

# Almanac is practical PR guide for educators

By Jerry Rodriguez

**The Public Relations Almanac for Educators**, Vol. 1 (Camp Hill Pennsylvania: Educational Communication Center, 1980), 139 pp., 8.95 paper.

As they enter the decade of the 1980s, educators are faced with public relations problems different from those of previous decades. News magazines and television programs have recently carried the message that the public schools are failing and that citizens have lost confidence in their educational institutions. Opinion polls support the claim that the public's attitudes about their schools have changed for the worse over the past decade. Publications are needed that will help school administrators and board members regain public approval and support for their schools. **The Public Relations Almanac for Educators**, with its emphasis on an array of effective PR practices, may be one such publication that can offer this kind of help.

A collection of 18 articles previously published in the **Journal of Educational Communication**, the **Almanac** is a practical "how-to" guide for educators interested in improving school PR. Contributing authors have a variety of backgrounds in school PR. Among them are a past and present president (as well as a president elect) of the National School Public Relations Association and authors of school PR texts. The content of the articles is timely and diverse, ranging from the general, how to conduct the traditional school survey, to the particular, how to communicate with minority publics.

The book is divided into eight chapters: Chapter 1—Planning and Management; Chapter 2—Internal Communication; Chapter 3—External Communication; Chapter 4—The Media; Chapter 5—Tax Referenda and Budget

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Jerry Rodriguez, an assistant professor of education at Indiana University in Fort Wayne, Indiana, teaches a course in school-community relations.

Preparation; Chapter 6—Audio-Visuals; Chapter 7—Evaluation; and Chapter 8—PR Tips. Since the book is a collection of published journal articles, chapter titles and divisions do not always blend perfectly with the content, the result of which is a certain measure of inconsistency that tends to characterize such collections. The use of pictures, clip art, summary blurbs, and shaded-boxed layout provided a format which made this book easy to read. A publication class at Shippensburg (PA) State College did an excellent job of preparing the design, layout, and mechanics for the book.

One of the most informative articles is "Get Good Vibes from a Versatile House Organ" by Barbara Ondrasik. In it, the author offers many practical ideas, from a variety of sources, about publishing a staff newsletter.

Another very useful article is "Effective Communication and Efficient Management Go Hand-in-hand," by Nick Goble and Albert Holliday. The authors provide a 10-question quiz for management and staff members, which can be used to plan the school district's communication program.

A credibility gap, lack of representation, language, and media selection are four problems associated with communicating with minority publics, according to E.K. Waters and Reginald Young in their article, "Communicating with Minority Publics Takes Extra Effort." The authors suggest six techniques designed to structure effective communication with minority publics. Among the suggestions are messages that are designed to convey this attitude: "You are a part of us. We want you involved. We are anxious to help. And we have a problem and need your help" (p. 51).

In her timely article "Women on the Management Team," Frances Powell lists a number of adjustments in traditional attitudes that women **must** make before they can earn acceptance by the other members of the management team. Among her suggestions are: "Play the role properly. . . . Never become emotional with tears. . . . Never talk about your personal feelings with your peers. . . . Don't overemphasize the aspects of your sex in your dress. . . . Don't view job rejections as defeats" (pp 18-19).

For educators dependent on tax referendums for financial support of their school districts, the article "Plan Well, and Pass That Next Tax Referendum" by William Banach and Cass Franks is **must** reading. The authors detail an eight-step strategy to follow in every financial election. They also offer 100 questions to be posed to the planning group **before** final plans for the bond issue election are presented to the school board. The responses to these questions will assist in identifying "what has to be done, by whom, how and when" (p. 72.)

With increased interest in the public's attitudes toward their schools and the importance of conducting valid surveys, Don Gallagher's article, "Learn Citizens' Opinions through Surveys," provides school districts with valuable information on how to conduct their own public opinion polls. He also lists the advantages and limitations of four survey methods: personal interviews, telephone interviews, drop off/pick-up questionnaires, and mailed questionnaires.

Though only a few articles have been discussed in this review, what has been gleaned from the text should give ample indication of the usefulness and timeliness of the **Almanac**. Moreover, since the field of school-community relations has within it such a sparse body of significant literature, the **Almanac** should be welcomed for its contribution.