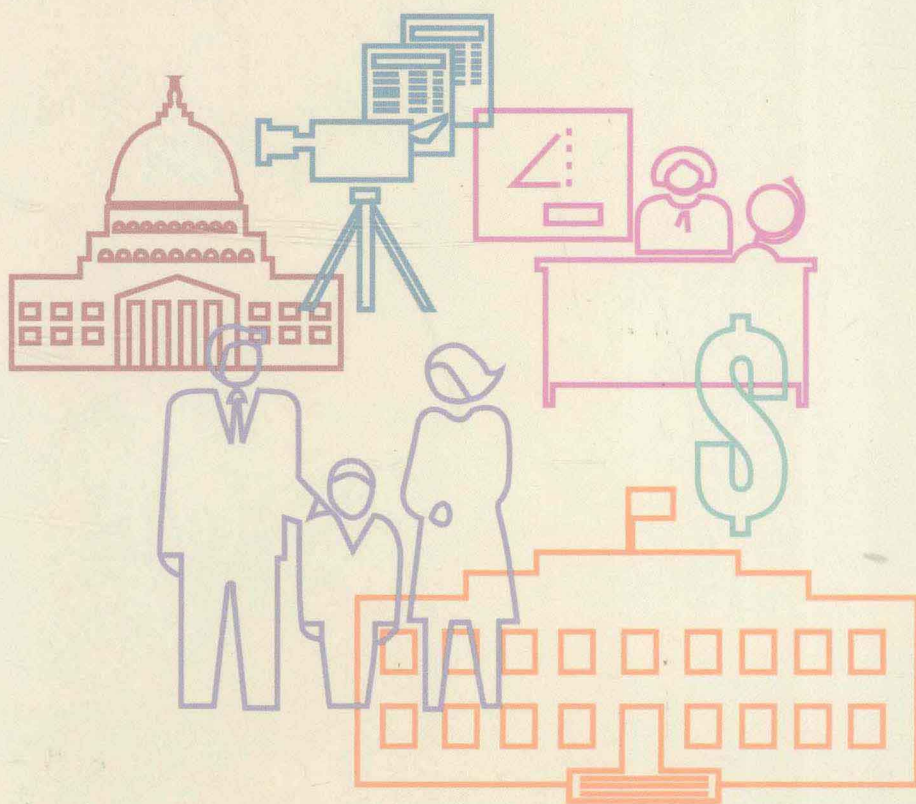
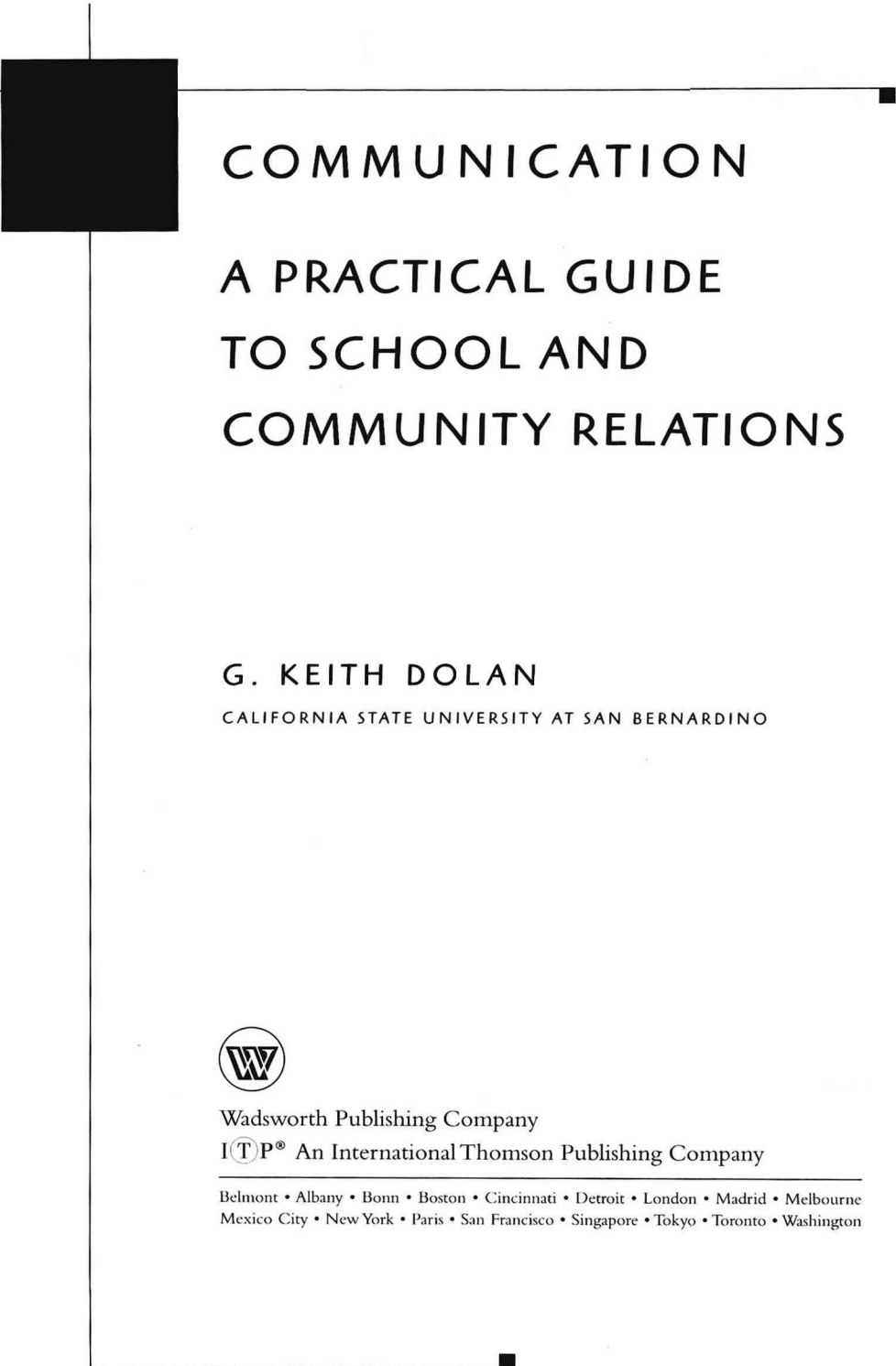


COMMUNICATION

A Practical Guide to School and Community Relations



G. KEITH DOLAN



COMMUNICATION

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

G. KEITH DOLAN

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY AT SAN BERNARDINO



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Communication: A Practical Guide to School and Community Relations



Preface

COMMUNICATION: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS is designed for educators who are seeking certificates, credentials, or degrees that allow them to be part of the administrative structure of school districts. It is intended for courses that include school–community relations as a topic or for courses that deal solely with this aspect of administration.

School–community relations are complex and are not easy to conduct. Inherent dangers lie in the process. Poor handling of school–community relations can fragment the groups that comprise the school or its district. Educators therefore need to become aware of the political, social, and cultural realities within their communities. They also must be prepared to meet the challenges that emerge from the vast number of changes that take place in our society as a whole. Educational leaders who are adept at communicating can effectively establish and maintain dialogue and can listen well to different groups and individuals expressing their concerns and wanting their demands met within the school structure.

Educators help forge and maintain a vision of the role and function of the school or district within the communities they serve. Educational leaders communicate that vision in a variety of ways. However, they also must understand that communication is two-way. Encouraging cooperative efforts among various constituencies and handling conflicts when they arise are essential skills for today's educational leaders.

ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT

Communication: A Practical Guide to School and Community Relations consists of eleven chapters that explore communication skills with a variety of groups. The first chapter gives an overview of ideal school–community relations. Chapters 2 and 3 explore politics and power and some of the demographic changes found in most communities.

Chapters 4 through 10 focus on groups or agencies that are part of the community structure, both internal and external. Chapter 11 describes briefly how to evaluate a school–community program. Although the text focuses on site-level problems that occur in a school district, the underlying principles of the text apply in other situations also. Any educator who seeks improved school–community relations may find these principles applicable.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Each chapter of this text includes the following sections to enhance the instructor’s presentation and the student’s learning.

- The **Chapter Objectives** lists major ideas or concepts, in sequence, for the student to think about.
- The **Chapter Outline** lists the chapter’s major headings to give both the student and the teacher a preview of the organization of the chapter.
- **References** appear at the close of the chapter.
- A brief **Summary** lists the ten major concepts discussed within the chapter.
- Following the summary are five **Discussion Questions** that can be used for either oral or written class activities.
- Following the questions are five **Activities** that can be assigned to students as field work projects. Students may use the results collectively for in-depth class discussions.

- The **Case Example** can be used for small-group study, class discussion, role-play, or as a written application challenge.

Appendix A features sample letters that administrators may use in various ways to improve or maintain good relations with teachers, parents, and others. Appendix B contains lists of items commonly included in handbooks for students, teachers, and parents.

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

In this chapter, you will learn

- The characteristics that define strong leaders
- Some of the leadership tasks to be undertaken by a school leader
- Examples of problems encountered in carrying out these tasks
- How strong communication skills can benefit the process
- A sampling of the groups that a school leader works with
- That a school leader must stand firm on certain issues
- That routine school activities need to be carefully planned

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Leadership Qualities
- Site-level Administrative Tasks
 - Working with Teachers
 - Teacher-Parent Communication
 - Teacher-Teacher Communication
 - Planning Public Relations Schoolwide
 - Communicating with Parents
 - Being Available
 - Working with Organizations
 - The Board of Education
 - The District Office
 - Teachers' Unions
 - Community Special-interest Groups
 - Listening to Parents
 - Planning Routine School Events
 - Conclusion



Leadership Qualities

One current, major topic in school administration is leadership ability because it is the leader who gets things done or gets others to get things done. Leadership is particularly important when states and school districts embrace the concept of decentralization.

Historically, schools have constantly been in a state of flux, and that has continued to be true during the last decade. Dramatic demographic changes are taking place in our country, many more groups seek equal participation in school operation, the public demands stronger and better schools, and we place greater emphasis on developing a school mission based on understanding its culture.

The principal is the primary person to give leadership to an individual school, although he or she has many tasks to perform and a variety of issues to deal with. This textbook specifically focuses on a number of leadership challenges that fall into the broad category of school–community relations.

A number of leadership models and theories are discussed in the literature other than trait theory, but as Hughes¹ quoted Bennis, five characteristics comprise a leader:

1. Leaders have a strong vision of where an organization needs to go and strong orientation to established outcomes.

2. Leaders can communicate this vision to others, often using metaphors as the communication device.
3. Leaders are persistent. Because failure is viewed as an opportunity to learn, leaders can stay the course when sudden setbacks occur.
4. Leaders know their organization and find ways and means to overcome obstacles.
5. Leaders empower others and develop an environment in which workers strive for excellence. Workers are given a clear sense that they are essential to progress and goal accomplishment.

Perhaps more important than the organizational structure a leader subscribes to may be his view of his ability to lead and the perceptions those who work closely with him have of his ability to lead. Leadership is a difficult characteristic to pin down. We all know of dynamic, powerful leaders whose personality types are all different but who can lead well despite these differences. Whatever the theoretical underpinnings of the particular leader, she has a vision and plan and seems able to get the job done.

Strong leadership is required in the area of school–community relations. Successful management of the never-ending list of contacts among the site administrator, his staff, and the varied community groups, which the school serves, requires vision and plans. All contacts must be handled skillfully and professionally, which requires leadership ability.

The most positive school–community relations begin in a school's classrooms. Students who like their teachers, enjoy their daily school experiences, and feel safe at their schools naturally relay their enthusiasm to their parents who radiate positive feelings about the schools their offspring attend. Problems that negatively affect this idealized scenario, however, often arise. Students do not always succeed in school; they do not always complete homework assignments; they sometimes become behavior problems at school. Some have difficulty relating effectively with their peer group, and others do not feel protected going to, or even attending, school.

Although classroom teachers try to alleviate these potential student problems, their main task is the daily teaching act itself; thus, principals must intercede with these student concerns. This places them

immediately in the center of school–community relationships, which include interacting with students, teachers, and parents as well as many other individuals and groups. The leadership of school principals is a necessary ingredient if effective schools are to be developed and maintained; it is no different with school–community relations.

Although it is not exclusively the site-level administrator's task to carry out a strong school–community relations program, she must recognize that it is an important goal of effective leadership. This administrative task, like most of the others discussed in the following pages, is not something scheduled “for the third Tuesday of each school month” or when the community is asked for funds. It is the thread, or more accurately a series of threads, that runs through the fabric of all tasks and responsibilities of the site-level administrator. Successfully interpreting a school and its programs to the diverse groups who are a part of the school and community requires serious planning for the countless contacts that will take place with these individuals and groups.



Site-Level Administrative Tasks

The principal should be able to recognize the components needed to develop a successful school–community relations program. Developing such a program cannot be left to chance. It requires planning, beginning at the site level.

The school administrator should work carefully with teachers, parents, and community organizations. He or she must be available for each of these groups. The school administrator should have good listening skills and should be able to concentrate on careful planning of routine school events, which are part of the public relations process.

WORKING WITH TEACHERS

An effective leader in the area of school–community relations develops a dedication to a workable relationship program that seeks to include all members of the school community. One primary group is, of course, the teaching staff.