Preface

Everyone thinking about becoming a school leader knows they had better sharpen their communication skills. It goes with the job. Principals spend a good portion of their day communicating with stakeholders, including staff, teachers, students, parents, central office administrators, and the superintendent. Schools today are expected to be transparent places. Data about state-administered test scores are public information, and school-by-school comparisons are published in the local newspaper. Principals are asked to explain the differences in scores. Students walk around with cell phones supposedly turned off, but let anything out of the ordinary occur on campus and the information is shared citywide in a heartbeat. And harried calls come immediately back to the principal for comment and clarification.

A transparent school requires principals to be much more open in their leadership style too. Consequently, principals today learn to delegate, to plan with committees of teachers and parents and even students. Trust and respect are built among the Partners, and a bond forms so that all parties are working together to help ensure the best education possible for the children in the school. The principal provides the leadership to keep the partnership moving ahead. But the partnership is dependent on the buy-in of its members. And they stay committed to the partnership because they believe the principal is as committed to the partnership as they are. In other words, they respect and trust him: He is their principal.

Therein lies another communication challenge for the principal. While fortifying his ties to his school partners, he may well be weakening his links to his employer, the superintendent, and central office staff that surround him.

In this era in which principals are being encouraged to develop a new leadership style that emphasizes instructional leadership and stronger ties to teachers, family, and community, there is a danger that principals might weaken their ties to their employer.

Simply put, principals are being trained to see themselves as leaders of their schools. They are being told they are responsible for the school's success, and they certainly are being held accountable for the children's achievement. As such, take-charge principals are enlisting faculty and family as well as community and students in an all-out effort to collectively address the school's academic needs. They are doing what it takes to get the job done.

But the fact is that principals are midlevel managers in larger bureaucracy. They report to someone in the central office. It may be directly to the superintendent in a small district, or it may be an assistant superintendent in a larger district. But in most districts, several people above the school level believe they have the authority to tell principals what to do. They in turn are told what to do by the school board, and it in turn is ordered around by the State Board of Education and the U.S. Department of Education. The question openly asked today is "Who really does run America's public schools?" Nobody really thinks it is the school principal.

That is why this book was written. Principals are required to please many people. It can be done, but it requires extraordinary communication management skills.

It is one thing to understand communication. It is another thing to understand it in context with management. Principals need to know how to manage communications among and between their various stakeholders if they are going to be effective at leading their schools.

From this book, principals will learn enough theory so they understand the how as well as the why when they use a strategy that enables them to deliver a top-down, district-ordered message to their schools' teachers, parents, and community and still maintain a collegial, working relationship with them. Or how best to word an argument to take to the central office for why a district policy should not go forward because it would interfere with plans the school has for its own self-improvement.

Interestingly, the literature for blending communication and management together derives from a field that at first blush probably would make most seasoned educational administrators skittish. It is public relations. School administrators tend to become nervous when authors start proposing public relations as a solution to their management challenges. The very term conjures up images of press agents and speech writers and, worst of all, educational consultants. School leaders associate the term with propaganda and manipulation, and they just do not want anything to do with it. Well, that is not how the

term is used here. Public relations is defined in this book as simply the "management of communications between an organization and its publics."

Throughout the book, public relations is talked about as the management of the communication that occurs between the school and its stakeholders. That is the public relations function. It is a management function, and it is the principals' responsibility. Principals cannot be effective leaders unless they also effectively manage the communication between their schools and their schools' stakeholders.

Key to every principal's success will be mastering the management of the communication between her school and her two key audiences: the enablers and the Partners. Simply stated, the Enablers are those people with the authority to tell the principal what to do. In other words, Enablers are those with the power to have the principal removed from her position. The Partners are those people with the ability to help or hinder the principal in her efforts to accomplish her school's goals.

Consequently, the primary thing school leaders will gain from reading this book is the ability to manage the communication between themselves and their key stakeholders so they can achieve their major objectives for their schools.

Organization of the Book

The book is organized into two parts. Part I provides the reader with an understanding of the theory that undergirds communication management. From these four chapters, readers will gain keen insights into stakeholders and publics and how a principal should attempt to manage communication with them. The theory comes from the public relations literature; much flows from the work of Professor James E. Grunig of the University of Maryland and his colleagues.

In Chapter 1, the reader is shown how principals go about identifying their schools' stakeholders. Furthermore, they are told that the more critical issue is to figure out who among their stakeholders will be "publics." These are groups of people that form in response to issues or problems. Stakeholders groups are "latent," which are basically paying no attention to the problem or issue; "aware," which are aware but not doing anything about the problem or issue yet; and "active," which are aware of the problem or issue and are actively engaged to do something about it. Each public has a different communication behavior, which means that principals have to be sensitive to the various ways they

process or seek out information if communicating with them is going to be successful.

Chapter 2 introduces the reader to Grunig's "situational theory to identify publics." It provides the reader with an understanding of why it is so challenging for principals to engage their various stakeholder publics in meaningful communication. More critically, the chapter spells out some clear implications of the theory for how school leaders should operate a communication management program.

Chapter 3 brings the reader into the heart of the book. This chapter introduces principals to the four most generally used communication management models and suggests most districts and schools cling to the "public information model" in which communication is basically one-way, from the school to the public, with little regard for how it is received. In a transparent school environment in which leadership is diffused and information widely available, a better communication model is one in which the school and its stakeholders are both engaged in a give-and-take exchange. The book explains why this model is preferred for principals today and how they should use it. The book also explains why, given the fact that school principals are still district-level employees, the model does not always work. Consequently, the book introduces principals to another model: the "mixed-motive" approach. The chapter goes on to explain when principals should use this alternative and cites the risks associated with its use. Although risky, the mixed-motive approach is probably going to be used frequently by the top principals as they attempt to balance the needs of both their Enablers and their Partners.

Chapter 4, the closing chapter of Part I, is an important one. It outlines the rationale behind the school-family-community partnerships and introduces the reader to the six major types of involvement that generally make up such an arrangement. This chapter borrows extensively from the work of Joyce Epstein and colleagues at the Center for Social Organization of Schools at The Johns Hopkins University. It is critical that school leaders learn what it takes to start such partnerships at whatever level of school—elementary, middle, or secondary—they intend to provide leadership.

Chapter 5 begins Part II of the book by offering the school leader a chance to read three case studies featuring an elementary, a middle, and a secondary school principal who used communication management strategies on the job. By reading these case studies, the school leader will have an opportunity to review the theories learned in the previous chapters and get a glimpse of their practical application. The

chapter also makes the point that the best lessons are frequently taught by peers.

Chapter 6 reminds the new school leader that not all communication originates from the principal's office. The principal's office is often the recipient of the communication. Knowing how to listen, negotiate, and compromise are all communication skills an effective principal masters. This chapter highlights some of the more common issues that confront principals and suggests how they might deal with them.

Chapter 7 suggests that principals with good communication management skills can play significant roles in their respective districts. On the one hand, they can be called on by their districts to be "boundary spanners" because they are close to the stakeholders. Consequently, they are able to read the public mood and give district-level administrators some early indication about how certain stakeholders would receive news of a new district-imposed policy. On the other hand, the district may choose to use such principals as part of the administrative decision-making team, calling on their insights and links to the stakeholders to enlighten the process at the central office. This chapter concludes with a suggestion to new school leaders that they master the ability to read and understand data.

Chapter 8 is a nuts-and-bolts chapter outlining the various tools that principals can use when managing communication. The chapter is particularly concerned with Web sites, e-mail, and other electronic devices now popular with stakeholders.

Chapter 9 moves the reader into some of the more practical applications of communication management. Here, the reader receives a basic primer in "communication" that every new principal should master before accepting the position. The chapter covers the basics; for example, it examines what communication tools are appropriate to use, in which situations, for which audiences.

Chapter 10 closes the book with a concluding statement.

Acknowledgments

My coauthor, Lara Hollenczer, and I owe a dept of gratitude to the many school leaders who helped us bring this book to life. Among these were friends of mine from the University of Oregon, Max G. Abbott and Lloyd DuVall; and Richard Rossmiller, a long-time chair of the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Although I never took a course from any of

them, I worked on the boundaries of their profession for more than 30 years and learned much from them. Others who contributed to my understanding of school leaders were Robert R. Rath, the long-time executive director of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon, and James Becker and Robert Scanlon, both previous executive directors of Research for Better Schools in Philadelphia. All six of these former principals and R&D leaders were chairmen of the board of directors of the Council for Educational Development and Research in Washington, D.C., while I was its executive director.

While working at the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), I had the opportunity to get to know many outstanding superintendents, all of whom had previously been school principals. I called on them liberally when writing this book. I owe a debt of gratitude to Stephen W. Daeschner, superintendent of Jefferson County, Kentucky, public schools. A couple of times when I got stumped and had a question, he allowed me to interrupt his incredibly busy day and provided me with an explanation. Another former principal who was generous in his guidance and insights was Joseph J. Cirasuolo, retired superintendent from Connecticut and past president of AASA. Joe read an early draft of one of the chapters and provided helpful feedback. I also did not hesitate to pick the brain of my good friend Thomas F. Koerner, retired executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. A popular secondary principal, Richard Warner, from my hometown of Fargo, North Dakota, also met with me to discuss the principalship. A case study featuring Dick is one of the book's highlights.

Lara and I owe a particular dept of graduate to Anne Turnburgh Lockwood, a fellow author for Corwin who guided us through the editing mysteries of the publishing world. Anne, an accomplished writer in her own right, read an early version of the manuscript and offered numerous suggestions for improvement. Willis Hawley, the coeditor of the Leadership for Learning Series of which this book is a part, also read and commented on several early drafts; his feedback also was invaluable. A final thanks to Rachel Livsey, acquisitions editor at Corwin Press, who guided this project from start to finish.

Finally, we could not have written this book without the public relations research done by James E. Grunig, professor of communications at the University of Maryland, College Park. Although he was helpful in providing us with books and finding us refuge copies of hard-to-trace original sources quoted in his seminal text, we did not ask him to review our book; consequently, he has no burden of

responsibility for any mistakes we might have made in the application of his theory to the field of educational leadership.

Corwin Press gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the following reviewers:

Richard B. Warner
Assistant Professor
School of Education
North Dakota State University
Fargo, ND

Susan N. Imamura
Principal
Manoa Elementary School
Honolulu, HI

Kathryn Anderson Alvestad
Adjunct Associate Professor
University of Maryland
College Park, MD

Robert Ramsey
Associate Superintendent (retired)
Education Consultant
Minneapolis, MN

Mike Ford
Superintendent of Schools
Phelps-Clifton Springs Central School District
Clifton Springs, NY

Susan Stone Kessler
Assistant Principal
Hillsboro High School
Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
Nashville, TN