School Community Relations
Syllabus

Course Description

How schools and communities relate to one another determines the overall success of the educational program. This course is designed to prepare school administrators to develop communication and outreach strategies geared specifically for their school communities. Course participants will develop an understanding that schools are part of the wider community; develop a public relations plan that will reach and enlist the support of diverse elements within communities; gain support for schools by presenting needs in positive ways; develop communication skills for internal and external audiences; use a variety of media tools; meet crises and solve conflicts with positive outcomes; and involve citizens in an “invitational” way. Each session emphasizes a practical application and use of communication skills for the student’s school community.

Competencies

Through participation in this course, participants will:
1. Understand that schools are part of a wider community involving diverse groups;
2. Develop a public relations strategy to present a positive image of the school;
3. Learn communication skills for both internal and external audiences;
4. Use the media effectively to portray positive messages about their schools;
5. Address controversial issues within the school by good conflict resolution communication methods;
6. Develop a crisis management plan involving communication that is timely, accurate and honest; and
7. Learn how to work effectively with the School Board and PTA.
Materials

All materials are accessed via the CaseNEX website http://www.casenex.com using the PIN provided and the user name/password you create.

All readings listed can be found by going to the Virtual Library and looking under the case you are reading that session. When pdf files are linked, we recommend printing them for easier reading.

If you do not have the following software, please download each from the given sites. You will find detailed instructions under the ‘Tutorials’ link.

- RealPlayer:  

- Adobe Reader:  
  http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html

- QuickTime:  

Cases Used

- Can Anyone Hear Me?
- Let Us Pray
- Up to Standard

Course Schedule

Typical course sessions run from Sunday morning through Saturday at midnight. Specific session dates may be found by clicking on Syllabus on the top menu bar. Course participants should read both the case and assigned readings prior to joining the online discussion. Participation in the discussion should be ongoing throughout each course session. For typical courses, final discussion postings, journals, and workbook assignments are due by Saturday at midnight unless otherwise noted. Please see the News Flash for any alterations of the course schedule posted by your instructor.
Introductory Session
Exploring the CaseNEX Site

Complete these tasks prior to the beginning of Session 1.

Readings

Read the "Course Tutorial" linked from the TUTORIAL menu, paying special attention to the Case-Analysis and Workbook Assignment Rubrics. These rubrics will be used by your instructor throughout the course to evaluate your Journal entries, Discussion responses, and Workbook assignments where appropriate.

Discussion

Post one entry introducing yourself to your classmates. You may choose to describe your professional background and experience, relevant personal information, or why you are taking this course. (100 words or fewer).

Journal

What do you find inspiring and challenging about your work in education? (100 words or fewer)

Note

Use CaseMail to send a note to your instructor stating that you will be taking this course. To do so, click on CaseMail on the top menu bar and then 'Click here to create a new message.' Use the marked link to look up an address. Continue linking down until you see the class list. Click on the instructor’s name and then compose your message and hit 'Post Message.'
Session 1
Public Education and Public Enterprise

Case
None this session

Readings
- Empowering Communities to Improve Education
  http://www.springerlink.com/content/l81h1249r725m356/?MUD=MP
- Gaining Support for Education
  http://www.sedl.org/policy/insights/n09/5.html
- Toss Out the PR Playbook: Send in the Public-Engagement Team
  http://www.publicagenda.org/articles/toss-out-pr-playbook-send-public-engagement-team
- Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change

Discussion
Consider the following statement from various school community perspectives: "Communities are more likely to financially support improvements that involve them.” Then, describe how you would put into action “deliberative dialogue” in your school community. What might be the intended or unintended consequences of your actions? Cite knowledge from the readings as you respond to your colleagues’ suggestions.

Journal
Are you aware of the many diverse groups with special interests that exist within your school community? Based on knowledge from research about your community, answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic makeup of the community? Include, age, gender, ethnicity, and other pertinent facts.
2. What percentage of taxpayers has children in the public school system?
3. What percentage of the community budget is allotted to schools?
4. How are schools funded? Are property taxes the primary source?
5. What major businesses significantly contribute to the tax base?

What issues emerge from this information that will form your thinking regarding a successful school community relations program?

Note
Check your CaseMail (linked from TOP menu bar) and News Flash (on the right when you login) for notes from your instructor every time you log on to the site.

**Workbook Assignment**

None this session
Session 2
Developing a Public Relations Program

Case
None this session

Readings

- Public Relations
  http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_relations#Methods,_tools_and_tactics
- The Power of Public Relations in Schools
  http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/447
- National School Public Relations Association
  http://www.nspra.org/
- Raising the Bar for School PR

Discussion

Think of one issue when leaders in your school or school district had to ask, "How can you get us out of this horrible public relations situation we are in?"
What would have been some positive consequences for having an effective public relations plan at that time?

Journal

Respond to a critical issue in your school (past, present, or possible) with a press release for the local newspaper. Based on knowledge gained from the readings, use the “inverted pyramid style” and the “Five W’s and an H” in writing the press release. Be cognizant of the possible consequences of the story being put on national newswires and shared with the world.

Workbook Assignment

Public Relations Program Design

I. Review, analyze and describe your school district’s “Public Relations Program” in terms of the model programs recommended in the readings. You may not be able to find a “Public Relations Office” per se but look for the functions of a public relations program. They may be distributed under different offices with different titles. Make commendations or recommendations for improvement to the program based on your analysis.
II. Design a “Public Relations Program” for your school in conjunction with the existing district program. Consider how you could best align your needs with the public relations function in your district. Describe the following:

Goals
- Outreach
- Positive messages

Mechanisms for
- Getting out good news
- Putting out the “fires” of bad news

Contacts
- Persons (with email addresses and 24/7 phone numbers) responsible at the school level to communicate information
- Persons (with correct titles, email addresses, phone numbers) responsible at the district offices, critical contacts within the community (School Board and PTA members) and media offices.

Evaluation
- Timetable for periodic review
- Assessment of program

Prepare the school “Public Relations Program” document in a format that could be shared with faculty or put on a school web page.

Due by the end of Session 3
Session 3
Effective Communication for Conflict Resolution

Case
Can Anyone Hear Me?

Readings
- Communication Skills
- Beyond the Parent-Teacher Conference: Diverse Patterns of Home-School Communication
- NPEC Sourcebook (read Chapter 3)

Discussion

Discuss the main issues in the discussion between Sam and Mr. McCree in Scene 3. Based your experience with effective communication and knowledge gained from the readings, is Mr. McCree using effective communication strategies in his conversation with Sam? Why or why not? If you were in Mr. McCree’s place, how would you respond to the requests made by Sam?

Journal

Identify a difficult school communication issue facing your school. What are the perspectives of the key players that are preventing resolution of the issues? Based on your experience, and knowledge gained from the readings, what communication strategies could you recommend that would help resolve the issues?

OR

As the principal or assistant principal in your school, prepare for a difficult teacher conference in which you need to address issues related to a teacher’s poor communication skills. Identify the area of poor communication which could be with students, staff or parents. What action steps would you recommend to the teacher to improve communication? How would you follow up with the teacher and encourage improvement?

Workbook Assignment

Public Relations Program Design is due by the end of this session.
Session 4
Effective PTA Partnering

Critical Perspective
Gloria Guzman: A Critical Perspective on School Leadership, Parts 4 and 5. (Access by clicking on “Class Materials” then “Critical Perspectives.”)

Case
None this session

Readings
- The Principal’s Role in Improving and Sustaining Parent Involvement
  http://cnx.org/content/m12925/latest/
- Virginia Department of Education’s Links for Parents
  http://www.doe.virginia.gov/students_parents/index.shtml
- Virginia PTA http://www.vapta.org/

Discussion

After listening to Gloria Guzman’s comments, discuss what you see as her perspective on thinking “out of the box” in dealing with parents and families. What action steps could you take in your school that would help families “participate one hundred percent” as she suggests? Discuss any new knowledge or insights on strategies for working with family members who are not English proficient.

Journal

What are some of the suggestions given in “The Principal’s Role in Improving and Sustaining Parent Involvement?” Which would work best for you and your school? Tell why you think these suggestions are worthwhile and how you would put them into action. Suggest your own techniques that work for you.

Review the “Virginia Department of Education's Links for Parents.” Choose 3 links that you would recommend to parents. Describe how it would increase their knowledge and why it meets the particular needs of your school community.
Workbook Assignment

Faculty Meeting Plan

You are the principal of a school (elementary, middle, or high school) and need to prepare for a faculty meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to provide teachers with information that will foster good parent/teacher relationships and ways to work with the PTA in productive and meaningful ways. Prepare for a 1½ hour faculty/inservice meeting.

I. Agenda
Prepare an agenda listing times, speakers, activities, breaks, etc.

II. Principal’s Opening Speech
Prepare your remarks (10-15 minutes) as if you were speaking to your faculty by starting with greetings, recognitions, etc. Use knowledge gained from the readings and your experience with and understanding of your school community as you prepare your comments. They should include but are not limited to the following:

Vision
• Your vision for good school community relations specific to the school
Rationale
• Reasons why good parent/teacher relations are important for the success of the overall school program
Affirmation
• Recognition of the importance of involvement of the both teachers and parents in building good school community relations
Roles and responsibilities
• Distinction between what teachers and parents can and cannot do
Goals
• Specific, attainable goals for the year

III. Activities
Create activities (at least two) geared for adult learners that will reinforce your message. These could include but are not limited to small group discussion, role playing, hands-on tools to facilitate communication, brainstorming, etc.

Due by the end of Session 5
Session 5
Communication through Multimedia

Case
None this session

Readings
- The Internet as a Way to Communicate With Parents and Students
  [Link]
- Parent Involvement in Children’s Education: Efforts by Elementary Schools
  [Link]
- Got Web? Investing in a District Website
  [Link]
- Beyond Image: Learning-Based Communications
  [Link]

Discussion

Share at least three communication methods success stories from your school: one for the internal audience and two for external audiences. How does the school use different multi-media methods to reach diverse audiences? Discuss the consequences of using each method in different school settings.

Journal

Based on knowledge gained from research and experience, analyze the different media communication methods used in your school district and school. These can include any outreach by print, electronic or face-to-face methods. List at least 10:
  - Rate the use of each as rarely, moderately or frequently.
  - Rate the quality of each as poor, good, superior.
What actions can you take to improve those which have a lower rating? Consider the perspectives of students, families, and community members: which methods might they find most helpful?

Workbook Assignment

Faculty Meeting Plan is due by the end of this session.
Session 6  
Crisis Management

Case  
Up to Standard (focus on scenes 4, 5, and 6)

Readings  
- Model School Crisis Management Plan  
- Safe from Harm (focus on the “Young Guns” article)  
- When Disaster Strikes

Discussion  
What are the main issues in the case Up to Standard with respect to Kyle and Jamey? How might the perspectives of the teachers and principal affect the consequence of Kyle’s expulsion? What communication-related actions could have been taken to avoid the final outcome?

Journal  
Imagine a student in your school is caught with a weapon. Based on knowledge gained from the readings, in particular the Virginia Department of Education’s guidelines on communication, what strategic actions should your administrators take to discuss the issue with the greater school community? Address external school community groups in your response, and consider what professional development might be provided to internal staff so that they are better able to deal with the crisis of a weapon in school.

Workbook Assignment

Crisis Management Plan Analysis

I. Analysis  
Read and analyze your school’s Crisis Management Plan. Compare it to the “Model School Crisis Management Plan.” List essential components and distinguish between those your school’s plan does and does not have. You may use the format that best facilitates analysis such as bullets, table, chart or another of your choosing. The goal is to prepare a document that could be presented to a faculty committee.

II. Letter  
As the principal in the case “Up to Standard”, draft a letter to go home to parents the day the weapon was found. The letter should inform
parents of the circumstances of the incident and actions the school has taken. Check your district's policy on sharing information so as not breach confidentiality or jeopardize evidence that could possibly be used in the upcoming expulsion hearing.

Due by the end of Session 7
Session 7
A Typical Day Managing Crises and Solving Conflicts

Case
Let Us Pray

Readings
- Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools
- Media Outreach Tips
- Dealing with the Press: No Matter What I Say, They Get It Wrong

Discussion

Discuss what action steps you would take in dealing with each scenario. What are possible consequences for the actions you might take?

The Day after Scene Six, 7:00 AM
Mr. Estment arrives to his office and finds a parent waiting outside, who is infuriated about the conservative Christian student prayer the night before.

9:00 AM
A School Board member calls the school demanding to know why the prayer took place and what the principal intends to do about it. He says his phone has been ringing off the hook with complaints from the community and he needs answers immediately.

12:00 AM
The superintendent’s office calls the principal and asks the principal to be in the superintendent’s office by 4:00 PM. He needs to be prepared to discuss what strategies he will use to defuse the tempest in the community regarding the student prayer and the science curriculum.

1:00 AM
Mr. Estment meets with the conservative Christian students who said the prayer the night before.

3:00 AM
Ms. Evergreen, science department chair, comes to the office obviously frustrated. She has had a call from a member of the School Board who wants to discuss the science curriculum in reference to intelligent design. She is visibly upset and says the science faculty has been agitated all day. She wonders if she should resign as the job is too stressful.

Journal
The Day after Scene Six, 10:00 a.m.

A reporter calls the school and asks to have an interview with the principal. She says wants a story on the conservative Christian student prayer at the assembly the night before. The reporter would like to have the interview immediately since she wants it to make the evening news. “Would you mind if they video taped the interview?” she asks. Based on the knowledge gained from reviewing the guidelines in the “Dealing with the Press” reading, prepare talking points for an interview with a reporter. Anticipate the consequences of statements made in the interview.

Workbook Assignment

Crisis Management Plan Analysis is due by the end of this session.
Session 8
Working with the School Board

Case
Let Us Pray

Readings
• Virginia School Boards Association
• American School Board Journal
• ‘Hold Them, Fold Them, or Walk Away’: Twelve Cardinal Rules for Dealing with School Board Conflict
• Working with School Boards

Discussion

Assume that the science department chair, and the three science teachers who received the National Science Foundation grant, are asked to attend a School Board meeting to discuss possible changes to the science curriculum. Discuss how they could prepare for the meeting by: understanding the issues and perspectives of various key players in the school community; having solid background knowledge of their subject in the context of school law precedents; formulating action steps with sound explanations for their curriculum choices. Project the possible consequences of this meeting.

Journal

Principals can work better with School Board members if they understand their issues. Write a short descriptive essay about your local School Board based on knowledge gathered from research or interviews.
• Describe the background of the members to include political affiliation.
• Are the members elected or appointed? What is a typical term?
• What is their monetary compensation for being on the Board?
• Approximately how many hours per week do they serve?
• Who is the chairman? Who is your local Board member?
• Identify the key issues of the School Board in your district. Do any of the key issues affect your school?
• Describe the highlights of a School Board meeting by attending one or watching a meeting on TV.
• What strategies does your school use to involve the School Board in activities?

Note
Remember to complete the online course evaluation which can be found under Class Materials on the menu bar.

**Workbook Assignment**

*None this session*