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Everything (in short) you've always wanted to know about school PR

By Veda M. Williams

Building Public Confidence for YOUR Schools: A Source Book of Proven PR Practices. (Arlington Virginia: National School Public Relations Association, 1978), 224 pp., 13.95 paper.

As a sourcebook, **Building Public Confidence for YOUR Schools**, meets the test of the adage, loosely quoted, "... a little bit of all things for all people." It is a book for public school administrators, for public school practitioners of school public relations, and for students of school PR.

For the school district planning to start a school PR program, the book offers a number of typical school board policies covering public relations strategies in that school. It also provides a number of job descriptions for the school public relations director. Samples of board policies and job descriptions are found in an appendix at the back of the book. A study of them will provide many directions any school district might wish to explore when setting up a new school PR program.

For the school district with an existing program of public information and communications, the book contains 13 chapters of tightly-written and neatly-condensed materials. These chapters summarize virtually every topic approached by a school public relations department—private school, public school, parochial school, or college or university. For the experienced communicator, this book is an excellent review of the day-to-day strategies and techniques used by educators everywhere.

For the student of school public relations, the book outlines topic after topic covered in college courses, in summer seminars, and in special workshops. Beyond the textbook, it would provide a primary source of materials for the student in school PR.

With respect to the state of the practice of school

public relations in the 1970s and 1980s, **Building Public Confidence for YOUR Schools** is the "bible" of current practices.

Briefly, the chapters cover:

• **Chapter 1—Overview.** Communications needs in the schools are many in today's America. Federal, state, and local funding of public education demands an expanded interest in education on the part of many public groups.

• **Chapter 2—Public Relations.** This chapter justifies the growing fields of public relations, in general, and of school public relations, in particular.

• **Chapter 3—Public Opinion Polling.** Lest the reader be fooled, public opinion polling is not so easily accomplished as this chapter indicates. Nevertheless, condensed suggestions provide basic guidelines to the PR process.

• **Chapter 4—Where Do You Start?** Starting a new program in school PR should be infinitely easier with this chapter as a pacesetter to the why's and wherefore's, where the money comes from, what are sources of additional help and information, getting community help, and internal audiences to satisfy.

• **Chapter 5—Key Audiences.** In any community, there are a variety of key communicators—from parents and senior citizens, to teachers and business supporters. This chapter covers how to reach them, what you may want to say to them, and what means you can use to communicate with them. A checklist on "Crisis Planning" is succinctly written and should not be overlooked. School people often find themselves in the position of putting out brush fires during the high winds of public controversy.

• **Chapter 6—Tools of Communications.** Written, oral, and audio-visual forms of communications are described thoroughly. Writing skills are included.

• **Chapter 7—Working with the Media.** There's nothing like first-hand experience, human to human, to learn about working with the media; however, some basics are carefully studied in this brief treatise.

• **Chapter 8—Handling the Basics.** Working with advisory committees and school-level councils are a step above the basics in school PR, but the various techniques and theories are well-covered in this chapter, along with suggestions for evaluation forms for assessing the worth and work of such groups. School board PR, budgets, bond issues, and tax levies also are studied. Don't miss the 12-month planning calendar for bond issues and tax levies! Some districts plan 18-months to two years ahead of need, stretching out items shown in the 12-month planning calendar described here.

• **Chapter 9—Dealing with Special Problems.** This chapter doesn't try to reinvent the wheel regarding strategies for dealing with special problems like discipline, violence, vandalism, declining enrollments, releasing test scores, public involvement in education, strikes, or desegregation; it does codify some of the answers to dealing with them. It's quick and easy reading.

• **Chapter 10—At the Building Level.** Building level communications is "where it all begins," and this chapter "tells it all" about key communicators; citizen advisory committees; communicating with parents, teachers, staff, students, and citizens in the community; school publications; and, school techniques for dealing with test scores, annual reports, and working with the media.

• **Chapter 11—Small Schools.** Small school or large,

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this chapter is a jewel in the crown of public relations strategies. It's two pages long, but the ideas can work throughout an educator's career, anywhere.

• **Chapter 12—Evaluating Your Efforts.** Many ideas here may be used for annual evaluations of school PR efforts and then extended into the next year as an outline for planning.

• **Chapter 13—Conclusion.** One page of justifications will inspire most school PR hopefuls and current practitioners to "get on with it."

For any school district, or for any school wishing to improve its school image, as well as for any educator or future educator interested in school public relations and communications, this book, **Building Public Confidence for YOUR Schools**, should be a must on the reference shelf. Particularly is this true for the school or person facing a tight budget with limited monies for professional books. After starting with this volume, practitioners may add at need and at current interest other books with more expansive descriptions of the topics.