

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“The entire school territory—the community—is involved in the process of education. . . . Communication between parents and other citizens, businesses, health and social care agencies, several levels of government, teachers, administrators, and students is essential and is the glue that binds the learning community.”

—Gerald C. Ubben,
Larry W. Hughes, and Cynthia J. Norris

“Clearly, more needs to be done to encourage principals to make the most of potential community contributions to student learning. By building partnerships with existing agencies and groups within the community, school leaders can enhance student achievement and success by creating learning communities that have access to resources beyond those within the school.”

—Peter Gretz

“Many recent polls conducted by various school administrator associations . . . rated school-community relations as the first or second most important aspect of their job.”

—Douglas J. Fiore

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Thomas Sergiovanni (1995) defines community as

collections of people bonded together by mutual commitments and special relationships, who together are bound to a set of shared ideas and values that they believe in, and feel compelled to follow. This bonding and binding helps them to become members of a tightly knit web of meaningful relationships and moral overtones. In communities of this kind, people belong, people care, people help each other, people make and keep commitments, people feel responsible for themselves and responsible to others. (p. 100)

School-community leadership, at its best, fosters such relationships. Principals don't simply mouth platitudes about community but rather are involved in ongoing, deep community partnerships that ultimately and most importantly support student learning.

According to Starratt and Howells (1998), "schools as communities have two purposes. One is the promotion of quality academic learning for all students. The second is the socialization of the group into the experience and practice of the community itself" (p. 1000). Although enhancing student learning is first and foremost, several other benefits accrue:

- Student acculturation into community
- Community understanding of school needs
- Staff viewed as community partners
- Parents participate in school and community affairs
- Schools seen as integral part of a larger community

Some principals get so bogged down in managing their school they forget the importance of reaching out to the community to forge those bonds that Sergiovanni explained above. As an effective school-community leader, your role and responsibility does not end at the school door. You realize that there are community forces that impinge on your activities in the school building. Expectations for leadership in the community abound. You utilize the community as a resource but also as an essential partner in furthering the school mission.

As you build educational partnerships, you will intentionally utilize community resources to improve your school. David Sadker and Myra Sadker (2000, p. 346) categorize community resources into nine major categories:

1. Professional associations (e.g., architects, lawyers, and engineers)
2. Environmental and conservation organizations
3. Museums, galleries, and other cultural attractions
4. Social and civic groups (e.g., League of Women Voters, Rotary and Lions clubs, historical societies, YMCA, Boy/Girl Scouts, fraternities and sororities)
5. Colleges and universities
6. Ethnic and cultural groups
7. Health agencies and hospitals
8. Senior citizens
9. Artists, musicians, and craftspeople

Certainly, the greatest and most available community resource at your disposal is the parent. As principal, you should carefully consider the nature and extent of parental involvement in your school. Cotton (2003) reports that “it is not surprising to learn that principals of high-achieving schools are more involved in outreach to parents and other community members than are less-successful principals” (p. 18). Research also demonstrates that higher-achieving schools have greater parent satisfaction (Davis, 1998). What do such principals do?

- Share their vision of best practice with parents at every turn.
- Invite community leaders to school functions.
- Invite parents as classroom helpers.
- Hold meetings and forums in local places of worship, community centers, etc.
- Use the school itself as a community center.
- Attend central office meetings.

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- Conduct workshops for parents and other interested community members.
- Solicit input from parents and community leaders about school decisions.
- Get out of their office.

Discovering natural and creative ways to reach out to parents is imperative for the principal as school-community leader.

This book represents one aspect of a principal's work. Each book in the series addresses a specific, important role or function of a principal. Discussing each separately, however, is quite artificial and a bit contrived. In fact, all seven forms of leadership (instructional, cultural, ethical/spiritual, collaborative, operational, strategic, and school-community) form an undifferentiated whole. Still, we can glean much from a more in-depth analysis of each form of leadership. It is with such understanding that this book is framed. School-community leadership reflects an educational paradigm based on the following assumptions or premises:

- You, as principal, play the most vital role to facilitate (i.e., establish and sustain) ongoing, meaningful, and effective school-community relations. In fact, without your commitment and efforts, little will be accomplished regarding community-school involvement.
- Schools are too complex and the needs so enormous that to exclude assistance from others in the community is shortsighted.
- Planned and organized engagement of parents is imperative both at home and at school.
- Parental involvement has a very positive effect on high achievement for all students.
- Principals encourage wide community participation in school affairs to the extent that such involvement promotes, directly or indirectly, student learning.
- Schools cannot improve without the systematic and ongoing participation of many individuals (see, e.g., Glanz & Sullivan, 2000).

Many schools engage parents and community but few have articulated, well-developed strategic plans linked to school goals and a mission that provides ongoing, in-depth attention to

school-community relations. Such an observation reflects Epstein and Salinas's (2004) conception of partnering with families and communities. They state, "Many schools conduct at least a few activities to involve families in their children's education, but most do not have well-organized, goal-linked, and sustainable partnership programs" (p. 18).

Reflective Questions

1. Consider leaders you have known. Assess their school-community leadership skills. What stands out as particularly noteworthy? Unworthy?
2. Assess the degree to which a "true school-community spirit" exists in your school. How can you contribute to a more involved and spirited community outreach program?
3. What school-community leadership challenges do you face? Explain.
4. React to the assumptions listed above. Which make the most sense to you?
5. What is the benefit of a school-community plan? Describe a school in which such a plan exists.

The major themes of this book and series on the principalship are as follows:

- The principal models school-community leadership in all aspects of school work.
- The success of a school-community effort rests with the principal.
- Parental involvement is the most essential element of any school-community relations program.
- Building school-community alliances takes time, but the benefits are immeasurable.
- Principals and schools cannot by themselves solve all students' instructional problems as other factors come into play (e.g., socioeconomic, health).

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- Yet, principals do play a role in facilitating whole school reform by encouraging attention to these out-of-school factors.
- School-community relations can affect student achievement.

This book and series are also aligned with standards established by the prominent Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC). ELCC standards are commonly accepted by most educational organizations concerned with preparing high-quality educational leaders and as such are most authoritative (Wilmore, 2002). The ELCC, an arm of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), developed six leadership standards used widely in principal preparation. These standards form the basis for this book and series:

1.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning supported by the school community.

2.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school culture, providing an effective instructional program, applying best practices to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff.

3.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by managing the organization, operations, and resources in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

**4.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and other community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

5.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the

success of all students by acting with integrity, fairly, and in an ethical manner.

6.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

** This standard is addressed in this book.

Readers should also familiarize themselves with Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) standards (see, e.g., http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate_School_Leaders_Licensure_Consortium/ and <http://www.boyercenter.org/basicschool/naesp.shtml>).

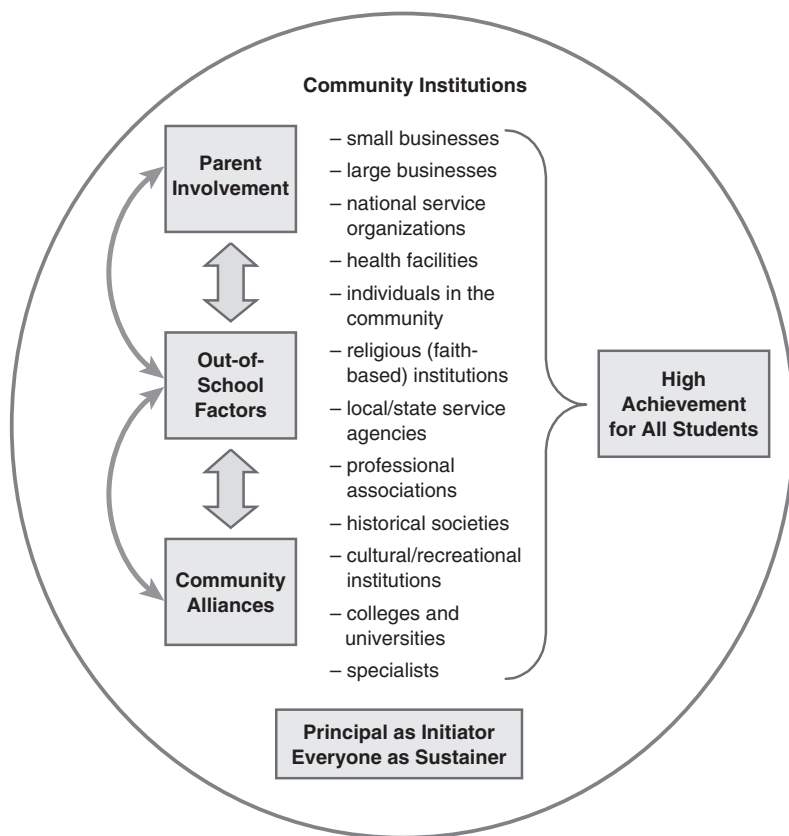
You may think that school-community leadership may not have as immediate a payback as some other forms of leadership. However, underestimating the long-range impact of school-community leadership is shortsighted. Marshalling community resources can have direct and indirect influences on school improvement and, more specifically, on student learning.

Reflective Questions

1. Which of the themes above make the most sense to you?
2. Which of the themes above make the least sense to you? Explain.
3. How do you perceive your role as school-community leader? What specific actions must you take to be effective? Be specific.
4. What do you do on a daily basis that affirms your commitment to school-community leadership? Provide detailed examples.
5. How do school-community relations affect student achievement, directly or indirectly? Be specific.

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In order to establish a framework for the three main chapters, Figure 1.1 illustrates the role of the principal attempting to facilitate and influence the critical elements of school-community relations (i.e., encouraging parent involvement, building community alliances, and affecting out-of-school factors that affect student learning). Effective principals reach out to a variety of community constituents. When these aspects of school-community relations work at their best, a large array of forces, resources, and personnel are brought to bear to positively influence student achievement.



Allow me to offer a word on chapter format and presentation of information. Information in Chapters 2 through 4 is presented

as concisely as possible to make for easy and quick reference reading. Each chapter begins with boxed material called “What You Should Know About.” The box will list and briefly explain the concepts covered in each chapter. Certainly, each chapter will not cover every bit of information there is to know about a given topic, as mentioned earlier. Each chapter culls, though, essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for a successful principal.

A brief word on chapter organization is in order to facilitate reading. Chapter 2 includes some best practices for reaching out to parents, so critical for any school-community initiative. After reviewing some practical strategies, obvious and not so obvious ones, Chapter 3 highlights practices for establishing a variety of community alliances that support school initiatives. Chapter 4 addresses the most critical problem of ensuring high achievement for all students, black and white. School-community leadership must be aimed at using community resources and reforms that promote learning for all students. Involvement in community merely for the sake of public relations is insufficient. Efforts must always be geared to strengthen collaborations that are aimed to help children learn; that’s the bottom line for any form of school leadership. Taken together, these three chapters provide you with information and strategies that promote a sense of community involvement. This book is not meant to be the definitive treatise on school-community leadership, but rather to raise some relevant issues for your consideration. It is my hope that the ideas in this book will give you pause to think about your own role in community relations.

As a concluding activity to this Introduction, read the boxed material below that contains 11 quotations meant to inspire but more importantly to provoke critical thinking about your role as school-community leader. Read each quotation and ask yourself these questions:

- What does the author convey about collaboration, directly or indirectly (in other words, what’s the message in a nutshell)?
- Critique the quotation. Does the thought reflect your beliefs? Explain.
- What practical step(s) could you take to actualize the idea behind each quotation?

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**Some Key Quotations
Related to School-Community Leadership**

“We need to surround kids with adults who know and care for our children, who have opinions and are accustomed to expressing them publicly, and who know how to reach reasonable collective decisions in the face of disagreement. That means increasing local decision making and simultaneously decreasing the size and bureaucratic complexity of schools.”

—Deborah Meier

“[We need a] . . . critically imaginative vision that sees leadership as a community effort to redesign schools for the maximization of the interest of that community for the school is not simply an organizational complex, with function and structure, peopled by workers exercising some status or role.”

—Spencer Maxcy

“Nothing is more important to our shared future than the well being of children. For the children are at our core—not only as vulnerable beings in need of love and care but as a moral touchstone amidst the complexity and contentiousness of modern life. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes children to raise up a village to become all it should be. The village we build with them in mind will be a better place for us all.”

—Hillary Rodham Clinton

“If we really believe family/community involvement is linked to student success, we must stop giving lip service and allocate at least modest sums for staff development, outreach, and coordination of activities.”

—Nancy Feyl Chavkin

“In many communities, partnerships involving schools and other community organizations and agencies are addressing . . . challenges. Such partnerships are helping to create community schools that offer supports and opportunities to enable all children and youth to learn and succeed and to help families and communities thrive.

These partnerships are enhancing the core mission of schools: improving academic achievement."

—Anonymous (*NASSP Bulletin*)

"Schools [should] develop public relations strategies to inform families, businesses, and the community about family/community involvement policies and programs through newsletters, slide shows, videotapes, local newspapers, and other media. It is critical that the strategies recognize the importance of a community's historical, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural resources."

—Nancy Feyl Chavkin

"By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children."

—GOALS 2000

"The same sensitivity required for shaping culture internally must be applied to linking the school to parents and other members of the community."

—Terrence E. Deal and Kent D. Peterson

"It is false to claim that higher standards, more testing and accountability, and better school leadership can close the achievement gap. . . . They may be able to narrow it some; by how much remains to be determined."

—Richard Rothstein

"Rather than waste so much time arguing . . . , policy makers, business and community leaders, and educators must learn to work together in new ways to 'reinvent' the American education system so that all students can find both challenge and joy in learning."

—Tony Wagner

"All teachers should be involved in their communities not just because of the obvious reasons but also because of the political ramifications. . . . PR work is needed to demonstrate the many services that a school provides and the good things that occur there."

—John G. Gabriel

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CASE STUDY* AND REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

The Oakridge Public School District is located in a suburban setting approximately 80 miles north of New York City. The regional population is approximately 250,000. For a suburban area, however, it has attracted a relatively high percentage of industries and commercial establishments, probably due to its lower tax base. Within a 10-mile radius, three institutions of higher learning are available. The Oakridge School District, although not particularly diverse, is committed to preparing students to live in a culturally diverse and global society. The district maintains a strong commitment to educational excellence and community involvement.

When the earthquake and resulting tsunami that wrecked coastlines along the Indian Ocean and killed an estimated 250,000 people hit, James McGregor, principal of Oakridge Middle School, seized the moment by planning a community-wide effort to raise awareness of the tragedy, which would include recruiting students in his school to play an active role in the relief effort. Wanting to use the catastrophic opportunity as a learning experience, Principal McGregor contacted several lead teachers during the Christmas break to solicit their involvement in planning curricular and instructional activities when students returned. Teachers, under his facilitative leadership, designed lessons and assembly programs. Flags at the school were flown at half-staff to honor the dead, plans were made to raise money for relief efforts, and science and social studies teachers decided to engage students in lessons to help them understand the natural disaster and its long-term implications for human welfare.

Susan Fearson, a science teacher at the 900-student Oakridge Middle School, engaged students in such topics as energy transfer, plate tectonics, and the way in which waves travel. "It was an invaluable opportunity to bring science they have learned into events that were happening in the world," she said. She had her students spend a day reading articles she had collected from newspapers and the Internet. The next day, they created a timeline on a world map showing how the disaster unfolded. They also wrote one-page essays on different aspects of the tsunami.

In social studies, Chester Esser said the best way to teach about the disaster is to link it to something the students are already learning or

*This case study has been developed from information gleaned from Trotter, A., Honawar, V., & Tonn, J. L. (2005, January 12). U.S. schools find lessons in tsunami. *Education Week*, 24(18), 1, 2.

already know. For example, he engaged students in research and discussions about how the natural catastrophe might affect existing conflicts in Sri Lanka and on the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

Principal McGregor invited a local politician to speak to students at the school about the importance of the relief effort. Students were given a larger political and social context for the work they were about to undertake. The principal invited others from the community to share their views on how the community might come together during this momentous and tragic occasion.

Beyond these important instructional activities, Principal McGregor mobilized fund-raising efforts by calling together student, faculty, and staff leaders at the same time as he reached out to local businesses and corporations. In-school and community functions were rapidly coordinated to hold events that would raise substantial monies for the relief effort. Donations were solicited from the entire school community and given to the Red Cross during a major assembly program at the school. The event was covered by local newspapers and media. One article read, "At Oakridge Middle School, students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the local community rally to support the tsunami relief effort. It shows what whole community involvement can accomplish." Principal McGregor explained, "Community involvement is integral to our institutional mission, so it was natural for us to immediately think 'community' as we began relief efforts and educational planning."

Principal McGregor, well versed with community agencies and resources, contacted well-known relief agencies, such as the American Red Cross, Save the Children, and Care USA. He requested information about fund-raising activities and solicited their assistance for his work at the school. These three organizations later became the recipients of over \$29,000 in collected donations. Several months later, McGregor was given the Principal-of-the-Year award by the school district, in large measure, for his school-community leadership that resulted in far more funds for the relief effort than other schools in the region. Sylvia Smith, superintendent, praised McGregor by explaining, "James displayed extraordinary leadership on multiple levels. While all principals should be commended for their in-school instructional and curricular efforts to engage students, he rose above the rest through community involvement on a massive scale. James is outstanding because of his articulated and actualized vision that it takes a whole community to educate children. We applaud his efforts and they serve to inspire all of us."

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Reflective Questions

1. Why is James McGregor so committed to school-community leadership?
2. What makes his efforts so unique?
3. What educational benefits are there for student learning when schools engage with community?
4. What other activities would you have engaged in related to school-community involvement?
5. How might you demonstrate your commitment to school-community involvement?
6. In what ways can such efforts affect student learning and, ultimately, achievement?

As mentioned in the Introduction, Chapter 2 builds on the preceding information by highlighting some “best practices” for helping you create meaningful parental involvement so crucial for school-community leadership. These ideas are not meant to be exhaustive of the topic, but merely a means to encourage thinking related to “reaching out to parents.”