17.8
38.1	15.2	6.5	40.2
17.4	21.7	15.2	45.7
26.4	52.7	16.5	4.4

#### EFFECTIVENESS

Very	Somewhat	Not
66.7	32.2	1.1
25.6	65.4	9.0
17.9	53.7	28.4
77.8	22.2	0
35.6	57.5	6.9
60.7	38.1	1.2
26.5	44.1	29.4
56.2	39.3	4.5
38.3	54.3	7.4
29.4	44.1	26.5
55.8	33.8	10.4
79.6	17.0	3.4
46.7	53.3	0
52.6	42.3	5.1
26.0	53.2	20.8
47.1	43.5	9.4
51.9	40.3	7.8
30.8	47.1	22.1
28.1	45.3	26.6
57.6	41.2	1.2

1. Use of a school newsletter (weekly, monthly, etc.).
  2. Use of activities which highlight senior citizens.
  3. Administrator/parent coffees.
  4. Use of local news media for coverage of school events, activities and actions.
  5. School clubs working on community projects.
  6. Recognition of students by a letter to parents.
  7. Use of an outdoor bulletin board.
  8. Administrator membership in civic organizations.
  9. Teacher membership in civic organizations.
  10. School support of a parent-teacher organization.
  11. Use of volunteers such as library helpers, classroom party organizers, etc.
  12. Providing an evening parent-teacher conference schedule for working parents.
  13. Use of parents on committees and advisory panels.
  14. Providing a year-long calendar to parents.
  15. Having the school available for "open gym" on weekends.
  16. Use of school facilities for community events such as church activities, beauty pageants, etc.
  17. Special lunch days for grandparents, businesses, etc.
  18. Use of booster clubs for athletics.
  19. Use of civic organizations to help at athletic events such as taking tickets, helping to park cars, etc.
  20. Use of local citizens' expertise in actual classrooms when appropriate.
21. Does your school have a planned public relations program?  
 Yes 40.2       No 59.8
22. Do you feel your current public relations program is:  
 Very effective 17.8  Effective 76.7  Not effective 5.5

## School Board Presidents' Responses Per Item

### *Superintendent-School Board President Public Relations Questionnaire*

Please complete the following questionnaire by ranking each public relation technique: (1) by how often it is used and (2) by how effective it is.

#### USE OF TECHNIQUE

Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Not Used
38	8	2	8
2	22	18	14
3	14	10	29
48	6	0	2
7	20	25	4
19	17	7	12
18	11	3	15
26	20	5	5
8	23	15	9
14	15	5	22
21	22	8	5
40	8	2	6
28	20	5	3
29	11	1	15
15	13	11	17
19	22	8	7
15	13	10	18
18	10	8	20
11	14	8	23
6	24	13	11

#### EFFECTIVENESS

Very	Somewhat	Not
34	15	2
10	26	5
9	18	8
40	16	0
16	32	0
26	15	4
20	14	8
33	16	4
20	21	9
18	14	9
30	19	6
40	9	5
35	15	3
25	13	11
20	18	7
20	27	3
21	14	10
16	17	10
12	16	13
23	20	4

1. Use of a school newsletter (weekly, monthly, etc.).
2. Use of activities which highlight senior citizens.
3. Administrator/parent coffees.
4. Use of local news media for coverage of school events, activities and actions.
5. School clubs working on community projects.
6. Recognition of students by a letter to parents.
7. Use of an outdoor bulletin board.
8. Administrator membership in civic organizations.
9. Teacher membership in civic organizations.
10. School support of a parent-teacher organization.
11. Use of volunteers such as library helpers, classroom party organizers, etc.
12. Providing an evening parent-teacher conference schedule for working parents.
13. Use of parents on committees and advisory panels.
14. Providing a year-long calendar to parents.
15. Having the school available for "open gym" on weekends.
16. Use of school facilities for community events such as church activities, beauty pageants, etc.
17. Special lunch days for grandparents, businesses, etc.
18. Use of booster clubs for athletics.
19. Use of civic organizations to help at athletic events such as taking tickets, helping to park cars, etc.
20. Use of local citizens' expertise in actual classrooms when appropriate.
21. Does your school have a planned public relations program?  
 Yes 18       No 38
22. Do you feel your current public relations program is:  
 Very effective 5     Effective 41     Not effective 7

## School Board Presidents' Percentage Of Responses Per Item

### ***Superintendent-School Board President Public Relations Questionnaire***

Please complete the following questionnaire by ranking each public relation technique: (1) by how often it is used and (2) by how effective it is.

USE OF TECHNIQUE			
Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Not Used
67.8	14.3	3.6	14.3
3.6	39.3	32.1	25.0
5.4	25.0	17.9	51.7
85.7	10.7	0	3.6
12.5	35.7	14.6	7.2
34.6	30.9	12.7	21.8
38.3	23.4	6.4	31.9
46.4	35.7	8.9	9.0
14.6	41.8	27.3	16.3
25.0	26.8	8.9	39.3
37.5	39.3	14.3	8.9
71.4	14.3	3.6	10.7
50.0	35.7	8.9	5.4
51.8	19.6	1.8	26.8
26.8	23.2	19.6	30.4
33.9	39.3	14.3	12.5
26.8	23.2	17.9	32.1
32.1	17.9	14.3	35.7
19.6	25.0	14.3	41.1
11.1	44.4	24.1	20.4

1. Use of a school newsletter (weekly, monthly, etc.).
2. Use of activities which highlight senior citizens.
3. Administrator/parent coffees.
4. Use of local news media for coverage of school events, activities and actions.
5. School clubs working on community projects.
6. Recognition of students by a letter to parents.
7. Use of an outdoor bulletin board.
8. Administrator membership in civic organizations.
9. Teacher membership in civic organizations.
10. School support of a parent-teacher organization.
11. Use of volunteers such as library helpers, classroom party organizers, etc.
12. Providing an evening parent-teacher conference schedule for working parents.
13. Use of parents on committees and advisory panels.
14. Providing a year-long calendar to parents.
15. Having the school available for "open gym" on weekends.
16. Use of school facilities for community events such as church activities, beauty pageants, etc.
17. Special lunch days for grandparents, businesses, etc.
18. Use of booster clubs for athletics.
19. Use of civic organizations to help at athletic events such as taking tickets, helping to park cars, etc.
20. Use of local citizens' expertise in actual classrooms when appropriate.

EFFECTIVENESS		
Very	Somewhat	Not
66.6	29.4	4.0
24.4	63.4	12.2
25.7	51.4	22.9
71.4	28.6	0
33.3	66.7	0
57.8	33.3	8.9
47.6	33.3	19.1
62.3	30.2	7.5
40.0	42.0	18.0
43.9	34.1	22.0
54.5	34.5	11.0
74.1	16.7	9.2
66.0	28.3	5.7
51.0	26.5	22.5
44.4	40.0	15.6
40.0	54.0	6.0
46.7	31.1	22.2
37.2	39.5	23.3
29.3	39.0	31.7
48.9	42.6	8.5

21. Does your school have a planned public relations program?  
 Yes 32.1       No 67.9

22. Do you feel your current public relations program is:  
 Very effective 9.4    Effective 77.4    Not effective 13.2