The School Superintendent: Theory, Practice, and Cases

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Leaderhip in the Larger Community

Key Concepts

- A superintendent’s leadership role in school and community relations
- Creating dialogue about the purposes of education
- Informing the community about education
- Building and maintaining community support for public education
- School district partnerships
- A superintendent’s personal involvement in community activities
A superintendent's role in providing leadership beyond the school district is associated with political realities and professional responsibilities. In the political framework, superintendents are commonly seen as public property (Blumberg, 1985; Kowalski, 1995). As such, their behavior is constantly scrutinized. Any impropriety may become a scandal. However, taxpayers do not only see superintendents as public servants; they also view them as public resources. In this light, many citizens believe that the responsibilities of the position extend beyond managing the school district to include activities such as attending public functions and speaking at them and serving on the boards of various civic groups (Lober, 1993). Board members and school district employees also routinely expect superintendents to be active in community matters, especially with regard to being a forceful politician who is able to compete with other governmental leaders for scarce resources.

A superintendent's responsibility to be a leader outside of the school district is framed within the conceptions of the superintendent as teacher-scholar and as democratic leader. Specific obligations include (1) building a symbiotic relationship between the school district and the community, (2) informing the public of educational needs, (3) bringing people together to create visions and goals, (4) interpreting educational goals to the public, and (5) building support for school initiatives. As policy making shifts toward the local level as a result of deregulation and decentralization, these responsibilities become increasingly important.

This chapter explores three primary topics related to the superintendent's leadership in the larger community. The first entails leadership for positive school-community relations; the second relates to the growing popularity of partnership programs; the third pertains to the superintendent's involvement in community service.

LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

In states that exert a high degree of control over public education, school boards and superintendents often function primarily as regulators. That is to say, their primary responsibilities pertain to ensuring that laws, policies, and regulations developed at the state level are followed appropriately at the local district level. However, as policy making shifts to the local level, success in the superintendent becomes more dependent on leadership than on management. In this context, not only do superintendents play a pivotal role in facilitating the task of deciding what should be done, they also are accountable for building and maintaining public support for the schools. This responsibility of a superintendent, commonly addressed under the topics of public relations or school-community relations, has three fundamental components:

1. To inform the public (e.g., about intentions, processes, and outcomes)
2. To persuade the public (e.g., to modify attitudes and opinions that are based on misperceptions)
3. To integrate the actions and attitudes of the school organization with those of the community (e.g., to ensure that the values and purposes driving the school district are congruous with the values and beliefs in the larger community) (Cohen, 1987)

To properly perform these duties, superintendents must engage in honest, open, consistent, fair, and continuous two-way communication with the community. Their efforts should produce credibility, confidence, goodwill, and social harmony (Seitel, 1992). This responsibility requires an understanding of the political context of contemporary practice, especially as it relates to public perceptions and values about education.

The Issue of Purpose

Despite intense rhetoric that suggests the contrary, the public schools remain one of the most democratic institutions in American society (Amundson, 1996). Local school boards still retain sufficient authority to make significant decisions that affect students, employees, and the entire community. These decisions are not made in a vacuum; they are influenced by pressure groups and powerful individuals who have their own agendas for elementary and secondary education. Public beliefs about the role of schools in our society are critical; these convictions influence community values and ultimately educational policy. This fact becomes quite evident when diverse purposes for education are analyzed in light of the reform agendas that have been proposed over the past 2 decades.

Reform is certainly not a new issue in public education. Throughout the 20th century, there have been recurring cycles during which the public has demanded school improvement. These periodic expressions of dissatisfaction are associated with several realities about the structure of American society. First, reform has often been pursued at the national and state levels—largely because centralized initiatives are easier to initiate. However, these top-down efforts rarely have been successful in eradicating the problems they hoped to address. Second, the proposed solutions often reflect a narrow perspective of schools. This has resulted in the promotion of solutions that are usually too simplistic to solve the real problems. Third, the problems faced by public education are directly linked with the persistent dilemma of pursuing seemingly conflicting metavalues (Cuban, 1988).

To elaborate, education policy has been, and continues to be, guided by five values: liberty, equality, adequacy, efficiency, and fraternity. Tensions between liberty and equality—ethical values derived from the doctrine of natural rights—are especially important with respect to analyzing school reform policy. While liberty pertains to the right to act without undue restriction, equality refers to the state of enjoying reasonably equal social, political, and economic rights (Swanson & King, 1997). The simultaneous influence of these metavalues is visible in both policy and laws. For example, court decisions in school finance litigation often reveal a determination to maintain an equilibrium between the principles of lib-
Property and equality (Burrup, Brimley, & Garfield, 1996). Kern Alexander and Richard Salmon (1995) noted the following:

Equality and economic freedom are ultimately intermingled and highly interdependent. The role of the state in fostering care, protection, and equality as balanced against individual freedom and liberty forms the primary ground on which political philosophy is argued and tested at the polls, in the legislatures, and in the courts of this nation. (p. 134)

Tensions between liberty and equality are becoming ever more visible in school reform initiatives because the unresolved issues of purpose are central to improving education. For example, school choice and vouchers are ideas intended to increase liberty. Critics of these ideas charge that allowing parents to select schools—and especially using tuition vouchers in either public and private schools—promotes racial and economic segregation. Proponents counter that a student does better in a school that complies with his or her family’s values and philosophy. Tensions over such reform ideas reflect the problem of not having a set of universally accepted purposes for public education. As metavalues are pursued, they rekindle basic tensions. School finance, the quintessential example of conflict between two educational metavalues, continues to be debated in the courts, even after more than 30 years of litigation (Whitney & Crampton, 1995).

Less abstract differences regarding the purposes of education have been discussed during the most recent cycle of reform initiatives. Four have been particularly prominent:

1. Promoting the intellectual attainment of students
2. Shaping good citizens in the interest of a better society
3. Preparing students for the workforce
4. Fostering lifelong learning skills (Armstrong, Henson, & Savage, 1989)

In addition to values and beliefs, directions for public schools also are shaped by changing societal conditions. Drug abuse, technology, poverty, and the changing nature of work are but a few of the factors in this category. Collectively, values and societal circumstances combine to form individual perceptions of what schools should be accomplishing—and more important, they become the basis for reform agendas.

Americans have always been unable to agree on specific purposes for public schools (Spring, 1990), and there is little doubt that this condition has been primarily responsible for the past failures of top-down, centralized reform initiatives. The lack of a national consensus regarding what is expected of public schools often leads to a situation in which powerful individuals or groups are able to advance their narrow views as being representative of society (Tesconi, 1984). Much of what was attempted during the 1980s, for instance, was predicated on erroneous assumptions that schools were unproductive simply because
students were lazy and teachers were incompetent. David Clark and Terry Astuto (1994) correctly observed that many of these efforts would have been dismissed as ridiculous had they not been vigorously supported by powerful advocates. By the end of the 1990s, many policy analysts discerned that “one size fits all” educational mandates that ignored vast differences among communities and learners had done little to improve our schools. In light of these failed experiences, Clark and Astuto (1994) concluded, “No one can reform our schools for us. If there is to be authentic reform in American education, it must be a grassroots movement” (p. 520).

 Appropriately, reform efforts since the early 1990s have been tilting toward deregulation and decentralization—strategies intended to increase the relevance and effectiveness of change-related policies. However, as noted earlier in this book, the concept of directed autonomy serves to remind us that state governments and the courts will exercise their responsibilities to ensure that increased freedoms at the local level do not result in an unequal, inadequate, or inefficient system of public education. In addition, meaningful renewal is unlikely unless educators commit themselves to openly discussing the purposes of education among themselves and ultimately with the community at-large (Sarason, 1996).

 If local districts are to engage effectively in school renewal, three critical issues need to be understood by the community:

1. There is a need to recognize that the diversity of opinion regarding the purposes of education is no less important at the school district or school level than it is at the national or state level. Taking the matter to the local level merely makes it more likely that these differences can be identified accurately and that subsequently understanding these differences can become a basis for building consensus concerning education goals. While citizens disagree about what may be the most important educational purpose, opinion polls often reveal that there is majority support for five or six rather common goals (e.g., Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1996). This fact adds credence to the workability of the strategy of seeking consensus at the local level.

2. There is a need to recognize that local policies and regulations regarding school improvement should be made within a framework of legal requirements and state political expectations (e.g., that school districts will be accountable for student outcomes). Increased liberties do not diminish the importance of other metavalues, such as equality, adequacy, and efficiency.

3. There is a need to recognize that school boards and superintendents are responsible for ensuring that all students in a local district receive reasonably equal educational opportunities. Thus, individual schools are unlikely to receive total freedom to set their visions and long-range plans.

The responsibility for explaining these issues, first to the school board and employees and then to the broader community, belongs to the superintendent. In addition, it is the superintendent who is most likely to play the central role of
Creating and facilitating a format allowing a democratic debate to take place. In many communities, it will be difficult, and possibly politically uncomfortable, for the superintendent to articulate these issues. Likewise, bringing people with differing philosophies to the table to discuss the goals of education is certain to generate higher levels of conflict. However, unless these issues are addressed, school renewal at the local level is improbable.

Keeping the Community Informed

Inertia in public education is often blamed on obstacles that prevent school districts from implementing change. An unsuitable building that cannot be adapted to new needs and an inadequate budget are examples of barriers that educators and general public readily understand. Less obvious are barriers to understanding and barriers to acceptance. The former include a lack of understanding of key concepts or purposes for change; the latter include rejection on the part of those who have the power to influence implementation (Connor & Lake, 1994). The need to promote public understanding and acceptance of educational programs has increased in a society in which nearly 80% of taxpayers do not have children enrolled in the elementary and secondary public schools. Another problem for superintendents to face is that since the 1950s, there has been an erosion of confidence in public education. "Rather than being held in high esteem, public education now is viewed by many as unproductive and fiscally excessive" (Kowalski, 1995, p. 11). Consequently, superintendents must work to reverse this perception. To do this, they must inform the public of what the schools are really trying to do; they must persuade the public that these initiatives positively affect individuals and society. Most important, they must exhibit that the school district is in harmony with the community.

In addition to facilitating democratic discussions of the purpose of education, the superintendent's leadership role in the community extends to informing the public of agreed-upon goals, instructional and curricular decisions related to those goals, and student outcomes that allow goal attainment to be evaluated. A first step in this direction entails identifying various publics who should receive this information. A superintendent can accomplish this task by developing a list of key communicators such as parents, government officials, and business leaders. Both the school board and administrative staff should review the list before it is finalized to ensure its completeness and accuracy.

Another facet of a superintendent's leadership in school-community relations involves deciding what needs to be communicated to the various publics. Clearly, informing the community of shared visions, goals, and outcomes becomes an overriding responsibility in a policy-making arena requiring direct citizen support (e.g., for change ideas, for tax increases). In large measure, this is true because both deregulation and decentralization result in a dispersing of power and knowledge (Murphy, 1994). While superintendents always have been expected to educate the public about the school district's goals, role expectations related to this task are changing in many districts. Rather than informing the public of personal agendas and personal decisions, superintendents are more
likely to be communicating shared decisions, outlining the importance of community support for those decisions, and providing outcome data that allow the public to assess the school district's effectiveness.

Increasingly, superintendents also find themselves having to share research-based data that relate to school improvement. For example, districts considering the formation of site-based councils may find it advantageous to share empirical data on the concept. The National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policymaking, and Management (1997) offers the following suggestions for disseminating such information to policy audiences:

1. Information should be distributed in a timely manner.
2. Information should be succinctly and clearly written; summaries are better than long reports.
3. Information should be provided in a form that accommodates the intended audiences. Audiotapes, for example, may be preferred by busy individuals.
4. Information should be objective, accurate, and fairly reported.

Unfortunately, school districts have not been prone to thinking, planning, executing, and evaluating services from viewpoints outside of their organizations (Topor, 1992). Many superintendents continue to be oriented toward internal reference groups (e.g., other administrators in the district, board members), and consequently, they devote much less time to community-based interactions than their counterparts in private industry typically give to interactions outside their organizations. Moving to continuous, two-way communication requires both an appropriate philosophy and an appropriate strategy to change traditional behaviors.

Building and Maintaining Community Support

Communities are unique entities that differ substantially with respect to engagement in political activity and support for public education. Thus, no one recipe is universally effective for building and maintaining community support for public education. Instead, superintendents are wise to devise their own plans based on the uniqueness of the community, the specific needs of a school district, and a congruence between educational and community values.

Citizens often expect to have substantial input and influence over educational decisions for two very practical reasons. First, they pay taxes to support schools; second, they have a stake in public education. In addition, people in America are inherently political. Many do not respond passively when they are excluded from educational decisions. When their individual voices are ignored, they are likely to gather into groups and form associations. To gain even greater political leverage, they may form coalitions (West, 1985). In addition, those who are ill informed or who perceive they are being excluded from school matters become prime targets for misinformation from those who oppose change or increased fiscal support (Ledell & Arnsperger, 1993). However, one of the most
significant findings from the various reform reports is that stakeholders typically have little involvement in decisions that affect them (Patterson, 1993).

School reform expert Philip Schlechty argues that restructuring creates expectations that superintendents become active in influencing stakeholder decisions (Brandt, 1993). Some superintendents, however, may have negative feelings about assuming this role. For them, influencing others has connotations of using sales pitches, engaging in arm twisting, and using other public relations gimmicks; they tend to define persuasion narrowly and negatively. According to Philip West (1985), persuasion is a relatively complex concept that needs to be understood at both its lowest and highest levels:

At its lowest level persuading may be identified as propaganda and attempts to distort or deceive. It is reporting good news but concealing bad and preaching by word and not by deed. At its highest level it is akin to educating in the most palatable manner in order to motivate people to act in their best interests. It is skillfully organizing a message to get a much needed point across. (p. 28)

Clearly, it is the highest level of persuading that is consistent with the moral and ethical responsibilities of a superintendent as a professional educator and community leader. To a large extent, this responsibility merely means telling the public the truth (Amundson, 1996). However, to fulfill this seemingly simple task, superintendents must have the data that present the truth; they must be willing to correct others when they present incorrect data—even when these others are powerful individuals and groups.

In large city districts, the superintendent needs direct assistance in gaining community support. Some of that assistance can come from other district employees and school board members; it can also come from opinion leaders. These are individuals who “often serve as key sources of information about issues, and, in an informal sense, frame issues for discussion, debate, and action” (Ledell & Arnsparger, 1993, p. 9). Opinion leaders usually make themselves known. They attend school-related meetings; they exhibit an interest in education; they are good organizers who are respected by others; they are well-informed and ask relevant questions (Ledell & Arnsparger, 1993).

Whether school districts will be able to capitalize on the current window of opportunity to have greater autonomy over school reform depends on several issues. Among them are the following:

• The degree to which the community is given an opportunity to interact with educators to reach consensus on the purposes of education
• The degree to which these interactions reduce a meaningful vision and goals
• The degree to which the community supports the vision and goals
• The degree to which the community receives accurate information about progress toward goal attainment
• The degree to which community support is sustained over long periods of time
LEADERSHIP IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY

There are many signs that policymakers and other power elites are becoming increasingly intolerant of ineffective leaders who fail to produce real school improvement (Sarason, 1996). Their displeasure could actually move public education in the direction of less, rather than greater, autonomy. However, the issue of public dissatisfaction is not the sole reason why superintendents need to give greater attention to community support. Others include (1) reduced resources; (2) an increasing percentage of taxpayers who do not perceive themselves receiving a direct benefit from schools; (3) shifting educational needs and priorities; and (4) continued reliance on property tax revenues (which often means voter approval for tax increases). Because of such conditions, superintendents are expected to gain responsive and representative community participation, identify emerging issues and needs, and abort issues that are counterproductive to school reform (West, 1985). Thus, leadership for change includes building goodwill in the community and gaining public support.

An organized approach for a superintendent to accomplishing these leadership tasks is strategic marketing. Strategic marketing in education has been defined as including the planning, implementation, and control of programs designed to create voluntary exchanges of values and beliefs between the schools and targeted segments of the school district's population (Kotler & Fox, 1985). Essentially, the process spans three key functions: (1) obtaining accurate information (needs and values); (2) developing relevant programs; and (3) building public support for the programs. Each of these functions prompts the superintendent to engage and inform the public. In addition, superintendents "have an obligation to protect the schools from being manipulated by special interest groups who seek to misinform the general public or advance a narrow agenda" (Ledell & Arnsparger, 1993, p. 35).

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

The growth of school partnerships parallels public disfavor with education. Generally, partnerships are joint ventures involving two or more organizations working together to reach common goals. These relationships may or may not be based on a formal contract. An example is a manufacturing company that provides technology resources to a local district because it desires to hire computer-literate high school graduates.

In 1983, only 17% of the nation's schools had such compacts; by 1989, this percentage more than doubled to 40% (Marenda, 1989). By 1990, the United States Department of Education estimated that there were over 140,000 partnership nationwide in just one category—partnerships between schools and businesses (Rigden, 1991). In large measure, the popularity of partnerships is attributable to several factors, which are outlined in Table 11-1. They include economic, political, demographic, and philosophical issues that prompt superintendents to pursue formal associations with other organizations.
Table 11-1
Factors associated with the growing popularity of school partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>America is becoming a more diverse society; a growing number of students are living in poverty. These conditions increase the need and demand for services in public schools. Partnerships can support some of these services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Many public school districts simultaneously face increased demands for services and dwindling resources. Hence, partnership ventures are often forged as a means to overcome deficiencies in resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social implications</td>
<td>The consequences of educational failures have shifted from the individual to society. In an information age and global economy, there are few jobs for those who do not succeed in school. Each student who fails to get an appropriate education becomes a concern for the community, state, and nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Gaining the support of community power structures or a majority of taxpayers is becoming increasingly difficult. Three issues—public skepticism about the quality of public education, a growing resistance to taxation, and the fact that a decreasing number of taxpayers have children enrolled in the public schools—are largely responsible. Partnerships are seen as a way to build bridges to those citizens who have become disconnected from schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Many superintendents believe that real improvement in schools becomes more likely in environments where there is a symbiotic relationship between schools and community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Defining the Partnership Relationship

Relationships between school districts and other agencies are often described by different terms, which may or may not reflect actual differences in the nature of the relationships. These associations are commonly described by four terms that reflect varying levels of commitment and legal obligations between the parties (see Figure 11-1).

1. The weakest linkage is networking. Organizational networks may be formal or informal, and they often are formed solely to facilitate communication (e.g., sharing information, statistics). Members commonly are freestanding participants (that is, the organizations retain autonomy) (Harris, 1993).

2. Organizational coordination almost always is based on a formal agreement. For example, a school district and a community college execute a coordination agreement designed to avoid duplication of adult education programming. The two organizations sacrifice little autonomy and continue to function as parallel education providers. There is only a minimal level of contact between agency leaders (Loughran, 1982).
3. Institutional cooperation is the next level of commitment and obligation. Generally, some degree of autonomy is sacrificed. One party to the agreement operates the programs in question with the cooperation and support of one or more other agencies. There is greater contact among leaders than is the case with either networking or coordination. Most joint ventures in special education and vocational education exemplify cooperative ventures. One district serves as the legal agent for the cooperative, and other members provide financial support for the services they receive.

4. Collaboration designates ventures in which participating organizations commit to a common goal and sacrifice considerable autonomy in affected areas of operation. Power and authority are shared; leaders in the participating organizations often have considerable contact with one another. Collaborative arrangements are usually quite formal in that they are based on written agreements designating purpose, goals, contributions, and so on.

While each of these four levels of linkage may be called partnerships, they clearly represent different concepts of working together. Precise understandings are made even more difficult by the fact that schools enter partnerships with different types of groups and agencies. The most widely publicized relationships have been between schools and businesses. Common examples of partnership activities include tutoring programs, field trips and special activities, donations (supplies, equipment), student jobs, summer jobs for teachers, loaned executives, and resource persons to speak to classes (American Association of School Administrators, 1988). The National Alliance of Business (1987) defined six levels of potential interaction:

1. Level I—Policy. These alliances are designed to shape new policy or modify existing policy by influencing state or national legislation.

2. Level II—Systematic educational improvement. Groups work together to identify areas needing reform and make joint efforts over a long period of time to seek improvement in those areas.
3. **Level III—Management assistance.** Business partners provide school administrators with management support and business expertise over a broad range of management areas.

4. **Level IV—Training and development.** Business partners provide opportunities for educators to update skills and learn about labor markets, industrial/business operations, workplace needs, and career opportunities.

5. **Level V—Classroom activities.** Business volunteers serve as guest instructors or entire classrooms visit business sites.

6. **Level VI—Special services.** These are short-term projects, student-specific activities, or resource allocation to assist schools with a specific need or problem.

Some business leaders unfortunately believe that they have little to gain by interacting with school administrators. For them, partnerships with schools have nothing to do with improving their leadership skills or broadening their understanding of public institutions. Instead, the linkages are justified in terms of influencing the education of potential future employees and of gaining positive media exposure in the community. Business leaders have tended to ask two questions about partnerships with schools: (1) How can business improve public schools? and (2) How can public schools respond more directly to the needs of employers? Both questions fail to take into consideration the needs and interests of students (Wise, 1981).

School districts also establish formal relationships with other educational institutions, most notably colleges and universities. These ventures may be related to the commitment on the part of many institutions of higher learning to general service to the community (e.g., helping to improve community life by improving the public schools), or they may be pragmatic linkages serving mutual needs (e.g., joint programs in teacher education). Commonly, partnerships between school districts and universities take four forms:

1. **Program assistance** (e.g., advanced placement courses for high school students)
2. **Programs and services for educators** (e.g., staff development for teachers and administrators)
3. **Curriculum and assessment projects** (e.g., conducting program evaluation, assisting with the design of evaluation systems)
4. **Sharing educational resources** (e.g., consultants, sharing technology) (Pitsch, 1991)

Other partnerships involving school districts are community based. These might include linkages with parents (who serve as volunteer aides or on special task forces), volunteers (for special school projects), local government, churches,
or other service agencies. In some cities, for instance, the public schools have joined forces with churches, hospitals, and mental health agencies to provide services to troubled students (e.g., pregnancy counseling, therapy for behavior disorders). Recreation programs and adult education programs are two of the most established areas of school-community collaboration.

More recently, partnerships have been categorized according to goals and intentions. Three categories are commonly used for this purpose: (1) program enhancement, (2) new programs, or (3) reform-related programs. While the first two involve adjustments to the current school program, the third entails more significant and sweeping changes to schools and districts. Reform-related partnerships are usually rooted in a mutual conviction that school improvement cannot be achieved without restructuring. A three-tiered approach for categorizing school partnerships—based on intentions, nature of school partners, and scope of projects—is shown in Figure 11-2.

### Intention of Partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Enhancement</th>
<th>New Program</th>
<th>School Reform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving or expanding an existing program (e.g., new software for a computer class)</td>
<td>Adding a new program to the existing structure/curriculum (e.g., adding a mathematics program)</td>
<td>Significant changes to the structure and/or curriculum of the school (e.g., moving to a decentralized, shared governance system)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business/Industry</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Other Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A joint venture with a private, profit-seeking organization (e.g., partnership with a local bank)</td>
<td>A joint venture with agencies, groups, or individuals who are not engaged in business or industry (e.g., partnership with parents, city government)</td>
<td>A joint venture with other education organizations (e.g., a partnership with a university)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Type of Partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adopt-a-School</th>
<th>One-Way, Project Driven</th>
<th>Limited, Two-Way</th>
<th>Full, Two-Way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resources are given to the school for general purposes; school does not provide resources to the partner.</td>
<td>Resources are given to the school for a specific project that is of interest to the partner; school does not provide resources to the partner.</td>
<td>Resources are given to the school for one or more projects; school responds by meeting a need of the partner.</td>
<td>Resources are exchanged over a broad area of programs; mutual benefits become a focal point for programming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 11-2**

Categorization of school partnerships
Critical Decisions About Partnerships

The literature abounds with success stories about school partnerships; less known is the fact that many of these projects fail to live up to their potential. A study of 133 schools in one of the nation’s largest districts, for instance, found that only 8 of 450 partnership projects with local businesses had led to instructional change (Miron & Wimpelberg, 1989). Pressured by the demands of a global economy, many business leaders in the 1980s presumed a cause-and-effect relationship between education and prosperity (Wynne, 1986). At the same time that they were publicly criticizing schools, many were assuming a more active role with local schools and encouraging their colleagues to do so. Hence, many of the partnerships spawned in this environment were based on unrealistic and narrow goals flowing from the conclusion that education was responsible for America’s declining dominance in world markets. These collaborative efforts were prone to failure because they were ill conceived or improperly supported.

To avoid the potential pitfalls of collaboration, superintendents should raise a series of essential questions before any agreement is reached. Factors that drive these questions and the range of possible decisions are shown in Table 11–2.

Of greatest importance are the following questions:

- **Compatibility of organizational cultures.** To what degree does a school district and a potential partner possess similar cultures? To what extent are their cultures strong or weak (that is, whether there is wide acceptance of basic values or not)? Unless cultures are reasonably compatible, excessive conflict may deter goal attainment (MacDowell, 1989).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 11–2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues associated with forming school partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility of organizational cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between risk and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs foci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication among partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational coupling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of the relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource commitments</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
• **Relationship between risk and experience.** To what extent is risk involved? Have the partners worked together before? Do potential partners have previous experiences with these types of ventures? It is often advisable to build on previous successes, and it is advantageous to begin with a project that is likely to succeed (Page, 1987).

• **Needs foci.** Will the partnership projects focus solely on organizational needs? If so, what problems will be created? Are there ways to simultaneously address organizational and individual needs? Balancing the needs of the organization and individuals is most likely to produce interest and personal commitments in any projects.

• **Benefits received.** Is the partnership designed so that only one partner is the beneficiary? If so, how might this condition negatively affect goal attainment? Are there ways of pursuing mutual benefits? When schools are the sole beneficiaries, projects tend to be short-lived. Each potential partner should be encouraged to answer the question, "What's in it for me?" (Page, 1987).

• **Communication among partners.** Will communication be restricted to the school district giving information to the partner? Or will the partner be exchanging messages with the school district? Without active exchanges of information, one or more of the partners may become disinterested or form faulty conclusions about the project's effectiveness.

• **Partnership goals.** Are the goals long-term and rigid? Are there provisions for adjusting goals based on short-term outcomes? Setting rigid long-term goals prevents periodic adjustments for unanticipated problems or outcomes. All parties should agree on the goals before the project starts (MacDowell, 1989).

• **Organizational coupling.** To what extent will the partners sacrifice autonomy? To what extent will the partners be required to share power, decision making, and responsibility? Without coupling, organizations are likely to protect interests and authority to the extent that the project might be negatively affected.

• **Duration of the relationship.** What is the time frame for the partnership? Does the association have an opportunity to grow and prosper—or will it be terminated at a specified time regardless of outcomes? Because most change in public education requires time and patience, the most productive partnerships tend to be long-term ventures.

• **Resource commitments.** Will each partner be contributing resources? Will these resources be material or human? Are necessary resource allocations identified and understood? Without fairly substantial commitments of human and material resources, partners find it easy to withdraw when problems are encountered.

It is far better to ask and answer these types of questions before a relationship with other organizations is formalized. Unfortunately, this does not always occur. Often educational administrators seize what they think are golden opportunities to gain resources without adequately considering the long-term repercussions of doing so.
Why Partnerships Fail and Succeed

Given the unique nature of school districts as well as of their potential partners, there are a myriad of reasons why joint ventures succeed or fail. Nevertheless, experience and observation provide insights into recurring issues that appear to influence the ultimate fate of school partnerships. Among the many stumbling blocks, five have proven to be especially troublesome. They are identified in Figure 11-3 and explained below.

1. **Turf protection**, which refers to the tendency of organizations or divisions of organizations to protect authority, has long been recognized as a source of conflict within bureaucratic-like organizations. In the realm of partnerships, jurisdictional disputes often emerge with respect to autonomy—that is, the degree to which a school district or partner must surrender autonomy. One example of this problem was visible in a joint venture between a school district and a community college. Existing side by side in the same city, the two institutions agreed to collaborate in the area of adult education. Conflict emerged when administrators disagreed over ultimate control of curricular and scheduling decisions. While the officials recognized the benefits of working together, neither side was willing to sacrifice autonomy to accomplish this goal. Turf protection also can emerge in partnerships with business. Here schools are often confronted with aggressive executives who attempt to use their clout to control key educational decisions.

2. Partnerships also fail because of **insufficient planning and ambiguous direction**. These arise for two main reasons. First, superintendents or principals are often impetuous, entering partnerships with little forethought about end products and the means for reaching those goals. The ideal is to aim for long-term relationships that have incremental objectives (Gardner, 1990). Second, administrators may enter partnerships without giving adequate time and attention to comprehensive planning; critical issues are either ignored or insufficiently studied.

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**Figure 11-3**
Common reasons why partnerships fail

- Turf Protection
- Inadequate Resources
- Lack of Planning/Direction
- Unresolved Conflict
- Lack of Patience
3. A more obvious reason for failure relates to inadequate resources. An example of this barrier was obvious in a project between a school district and a local manufacturing company. The primary goal was to provide summer jobs to high school juniors and seniors. The company wanted the school district to provide an after-school training program that would prepare students for future work experiences. The project ran into difficulty when funds could not be secured to pay instructors for the training program. Equally dysfunctional are situations in which administrators and teachers are asked to perform the work created by a partnership without receiving additional compensation or released time.

4. Unresolved conflict is almost always associated with the unwillingness of partners to address tensions that are inevitable in their joint ventures. A drug counseling project between a school district and local mental health agency exemplifies this barrier. Tension was generated because the school counselors and staff at the agency disagreed with respect to counseling approaches. Rather than attempting to resolve their differences, they worked around each other. Eventually, the project fell apart because of a lack of communication.

5. A final problem deserving attention involves time parameters. Many business executives are accustomed to seeing short-term results in their programs. For example, they want to see signs of increased sales within 6 to 18 months from the time that they improve a product. Accordingly, those who become engaged in school partnerships often exhibit a lack of patience. They do not understand that the fruits of education may require many years of nurturing. Unless this is adequately explained at the front end of project, partners may become impatient and withdraw from the joint agreements.

Success, too, can be attributed to many different factors. The more prominent ones are identified in Figure 11-4. There is a synergistic element to these factors. That is to say, they become more effective when they occur collectively. Put simply, the more of these elements that are present, the more likely the partnership will be successful. Brief explanations are provided for each of these recurring attributes related to success.

- **Partners receive recognition.** To a certain degree, partnership ventures represent a transactional process; each partner expects to gain something. In the case of one-way, restricted ventures, the school district's partners often seek positive publicity. Thus, school officials need to take the necessary steps to ensure that all partners receive recognition.

- **Employees are supportive.** Projects are often developed without employee involvement. This mistake can be disastrous. In effective projects, enthusiasm and support are usually visible among administrators, teachers, and others who have direct responsibilities in the work involved for the project.

- **Periodic progress reports are provided.** Anyone who invests time and money wants some feedback regarding progress. Hence, a prescribed system of
communication should provide periodic reports to the partners; a minimum of three or four reports a year is recommended.

- Mutual benefits are at the core of the partnership. While many arguments can be made for schools accepting handouts, one-way partnerships often fail to live up to their full potential. Ventures predicated on mutual interests and mutual gains are more likely to endure. A key to effective partnerships is establishment of an intersection of educational interests—a point at which partners are able to justify the commitments they make to each other (Wise, 1981).

- Adequate resources are in place. Clearly, partnerships will not achieve their intended outcomes unless necessary resources are available.

- Policymakers are supportive and involved. Enduring partnerships often require adjustments—adaptations to unforeseen problems or emerging needs. This quality is more likely in partnerships in which key policy figures are involved in the project. For example, a school board member can serve on the advisory committee for the project.

- Mission and objectives are clear and understood. Those engaged in the partnership should be able to identify the mission and objectives with the same degree of clarity. Resolving misunderstandings about intentions can be extremely counterproductive once a partnership is in effect.

- Scope and complexity should increase incrementally. Like all relationships, partnerships require time to become stronger. Often it is best to begin with simple projects. This allows the partners to experience success and to build
on that accomplishment. The best partnerships often reveal this evolutionary pattern of growth.

- **Trust is central to the relationship.** Because the most effective partnerships are two-way ventures and because two-way ventures almost always require interdependency, trust is an essential ingredient. Over time, partners who trust each other are more likely to rely on transformational rather than transactional exchanges to set their goals.

While all the above factors may be essential in given situations, trust is undoubt edly the most powerful and pervasive ingredient in successful collaboration.

Despite the immense popularity of school partnerships, there has been very little formal research on this topic. In part, this is due to the fact that it is extremely difficult to isolate outcomes that are directly attributable to collaboration; it is especially difficult to determine the effects of partnerships on student outcomes (Cobb & Quaglia, 1994). Because collaboration is often sparked by economic and political forces, evaluation of such projects concentrates on resource acquisition and public relations. For example, projects may be deemed successful simply because schools received additional equipment or because positive publicity was generated for the partners. From a political perspective, however, partnerships are valuable simply because they serve to bring the school and the community closer to each other.

### A SUPERINTENDENT'S PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Four different conceptions of the superintendency (teacher of teachers, business manager, democratic leader, and applied social scientist) were reviewed in chapter 7. Stresses commonly produced by these competing role expectations continue to capture the attention of researchers and practitioners. One common area of conflict pertains to expectations that superintendents simultaneously should be professional leaders and effective politicians. Unmistakably, there is a certain degree of incompatibility between requiring a superintendent to have a specific level of education (and hence, a specified professional knowledge base) and requiring a superintendent to acquire political support from nonprofessionals for critical education decisions. Arthur Blumberg (1985) referred to this issue as the political dilemma of being a nonelected public official. That is, nonelected officials face a certain degree of role conflict in their work because they are both professionals and political figures. Blumberg cited several reasons why the superintendency was unique among such nonelected official positions:

- Superintendents lead institutions to which some of the most deeply held values in the American tradition are attached.
- Superintendents assume their jobs as supposed experts, yet their expertise is dependent on their ability to develop a supportive constituency among the school board, community, and professional staff.
School districts are composed of people who often have equal or more expertise in education than the superintendent. Even though superintendents may be highly educated and highly experienced, they rarely are able to make decisions outside of a political context.

The need to gain public acceptance and support is one compelling reason why superintendents should assume leadership roles in their communities. Being an active member of a service club, serving on city and county boards, and attending public functions regularly permit the superintendent to learn the history, values, and politics of the community. These activities also provide forums for communicating; they allow the superintendent to provide information (e.g., about school programs, emerging needs), as well as to receive information. Often persons not directly connected to the schools are opinion leaders; and unless superintendents become active in the larger community, they may not be able to cultivate their support.

Community involvement also allows a superintendent to identify various publics. This task is particularly important in larger, heterogeneous communities. In urban districts, for example, school boards are often composed of individuals who represent single constituencies (Kowalski, 1995). Unless the superintendent has ongoing interactions with all of these publics, personal relationships with board members may suffer. In addition, contact with various publics serves a multitude of purposes including the following:

- Being able to get a better perspective of real needs and expectations of the community
- Being able to establish an identity and working relationship with a broad base of citizens
- Being able to engage in two-way communication
- Being able to secure support for resources and reform

Involvement within the community is also linked to the fact that the superintendent is the visible head of the school district. Because of this role, superintendents find themselves interacting primarily with adults, unlike teachers and principals who spend more of their time interacting with students. “Much of what the superintendent does in these meetings is symbolic; the superintendent represents the schools to the community” (Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, & Thurston, 1992, p. 321). Thus, it is extremely important for a superintendent to be active in the community, to have access to power structures, and to have positive relationships with influential individuals who make up the power structures.

Maintaining high visibility in the community has become an even more important issue for superintendents because of educational reform. Public schools have a myriad of stakeholders, and these stakeholders often want a voice in major proposed changes. Because many patrons are not well informed about what is occurring in the schools, they are likely to accept misinformation (Ledell & Arnsperger, 1993). If no concerted effort is made to provide them with accurate
data, they are not likely to support proposed reforms—especially if the changes are linked to tax increases. A superintendent can exercise leadership for school reform by pursuing activities such as these:

- Having a series of meetings involving a broad cross section of the community
- Inviting reform opponents to face-to-face meetings
- Keeping focused on what the community wants and expects from public schools
- Getting patrons to visit schools (Ledell & Arnsparger, 1993)

In addition, face-to-face contacts with elected officials, business leaders, clergy, and other influential community members allow a superintendent to take advantage of informal communication networks across the community.

While there are many potential benefits associated with a superintendent maintaining a high profile in the community, several caveats need to be considered. In most school districts, superintendents are expected to spend a good portion of their time dealing with internal matters. That is, they are expected to manage the day-to-day problems of the school district. If a superintendent spends too much time away from the office, this may be viewed negatively in certain contexts. Effective superintendents balance their time and set priorities; much of their contact with community groups occurs outside of the regular school day.

Interacting with power structures can be a highly political activity. On occasion, a superintendent may need the support of influential citizens. Such contacts, while advantageous to the school district, can place an administrator in a compromising position. For example, in exchange for supporting a school bond issue, a person may request that the superintendent provide overt support for a political candidate, endorse certain programs, or provide preferential treatment for a relative who is seeking employment in the school district. Usually such transactions are not blatant attempts at receiving favors; they occur after relationships have developed naturally over time and the requests may be quite indirect. A superintendent may soon discover that it is not easy to work effectively in political arenas while maintaining high ethical and moral standards. There are, however, hundreds of skilled practitioners who are able to achieve this balance. They do so by placing the interests of the school district above personal interests, by being honest and candid in their communication, by avoiding illegal and unethical deals, and by honoring their responsibilities inherent in being a public official in a democratic society.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

This chapter examined the leadership role of the superintendent in the wider community. These responsibilities span providing an effective school-community relations program, partnerships with other groups in the community, and a superintendent's personal involvement in community activities.
As you consider what you read in this chapter, answer the following questions:

1. Public relations has become a higher priority for many school districts. What factors have contributed to its rise in importance?

2. School districts have multiple publics. What measures can a superintendent take to identify such publics and communicate with them?

3. In most communities, multiple purposes for public education are identified by taxpayers. How does this fact relate to the superintendent’s responsibility to provide leadership in the community?

4. What are the advantages of schools entering into partnerships with business? With other educational agencies?

5. What common problems can superintendents expect with regard to building and maintaining effective partnerships?

6. Do you believe that the size (enrollment) of a school district influences the amount of time a superintendent spends with community activities? Why or why not?

7. Based on your experiences with superintendents, do they devote a considerable portion of their time to being visible within the community? What is the basis for your response?

8. Assume you were interviewing for your first superintendency. A board member asks you, “Are you an educator or a politician?” How would you respond?

9. Many taxpayers are not well informed about what is occurring in the public schools. In part, this is because a high percentage of them no longer have children enrolled. In addition to traditional newsletters and occasional press releases, how can superintendents reach out to establish meaningful communication with these individuals?

10. Should superintendents ever become involved in supporting candidates for a school board election? Why or why not?

CASE STUDY

Brighton, the home of Southeastern State University, is a community with about 13,000 residents. The public schools enroll 2,600 students at six attendance centers. Over the years, the school district and university have maintained a positive relationship that focused largely on teacher education. Education students at the university have access to the local elementary and secondary schools for classroom observations and student teaching. George Bascum, the superintendent of
the Brighton school district, himself a graduate of Southeastern, serves on the university's Alumni Board.

Two years ago, when Dr. Sandra Walker was named president at Southeastern, the relationship between the university and school district changed. Having been an elementary school teacher and dean of education, President Walker had a particular interest in developing a partnership with the local schools. Although the two institutions had been collaborating for years, no formal agreement defined their activities. The dean of Southeastern's school of education, Dr. Elizabeth O'Ryan, was urged by the new president to formalize the relationship. At first, Dean O'Ryan was reluctant to do so because she felt that the current situation had worked well for both parties. President Walker, however, wanted a relationship that would allow the university faculty to take a more direct role in school reform efforts. She explained her position to Dean O'Ryan as follows:

"While our current level of involvement with the public schools is essential, I am thinking about doing more than just placing our students in their district to do classroom participation and perhaps student teaching. The quality of our teacher education programs depends on having access to schools that are using 'cutting edge' ideas. Without a formal agreement for collaboration, it will be difficult for our faculty to become involved in school improvement. I am thinking about a real partnership—one in which their staff and ours work side by side to reconstruct the schools. To do this, I think we need a formal partnership. I've outlined some key points for such an agreement. You need to contact Mr. Bascum and discuss the proposal. If he is reluctant, I'll become involved. I would prefer, however, that the two of your work things out."

Dean O'Ryan met with the superintendent several days after being instructed to do so. She shared President Walker's interest in developing a formal partnership. She then outlined basic elements for the agreement.

- The partnership would begin with two pilot schools (one elementary school and one secondary school).
- At each of these schools, a planning committee would consist of (1) the school principal, (2) two of the school's teachers, and (3) three professors appointed by Dean O'Ryan.
- The planning committee would identify specific needs and projects associated with school reform. The school district and university would work collaboratively to implement these initiatives. There would be no cost to the school district for university personnel.
- School district personnel serving on the planning committee or directly involved in partnership initiatives would be eligible to receive a 50% reduction in tuition for any graduate courses they would take at Southeastern.
- The planning team would determine how teacher education students could participate in the newly developed programs.
Superintendent Bascum reacted cautiously to the university’s proposal. “I’ll have to discuss this matter with the school board, but I see a great deal of opportunity here. You know, many residents are urging us to develop closer ties with Southeastern. There may be ways that we can save resources by working together.”

Dean O’Ryan responded, “We have many resources in this community. We should work together to ensure that the schools in the community provide the very best education for students. Your students and teachers will benefit, and our faculty and teacher education students will be able to receive highly relevant experiences. It’s a win-win situation.”

Mr. Bascum was not totally convinced that the partnership was a good idea. After Dean O’Ryan left, he immediately went to see Peter Jones, his assistant superintendent. He outlined the proposal and asked, “What do you think?”

“Well, there are possible benefits and possible problems,” Jones answered. “What if we get into situations where the committee becomes divided? How can we get anything done if the votes are evenly split? And what happens if our teachers and administrators don’t like the ideas that come out of these committees? But on the other hand, we may have no choice but to play ball with them. We could have real political problems if we reject their offer.”

The pair decided that the idea should be presented to the school board at the next meeting. Their intention was to share the idea and see how the five board members reacted. There were several reasons why they believed the board would not respond favorably:

- Two of the board members had previously complained about university personnel wanting to influence school district policy. Just 2 weeks ago, for example, one of them complained to Mr. Bascum about “pushy professors who wanted to run the school district.”
- Several professors had written letters to the editor of the local newspaper in the past year criticizing either the school district’s discipline policies or the school’s curriculum. The board had reacted rather negatively to these letters.
- Only one of the five board members was employed by the university. Barbara White, director of food services in the dormitories, had shown no previous interest in developing joint programs with the university.
- The board members generally felt that the schools were very good, and they were cautious about “pursuing change just to be in vogue.”

However, after outlining the details of the proposal, Mrs. White immediately made a motion to approve the partnership concept. Brian Debow, a farmer and one of the 2 board members who previously voiced concerns about university employees trying to influence policy, argued against the motion. He asked the board to delay action on the matter. Mrs. White countered that the partnership was an opportunity to discuss new ideas and that it should be started as soon as possible. Another board member asked Mr. Bascum how he felt about the pro-
posal. He said that although there had been little time to consider it, it basically looked like a great opportunity for the school district. After about 20 minutes of discussion, the board voted 4 to 1 to approve the partnership proposal.

The local media reported the board's action the next morning. A live interview with President Walker aired on the local radio station at 7:30 A.M. She expressed optimism about collaborating with the school district, and she congratulated the superintendent and school board for having approved the agreement. The morning newspaper carried a front-page article announcing the partnership. The article described it as "a positive example of public institutions working together." Unfortunately for Mr. Bascum, most school employees found out about the partnership from these sources; many were surprised and concerned that the matter had not been discussed within the school district.

That afternoon Mr. Bascum met with the principals in his office. He first apologized for the way the partnership was announced. He told the principals, "I wish we would have had more time to discuss this, but I really thought the matter would be tabled by the school board. This would have given us the opportunity to examine the partnership proposal more closely. That didn't happen." After sharing the details of the proposal—the same details outlined by Dean O'Ryan and approved by the school board—he asked if any of the principals wanted to have their schools serve as pilot sites. Only one elementary principal volunteered, and she was the least experienced of the group. Neither the middle school nor high school principal wanted to participate. After the superintendent stated that it was necessary for one of the schools to become involved, the middle school principal reluctantly agreed to cooperate.

The initial meeting of the planning teams at both schools occurred approximately 1 month after the school board had acted to approve the partnership. The school personnel entered the first meeting expecting to engage in general discussions about current practices and possible ideas for improvement. Instead, they were surprised when the professors distributed a proposal calling for the consideration of three specific programs: site-based management, cooperative learning, and differentiated staffing. The professors suggested that these programs have been proven to be effective in a number of schools, and, thus, they provided possible starting points. One professor serving on the elementary school planning team noted, "I'd love to have my students see these programs operating in real schools."

The school representatives at both schools became more apprehensive after their initial meetings with the professors. They were especially concerned that there might be a "hidden agenda." Even though no decisions were made during the first meeting, the school personnel felt they were already put on the defensive; they had to provide reasons why these programs were not good starting points. Their sentiments quickly spread through their schools via informal communication channels. Rumors emerged about the purposes of the project and the amount of control that the university would now exercise over the schools. One rumor was that the university was trying to turn the two participating schools into laboratory schools. The principals of these sites started to receive a myriad of questions and complaints; they wasted no time in informing Superintendent Bascum of that fact.
At the next committee meetings at both the middle school and elementary school, the professors were asked why they had selected these three programs. The same answer was given at both schools—the programs were tied to successful reform ventures in other public schools. The professors also pointed out that it would be helpful if both schools pursued the same initiatives. In addition, they denied accusations that there was a hidden agenda in the partnership. The professors urged the school representatives to present their own ideas about possible programs; however, none was offered.

After just two meetings, the planning teams were clearly divided. The school personnel were highly suspicious of the university’s motives, and the professors generally viewed the school representatives as unwilling to look at new ideas. Both teams decided to wait two weeks before having their third meeting.

The two principals of the partnership sites met with Mr. Bascum after the second meetings. This time they were more emphatic, pointing out that the partnership had become a disruptive force in their buildings. The superintendent knew that collaboration was likely to generate conflict; however, he was astonished it occurred so quickly. Based on the information he received from the principals, he concluded that some form of intervention had to occur before the teams met again. He went to see Dean O’Ryan after his meeting with the principals. He shared the concerns that had emerged among the teachers. He told her, “I’m getting messages from my principals that the planning team meetings are not going well. There is some feeling on the part of our representatives that there is a hidden agenda—that the university is trying to take control of these two schools. For example, they feel that the professors have already decided which projects will be pursued.”

Dean O’Ryan responded, “Our representatives merely offered three ideas as starting points for discussion. They feel your principals and teachers immediately became defensive; rather than offering their own ideas, they continued to question our motives.” The two agreed that the problem required their intervention. Dean O’Ryan suggested that the two of them attend the next planning meeting at each school. “We have to convince everyone that there is no hidden agenda; we have to create an atmosphere of openness and flexibility. If not, this project will fail. And if it does, we all look bad.”

Superintendent Bascum agreed with Dean O’Ryan’s suggestion. They would try to reduce tensions by ensuring the participants that the only goal was to improve both the school programs and the university’s teacher education program.

However, when he returned to his office, Mr. Bascum went to see his assistant superintendent. He told Mr. Jones about his meeting with Dean O’Ryan and then said, “This thing is really backfiring on us. We have had good relationships with Southeastern, and this partnership thing may destroy that. Teachers are starting to think they are being used as guinea pigs; the principals are claiming that the partnership is causing a great deal of conflict.”

Mr. Jones responded, “I think we need to find a way out. And the quicker we do that, the better. This is a lot of trouble we don’t need. I never thought the board would buy into this—at least not right away. Maybe we can convince everyone to put this on the back burner for a year or so.”
"No, we can’t do that," Superintendent Bascum responded. "We made a commitment and we have to stand by it—at least for a reasonable period of time. How would it look if we backed out now? What would the board say? We would probably get criticized heavily in the media. No, we can’t just quit at this early point, and stalling for a year is no better alternative. After all, maybe the professors are correct; maybe our people are being too defensive."

A letter, signed by both Superintendent Bascum and Dean O’Ryan, was sent to the 12 members of the planning teams. In it, the pair indicated that they would be attending the next meeting to discuss the intentions of the partnership and to answer questions about unfounded rumors. The day after that letter was delivered, Mr. Bascum received letters signed by virtually all of the teachers at the two schools requesting that the school district withdraw from the partnership—at least until the faculties at the two schools had an opportunity to discuss the potential of such a partnership among themselves. He also received a letter from the president of the teachers’ union criticizing him for having entered the partnership without consulting the union. He sat at his desk and read each of the letters a second time. He also looked at several telephone messages from school board members indicating that they had received complaints about the partnerships. He then stared out of his office window and contemplated what he should do next.

**Issues for Discussion**

1. Evaluate the decision of the superintendent to take the proposal to the school board so quickly. What matters should have been investigated before the proposal was taken to the school board?

2. Did the superintendent have any alternatives to taking the proposal to the school board? If so, what were they?

3. Discuss the intended purposes of the partnership as outlined by President Walker. To what extent did these purposes contribute to the conflict?

4. Is it common for school personnel to be apprehensive about working with university personnel? What information or experiences contribute to your conclusion?

5. This chapter presented information about effective school partnerships. Evaluate the actions of the institutional leaders in this case based on that information.

6. Can this partnership be saved? If so, what actions are needed?

7. Fear of public criticism is one reason why the superintendent does not want to retreat from the partnership. Do you believe that fear is warranted? Why or why not?

8. Would it have been helpful for the school district and university to start with a small project that was likely to succeed? Why or why not?

9. If you had been the superintendent, would you have discussed the proposal with the teachers’ union prior to taking it to the school board?
REFERENCES


