

PUBLIC RELATIONS
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800 PUBLIC RELATIONS

Introduction

In a real sense the school belongs to the people, more specifically, the constituents. It is therefore of utmost importance that the people be involved in its program and are continually made aware of its needs, programs and goals. Only by generating a closeness to the school can we hope to generate a love and support for it.

The purpose of the public relation program of our Association is to create a better understanding between the school and the people it serves.

810 MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION

811 Intra-school Media

1. Each school has its own bulletins to teachers and its own informational staff meetings.
2. The superintendent's bulletin is sent to all teachers periodically.

812 Community and Constituency Media

1. Regular publications from the central office to the constituency include superintendent newsletters, alumni magazines and various annual reports.
2. Each school sends regular bulletins to parents.
3. The church bulletins are used to communicate events to the constituency.
4. Newspaper, radio, and TV news releases are periodically distributed through the superintendent.
5. School directories are published by each District School Board.

813 Crisis Communication Plan

Approved -- September, 1998

It might be true that whatever can go wrong will go wrong at the worst possible time. The real question is, "How do we deal with it?"

Today's rush to litigation and the media's bent towards "bad news" make it important for us to have a crisis communication plan in place and to be prepared to operate under its guidelines in the event of a crisis.

Understanding our plan, our goals, and our procedures will make it easier to manage both the

crisis and the communication about it. The purpose of this document is to help us communicate information about the crisis accurately and efficiently to the various audiences that are important to our schools.

813.1 What is a Crisis?

A crisis should be considered as any event that you judge will attract media attention and that has a potentially adverse effect on the public's perception of our schools (i.e., a serious bus accident in which our driver was judged to be at fault, a staff member (past or present) who is reported in serious violation of the law, student activity during school hours that requires police intervention.)

While it is impossible to anticipate every possible crisis that could occur, several types of potential crises are listed below:

- a. Natural Disasters
- b. Accidents
- c. Acts of Violence
- d. Vandalism
- e. Misconduct – actual or perceived
 - Student
 - Staff
 - Volunteer
- f. Organizational
 - Staff Dissension
 - Volunteer Dissension
 - Values/Policies/Procedures
- g. Financial Matters
 - Impropriety
 - Budget Shortfall
- h. Tragedies
 - Student
 - Staff
 - Volunteers
- i. Litigation

813.2 Crisis Communication Goals

Our goals for managing communication in the event of a crisis are:

- a. to assure that accurate information is communicated
- b. to avoid fueling the crisis
- c. to safeguard student and staff privacy rights
- d. to maintain a positive image for The Grand Rapids Christian Schools
- e. to be responsive to media and constituents' inquiries

813.3 Who Is The Audience?

We have a number of different audiences with whom we communicate. The audience for crisis communication will vary, depending on the nature and scope of the situation.

While the media is the audience, which may immediately come to mind in a crisis and may provoke the most concern, we also should manage crisis communication to the following audiences:

- a. Parents/Families/Students
- b. Staff
- c. Board of Trustees
- d. District Boards
- e. Key Volunteer Groups
- f. Supporting Church Leaders
- g. Other Church Leaders
- h. Other School Communities
- i. Donors
- j. Alumni

813.4 Specific Procedures for Managing Crisis Communication:

- 813.4.1** Because God is our ultimate help, in the event of a crisis it is appropriate to take a moment to offer a prayer to God, asking for guidance and care for those affected by the crisis.
- 813.4.2** As soon as you become aware of the crisis (or believe a crisis may occur), contact the superintendent immediately. He will evaluate the scope of the crisis and determine if the Crisis Communication Team should be activated.
- 813.4.3** The Crisis Communication Team is composed of:
- a. Superintendent
 - b. Board of Trustees President and/or school system legal counsel
 - c. Director of Communication
 - d. Director of Mission Advancement
- 813.4.4** The superintendent or the Crisis Team will develop a strategy for communicating about the crisis, dealing with various audiences, and responding to the media.
- The strategy may include prepared statements, letters, news releases, news conferences, and assistance from media and/or legal consultants. The superintendent will issue an initial public statement the same day as the crisis occurs.
- 813.4.5** The superintendent (or his designate) will be the contact person with the media.
- a. All requests from the media for information and comment should be politely but firmly directed to the superintendent. This will help maintain control and uniformity regarding communication and will minimize the potential for conflicting messages. It will also free you to deal with resolving the crisis.
 - b. If you or a member of your staff are contacted by telephone or in person by the media during a crisis, please refer them directly to the superintendent.
 - c. Immediately advise the superintendent that you have been contacted by the media and, if possible, alert him to the tone and nature of their inquiry.
 - d. Advise staff that all media communication should go through the

superintendent.

- e. When referring the media to the superintendent, never say “No comment.” The “No comment” response only suggests lack of cooperation and that we have something to hide. A more appropriate response would be:

“We are shocked by this news and have already begun a full investigation into this matter. Our Superintendent’s Office will issue a statement at the earliest possible moment as we learn more. We can assure everyone that we will take every action necessary to insure no further harm will occur. Please contact our superintendent, Tom DeJonge, at 574-6370 for more information.”

820 SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

821 Student Participation

Students are not to be used for distribution of announcements, circulars, or advertisements for non-school organizations except those, which have to do with religious, recreational, health, safety or library services. All materials must be approved by the superintendent.

822 Personnel Participation

All school personnel will be held responsible for any actions that reflect unfavorably toward the schools. Courteous treatment of the public is mandatory. Indeed, beyond this a positive Christian approach to the public is expected. All personnel are encouraged to take an active role in community and church.

830 RESPONSIBILITIES DEFINED

831 Responsibility of Superintendent

All news releases will be given to news media by the superintendent or the superintendent's designated representative only.

832 In Dealing With the Constituents It Is Well For the Board Members to Keep Certain Principles and Procedures in Mind

1. Board members should always act in the best interest of the entire Association.
2. Refrain from making individual commitments to constituents or organizations; rather faithfully report board positions or decisions when information is requested.
3. Work individually and as a board to build good relationships between the schools, and the constituents and the community.
4. Keep confidential the discussions, materials, and decisions of the board that are sensitive in nature.
5. Be publicly loyal to the majority in decisions with which he/she is in disagreement.

833 Responsibility of the Principals

1. The principal will be constantly alert to events or practices which reflect negatively or positively upon the school and upon Christ's name and shall do all he/she can to remedy or utilize such situations.
2. The principal will keep alert to information which should be transmitted to the constituency or the public regarding his/ her school and shall see to it that such information is made available for publication in school or Association communication media.
3. The principal is to be sensitive to the attitudes and action of the personnel under him/her. Attitudes and actions that reflect negatively or positively upon the school and upon Christ's name are to be a focus of attention.
4. The principal is responsible for the communication media that comes from the district schools and for the proper supervision of teacher and/or student communication media.

840 RELATIONSHIP TO AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS

841 Relationship Between Board and PTA's

All boards are to encourage the organization and operation of district PTA groups. Inasmuch as possible funds raised by such groups will be retained for use in the district. The District Boards will approve specific projects and events since all school PTA's are under the direct jurisdiction of the District Board. Cooperation and mutual help among district PTA groups will be advocated and encouraged.

842 Relation Between Church and School

Church and school exist in an essential relationship. Most supporting churches call for the maintenance of good Christian schools in their church order. The Christian school wants and needs a cordial relationship with the church. It is therefore necessary:

1. That the school cooperates in every way possible with the churches and the ministers.
2. That regular communication between school and churches be maintained.
3. That the school board initiates meetings with church leaders.
4. That the support of the church councils and ministers for Christian schools be regularly encouraged.

843 Use of School Personnel

The Association seeks the general good for the education of all children in all Christian schools and hence it allows the use of its personnel in advising and other ways assisting other Christian schools. Such use of personnel is supervised and approved by the superintendent.

844 Relationship with the Community

The Christian school provides a public service. School personnel and boards shall continuously interpret their program to the community at large soliciting and encouraging public appreciation and support. The Christian school shall also offer its service and personnel to the community where feasible and financially practical.

850 BOARD POSITION ON SCHOOL-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

851 Original and Current Position

Resolved, inasmuch as the government requires all children to receive an education and

Inasmuch as parents who wish religious direction should not be discriminated against as long as they meet state requirements, therefore

The Grand Rapids Christian Schools Board of Trustees goes on record as favoring legislation which provides greater equity in educational aid for all citizens, whether they send their children to public or private schools. Provided that such legislation in no way compromises the Reformed Character of our schools, or hinders the schools from implementing their Christian philosophy of education.

860 NAMING OPPORTUNITIES

adopted May 14, 2000

861 Non-donor

Under certain situations the GRCS Board of Trustees will use a naming opportunity to honor one that has played an important role in advancing the cause of Christian education. The board will receive recommendation from the superintendent relative to such naming considerations. Candidates worthy of consideration would be characterized as follow:

1. Strong Christian commitment
2. Has demonstrated a long history of support for the Grand Rapids Christian Schools
3. Has reached a point in life where the person is retired (if ever employed) from active service in the Grand Rapids Christian Schools.

862 Donor

Any individual who contributes 50% or more of the funds necessary to complete a capital project will have opportunity to be involved in the selection of the name of the facility. Final name selection is to be approved by the Grand Rapids Christian Schools Board of Trustees or its designate.