

# School-Community Relations

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## COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC

As federal, state, and local tax structures are changed from time to time, the expenditures of the publicly supported governmental units and institutions are scrutinized very carefully. Financial support of the schools will depend largely on how well the school program is understood by teachers and how well they have interpreted, and continue to interpret, the public school program to the general public.

Principals have a major responsibility for school-community relations. Teachers have many opportunities for good public relations. Major emphasis is on good human relations, on considering citizens as friends and explaining the reasons for the program of the school in a plain, straightforward manner. On the other hand, school personnel should attempt to learn all they can from citizens in the community that will help them with the education of the children of the community.

Efforts should be made in the following areas to expand these activities for a more effective public relations program:

- A. AREA OF SCHOOL CURRICULUM
  1. Publish goals and objectives in handbooks, brochures, and other publications.
  2. Seek opportunities to present programs on the curriculum to parent/teacher organizations, civic groups, and other organizations.
  3. Release feature stories to the news media on curriculum, activities, changes in the curriculum, and honors and recognition by individuals or school groups.
  4. Make use of community personnel as resource teachers or speakers as the opportunities arise.
  
- B. AREA OF STUDENT ACTIVITIES
  1. Encourage student and parent participation in activities.
  2. Release information to news media of activities scheduled and report on the results of them.
  3. Promote attendance for activities by use of student bulletins, news media, and other promotions.
  4. Support activity programs and reflect this support by attendance.
  
- C. AREA OF SCHOOL PUBLICATIONS
  1. Student publications - school newspaper, yearbooks, etc., should be utilized to promote public relations among the student body, parents, and the community.
  2. Superintendent's Publications
    - (a) Monthly reports to the Board of Education.
    - (b) News releases on specific subjects.
    - (c) Special bulletins and brochures to the community.
    - (d) Special reports to the faculty and staff.
  3. Report of School Board Activities
    - (a) Budgetary and financial reports.
    - (b) Publication of minutes of meetings of the Board of Education.
    - (c) News releases on action taken by the Board of Education at regular meetings.

- D. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY
  1. The school administration and Board of Education should utilize existing community organizations and representatives from various segments of the community in planning and evaluating the education program.
  2. School personnel are encouraged to participate in activities of organizations in the community.
  3. The schools within the district will diligently involve the people of the community in such activities as the organized volunteer program, school business partnership, and other efforts.
  
- E. THE LOCAL NEWS MEDIA
  1. An internal school organization for the collecting and dissemination of news is necessary.
  2. A channel for news release is imperative. The superintendent of schools shall provide a system for news releases within the school system.
  3. Good relationships with the editors and reporters are to be maintained.
  4. In coverage of special events, deadlines are important.
  5. Special educational features are important and are to be encouraged.
  
- F. PERSONAL CONTACTS BY SCHOOL PERSONNEL
  1. Contacts with parents by working together in parent/teacher organizations, school committees, parent conferences, and social activities is important.
  2. Contacts with patrons by utilizing them as resource personnel and by cooperating with business and industry in planning field trips is encouraged.
  3. Contacts with community leaders, service on community-wide committees, in social groups, church work, and service clubs are encouraged.

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE SCHOOL OFFICES**

Good public relations is the job of the entire staff. Every employee should feel a keen personal responsibility for the development of good relations with the public. Each contact made with the school offices, whether in person, by telephone or by letter, should always receive a warm, courteous and personal reception.

Incoming communications and United States mail should be answered or otherwise acted upon within 24 hours after delivery.

Copies should be made of all outgoing letters, and those copies filed for future reference.

Telephone calls should be answered promptly. Delay in answering the phone is not conducive to good public relations.

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF STAFF**

The public relations program of the Altus Public Schools involves the Board of Education and all persons in the community.

All professional and non-teaching personnel have roles in a total public relations program. The superintendent of schools has the responsibility for leadership of the school-community program of public relations. The school-community relations are largely determined by what happens in the classroom. The school curriculum is extremely important in the whole matter of school-community relations.

All school personnel have a responsibility toward the public relations program. Secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers have important roles in the school-community relations program. Each contact made with the school offices, whether in person, by telephone, or by letter, should always receive a warm, courteous, and personal reception. It is the responsibility of the supervising staff member to foster in their employees good grooming and tact in dealing with the public.

## **PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICY**

The district shall strive to maintain effective two-way communication channels with the public. Such channels shall enable the Board and staff to interpret the schools' needs to the community in a concise, factual manner.

The administration shall establish and maintain a communication process within the school system and between it and the community. Such a public information program shall provide for news media coverage of district programs and events, provide for regular direct communications between individual schools and the citizens they serve, and assist staff in improving their skill and understanding in communicating with the public.

Normally, the Superintendent, his designee, or the Public Relations Office will be the district liaison with the public news media. All contacts and releases concerning district policies and regulations, matters of district-wide interest, or potentially controversial topics will be handled or cleared by the Superintendent or district liaison. When it becomes apparent that crises or emergencies may disrupt school district operations, the Superintendent and the Public Relations Office will coordinate the release of information to the staff, students, parents, and community.

Principals will be the primary contacts for their school sites. They will make available information regarding the school, its programs and operation, except as prohibited by Board policies, administrative regulations, and federal or state laws. If principals have questions about releasing information, they will contact the Public Relations Office. Principals will inform the Superintendent and district liaison about media contacts, existing or potential problems or public concern, and any criticisms or commendations.

In order to solicit media coverage of a classroom or school project, teachers should contact their building administrator and/or the Public Relations Office. Certain procedural safeguards will need to be met prior to the actual media contact, including checking for "Denial of Permission" forms signed by parents, review of legal documents regarding students, review of content of material released, and approval from the building administrator or Public Relations Office. Following the completion of the safeguards, the building administrator and/or the Public Relations Office shall direct that the media be contacted.

Any district photograph which might invade an individual's right of privacy will not be released. Parents/Guardians will be given the opportunity to deny permission for the release of a child's image, voice, words, etc., to the media, during the enrollment process. They may do so by completing a "Denial of Permission" privacy form (see Policy 700.400).

During regular school hours, all media representatives must notify the Public Relations Office of their location at a school site prior to going to that site. Once at the site, all media representatives must report to the building administrator for identification and authorization before going to any part of the building or grounds or contacting any individual.

## **DISTRICT OVERSIGHT OF MATERIALS RELEASED TO STUDENTS**

The superintendent, as a representative of the district, is given the responsibility of informing the public as to the purpose, goals, methods, and progress of the educational program. Accuracy, reliability, and leadership in this area will develop confidence and understanding, thereby creating better relationships between the school district and the community. All school personnel are responsible for good public relations.

Therefore, all written notices, bulletins, newsletters, and matters pertaining to students are to be submitted to the principal prior to release. Matters that pertain to the district will be submitted to the superintendent of schools prior to release.

Non-school-originated material of a commercial, political, or religious nature shall not be disseminated. Notices from community organizations, such as Camp Fire Girls, Boy Scouts, PTA, etc., that directly effect the children of the district may, in the discretion of the principal, be forwarded to parents via the students.

The policy is not intended to interfere with the responsibility of district personnel to communicate with the parents or legal guardians of a particular student. It is intended to insure that prompt, reliable, and accurate information is provided to parents and patrons of this district.

## **CHURCH RELATED ACTIVITIES**

The Altus Public Schools recognizes, appreciates, and supports the role of local churches in enhancing the lives of those who live in the community; however, because of the large number of and diversity in the beliefs of local churches and because of the commitment of the local schools to a planned, organized curriculum, the Altus Schools cannot accommodate programs emanating from the churches. Neither may a representative from any religious organization meet with students during school hours before or after school on school property.

The policy will in no way affect current use of facilities by religious groups at a time when schools are not in session.



## **STUDENTS PROHIBITED FROM PARTICIPATION IN DRIVES**

Community drives are not permitted to operate through the school system by sending home objects or articles to be sold, or cards, folders or envelopes to be returned by the student with donations.

This prohibition against all community drive participation was enacted a number of years ago to prevent embarrassment in many instances for the child; to prevent pressure on parents to make additional donations, avoid bother of neighbors of school children by solicitation for nonschool drives, and to avoid rivalry between schools within the system.

## SCHOOL VISITORS

It is the policy of the Altus Board of Education that all visitors to any school facility obtain a visitor's pass at the building principal's office. **Parents are requested not to send or allow siblings or friends to visit students on campus.**

Staff members are not normally expected to have personal visitors during the school day.

Agents or other persons shall not visit teachers during school hours for the purpose of selling books or other articles without written consent from the superintendent.

The superintendent or principal of any school shall have the authority to order any person out of the school building and off the school property when it appears that the presence of such person is a threat to the peaceful conduct of school business, school activities, and/or school classes. Any person who refuses to leave the school building or grounds after being ordered to do so by the superintendent or principal, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$500.00 or by imprisonment in the county jail for not more than 90 days, or by both such fine and imprisonment.

Any person who is requested to leave the premises shall be unable to return to the premises without the written permission of the administration for a period of six months. A grievance or an appeal may be filed by the individual as per district policy 400.041.

## **SCHOOL VISITORS (GRIEVANCE/APEALS PROCESS)**

Any person who has been removed from this institution shall be given written notice of the procedures for requesting a hearing and filing a grievance or appeal with the board of education by their receipt of a copy of this policy.

### Filing a Grievance or Appeal

Within five (5) working days of being directed to leave premises, the individual ("complainant") may request a hearing before the board of education regarding their removal from school premises. The request shall be submitted in writing to the superintendent. Such request shall be mailed certified mail, return receipt requested. If the complainant fails to request a hearing within five (5) working days of being directed to leave the premises, the right to a hearing shall be deemed to be waived.

Upon receipt of the complainant's request for a hearing, the administration shall prepare a written summary of the reason(s) why the individual was directed to leave school premises. The written summary may include the date, time, place, witness statements, and reasoning behind the administrator's decision to direct the individual to leave school premises. The written summary prepared by the administration shall be mailed to the complainant no later than ten(10) days prior to the date set for hearing before the board of education.

### Hearing

The hearing shall be conducted by the board of education as follows:

1. The administration shall present each of the board members with a copy of the written summary provided to the complainant;
2. The complainant shall present each of the board members with a copy of a written response to the administration's paperwork;
3. Members of the board of education shall be afforded the opportunity to ask questions related to the summary and response;
4. The Board of education shall vote to accept, amend, or reject the recommendation of the administration with regard to the directive to complainant.

The decision of the board of education shall be final and unappealable.

## **MEMORIALS FOR DECEASED STUDENTS OR STAFF**

Recognizing that the loss of a member of the school community is deeply felt, the school district will support staff, students and families who feel the loss, and will assist with connections to appropriate community resources. As places designed primarily to support learning, school sites should not serve as the main venue for the memorializing of students or staff.

Permanent memorials for deceased students or staff shall be limited in form to perpetual awards or scholarships, plantings, collections of books or items of historical or educational significance. Memorials shall be limited to one per loss. Plantings should take place in an optional viewing site on the side or perimeter of the campus. Plaques may be created and given to the family at time of planting/scholarship/contribution, or displayed in a designated optional viewing site until the end of that particular school year and then given to the family.

Temporary school-wide memorials for deceased students or staff may include plaques or other displays that are returned to the family at the end of the school year. Memorial symbols displayed by individuals on campus shall be limited to the school year within which the death occurred.

The school or district reserves the right to establish design parameters so that a memorial blends with the architecture or setting of the facility, and/or blends with existing memorials.

## **PARENT PARTICIPATION IN THE ALTUS SCHOOL DISTRICT**

The board of education, in consultation with parents, teachers, and administrators, has developed and adopted this policy to promote and encourage the involvement of parents and guardians of children within the school district.

1. Parent participation in the schools is encouraged to improve parent and teacher cooperation in such areas as homework, attendance and discipline. At the beginning of each school year each teacher shall provide parents with contact information so that a parent has the opportunity to contact the teacher or administration to address concerns related to homework, attendance and discipline.
2. Parents may request additional information from the administration to learn about the course of study for their children and review learning materials, including the source of any supplemental educational materials.
3. Parents who object to any learning material or activity on the basis that it is harmful may withdraw their children from the activity or from the class or program in which the material is used. Objection to a learning material or activity on the basis that it is harmful includes objection to a material or activity because it questions beliefs or practices in sex, morality or religion. Parents are hereby informed that the withdrawal of a child from any state mandated courses could prevent their child from being eligible to receive a high school diploma.
4. If the school district offers any sex education curricula pursuant to Section 11-105.1 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes or pursuant to any rules adopted by the State Board of Education, parents may opt their child out of sex education instruction if the child's parent provides written objection to the child's participation in the sex education curricula.
5. Parents are hereby notified and given the opportunity to withdraw their children from any instruction or presentations regarding sexuality in courses other than formal sex education curricula pursuant to Section 11-105.1 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes.

6. Parents may learn about the nature and purpose of clubs and activities that are part of the school curriculum, as well as extracurricular clubs and activities that have been approved by the school. A list of school clubs that have been approved by the board of education is available from the administration upon request.
  
7. Specific parent rights and responsibilities provided under the laws of this state, include the following:
  - a. the right to opt out of a sex education curriculum if one is provided by the school district.
  - b. open enrollment rights.
  - c. the right to opt out of assignments.
  - d. the right to be exempt from the immunization laws of the state pursuant to Section 1210.192 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes.
  - e. the promotion requirements prescribed in Section 1210.508E of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes.
  - f. the minimum course of study and competency requirements for graduation from high school prescribed in Section 11-103.6 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes.
  - g. the right to opt out of instruction on the acquired immune deficiency syndrome pursuant to Section 11-103.3 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes.
  - h. the right to review test results.
  - i. the right to inspect instructional materials used in connection with any research or experimentation program or project pursuant to Section 11-106 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes.
  - j. the right to inspect instructional materials used in connection with any research or experimentation program or project pursuant to Section 11-106 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes.
  - k. the right to receive a school report card.
  - l. the attendance requirements prescribed in section 10-106 of Title 70 of the Oklahoma Statutes.
  - m. the right to public review of courses of study and textbooks.

- n. the right to be excused from school attendance for religious purposes.
- o. policies related to parental involvement pursuant to this section.
- p. the right to participate in parent-teacher associations and organizations that are sanctioned by the board of education of a school district, and
- q. the right to opt out of any data collection instrument at the district level that would capture data for inclusion in the state longitudinal student data system except what is necessary and essential for establishing a student's public school record.

Parents may submit a written request for information during regular business hours to either the school principal at the school site or the superintendent at the office of the school district. Within ten (10) days of receiving the request for information, the school principal or superintendent, shall deliver the requested information to the parent or provide a written explanation of the reasons for the denial of the requested information. If the request is denied or the parent does not receive the requested information within fifteen (15) days after submitting the request, the parent may submit a written request for the information to the board of education. The board of education shall formally consider the request at the next scheduled public meeting if the request can be properly noticed on the agenda. If the request cannot be properly noticed on the agenda, the board of education shall formally consider the request at the next subsequent meeting of the board of education.

Legal References:        70 O.S. § 10-106  
                                  70 O.S. § 11-103.3  
                                  70 O.S. § 11-103.6  
                                  70 O.S. § 11-105.1  
                                  70 O.S. § 11-106  
                                  70 O.S. § 1210.192  
                                  70 O.S. § 1210.301 through § 1210.308  
                                  70 O.S. § 1210.508E