

# Questionnaire: Before We Get Started . . .

**D**irections: Using the Likert scale below, circle the answer that best represents your on-the-spot belief about each statement. The questionnaire serves as an advanced organizer of sorts for some of the key topics in this book, although items are purposely constructed in no particular order. Discussion of each topic, though, occurs within the context of relevant chapters. Responses or views to each statement are presented in a subsection following the questionnaire (this section begins “Now, let’s analyze your responses . . .”). You may or may not agree with the points made, but I hope you will be encouraged to reflect on your own views. Reflective activities follow to allow for deeper analysis. Elaboration of ideas emanating from this brief activity will occur throughout the text and series. I encourage you to share reflections (yours and mine) with colleagues. I’d appreciate your personal feedback via the e-mail address I’ve listed in the “About the Author” section.

SA = Strongly Agree (“For the most part, yes.”)

A = Agree (“Yes, but . . .”)

D = Disagree (“No, but . . .”)

SD = Strongly Disagree (“For the most part, no.”)

- SA   A   D   SD   1. Since I am so busy with in-school affairs,  
I really cannot devote the time to build  
strong, enduring relations with the

## xiv School-Community Leadership

- community, other than with parents of course.
- SA A D SD 2. I think I should devote most, if not all, of my time working with teachers on promoting good teaching practice in order to promote student achievement. Dealing with noninstructional, community-related issues is simply distracting and would have, in the end, a dubious impact on student learning.
- SA A D SD 3. Principals are expected to do it all; we simply cannot. Hold us accountable for those areas we can impact. As for community relations, it's a waste of time.
- SA A D SD 4. I acknowledge my responsibility for organizing and implementing an effective school-community relations program.
- SA A D SD 5. I sincerely believe that my involvement in building community relations will have a very positive effect on student learning. We cannot simply abrogate our responsibility to doing all we can to promote student achievement.
- SA A D SD 6. If we do not actively campaign to forge meaningful school-community relations, our ability to help children succeed academically will be limited.
- SA A D SD 7. One of my most important responsibilities is to reach out to parents in meaningful and sustained ways.
- SA A D SD 8. I actively seek to engage parents in school governance and decision-making authority in my school.

- SA A D SD 9. Building a strong public relations program is essential to my school's success.
- SA A D SD 10. I spend a good portion of my week forging community alliances in order to support what we do in school.
- SA A D SD 11. I actively campaign for select local politicians because they play an important role in sustaining vital community relations activities.
- SA A D SD 12. We educators do not work hard enough to narrow the black-white achievement gap. We can indeed do more and work harder to eliminate such differences in academic achievement.
- SA A D SD 13. I play an important role in closing the black-white achievement gap.
- SA A D SD 14. Whole school reform necessitates our involvement in and commitment to school-community relations.
- SA A D SD 15. I need to do more to build and sustain a sound school-community relations program.

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## xvi School-Community Leadership

Before we analyze your responses, consider the fact that our beliefs influence our actions and, more specifically, our commitment to school-community relations. Do you really believe that the time spent on nurturing community relations is in fact time well spent? If so, how much time would you allot? Also, if you do support community involvement, to what extent do you do this? This work will emphasize a rather vigorous commitment to school-community relations that many principals may find overwhelming. Without a firm belief that such work will make a difference to both school morale and, ultimately, student achievement, a principal is not likely to commit the time and energy necessary to make school-community work effective. Examine the premises that follow to determine your commitment to school-community work. Do the following ideas and activities match your own sense of how you see yourself involved in such work?

A school-community leader

- envisions the school building as nested within a larger community structure;
- considers ways the school may meet community needs and vice versa;
- realizes that external community factors may influence student learning even more than what goes on in school;
- spends much time forging and sustaining relations with parents, certainly, but also with local business people, religious institutions, social and health agencies, and civic groups;
- thinks creatively about different ways of involving others in school matters;
- shares information with community partners;
- listens to community partners about ways of improving the school or suggestions for further collaborations;
- encourages innovative ideas and thinking by all members of the community;
- forms committees of internal and external constituents to plan strategically about ways to improve the school, in general, and more specifically, ways of better promoting student achievement.

As you consider the meaning and relevance of school-community leadership, share your thoughts about these questions with a colleague:

### Reflective Questions

1. Do you really believe school-community relations are essential to your work as principal? How so? Be specific.
2. How much time would you devote to forging such relationships? With all that you do, how would you find the time to build community ties to your school?
3. How would you utilize parents in your school?
4. What does school-community leadership mean to you, and why is it so important, if it is? Explain.
5. What are specific ways you solicit community collaboration in your school?
6. What school-community practices or programs have you seen that really work well? Share with a colleague.

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Examine these quotations on school-community relations. What do they mean to you?

*“The move to community-building in education . . . reflects a growing awareness of the profound need . . . to feel part of something larger than themselves.”*

—Rachel Kessler

*“One of the biggest problems of schools is that they have pulled themselves away from the public. There cannot be a border between the school and the community, where the school ends the community starts.”*

—Rod Paige

*“[Democratic society] must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social change without introducing disorder.”*

—John Dewey

*“The school exists for and serves the community.”*

—James Scheurich

*“Where the importance of parental involvement is explicit in the research, the importance of community involvement is more implicit.”*

—Robert J. Marzano

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Now, let’s analyze your responses to the questionnaire:

1. Since I am so busy with in-school affairs, I really cannot devote the time to build strong, enduring relations with the community, other than with parents of course.

*Principals today cannot afford to take such stands. Schools are so complex today that inattention to concrete and sensible ways to involve community to benefit the school is shortsighted at best. Certainly, you are quite busy with a plethora of demands within your school building. Still, without serious and mindful attention to building school-community ties, you will not be able to best and most effectively address the varied needs of learners in your building. Without doubt, principals should establish leadership practices that consider the importance of involving school district and community resources in order to further the school’s mission. Your effectiveness as a principal is contingent on your ability to reign in community-wide resources aimed at enhancing the educational experiences of students and directly or indirectly promoting student learning. Your work in schools does not occur, and must not occur, in isolation from the large external school community (Epstein et al., 2002).*

2. I think I should devote most, if not all, of my time working with teachers on promoting good teaching practice in order to promote student achievement. Dealing with noninstructional, community-related issues is simply distracting and would have, in the end, a dubious impact on student learning.

*Certainly some could argue by citing relevant research (e.g., Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001) that working directly with teachers on instructional matters has significant positive consequences for student learning. However, given the complex nature of teaching and learning, combined with many outside school influences on student learning, careful attention to factors beyond the classroom and even the school door can only bring to bear additional important resources to assist in our work as principals. Of course, most of our efforts should involve utilizing community resources that have a direct impact in the classroom. For instance, if a local senator's office can provide a modest \$20,000 grant to purchase a dozen or so extra computers along with wireless capability and other multimedia items, then teachers would have better resources to accomplish their ultimate goal of promoting student achievement. Successful principals look for creative ways outside the four walls of the school to enhance instructional and curricular work within the school building. These principals make a difference because they are forward-looking, optimistic, and will do almost anything to further the school mission. Studying the work of noteworthy principals will indicate that they do not find noninstructional, community-related issues as distracting, but on the contrary, they are aware that such efforts and resources accumulated might just make the difference (e.g., Goldberg, 2001).*

3. Principals are expected to do it all; we simply cannot. Hold us accountable for those areas we can impact. As for community relations, it's a waste of time.

*The public certainly expects much from principals. Still, many realize that principals cannot indeed do it alone. But to negate obligations to connect to the community is shortsighted, if not incompetent. It is in fact because principals cannot accomplish their objectives without the assistance of others that they reach out to important community members and agencies in relevant and meaningful ways. Principals should be accountable to establish connections with the community in order to channel resources that might not otherwise be available to schools. These resources, personnel or otherwise, might make the difference. Is this difficult work? Indeed. Is it a "waste of time?" Most definitely not.*

4. I acknowledge my responsibility for organizing and implementing an effective school-community relations program.

## xx School-Community Leadership

*Community relations leadership is not a luxury or optional. It is a moral imperative for 21st-century principals. You must take a proactive stance by articulating a commitment toward establishing contacts with the community to better promote student achievement. Then, you must take specific measures to reach out to the community. Developing a plan, strategic or otherwise, is recommended. Effective school-community leaders undertake the following, among other, activities:*

- *Visit local business establishments.*
- *Call on local health agencies.*
- *Join local civic associations.*
- *Participate in nonschool community functions.*
- *Conduct ongoing parent workshops.*
- *Attract parent and community volunteers to the school.*
- *Organize student and parent events.*
- *Solicit partnerships with local colleges.*
- *Celebrate community events.*
- *Circulate school-community newsletters.*
- *Host community breakfasts.*
- *Foster a welcoming environment conducive to collaboration and involvement.*

*Fiore (2002) suggests that you create a school-community relations plan. He offers three kinds of plans:*

- *The Coordinated Plan—A plan developed by the school with representatives from the community. “A coordinated school-community relations plan that is organized and carried out effectively offers an excellent opportunity for cooperation and consistency with a school system” (p. 15). Although the principal retains authority, involvement of central office staff and other community nonprofessional educators is vital to its success.*

- *The Centralized Plan—These plans are initiated and coordinated by central office staff, usually by the superintendent or designee. The advantage of such a plan centers on tapping into central office personnel’s vast expertise and resources relating to public relations and community involvement. “Many argue that although the superintendent may know the larger community well, the building level administrators best understand the populations served by each individual school” (p. 16).*



• *The Decentralized Plan*—This plan involves almost no direct participation of the central office. Authority for development and coordination rests with the building principal. “The common belief is that the principal is in the best position to develop a school-community relations plan that will be of the most benefit to his or her own particular school” (p. 17). Depending on your experience, such a plan allows a principal to frame a community effort that meets the specific needs of a particular school.

Fiore (2002) cautions that “There are pros and cons to all three types of plans. . . . [Ultimately], it is the principal’s responsibility to develop and maintain positive relationships with the school-community—both internally and externally” (p. 17). Fiore provides an easy-to-refer-to checklist of questions to consider whenever framing such a plan:

- Does the plan make use of appropriate and varied communication channels for the various audiences involved?
- Do all individuals with responsibility in the school-community relations plan know what the goals and objectives are?
- Does the plan contain strategies for involving all stakeholder groups whenever possible?
- Are the goals, objectives, and desired outcomes of the school-community relations plan consistent with the school philosophy and the state’s laws?
- Are the goals, objectives, and desired outcomes stated in measurable terms to the extent possible?
- Has the design of the plan’s strategies and activities considered available human resources, funds, and facilities?
- Does the plan distinguish between long- and short-term goals and objectives?
- Are there provisions in the plan for future audits of its effectiveness and results?
- Is the school-community relations plan tailored to the specific needs of the school and its community?
- Does the school-community relations plan take into account the need for in-service education of the staff? (p. 14)

5. I sincerely believe that my involvement in building community relations will have a very positive effect on student learning.

## xxii School-Community Leadership

We cannot simply abrogate our responsibility to doing all we can to promote student achievement.

*Promoting student achievement is undoubtedly our number one objective. Good principals utilize a multifaceted approach to build and sustain a sound learning community that supports good teaching and high achievement for all students. These principals realize that many complex factors affect learning. In-school and out-of-school factors play critical roles. Direct and indirect approaches are needed. Although instructional leadership is now widely viewed as most critical for principals, creating learning communities that include “educators, students, parents, and community partners who work together to improve the school and enhance students’ learning opportunities” (Epstein & Salinas, 2004, p. 12) is equally essential.*

6. If we do not actively campaign to forge meaningful school-community relations, our ability to help children succeed academically will be limited.

*The answer to this item reaffirms the belief previously described.*

7. One of my most important responsibilities is to reach out to parents in meaningful and sustained ways.

*I’ve personally never met a principal who would not solicit parental involvement in student learning at least, in some way. Allow me to relate a humorous but true incident when I was asked at a job interview if I was committed to parental involvement. I didn’t want them (a committee comprised of administrators, teachers, and parents) to forget my response, which hopefully captured my commitment to parents. I rose out of my seat, taking a marker and pad in hand, and said:*

*“Let me show you what I mean when I say that parental involvement is essential.” I held up a blank piece of paper (Figure 1). I continued, “Within a school there are basically three groups of individuals. There are faculty (including administration and teachers), there are students, and there are parents (i.e., community).” As I mentioned each group, I drew a small oval until I developed the configuration seen in Figure 2. “Quite often,” I lamented, “when faculty work on their side, and the parents work on their side, all without partnership and commitment, the students are left in the middle.” As I mentioned “the faculty,” I placed a dot in*

the center of the left-hand oval; as I mentioned “the parents,” I placed a dot in the center of the right-hand oval; and as I mentioned “the students,” I merely pointed to the center oval. I ended up with the configuration in Figure 3.

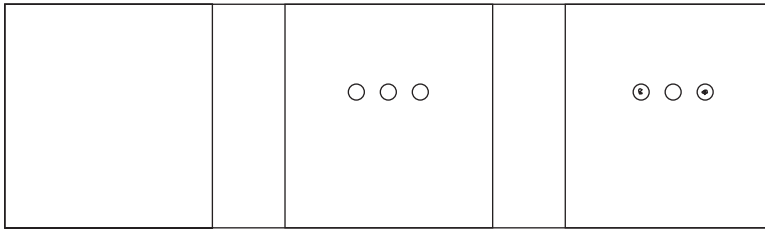


Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

“When this happens,” I continued, “when there is no communication and teamwork between these two sides, the whole system can get looking pretty unhappy.” As I said, “when there is no communication,” I drew the curved line under the three ovals. The configuration now resembled the sad face shown in Figure 4.

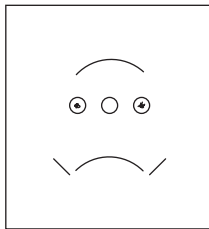


Figure 4

“But, let’s add teamwork. Let’s get everyone working together to help our children. When parents and faculty work together constructively, the whole school is unified.” As I mentioned “working together,” I drew a large encompassing oval around the sad face so that it looked like Figure 5.

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## xxiv School-Community Leadership

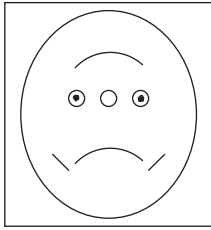


Figure 5

*“Then,” I concluded, “thanks to teamwork and spirit of cooperativeness, students will succeed and we will have a happy and functioning school; one we may all be justly proud of.” As I said the last words, I turned the drawing around 180 degrees. Before the eyes of the committee, it turned into the happy face as seen in Figure 6.*

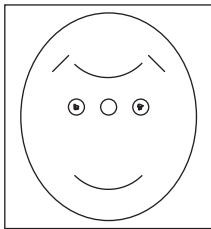


Figure 6

*Although this was a somewhat contrived and simple demonstration of my philosophical commitment to parental involvement, several committee members did smile, and I’m certain I effectively communicated my point. Involve parents in any way possible. Here are some suggestions:*

- 1. Invite their participation on needs assessment and goal committees through formal and informal invitations.*
- 2. Sponsor an open house at which you will provide refreshments and outline the nature of participation you desire.*
- 3. Develop a parent hotline so that parents may be kept abreast of “what’s happenin’” in the school.*
- 4. Invite parents to a parent-student picture night.*

*Now, commitment to parental involvement may be contrived or sincere. You’ll need to determine that for yourself. But even if you are*

*sincere, what is the nature of such involvement? Do you believe that parents are important only in working with their child at home on homework and school-related projects? Or, would you also invite parents to join in-school curriculum committees, or even contribute to shared decision making? Reaching out to parents is one thing; the nature of that involvement is quite another.*

8. I actively seek to engage parents in school governance and decision-making authority in my school.

*Picking up from the response to the last item, would you in fact engage parents in such meaningful activities and responsibilities? One of the major responsibilities of school-community leadership is engaging parents in significant and ongoing involvement in all aspects of the school programming. As Buchen (2003) observes, "Parents are taking more assertive roles, moving well beyond the stereotype of running bake sales" (p. 46). Successful principal school-community leaders engage in the following, among others, parent-related activities:*

- *Invite parents to join a variety of school and curriculum-related committees.*
- *Provide parent area, with parent resources.*
- *Solicit their advice for better ways of conducting school business.*
- *Identify their professional expertise in order to involve them in your school in some creative way.*
- *Share your ideas with them.*
- *Establish ongoing educational and social workshops for them.*
- *Ask them to conduct relevant workshops matched to their areas of interest and expertise.*
- *Ask them to volunteer to read to or tutor children.*
- *Involve them in action research projects.*
- *Let them serve as school representatives at various community social or cultural functions.*
- *Involve them in recruitment initiatives.*
- *Include them in school governance.*

9. Building a strong public relations program is essential to my school's success.

*Here is another area that some principals may not think about. Successful principals think out of the box . . . and out of the school for*

*that matter. How might promoting in-school affairs to the public at large assist you in accomplishing your educational objectives? Highlighting innovative school projects might, for instance, attract the attention of some business or private enterprise that might, in turn, want to donate some funds to expand the project. Computer companies often look out for their own public relations (PR) interests and would be willing to donate some new technologies. Private individuals, especially alumni, might take interest in that project by donating special funds to support school-related initiatives. Here are some ways principals might initiate a PR campaign:*

- *Form a PR campaign committee comprised of teachers, administrators, students, parents, and a nonparent community member if possible.*
- *Develop a strategic plan with listed objectives and concrete strategies for initiation.*
- *Create a newsletter for community-wide distribution that highlights monthly school projects, latest announcements, teacher achievements, and so on.*
- *Get out into the community on a weekly basis to herald school achievements (e.g., visit local stores and agencies, have lunch or dinner with key community officials and even politicians).*
- *Publish relevant statistics that either highlight school successes or list suggestions for potential donors to assist needed areas (e.g., technology, sports, curriculum resources).*

10. I spend a good portion of my week forging community alliances in order to support what we do in school.

*“Good portion” is key. I would say that “quality” time is more important than “quantity.” A strong school-community leader does not sit behind the desk, but pays close attention to community activities. Ongoing visits and engagements within the community are warranted. Schedule, at the very least, monthly meetings with key community members (e.g., lunch with the local Rotary Club). Join local associations and participate actively.*

11. I actively campaign for select local politicians because they play an important role in sustaining vital community relations activities.

*Caution here is suggested. Interacting with local politicians is wise, but given the vicissitudes of politics and the ever-changing nature of*

*alliances, siding with one politician over another might come back to bite you, so to speak. Maintaining friendly relations to all is highly recommended. As principal of a school, your advocacy of one person over another carries some weight. Always consult your superintendent for advice before you engage in a political campaign. From my experience, politicians will be willing to assist your school-related projects regardless of your personal political stance. Seize on their willingness to help.*

12. We educators do not work hard enough to narrow the black-white achievement gap. We can indeed do more and work harder to eliminate such differences in academic achievement.

*We are too insular in our approach to raising academic achievement, especially in regard to the so-called black-white achievement gap. We must realize that many non-school-related forces and factors affect student achievement. Although we must remain cognizant of our responsibilities to promote student learning within our direct areas of control, proactive school-community leaders attempt to influence non-school-related factors that also impact student learning. Principals can contribute greatly to the larger effort to narrow this achievement gap by serving as advocates, for example, of "policies to stabilize family housing, school-community health clinics, early childhood education, after school programs, and summer programs" (Levine, 2004, p. xi).*

13. I play an important role in closing the black-white achievement gap.

*Effective school-community leaders exude a confident, optimistic belief that their work makes a difference. A high sense of efficacy characterizes these individuals. As principal, you remain committed to the notion that all students can learn, albeit at different rates and in different ways. You are unrelenting in pursuit of ways to help each child succeed and reach his or her potential. Although you are aware of the practical limits of your efforts, you remain steadfast to your commitment to reducing, if not closing, the achievement gap.*

14. Whole school reform necessitates our involvement in and commitment to school-community relations.

*Much has been written about whole school reform (e.g., Elmore, 1999; Fullan, 1999). Enormous energies and efforts have been expended on alternative ways of structuring schools, modifying curricula, and providing additional instructional resources that support student learning.*

## xxviii School-Community Leadership

*Federal legislation (i.e., the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002) has made a significant mark on American education. Although pockets of success stories exist, little change has been effected on a systemic or schools-wide basis. As alluded to earlier, educators should remain cognizant of ways they may influence out-of-the-school factors that affect student learning. Although they cannot, by themselves, create sustained whole school improvement (a societal effort is needed, as will be argued at greater length later in this volume), they do play, especially we principals, a significant influential role. The more you consider and act on school-community initiatives, the better position you'll be in to effect changes in your school that you might not otherwise be able to accomplish. An important reason for our involvement in school-community relations is to somehow have an impact on whole school reform by utilizing resources external to the school building that may just make the difference.*

15. I need to do more to build and sustain a sound school-community relations program.

*Self-assessment here is critical. In writing this book, I interviewed several current principals. Except for one, each reported a commitment to school-community relations but said that "I could/should be doing much more." Hopefully this book will encourage your continued efforts in this area.*

**Reflective Questions**

1. Which of the explanations above make the most sense to you?
2. Which of the explanations above make the least sense to you? Explain why.
3. Can you think of an instance when you were involved in a meaningful school-relations venture or project? Describe the project, your involvement, what you learned, and how the experience befitted student learning.
4. Can you think of principals who serve as exemplars in school-community relations? What qualities do they possess? Are such qualities replicable? What can you learn from them?
5. In what ways do you reach out to parents? Community representatives? Explain in detail.



6. Do you believe that your work can make a significant difference in the achievement of students in your school? What factors are in your control? What factors are beyond your control? Is there any way to influence some of those factors you currently feel are beyond your control? Explain. What must society or other agencies do to assist? How might you utilize community resources to facilitate the process?

See Resource B for a more detailed survey to assess your role as a school-community leader.