

*G. Johnson*

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# THE FACULTY RESEARCH BULLETIN

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Volume 1, No. 1

Summer 1954

*Published by*  
SAVANNAH STATE COLLEGE  
State College Branch  
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

# FACULTY RESEARCH BULLETIN

published by

THE SAVANNAH STATE COLLEGE

Volume 1, No. 1

Savannah, Georgia

Summer, 1954

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A Consideration of

# Selected Principles of Leadership

In School and Community Relations

By Wilton C. Scott

Understanding is the foundation of all progress. Before any advancement may be expected toward meeting common objectives, people must first become acquainted. Our purpose in community relations is one of highest dedications in the field of education—the building of understanding and good-will on the part of education and its multitude of constituents.

Actually, the essentials of community relations are the essentials of good human relations. Good human relations are based upon understanding and mutual confidence, respect for the opinion of others, a willingness to make and abide by group decision, and sensitivity for the concern of other people.

This means that every community relations program must be honest in interest and execution, comprehensive in character, and continuous in application. The heart of the program lies in its honesty of purpose, its attitudes of service and its sensitivity of the problems which concern the public.

1. *Understanding and support of education rests upon full recognition of the role and responsibilities of schools.* To the man in the street, the scope and services of the schools may not be clear. Without having our constituents aware of the purpose and the offerings of education, there can be no appreciable change in public attitudes towards improvement of existing educational institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Positive understanding should be based upon those elements which are most important to the people of the community and to the schools which they serve. Such basic consideration must be defined and emphasized in all public relations. They are guideposts around which to build the public relations program.<sup>2</sup>

- a. Education can do more than any other institution in our society to strengthen and perpetuate the free way of life.

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<sup>1</sup>Benjamin Fine, *Educational Publicity*, pp. 100-210.

<sup>2</sup>Edward G. Olsen, *School and Community*, pp. 89-150

- b. Education through its services and progress, should contribute immeasurably to the well-being of all the people and the community.
- c. The public deserves to know the purposes and accomplishments of its schools, and the improvements which must be made if schools are to be prepared to meet the heavy responsibilities of the decade ahead.
- d. Continued emphasis in education must be placed upon the development of individual students into young men and women of outstanding quality by every moral, educational, civic and professional standard.

2. *A sound program of community relations follows clear and specific policies and principles.* It should be recognized at all times that community relations is a two-way process. First, there is school and second, there is the public. The problem becomes one of developing and acquaintanceship with and an appreciation of the problems of the other person, and upon the basis of this understanding working jointly toward the development of next steps in the course of action.<sup>3</sup>

Community relations, therefore, is continuous. It is concerned with developing communication. It emphasizes cooperation on all common problems. It is the solicitation of advance and suggestions and criticisms, and the making of improvements therefrom. It is working together on behalf of the youth and the people of the community.

3. *Schools must deal with many groups in planning and conducting community relations activities.* All community relations must carry the personal touch. Unless the person who is reached by the program has the feeling that he is being dealt with directly, the contact loses all of its effectiveness.

Especially important is the realization that the community relations program deals with many publics and that specific requirements in approach, information, and attitude will be necessary for each public.<sup>4</sup>

4. *The comprehensive program of community relations will include many specific provisions, organized into a formal plan of action.* There is no magic in public relations. Rather, success of the program will rest largely upon how the various tech-

<sup>3</sup>Parmenter and Crosby, *Public Relations Primer*, p. 100

<sup>4</sup>Edward G. Olsen, *School and Community Programs*, pp. 42-97

niques are planned, organized and developed. In developing the specifications of the community relations program, it should be recognized that there are many opportunities for such service.<sup>5</sup>

- a. *Meeting student needs through instruction and personal services.* A satisfied student is the best public relations agent any school can have. A definite statement of purpose should guide development of the entire instructional program. Many specific activities may be utilized: get-acquainted week, reports to students, guidance and counselling, etc.
- b. *Meeting professional and community needs through the school.* School officials and faculty members through their contributions to the community are excellent ambassadors of good-will. Specific services include the curriculum, pre-service and in-service programs, adult education, advisory and consultative services to the professional and community organizations.
- c. *Effective cooperation within and throughout the educational structure.* A house united is the best defense any organization can have. Best thinking must be applied to develop this unit of purpose within all members of the institution; good possibilities; working on joint committees; stating clearly the problems of mutual interest; developing specific plans in areas of work; recognizing work well done; sharing of staff facilities.
- d. *Sharing in projects and activities of community and regional organizations.* Staff should know and be known by other leaders in the school community, and throughout the region served by the school. The institution should be represented actively by a staff member in every organized fraternal, civic and religious body in the community. If the school would go more than half way in helping make both the local community and the region better, then, the public will return their cooperation many times over.
- e. *Developing understanding through participation in group meetings.* The story of a school can be told effectively to all organized groups and bodies. Staff members, parents, and students jointly should share in

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<sup>5</sup>AAASA Yearbook, *Public Relations for American Schools*, pp. 40-280

such presentations. Possibilities include: the speakers' bureau, speeches, conference leadership, workshops, institutes, etc.

- f. *Developing understanding through public exercises.* Occasions when people are invited to share campus exercises offer excellent public relations opportunities. These may be considered: dedications, homecoming, honorary degrees, visitation days, forums, national and state commemorative observances, such as Conservation and American Education Week, historical anniversaries.
- g. *Developing understanding through press, radio, movies, television.* The more frequent and pleasant the contacts with the general public, the more sound the attitudes which are created. These relationships should be cultivated and used to the fullest possible extent. News releases and presentations over press, radio, and cinema offer excellent means of communicating with patrons.
- h. *Utilizing the interest and resources of the student body in the program of interpretation.* Student activities should be considered among the most effective means of community relations. These rank high as successful media: student publications, scholastic progress, concerts, plays, arts and crafts, exhibitions, deputations groups, athletics.
- i. *Working with the elected representatives of the people.* Relations with representatives of the people must be based upon a sincerity of purpose and factual analysis of needs. In a public institution the governing board and the legislature develop basic policies. Consideration must be given to relations in these groups: representatives in the legislature; officers in the state, county and city government; leaders in the various professional and regional associations; business, religious and civic leaders.<sup>6</sup> Defense and population growth have resulted in heavier loads of taxation. This condition affects directly the financing of all public institutions. The public relations program must be concerned with two basic approaches: relations with the people, who, through being informed

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<sup>6</sup>Wm. Yeager, *Home-School-Community Relations*, pp. 120-440.

are willing to vote bond issues and special levies for educational purposes; working with legislators so that through their first hand knowledge of needs of education they will grant sufficient appropriation to make possible these services. Definite techniques apply in this field of service and should be the basis upon which such understandings are developed.

- j. *Planning as a basis for understanding and action.* The effective public relations program does not just happen. The conscious effort of the entire staff, coordinated under skilled leadership, provides the foundation of progress. Planning community relations should be considered in the same careful manner that the planning of all other parts of the program is considered. Since the public program can only be as strong as the leadership provided it, it is important that specific attention be given to the work of the individual who directs the program in the individual system or school. The basic essential in a successful community relations program then, is the one chosen to direct it. This person should be one who possesses a thorough understanding of the purposes and program of education, be well versed in the needs of the communities served by the school or school system, and be acquainted with many friends and patrons of the school.

The superintendent of schools or principal as well as his public relations assistants will find inspiration and practical assistance gained through his active participation in the work of professional organizations in the field of public relations. Particularly helpful will be the sharing with leaders in the field of business and industry, those tested techniques which are utilized to advantage in developing acceptance of commercial materials. Business and industrial psychology again, are rich in examples of successful techniques.<sup>7</sup>

Immediate needs should be emphasized in public relations, at the same time each step taken in answer to a current problem should contribute to meeting the objectives of the long range action program. This will focus attention upon the many specific issues and techniques in the broad area of developing understanding and support for education. This process, by virtue of the fact that it deals with people, is a complicated process. Success in all work will depend upon how skillful educational

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<sup>7</sup>AASA Yearbook, *American School Superintendents*, pp. 50-225

and community leaders are in handling the various tools of their trade, the techniques and media of public relations.

Public relations is, in a way, everybody's job. The school public relations people have underlined the important concept that public relations will be carried on not just when everyone connected with the school is aware that everything he says and does has public relations implications, or even when he speaks and acts in the interest of good public relations. This will come when all the diverse elements of the school students, faculty, non-academic employees, administration, board and parents are welded together into a community in the best sense of that word. It involves the development of a spirit of cooperation and unity; in no way does this imply uniformity of thought or action which springs primarily from three conditions: (1) well developed and regularly exercised channels of communication between the various elements of the school, (2) careful attention to democratic participation of these elements whenever their interests are involved, and (3) inspired and respected leadership by superintendents, principals, and other persons in positions of authority. When a real academic community of this kind exists, it can be mobilized impressively to help meet both the immediate and long-range problems of the school. As such problems are met school by school, education everywhere is strengthened and thus enabled to meet far more effectively the heavy responsibilities laid upon it today.