

Preface

The first edition of *Promoting Your School* was published in 1994. Because of its success, Corwin asked me to update it with new material on the challenges facing education in the 21st century. The second edition, published in 2000, came out on the cusp of the explosion in technology that is still going on. Today, as we have prepared this third edition, even more rapid advances in technology continue to direct the ways we communicate. So we have done even more research on the most effective applications of technology. Educational leaders who participated in the first and second editions of the book were asked for additional input. From elementary and secondary state school “Principals of the Year” to “Superintendents of the Year” to school public relations experts from around the country—all were invited to contribute. As a result, this new edition contains updated examples of how these experts are taking full advantage of the latest technology in school and district communication efforts. Students and educators alike are increasingly sophisticated in their knowledge and use of computer technology and all its possibilities, so examples have been added throughout this edition showcasing some of the best practices in use today in public education. There is no better way to increase the confidence level of parents who want their children to be prepared to succeed both academically and economically in this changing world than to show them firsthand how educational change, creatively employed by educational leaders, is benefiting their children.

Promoting Your School is about communication. In this era of high-demand/high-performance expectations, schools struggle with their role in the community and with their ability to project an image that is both positive and honest. Academic requirements have increased at the same time that schools have taken on countless new responsibilities—responsibilities having nothing to do with the classic “three R’s” that traditionally have been fulfilled by extended families, community agencies, and religious institutions. *Promoting Your School* was written with these realities in mind, and to simplify at least some aspects of the life of all school leaders by helping them draw upon a wide array of school and community resources to build a support base of human, material, and financial capital.

Parents who believe their children are getting a quality education in your school or school district will not “vote with their feet” by withdrawing their children from the public schools and enrolling them in a private school—and then lobbying for state funding to pay their tuition! If you honestly and openly involve parents and the greater community in your efforts to improve your school or your district, they will reward you not only with their time and support but also with the most precious asset they possess—their children.

Moreover, America’s businesses have come to understand that a well-trained, well-educated, properly motivated workforce is the most powerful asset any company can have—especially if that company wants to be a player in the global economy of the 21st century. Employers are increasingly willing, even eager, to partner with schools to assist in developing such a workforce.

As it is with the private sector and with parents, it will also be with the community at large. Households that have no school-age children need tangible demonstrations of getting their money's worth before they will even consider paying more in taxes to support somebody else's children. It is up to you and your school teams to demonstrate the value of the education tax dollar.

So, more than ever before, it is "Job #1" for schools and school leaders to build and strengthen the four-way partnership between schools, parents, community, and the private sector. Today's high-demand/high-performance-era educational leaders must be able to successfully communicate the needs, problems, goals, successes, challenges, and educational priorities of their schools. Stakeholders who know the truth about public schools have demonstrated a remarkable willingness to be supportive not only with their time but with their resources as well.

But you have to tell them! You have to *communicate* with them! The *entire* community has to be told. It is up to *you* to see that the message gets out, and to remember that some of your best communicators are your students, staff, parents, and community members.

Throughout this book, the word *marketing* is used. You have to market (sell) your school and your district to the external constituencies of parents and community and employers, as well as to the internal constituencies of students, teachers, and staff. Every group must be given a reason for caring about what happens to your school.

No single book can answer every question or foresee every eventuality, but the strategies contained in this book *can* provide you with a map to help you and your team get to where you want and *need* to go. Most of these techniques and strategies are drawn from the actual successful experiences of schools all across the United States. Still others are taken from real-world business and political situations in which collaborative, communicative leadership has overcome bureaucratic tradition and inertia.

There are 13 chapters in this book. Each chapter deals with a separate component of communicating/marketing challenges and offers strategies for how to meet them. Unlike a novel or a biography, this book isn't necessarily designed to be read from beginning to end, or chapter by chapter. Communicating/marketing/selling your school or your school district is the only "plot," and there is a certain amount of duplication from chapter to chapter, since some basic marketing techniques obviously apply to more than one strategy or project.

Thus, each chapter is something of a stand-alone "cookbook" intended to provide hands-on strategies, tips, how-to's, lists, and resources for reaching and enlisting your essential audiences. The emphasis is on the practical and the doable rather than the theoretical.

Clearly, every tip and technique will not work for every school. Although some of this information may be old hat or didn't work for you, it may be new to someone else and may work well in another school environment or community. Also, remember that just because an idea has been around a long time doesn't mean it's not a good one.

This book is written to be used by all school and district administrators, new to the position or experienced, and at schools or districts, large or small; rural, suburban, or urban; elementary, intermediate, or secondary. It recognizes that principals and district administrators come to this task with varying levels of expertise in communications and marketing but that they are united by a common desire to help their schools be the best that they can be.

The book is also intended to be used, or at least to be helpful, to leaders of PTA/PTO organizations who want to be effective and supportive school advocates; to business leaders who realize that, without quality public schools, they have no economic future; to community

members who understand that good schools make strong, healthy neighborhoods; and to elected and appointed public officials who understand the relationship between high-achieving public schools and an enhanced quality of life for their constituents.

The resources and samples at the end of each chapter were drawn from a wide variety of sources. A survey instrument was sent to “Principals of the Year” in all 50 states and to selected other school administrators—several hundred in all—soliciting items from their “arsenal of tricks.” Other techniques and concepts were gleaned from school public relations professionals and other communication experts. The goal throughout was to avoid reinventing the wheel and to seek out what works best from the practitioners who are in the arena, marketing their schools day in and day out.

Selecting which material to include was a challenging task. The standards were to select those resources/samples that (a) seemed to best represent successful practices, (b) could be replicated outside their original setting, (c) covered as wide a spectrum of techniques and approaches as possible, and (d) could actually be implemented at the building level with building-level resources as well as at the district level, with a broader array of support. Every form, sample, example, or model is included in the book for one purpose only: *to be used*. Permission is granted to readers to copy, modify, or adapt any of this material for local school or district use.

Like the first and second editions, this new, third edition of *Promoting Your School: Going Beyond PR* has been very much a collaborative effort. Throughout the research process, I have received enormous and willing assistance from many of the best, most creative minds in education and from a number of outstanding national educational organizations and enterprises. I am grateful to the many educators who have shared so generously their ideas, advice, techniques, strategies, wisdom, and vision. Their contributions make up a large portion this book. With admiration and appreciation, those educators who contributed to both the original and second editions of *Promoting Your School* are acknowledged in Resource A at the end of the book.