

## Relationship Building: The First “R” for Principals

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### **Abstract**

School leadership today demands skills, knowledge, and attitudes much different than those required a short time ago. With the increased accountability for principals to achieve and maintain adequate yearly progress, test scores are often seen by teachers and parents as principals’ top priority. Relationships are seen as secondary and they should be higher on the priority list. It is our contention that if principals spend more time building relationships with students, teachers, parents, and community members, test scores will rise and discipline referrals will diminish.

### **Introduction**

We are born out of and live in relationships...The educational leader needs to recognize that relationships are a fundamental and intrinsic part of being; we cannot separate our existence from our relationships. Hence, leadership activities that focus unduly on the technical and bureaucratic elements of an organization are devoid of meaning. Educational leaders who acknowledge that human interactions are basic to our lives, to the creation of meaning, and to the development of understanding are more likely to take full account of the *why, who, what, where, and when* of schooling (Shields, 2006, p.76).

School leadership today demands knowledge, skills, and dispositions very different than those required a short time ago. “The school principal should be a keeper of a collective covenant, rather than the custodian of the status quo. She or he must be a builder of relationships among a number of constituents including teachers, students, parents and the community at large” (Sorensen & Machell, 1996, p.12). Witmer (2005) added relationships as the fourth R in education. She contended, “Reading, ‘riting, ‘rithmetic, and *relationships* are the foundations of an effective educator” (p. 224). With the increased accountability for principals to achieve and maintain adequate yearly progress, test scores are often seen by teachers and parents as principals’ top priority (Ried, 2004). After reviewing a 2003 survey of American teachers by Metropolitan Life, Reg Weaver, president of the National Education Association, reported, “MetLife’s survey is a reality check to principals that their best efforts to motivate teachers and

students and listen to all school staff, students, and parents are falling short” (as reported by Reid, 2004). Unfortunately, relationships are seen as secondary and they should be higher on the priority list. It is our contention that if principals spend more time building relationships with students, teachers, parents, and community members, test scores will rise and discipline referrals will diminish.

### **Research Questions**

1. What specific strategies can principals use to build relationships with students?
2. What specific strategies can principals use to build relationships with teachers?
3. What specific strategies can principals use to build relationships with parents/families?
4. What specific strategies can principals use to build relationships with the community?

### **Methodology**

Several methods were used to collect data for this study: 1) A thorough review of literature on principals and relationships was completed. 2) Five principals from China were surveyed regarding ways they build relationships with young children in their schools. 3) Principals were interviewed as to how they build relationships with students, teachers, parents/families and the community. 4) Teachers were informally questioned as to how principals currently work to build relationships and how they would like to see principals build relationships with people in their school community.

### **Review of the Literature**

#### What is a School Principal?

A principal is often defined as the person who is in a leading position in a school and possibly the most important member of the organization. He/she is the instructional leader of the school (Palaniuk, 1987) and an effective principal is thought to be a necessary precondition to an effective school (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). A 1977 U.S. Senate Committee Report on Equal Education Opportunity (U.S. Congress, 1970) identified the principal as the most influential person in a school. The committee stated, “It is the leadership of the principal that sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of the teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become... If a school is a vibrant, innovative, child-centered place, if it has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost always point to the principal’s leadership as the key to success” (p. 56).

In the early 1980s, Jack Frymeir chaired a committee to conduct a *Good Schools Project*. Frymeir and his colleagues (1984) reported information from more than 28,000 students and 3,200 teachers who lived and worked in 106 schools across America. They identified several characteristics as being persistent qualities or practices of effective schools. The first dimension was strong administrative leadership and their interview data supported the proposition that the principal was a significant factor contributing to school success. When the committee listed some “Earmarks of a Good School” one key indicator was “The school principal is a generally liked and respected leader who leads and collaborates effectively in school and community projects” (p. 221).

Kindergarten children, when asked by Chenfield (1988) just what is it that principals do, gave various responses. A number of ideas were negative and included: “calling mom when you are bad,” “taking bad kids to the office,” and “going outside to see who is being bad” (p. 95). Some children viewed the principal as more of an office manager as they responded the principal talks on the telephone, uses the computer, signs papers, and rings the bell. Other tasks of principals identified included using the loudspeaker to call buses, telling people when it is hot or cold, and “telling us everything he knows” (p. 95). Positive statements from the children included the principal says nice things to kids, comes to the room and asks the teacher how good the kids were, keeps the school in order, and is my friend. One young person, after thoughtful deliberation said, “A principal helps the secretary” (p. 95).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 1998) stated, “Skillful principals, in partnership with faculty and community members, will plan for and provide the necessary information and resources to assure that their schools offer an enriching, joyful, and meaningful experience for the millions of young children whose education they lead” (p. 9). They believe the principal is responsible for, among other duties, stimulating parent involvement and arranging collaboration with community agencies and programs that work with young children and their families.

In his 2003 book, *What Great Principals Do Differently: Fifteen Things That Matter Most*, Whitaker suggested that effective principals focus on people, not programs; focus on behaviors, then on beliefs; insist on loyalty to the students; maximize the ability of their high achieving teachers; and establish expectations at the beginning of the school year. He stated, “When the principal sneezes, the whole school catches a cold... If we have great credibility and good relationships, people work to please us” (p. 30).

### Principals and Relationships in General

The best administrators spend an intense amount of time developing, improving, and investing in relationships. Positive relationships are the heart of what makes a school extraordinary. The best leaders build environments of trust, respect, professionalism, caring, compassion, collaboration, teaming, advising, caring, and nurturing (Connors, 2000). In order for a principal to build relationships with people and positively shape school culture, it is necessary for the school leader to be visible in the school and community (Rieg, 2007). With the multitude of responsibilities principals have, being visible is often difficult. Fullan (1997) said, “Principals are either overloaded with what they are doing or overloaded with all the things they think they should be doing” (p. ix).

In her 2006 article, Shields suggested, “Relationships are not merely the beginning, but indeed the foundation of the educative endeavor” (p. 76). She noted that teaching must be based on relationships of respect and absolute regard and therefore, leadership should be built on that same foundation--modeling, encouraging, and demonstrating the importance of relationships and positive interactions.

The Australian Research Council funded a project called An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project (AESOP). The AESOP was not focused on the role of the principal; however, examination of the factors responsible for effective faculties revealed the influence principals had made to foster educational achievement (Dinham, 2007). Dinham reported that the school principals had positive attitudes that were contagious and they motivated other people through example. The leaders realized negativity can be

“handicapping” (p. 268), demonstrated a high degree of intellectual capacity and imagination, and were good judges of people. They were warm, supportive and sensitive to individuals and the collective needs within the school and community and could work with a wide range of individuals. The principals could balance the “big picture with finer detail” (p.268) and could multi-task. Dinham described these principals as authentic leaders who knew when to consult and when to be courageous, and exhibited the values, professionalism and behavior they expected of others. The principals were good communicators and listeners who provided both good and bad feedback. They challenged people, insisted that teaching and learning was the core purpose of the school, and set a vision for the future of the organization. These leaders were typically liked, respected, and trusted. They demonstrated a sense of humor, empathy, and compassion and were seen to work for the betterment of the school, teachers, and students rather than themselves.

### Principals and Students

As important as these researchers believe this topic is, there is virtually no scholarly research available on principals’ relationships with students. We found a couple of brief (one- to two-page) articles in *Principal* magazine on the topic. Turner (2007) attempted to “break the spell of the wicked principal” (p. 60) by instilling respect not fear, and helping students to make responsible decisions in the future. She also reported that she developed relationships with students by communicating “who I am to the students” (p. 61) and inviting them to come to her office so she could connect with them. Kellison (2007) stated that students, teachers, staff and parents want to see an administrator’s commitment and being present and accessible is a way to demonstrate that commitment. He also recommended taking time to listen to students, and recognizing their contributions to the school.

Since the scholarly research is lacking, we drew on our own experiences and our own research to address this in our study. Here is where we hope to fill the gap in the literature.

### Principals and Teachers

Although today’s principals have neither the time nor the expertise to be the instructional leader in the traditional sense – by knowing the most – we can exercise instructional leadership just as powerfully through facilitating teachers’ learning...Teachers don’t necessarily look for answers from an instructional leader. But they need to know that their leader understands and appreciates their work and recognizes their challenges and frustrations. Teachers need to see their principals as partners in education, learning with and from them. (Hoerr, 2008, pp. 84-85).

Hoerr (2008) went on to state that the aspect of leading through facilitating teachers’ growth is giving input on lessons and leading teachers to make their own discoveries. He gave the following questions he uses when he gives feedback on a lesson plan or lesson delivery:

- How did this lesson address the needs of your strongest and weakest students?

- What would you do differently the next time you teach this lesson? Why?
- How will you know what your students learned?
- How could you create an assessment tool that would help you teach these concepts?

Relationship building with teachers by principals helps to underscore the adage that “all business is personal.” In order to get the most out of their staffs, principals must establish relationships that are time-tested and solid. This is especially true in public education, which historically has been recognized as an isolated profession. Relationships must be professionally supportive, sincere, and consciously developed. After all, principals are attempting to create teams within their school, which are connected by relationships, challenge the status quo, and focus on continuous improvements. No one person possesses all of the skills and knowledge necessary to operate the organization effectively, and therefore the challenge is to blend the various strengths (Hyland & Yost, 1994). Team building is somewhat of an art, however, and should occur under the critical and watchful eye of the principal. Teamwork increases outputs among all levels of development within the school system, and enables staff members to work harder than they would as individuals (Ramsey, 1999).

School principals are often held accountable for things beyond their control, such as the skills students bring to kindergarten, the education attainment of families, the local tax base, and the pool of available teachers (Reeves, 2006). Reeves contended that it is more productive to focus on factors we can influence such as teacher assignment. He stated, “The most important resource any education leader allocates is teachers” (p. 86) and recommended school leaders ask themselves the following question: “Does every student in my school have an equal opportunity to have the best teachers...?” (p. 86). Reeves realized the effect that collective bargaining agreements sometimes limit the ability to change teachers’ assignments but he believes leaders can use creative options to improve the equitable distribution of teachers. He suggested offering teachers in the most difficult classes lower class sizes, more planning time, more professional development opportunities or greater autonomy. Regarding professional development, he recommended focusing on what to teach, how to teach it, how to meet the needs of students, and how to build internal capacity (leadership of professional development efforts come from the faculty and takes place in the classroom in the context of authentic teaching). Dinham (2007) agreed that effective principals place a high value on professional learning, their own and their teachers. He suggested supporting teacher learning inside and outside the school and recognizing that all teachers can be leaders.

Building relationships between the principal and faculty can happen if the principal occasionally offers to lend a hand (Kellison, 2007). Principals could teach a lesson or give a teacher an extended recess by supervising the children.

Teachers of very young children have their own unique needs and program characteristics. Principals need to be ready to provide moral and emotional support to teachers in early childhood classrooms (Zeng & Zeng, 2005). Also, school leaders can provide instructional materials that are appropriate for young children and facilitate ongoing curriculum evaluation that considers current trends and ideas in early childhood education (NAESP, 1998).

Positive relationships between teachers and principals do not happen naturally. Open communication is a key factor in any relationship; thus, teachers and principals

must stay in constant communication with each other and the families and communities whom they serve (Rieg, 2007).

### Principals and Parents/Families

Ask most parents of young children what they want from their school and they will respond that they want their children to feel like they are loved and supported. They want their children to be excited about going to school and be happy when they come home at night. They want to believe that when their children go to school they are being properly cared for. It is the principal's job to make these parents' wishes happen (Kellison, 2007).

One principal noted that teachers build relationships with the children and their parents each year but it is the principal's job to maintain those relationships (Lucas, 2000). The NAESP (1998) recognized the importance of forming partnerships with parents when they stated that parent involvement is important to the success of all elementary programs; for an early childhood program, it is crucial and should be a high priority of the principal. The NAESP (1998) made the following recommendations:

- Parents share in the development of the school's educational program, and so understand and support it. The principal and staff can provide information through meetings, newsletters and conversations about the program and its goals.
- Parents are assisted to increase their effectiveness in working with their children, at home and in school.
- Parent concerns are addressed formally and informally.
- Parents are actively involved in the school's site council, helping to make decisions about the program.
- A reciprocal relationship is formed and nurtured. All parties try to make both school and home places where children feel secure and enjoy success (p. 28).

Also recognizing the importance of family/school relationships was John Wherry (2007). He gave best practices as reported by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005):

- Send parents genuine invitations to attend school.
- Begin a positive relationship with parents and students before they arrive at school.
- Send home an information packet to all families before school starts.
- Try making some home visits to parents of students in your school.
- Aggressively recruit and engage parents in school activities.
- Have parent volunteers invite other parents in their neighborhoods.
- Organize small "study circles" for parents. (p. 8).

Sadly, Deal and Peterson (1999) contended that parents are interested in their children's education but are unsure of what they are supposed to do, "but pretty sure they're not always wanted, welcomed, or listened to" (p. 133). Constantino (2007) noted that the most important element in cultivating family engagement to enhance student learning is the principal's belief in it. He stated the importance of promoting the engagement not just with some families, but with all families, especially those who are disenfranchised from the school and with their children's learning. Constantino (2007) and Whitmer (2005) both recommend making schools inviting to parents. Witmer

suggested creating lounges and other areas where parents can meet and relax in the schools and Constantino suggested creating welcoming signs, using signs in multiple languages, having a greeter to greet parents and families, and creating parking spaces close to the building for family parking. He also recommended making contacting the school easy by clearly publishing telephone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and web pages. Constantino also noticed the decline in parental attendance as the students get older. He suggested moving meetings into the community and designating open-agenda meetings for families for whom English is not the first language. Complex curriculum was another factor Constantino believed influences parental involvement. He recommended encouraging teachers to send home newsletters about what is being taught and how families can support learning, and encouraged parent-teacher conferences.

Bridging the gap between parental interest and school needs can make a dramatic difference for a progressive principal. In *Building Successful Partnerships*, the National PTA (2000) offers several tips for successful programs:

- Survey parents about their interests, talents, and availability. Include options for volunteering on the survey; then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty.
- Survey teachers to find out how they would like to employ parents' talents.
- Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and built on volunteer interests and abilities.
- Ensure that office staff greetings, signs near the entrances, and other interactions with parents create a climate in which volunteers feel valued and welcomed.
- Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively using volunteer resources.
- Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given options for helping in other ways, such as from home or at work.
- Develop a system for staying in touch with all parent volunteers as the year progresses.
- Organize an easy, accessible system for coordinating the efforts of parent volunteers, a system that also provides ample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol.
- Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing child-care, transportation, and work schedule needs.
- Show appreciation for parents' participation, and value their diverse contributions.
- Develop a system for continually evaluating the parent-volunteer program. (p. 90)

### Principals and the Community

“Nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by school, family, and community working in partnership” (Fullan, 1997, p.22). Deal and Peterson (1999) identified schools as “producers of learning and purveyors of meaning” (p. 130). They stated that connections to the community seek both of those ends and gave examples of what school leaders should do:

- Market their schools by keeping the community updated on school successes.

- Build bonds with the community by bringing everyone together in a “meaningful ceremony.”
- Tie the history of the school with the history of the community.
- Connect to all members of the community (p. 130).

The NAESP (1998) recommended the school principals collaborate with community agencies to support children’s development, learning, and well-being; and, cooperate with local, state, and federal agencies in maintaining a directory of child-focused community agencies and services, and assist families who need those services. They also recognized that there are an increasing number of single-parent families or families with two working parents so before and after school programs are necessary. Suggestions for the principal included maintaining an assessment of the community’s child care needs, reviewing the school’s transportation plan to assure that child-care programs are accessible to those who need them, and initiating relationships with child-care providers and arranging for them to use school facilities.

Knowing the values of your community and the expectations of the community are also vital. Weaver (2007) cautioned principals to remember that what is acceptable in some communities is not acceptable in others. The values in urban schools might be different than those in suburban or rural communities. Wallace (1996) reminded us of the value of using senior citizens as volunteers within the schools. These experiences give senior citizens, who have hobbies, life experiences, and specialized expertise, something to do, look forward to, and feel challenged.

## **Results**

### Relationships with Students

Behind every great school stands a great principal! Although this common denominator has withstood the test of time, the characteristics associated with greatness are easily identified. These characteristics transcend any school setting, public or private, and generally begin with the principal knowing the student population. There is no way around it. Great principals can often recite the names of their students, and have a good grasp of the family dynamics as well. Yes, this takes time, and a conscious effort on the part of the school leader. However, the rewards of this simple act spill over into many other facets of the school operation as well.

Great principals greet their students at the school house door, and move with the student body throughout the school day. The principal and the students become one. The principal is in the halls, classrooms, cafeteria, study halls, etc. And the school day does not end with the great principals going home for the evening. The outstanding principals are equally visible at all evening functions as well. One highly successful high school principal summed up his efforts in this area in a somewhat succinct fashion. He stated that he works hard at getting to know each and every student. He knows them by name, their families, grades, test scores, progress, failures, achievements, involvement in school sports, music programs, and clubs. It is not unusual for him to know some of their favorite foods, what pets they have, and other things that make them unique. He treats them as individuals and makes them feel included, special, and important. They know that they can go to him in any situation.

In a survey of principals of Chinese primary schools, the principals were asked, “What do you do as a principal do to build relationships with three to eight year old

students?” Answers included visiting the classrooms and talking to kids, playing with kids and having one-on-one conversation with them, being their friend, respecting the kids and treating them equally, giving them care and nurturing, taking care of them like they are infants no matter how old they are, and knowing their psychological development and learning needs (Rieg, 2007).

One kindergarten teacher made it very clear she just wanted a principal to “come into the classroom often” to get to know the children. She mentioned that students did not even recognize one of their former principals because the school leader was basically invisible. The children thought the guidance counselor was the principal because the counselor was more visible than the building principal. However, she discussed another principal who came into her classroom regularly and invited the children to her office “just to see it.” She said it was nice that the students all “piled into the office” and could sometimes joke with this principal and the principal joked back with them. This principal showed the kindergarten students she is a “real person” by sharing pictures of her family and telling the students a little about herself. The kindergarten teacher also said she has had principals who showed a true interest in the students and their learning by sitting at centers with the students, observing them, and talking with the children as they worked. A former first grade teacher shared how her principal built relationships with the students also through academics. He invited the first graders to come to his office and read to him or sing a song. Small groups of children would go to his office and enlighten him through prose or music. The teacher expressed how much the children loved this as they got to know the principal as someone who valued education, rather than just a disciplinarian. The principal can also be an integral part of an Instructional Support Team and provide assistance to struggling learners (Rieg, 2007).

By now, one can begin to see that the great principal has created a family- like atmosphere, where the commonly quoted phrase of “in loco parentis”, has true meaning. As adults, we are usually quick to show family and friends recent pictures of our children. We boast about their achievements, for after all, our children are the most important people in our lives. We entrust them to public school officials during most of their developmental years, and expect school personnel to watch over and guide them through this formative period.

This boosting of loved ones/students is also found with great schools and great principals. Pictures in their offices and schools highlight the lives of the student body. When you walk through the halls, are you greeted with signs that reinforce the fact the school celebrates the family life of the school? Are pictures prevalent with students, staff and administrators? One elementary principal surveyed on this issue has candid pictures taken annually by a professional photographer. He then has them enlarged, framed, and hung in the school halls. The pictures depict the day in the life of students and staff. These pictures are refreshed each year, and serve as a wonderful memento for retiring faculty. Yet another highly successful principal celebrates student success with trophy cases that recognize students for awards for all facets of school life, not just athletics. The evidence of this family atmosphere is also present in yearbooks, school newspapers, websites, etc. The culture of the school, which is directed to a large degree by great principals, should be obvious immediately to everyone who walks through the doors.

## Relationships with Teachers

In order to build the relationships that create teams, principals must gain an in-depth knowledge of each and every staff member. One highly successful public school administrator stated that in building relationships with teachers, he gets to know them on a professional, yet personal basis. This approach enables him to build a personalized school system, one in which all staff members pull in the same direction. But how does this translate into the daily routine of the principal? Some of the critical ways in which the principal builds camaraderie and morale in the school may look different from principal to principal. However, there are 10 sure fire ways that if exercised routinely, will produce exponential results:

1. Recognizing teachers for jobs well done each and every day. This might be through the daily announcements, faculty meetings or personal notes from the principal.
2. Identifying the shining stars among the staff, and submitting their names for the local, state and national awards. Professional organizations are eager for these types of submissions.
3. Remaining visible and approachable through the school day. The principal should be the first and last person that the teacher sees on a regular day.
4. Attending funerals of staff members' loved ones. The respective staff members will never forget the thoughtfulness at what can be some of their darkest days!
5. Staying in touch with teachers that suffer through serious health issues. Teachers also appreciate the fact that the principal calls to check on them if they have missed a couple of days of school in a row.
6. Celebrating teacher recognition week by making breakfast/lunch for the staff. The staff loves to see the principal in an apron! In fact, what better way to thank the principal and keep the tradition going then by presenting the principal with a special apron for what should become an annual event?
7. Looking for ways to accommodate the personal needs of the staff. Does the principal try to cover a teacher's assignment whose child is in play, receiving an award, etc.? On a similar note, is the staff member able to stay in touch with an elderly parent that needs a brief sense of reassurance during the school day?
8. Taking the time to talk to the staff not just about school issues. Is the principal always preoccupied with the crisis du jour or does he/she find the time to talk about what is important in the life of the teacher?
9. Supporting the teachers as they deal with the complexities of the job. The principal must be viewed as the stalwart of organizational strength at all times. Teachers must never have to wonder where the principal is likely to stand on a given issue.
10. Recognizing staff members for plateau years of service (i.e., 5, 10, 15, 20...retirement). This recognition program can be part of an annual luncheon, in which small gifts are presented by the administration. Since many state auditors frown upon personal gift giving, a gift for the teachers' work area would more likely be in order.

Teachers, like students, must feel the personal connection to the school system as well. They must believe that they are working for an organization that cares about them as a person first; then an employee. But how is this seemingly simple standard developed

by building principals? One could easily begin by taking a page from Harvey Mackay's 1988 work in the envelope manufacturing industry. As an outstanding salesman of a not so glamorous product, Mackay found it necessary to personalize his business. He kept biographical information on every client. He knew their spouse's name, children's name(s), likes/dislikes, birthdates, etc. He knew which sports they watched and which sports they played. When he interacted with his clients, they were immediately elevated from what normally would have been a secondary relationship, to more closely that of a primary relationship.

The relationship building between principal and staff is equally interesting from the staff member's vantage point. In our informal survey, teachers were queried about the strategies that the principal uses to nurture these relationships. They viewed the principal as a caring individual, one that is totally committed to the school system. Teachers were able to easily approach the principal for advice and support, but for other professional needs as well. The relationship was built upon trust, mutual respect, and the golden rule.

#### Relationships with Parents/Families

Ask any effective principal what groups impact the quality of education the most in their school, and parents are likely to be cited as one of the top contenders. Yet in a review of the literature on principal's relationships with parents, the literature is limited, and thus not likely to be included in any systematic formal outreach efforts of typical principals. Furthermore, many principals struggle with the effective use of organizations such as the PTA's, PTO's etc., or fail to look for ways to properly utilize the willingness and readily available talent and resources that parents have to offer. Research has also shown that parental involvement in public schools tends to drop dramatically after the intermediate grades. This may be due to the growth and development of the child, their satisfactory performance/behavior, the increased difficulty of curriculum, or the fact that many children are from families in which both parents work.

With the lack of any formal avenue for parental involvement, relationship building becomes difficult at best. Public schools can be viewed as an uninviting world that remains light years away from the parents' personal experience decades before. Public schools remain local institutions with unique subcultures within. The dress, language (professional and otherwise) and customs in general are difficult to understand for the typical parent. Couple this atmosphere with the general concerns about security in post Columbine, and just getting in the door becomes a challenge.

#### Relationships with Community

School communities are set geographical areas with varying resources. They include some standard institutions like churches, hospitals, municipal governments, as well as some not so standard groups such as service clubs, professional organizations, and retirement centers. Community volunteerism in public schools can be an often overlooked asset that is readily available in most communities. Here again, effective principals must harness the community-wide resources available for the benefit of the school system. This need is more prevalent today in public schools, due in part to declining budgets and reductions in staff.

In order to properly connect the available community's resources with the public school need, principals must be involved in the community, conduct regular assessments,

and provide the mechanism for the involvement to occur. The proactive principal must go out in the community and actively recruit. Posters can be displayed, a speakers bureau established, newsletters utilized, and websites maximized. Principals should ask themselves if they are also using the community groups adequately in the normal operation of the school. For instance, is the local Veterans group involved in the Veteran's Day school activities? Do the professional groups provide job shadowing and professional coaching to those students interested in a particular profession?

Coordinating this community effort may be looked upon by the principal as one additional duty that is added to an already daunting list of job responsibilities. But this coordination effort can actually be handled by a trained volunteer! In some communities; the coordinator is paid by a grant, municipality, respective organization or from an endowment or foundation. Yet in other communities, the school system may offer a supplemental contract or tax rebate. What better way to reconnect a retired educator or support staff member? What is most dramatic is that these school community relationships become symbiotic. On the senior citizen front alone, seniors become engaged in a system that is sometimes recognized only for its tax burden status.

### **Implications for Practice**

In the days of high accountability, implications of this study are significant for school administrators. Research supports the importance of school administrators building relationships with all people involved in the school. If and when trusting relationships are built, the school will be a learning community with a positive school culture that leads to increased student achievement. The following are recommendations for relationship building for school principals:

1. **Get to know the students** by **visiting classrooms** and **being visible** throughout the school, having **children visit the office**, **learning students' names**, **listening to students** and **conversing** with them, and **acknowledging accomplishments** and **assisting with struggles**.
2. **Understand the needs of teachers** by being professionally **supportive and sincere**, **facilitating teachers' growth** through **quality professional development**, **creating learning teams**, **assigning teachers to grade levels and disciplines where they are most effective** with students, **covering a class period** for a teacher who needs time, **recognizing and celebrating teachers for outstanding work and accomplishments**, and **listening** and **showing care and concern**.
3. **Build positive rapport with families** by **forming partnership** for school **decision-making**, **being easily accessible** and **addressing concerns in a timely fashion**, **inviting parents to attend and participate in school functions**, sending home **newsletters addressing curricular and school events**, **making schools welcoming and inviting** for families, and **giving parents/families opportunities to volunteer**.
4. **Connect to the community** through **collaboration with agencies** and other community stakeholders, **respecting the values** of the community, **keeping the community updated on school successes and events**, **conducting regular assessments**, and **utilizing the valuable resources** offered by businesses, organizations, and senior citizens.

There is no question in the age of accountability that reading, writing, and arithmetic are, and should be, important concerns of the school principal; but we believe those areas should not be the main or only concern. Will test scores rise, quality teachers remain in the field, parents become actively involved in their children's schooling, and students reach their fullest potential without the leadership and support of a caring principal? We believe it takes a principal who understands the importance of, and need for, that fourth "R", or should we say "PR," positive relationships.

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