

This dissertation has been Mic 61-1965
microfilmed exactly as received

COLON, Vicente Antonio. A SURVEY OF THE
PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS IN
SELECTED SCHOOL SYSTEMS.

The University of Nebraska, Ph.D., 1961
Education, administration

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

A SURVEY OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS
IN
SELECTED SCHOOL SYSTEMS

by

Vicente A. Colon

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of School Administration

Lincoln, Nebraska

January, 1961

TITLE

A SURVEY OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS

IN SELECTED SCHOOL SYSTEMS

BY

VICENTE ANTONIO COLON

APPROVED

DATE

Leslie L. Chisholm January 27, 1961.

F.E. Hanzlik January 27, 1961.

W.K. Beggs January 27, 1961.

C.W. Colman January 27, 1961.

William E. Hall January 27, 1961.

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

GRADUATE COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the invaluable help of Dr. Leslie L. Chisholm, his counsel, assistance, and supervision during the study.

To wife, LoRene, and to sons, Franklin and Floyd, the writer is indebted for their patience and encouragement.

V.A.C.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Origin of the Problem	1
The Problem	3
Procedure	4
Selection of Schools	5
Criteria Used	6
Definition of Terms	11
Limitations of the Study	12
II. SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE	13
The Need for Public Relations	13
Where to Start?	16
Public Opinion	16
How to Build Understanding	18
Local Good Will	19
The Public and the Public Relations Program	21
What Constitutes a Good School?	22
How to Measure Public Opinion	28
Organization of the Program	31
Responsibility for the Program	32
The School-Board Member--Selection	34
Means of Keeping the Board Informed	36
The Press in the Public Relations Program	38
The School Press	40
Community Cooperation	41
School Activities	42
In-Service Training Program--The Staff	44
The Role of the School Executive in Interpreting the Community	45
Enlisting the Community in the Planning of the School Program	47
Suggested Approaches	52
Formal and Informal Participation	53
III. THE ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM	55
The Public Relations Program	55
The Administration of the Program	64
Evaluating the Program	66

Table of Contents (Continued)

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
IV. MEANS OF KEEPING THE SCHOOL BOARD INFORMED ABOUT THE SCHOOL	70
Professional Media	71
Other Procedures Used by the Superintendent	78
V. COMMUNITY NEWS MEDIA	82
Importance of the Local Press	82
Areas of School News for the Local Press	85
1. Program of the School	85
2. Management of the School	96
3. Other Areas of Interest	99
VI. SCHOOL PUBLICATIONS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS	102
Student Sponsored Publications	102
Other Publications	106
VII. SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES	113
Parent-Teacher Associations	114
Personal Advantages of the PTA	118
Per cent of Families in PTA	119
Percentage of Laymen who Belong to Clubs In Your School	121
Percentage of Teachers Holding Membership in Community Clubs	123
Participation of Staff in Organized Community Groups	125
School-Community Activities in Public Relations	127
VIII. INTERPRETING SCHOOL ACTIVITIES TO THE COMMUNITY	136
Extracurricular Activities	137
Adult Oriented Activities	140
Adult and Pupil Oriented Activities	143
IX. RAPPORT BETWEEN THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND THE SCHOOL PERSONNEL	147
Methods Used	147
Other Means of Achieving Rapport with the Staff	155

Table of Contents (Continued)

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
X. INTERPRETING THE COMMUNITY TO THE SCHOOL . . .	160
Community Survey	160
Other Sources of Community Information . . .	163
XI. ENLISTING THE COMMUNITY IN THE PLANNING OF THE SCHOOL PROGRAM	169
Citizens Councils	170
Additional Sources for Cooperative Planning.	172
The Role of Publicity in Enlisting the Community in the Planning of the School Program	174
XII. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	178
Findings	178
General Conclusions	183
Recommendations	184
BIBLIOGRAPHY	191
Appendix A	194
Appendix B	195

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Frequency of Programs of Public Relations	56
2. Immediate Responsibility of the School Public Relations Program	58
3. Training of Individual in Charge of Public Relations Program	62
4. Adjusting the Teaching Load	63
5. Evaluation of the Public Relations Program . . .	66
6. Awareness of Board Members of Needs of Their Schools	71
7. Professional Magazines and Books Read by Board .	72
8. Loose-leaf Notebooks	73
9. Superintendent's Report to Board	74
10. Personal Conferences with Board Members Other than During Regular Board Meetings	76
11. Regular Meetings of the Board	77
12. Written Agenda for Board Meetings	79
13. Visits to Schools	80
14. Attendance at Educational Conferences	81
15. Time School News Given to Press	84
16. Areas of School News Given to Local Press (1) Program of the School	87
17. Areas of School News for the Local Press (2) Management of the School	97
18. Areas of School News Given to Local Press (3) Other Areas of Interest	99

List of Tables (Continued)

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
19. School Publications in Public Relations The School Paper and School Annual	104
20. Other Publications	107
21. Per Cent of Families in PTA	119
22. School-Community Activities--Per cent of Participation by Laymen	122
23. Percentage of Teachers Holding Membership in Community Clubs	123
24. Participation of Staff in Organized Community Groups	126
25. School-Community Activities in Public Relations	129
26. Interpreting School Activities to the Community .	138
27. Rapport with School Personnel	149
28. Other Means of Achieving Rapport with Staff . . .	156
29. Sources of Community Information - The Survey . .	162
30. Other Sources of Community Information	164
31. Enlisting the Community in the Planning of the School Program	170
32. Other Sources of Community Involvement in the Educational Program--Service Clubs	173
33. The Role of Publicity in Enlisting the Community in Planning the School Program	176

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Origin of the Problem

Although the exploitation of good public relations practices has only recently been introduced into the field of education, it is only during the past third of a century that an awareness of the need for a positive and effective public relations program has come to the fore as a way of improving education.

The public in a democracy should be kept informed of the various phases of the work of the school. But even more necessary is the correct interpretation of these problems by the school to an otherwise unenlightened percentage of the school patrons.

The writer became interested in public relations while attending a class in "School Public Relations" at the University of Nebraska during the fall of 1951. Shortly thereafter, an unexpected promotion from the teaching ranks to the admissions office at Nebraska Wesleyan University further whetted the desire to discover what constitutes good public relations in school administration and how a good program of public relations can be an effective weapon in the furtherance

of the school's ultimate goal: the educational welfare of the children.

The failure of many school systems in securing adequate physical facilities, competent teaching staffs, and in keeping and safeguarding high educational standards may be traced directly, in many cases, to a poor program of public relations in the community. There is considerable evidence to indicate that over a period of time a disinterested public will care little for a school system that ignores the need for communication with its patrons. Much of the lack of interest in the schools, therefore, has been brought about through the failure of the school personnel to report, to clarify, to interpret issues in which the community at large has a big stake.

Through association with school superintendents, principals, school boards, students, and parents, the writer gained much information on the advantages of the public relations program as practiced in some of the communities throughout Nebraska. Likewise he became aware of certain glaring weaknesses in other communities and their consequent effect on the overall school program. The writer's interest, therefore, is more than passing, for the problem has a direct bearing on his work as officer of admissions on the college level.

Although many national and state offices provide a

measure of leadership, it is at the local level that a sound program of public relations must be developed. Each local district, each attendance area, is a community of its own. Each, therefore, should develop and carry to fruition a well-planned program of public relations. There is strong evidence to support the statement that successful accomplishments within certain school districts have been preceded by a thorough and considered program of public relations.

The Problem

The problem undertaken in this study is to discover by survey and analysis the nature and merits of the public relations programs in certain schools in Nebraska.

The problem may be further delineated by subdividing it as follows: (1) to ascertain what procedures are being used by the schools to give information to the public, (2) to determine the nature and scope of the public relations activities the schools use in interpreting their programs to the community, (3) to determine the extent to which the community participates actively in the planning of the school programs, particularly as it relates to the public relations of the school, and (4) to find new ways, if possible, of helping the people understand what the schools are trying to do and how they may do their work better.

Procedure

The procedure used in the present study consists of six steps, which are as follows:

1. A thorough review of the literature dealing with public relations in the public schools.
2. As a result of the survey of the literature, revise the interview blanks used in an earlier study as a means of bringing the criteria used in that study in harmony with developments in public relations since 1950.
3. Select a group of schools in such way that they will be as nearly typical as possible of the effectively organized schools of Nebraska, except that, because of size, Lincoln and Omaha will not be included.
4. Visit the selected schools and interview superintendents, principals, and teachers. Lay citizens will be interviewed concerning their participation in the public relations program of the school.
5. Broaden the scope of the study by interview through the use of a questionnaire sent to an additional number of selected school systems.
6. Organize, evaluate, and interpret the data and make appropriate recommendations which will serve as guides for the improvement of the public relations programs of the schools.

Selection of Schools

The selection of schools for this study was made from schools of sufficient size to represent properly organized school districts. Classes I and II were eliminated because the great majority of them would not meet the criteria that the University of Nebraska has set as an adequate district in a program of school district reorganization. Lincoln and Omaha districts were eliminated because their size is not typical of school districts in Nebraska. Class III districts, therefore, were chosen as representative.

Criteria for the further selection of the schools consisted of the following items:

1. Size
2. Wealth.

Size of the school district was determined by its enrollment; wealth indicates the average assessed valuation.

Officials in the following Class III school districts were interviewed and/or sent questionnaires: **

Arapahoe	Fremont
Beatrice	Friend
Bellevue	Geneva
Bloomfield	Gering
Broken Bow	Gibbon
Central City	Grand Island
*Crete	Gothenburg
David City	Hastings
Fairbury	Hemingford
Falls City	Henderson

* Personal interviews with officials.

** Approximately thirty five teachers, laymen and janitors were interviewed personally.

*Humboldt	Stromsburg
Kearney	Sutton
*Nebraska City	St. Edward
Norfolk	*St. Paul
*Papillion	Valentine
Plainview	Waverly
Scottsbluff	*Wilber
Sidney	York

* Personal interviews with officials.

Criteria Used

The writer secured permission from his advisor, Dr. Leslie L. Chisholm, to use similar criteria to those prepared by Dr. C. R. Searby.¹ Additions and deletions in the following questionnaire have been effected in keeping with the objectives of this study. However, Dr. Searby's criteria are so excellent and so encompassing that, with the addition of a new section entitled "Enlisting the Community in the Planning of the Program," they have served as a guide in the present study.

Part I. Do you consider your school to have a public relations program?

1. Who is responsible for the dissemination of the public relations program in your school?
2. Is this individual (or individuals) formally trained for this task? Does he execute his duties independently or in conjunction with other duties?

¹C. R. Searby, A Survey and Analysis of Public Relations Programs in Representative Public Schools in Seven States, an unpublished dissertation, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 1950.

3. As a public relations person, what are his duties?

4. How does the school evaluate its public relations program?

Part II. How does the superintendent inform the school board about the school?

1. Does the superintendent keep the members of the board informed as to the needs and goals of the school and of the board's responsibility thereof?

2. Does the superintendent submit a written report to the board? Monthly? Annually?

3. Are board members aware of the needs of their school? Do they visit other schools? Do they attend educational meetings?

4. Does the superintendent hold regular board meetings? Weekly? Monthly? Does he hold personal conferences with board members other than during the regular board meeting?

Part III. A. Community news media

1. Who is responsible for gathering news?

2. Are relations between school and press
a) friendly b) not friendly c) indifferent?

3. When and how is news given to the press?

4. Is the language used easily understood by the press as well as the patrons?

B. Areas of school news for the local press

1. Academic achievements of pupils

2. Methods of instruction

3. Curriculum

4. Attendance of pupils

5. Physical condition of plant

6. Finances
7. Minutes of board of education
8. PTA meetings
9. Extracurricular activities
10. Assemblies
11. Individual and group achievements in the arts, hobbies, etc.
12. Commencement
13. Other information pertinent to welfare of the pupils

Part IV. School Publications

1. School paper
 - a. How often published
 - b. Contents
 - c. How financed
 - d. Circulation
2. School annual
 - a. Contents
 - b. How financed
 - c. Circulation
3. Other pupil publications
 - a. Contents
 - b. How financed
 - c. Circulation
4. Superintendent's reports
 - a. When and how often published
 - b. Contents
 - c. Circulation
5. Letters to parents
 - a. When and how often published
 - b. Contents
 - c. Circulation

6. Other publications

- a. When and how often published
- b. Contents
- c. Circulation

Part V. School-Community Activities

- 1. PTA
- 2. Clubs (parents, mothers, etc.)
- 3. Teacher membership in community clubs
- 4. Staff participation in community affairs and organizations
- 5. Staff participation in
 - a. Boy Scouts
 - b. Girl Scouts
 - c. 4-H
 - d. Hi-Y
 - e. Others
- 6. School participation in community celebrations
- 7. School groups performing at community functions
- 8. Displays and demonstrations in public
- 9. Home visitation by staff members
- 10. Local and sectional school meetings
- 11. Patrons visiting days
- 12. Community use of the school plant
- 13. Others

Part VI. School Activities--interpreting them to the community

- 1. Sports
- 2. Dramatic presentations
- 3. Musical programs

4. School clubs
5. Open house
6. Exhibits and demonstrations
7. Assembly activities
8. Homeroom activities
9. Commencement
10. Honors or Senior Day
11. Special weeks
12. Special days

Part VII. Rapport with school personnel

1. Teacher meetings
2. Workshops
3. Committees
4. Bulletins
5. Personal Conferences
6. How do teachers report exemplary performance by pupils?
7. Are non-professional employees made to feel their work is important to the whole educational pattern?

Part VIII. Interpreting the community to the school

1. If the school has made a community survey, when did it take place?
2. Have parents organizations proved helpful?
3. School board members
4. Service clubs
5. Teacher-community contacts
6. Citizens and friends

Part IX. Enlisting the community in the planning of the school program

1. Citizens' Council
2. Committees
3. Service clubs
4. Radio and Television stations
5. Newspapers
6. Churches

Definition of Terms

Leslie W. Kindred's definition of public relations is, in the opinion of the writer, one of the most comprehensive, and it embodies the objectives pursued in this study. Dr. Kindred expresses it thus:

School public relations...is a process of communication with the school and community for the purpose of increasing citizen understanding of educational needs and practices and encouraging intelligent citizen interest and co-operation in the work of improving the school. Stated somewhat differently, school public relations is a combination of the following ideas and practices:

1. A way of life expressed daily by each person on the school staff in his relations with other staff members, pupils, parents, and people in the community--in short, good human relations.
2. A systematic, honest, and continuing series of activities for educating people in the community for the purposes of the school, its program, problems and accomplishments.
3. A systematic, honest, and continuing series of activities for finding out what people in the community think about their schools and what they want their schools to provide for children.

4. An active partnership between the school and community, in which professional education and laymen work together for essential modifications and improvements in the educational program.¹

It is interesting to note that other exponents of public relations also emphasize the word "honest" in their definitions of what constitutes a good public relations program in our public schools.

Limitations to the Study

This study is confined to a consideration of the public relations programs of schools in local systems in Nebraska. No attempt has been made to expand the findings and conclusions to other states or to the nation as a whole. It should be said in this connection, however, that since the schools involved in the present study are those in effective school districts, the findings are likely to be of some value to educators generally.

¹Leslie W. Kindred, School Public Relations, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1957, p. 16.

CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

The Need for Public Relations

It was not until the depression years of the 1930's that the schools became fully aware of the need for a program of public relations. The people, many unable to eke out a decent livelihood, were becoming increasingly wary of the high cost of public education and clamored incessantly for a reduction of taxes. Naturally, this affected the school program directly. The school people, staff, boards of education, and others began to realize that somehow the average citizen had become alienated from the school and there was a grave need to bring him back to the fold.

To bridge the gap between the people and the school, the school was forced to initiate a series of activities designed to strengthen the confidence of the people in public education. Many schools succeeded in this and have kept a continuous program of public relations directed at their constituents. Unfortunately, once the financial crisis was over, many schools reverted to their isolation practices and, as a result, too much of the American public has failed to regain their love for one of the greatest blessings of our society-- a public and free education.

"In the absence of accurate information and direct contact with educational institutions, the average person scarcely realizes what this vast population of youngsters has meant in public education. He cannot comprehend with any reasonable degree of understanding why public schools should cost as much as they do, why curricular offerings are different, what standards have been altered, and why high school graduates seem less capable than their predecessors. He still views the school in terms of his own experiences and the comments he hears from others. He would like to judge its work fairly because of his faith in the power of public education, but he does not have the facts to think with or the information for forming sound opinions."¹

What, then, is public relations?

"Public relations is not simply a technique for getting public attention. It is not synonymous with publicity. It is not merely a program for influencing people favorably toward an idea or a cause. Public relations is bigger than any of these. It is the art of working effectively with people. Without skill in dealing with its publics the best dreams and ideals of leadership die for want of workers to put them into action. People will not join vigorous battle for academic causes they have not helped evolve or to which they have not been won.

"Public relations anticipates finding out what the publics think about the 'school' as well as telling the publics what the 'school' thinks. It envisions an administrative attitude that seeks the ideas and opinions (even critical opinions) of faculty, students, alumni, and the general public with the same alacrity that it presents its own directives for the common good. Public relations is the tone of voice of an institution."²

¹Ibid., p. 21.

²Public Relations for Teacher Education, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Oneonta, New York, 1950, p. 7.

The writer recalls a class lecture by his present advisor, Dr. Chisholm, in which the professor underscored the fact that even a smile, a handshake, a pat on the back constitute public relations. This lesson has been ever present in the writer's mind and is confirmed by the following extract:

"Friendliness, just plain pleasantness is the Alpha and Omega of good public relations. The school of education that wants good public relations must go more than half way in meeting the public."¹

Many publics resent the impersonal attitude of the school towards the community. Needless to say, these same citizens will be the first to adopt a negative, and sometimes antagonistic attitude towards the school. The public must be educated concerning the purpose of each and every action by the school. Is the school in need of an expanding curriculum? Does it need an additional room for a kindergarten? Simple and intra-mural as these questions appear to be, the public must be kept informed. Only then will additional funds be contributed ungrudgingly; only then will the school receive the moral endorsement of the community.

In order to keep a close rapport between the school and the community, the people of each school district elect a group of representatives commonly known as the school board of education. These individuals are delegated broad powers designed to help in their school district to develop an

¹Lecture in the class in public relations at the University of Nebraska.