

# Four Steps to Effective Community Involvement

KERRY L. MOYER

Effective community programs combine two of the most powerful influences on student achievement—the school and the community. To learn more about such programs we surveyed over 700 school administrators who developed and achieved community involvement in their schools. We later interviewed an additional 138 administrators, teachers, students, board members, and community volunteers to learn the outcomes of different approaches.

## What Did We Find?

Strategies were different but all effective programs served the schools' needs and were personally satisfying to volunteers and educators. It was evident that the person most responsible for an effective program was the school administrator.

We also identified four steps to effective community involvement: (1) readiness to accept, credit, and use community resources; (2) successful recruitment of community volunteers; (3) assignment of specific objectives, responsibilities, and tasks to each volunteer; and (4) orientation and training necessary for community members to perform their assignments adequately.

*Step 1.* Readiness to accept public participation has two parts: philosophical acceptance and administrative preparation. The community is acutely aware of an administrator's motives and sincerity. (Community members defined sincerity as the gen-

Community people make a valuable contribution when educators welcome their help, make clear what needs doing, and explain how to do it.

uine desire and need for their assistance, the school staff's willingness to listen, and the educators' ability to avoid jargon.)

A management plan that outlines the four steps of community involvement is essential. The plan should be highly visible prior to volunteer recruitment. It could take the form of a handbook that explains goals and tasks of community involvement or even better provides a complete listing of activities and instruction in a quasi-contract form. Community members need to perceive the importance of their contribution, the responsibilities of their involvement, and the beneficial outcome for all.

*Step 2.* Successful recruitment means selective recruiting and use of volunteers that ensures cross-sectional representation of the entire community. The school administrator may directly recruit community members or they may volunteer in response to a public appeal. Whatever technique—offer all community members equal opportunity to participate. A combination of the two approaches—recruitment and volunteer appeals—proved highly successful for most schools. An administrator must be careful, though, not to ignore any significant community group because they did not provide eager volunteers.

Selection may be the administrator's most significant task. The

*Kerry L. Moyer is Senior Research Associate, Pennsylvania Department of Education, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.*

dominant personalities of volunteers frequently overrode the effects of careful planning, task assignments, or detailed training. Often, the outcomes of community involvement were dependent on particular personalities and their interactions.

*Step 3.* For assignments school administrators involved community members in the ways described in Figure 1. Each type of involvement reflects the particular administrative needs listed in the second column,

"Probable Assignment." The criteria for effectiveness (third column) provide a checklist for recruiting individuals and a general outline for the management plan. The possible outcomes column summarizes frequent results of each involvement strategy. The fifth column offers performance evaluation criteria for determining the effectiveness of each community involvement approach. Each type of involvement shares one basic criterion—all are advisory

groups.

The order of involvement strategies in Figure 1 is significant. Volunteer satisfaction was highest for members of a task force, declining in order to the review committees which were least beneficial and satisfying. Each type of involvement offers advantages and disadvantages to the school administrator and many programs used several types of involvement simultaneously.

*Step 4.* The training of volunteers,

**FIGURE 1. ASSIGNMENT OF TASKS TO COMMUNITY MEMBER VOLUNTEERS.**

Type of Involvement	Probable Assignment	Criteria for Effectiveness	Possible Outcomes	Performance Evaluation
Member of Task Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serve as a resource person</li> <li>Represent a specific group (PTA, NAACP, etc.)</li> <li>Leadership of task force</li> <li>Serve as community representatives at large</li> <li>Contribute to problem solving, plans, goal statements, curriculum guides, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Genuine need for task force shown by the administration and perceived by the participants</li> <li>Exact statement of goals and activities given task force members</li> <li>Integration of professional and non-professional viewpoints</li> <li>Provision of adequate administrative time to organize and train members</li> <li>Ability of volunteers to understand differing viewpoints on issues</li> <li>Acceptance of advisory role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assignments completed, task force disbanded</li> <li>Assignments continuous, task force remains active</li> <li>Election of task force members to school board</li> <li>Increased communication and respect among participants</li> <li>Retreat from emotional approaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate time donated by volunteers</li> <li>Willingness and ability to follow task force objectives</li> <li>Relevance and usefulness of advice and suggestions</li> <li>Timeliness met</li> <li>Workload shared by school staff and community volunteers</li> </ul>
Consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advise committees or task force</li> <li>Produce or coordinate specific report or plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate credentials and credibility of consultant</li> <li>Commitment to assigned task</li> <li>Availability of services</li> <li>Adequate support provided by school staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provision of otherwise unavailable or unaffordable services</li> <li>Improved resource management</li> <li>Adaptation of private sector practices to school operations</li> <li>Initial skepticism from school staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timeliness met</li> <li>Services provided match need for information</li> <li>Understandable language and presentation</li> <li>Usefulness of report or advice</li> <li>Accuracy of information</li> </ul>
Program Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serve as classroom volunteer or aide</li> <li>Organize or support field trips, intramural sports, and so on</li> <li>Participate in support groups (PTA, parents club, and so on)</li> <li>Assume routine duties (lunchroom bus duty, and so on)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dependability of volunteers</li> <li>Adequate on-the-job training</li> <li>Mutual respect between volunteers and school staff</li> <li>Systems for expressing appreciation for jobs well done</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved sense of community</li> <li>Strengthening of neighborhood school concept</li> <li>Improved community relations</li> <li>Provision of programs not otherwise possible</li> <li>Professional time freed by volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of provided services</li> <li>Amount of support provided to school staff</li> <li>Satisfaction of administration and faculty with volunteers</li> </ul>
Evaluation Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist with data collection activities</li> <li>Support program developers</li> <li>Conduct product evaluations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credibility of evaluation team</li> <li>Appropriate and precise research methodology</li> <li>Ability to disseminate findings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved public relations</li> <li>Statements of school effectiveness and areas in need of improvement</li> <li>Better planning through needs assessment and research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timeliness met</li> <li>Objectivity of approaches and reporting</li> <li>Validity of findings</li> </ul>

the most time-consuming activity, is the best investment of effort. To make educationally sound recommendations, volunteers must understand the school's organization, philosophy, and mandates. Insufficient training will cost time later when administrators must personally perform tasks assigned to community members.

After training, community members should be able to evaluate their own recommendations or performance based on educational practicality,

legality, and political feasibility. Community members should submit their recommendations with a detailed explanation of (1) the benefits to the school, (2) the exact cost and resources needed to implement, and (3) the source of needed funds and resources.

In summary, the school administrator creates an effective community involvement program by preparing a management plan, recruiting community members, and adequately

training volunteers for the achievement of assigned tasks. Public involvement is always a high-risk activity with no guarantees of success. Similar programs adopted by several schools produced vastly different outcomes. If the public school is to survive, however, a true coalition of school and community is an absolute necessity. ■

Type of Involvement	Probable Assignment	Criteria for Effectiveness	Possible Outcomes	Performance Evaluation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inspect physical plant</li> <li>Document program impact</li> <li>Provide needs assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administration decisions waiting for evaluation findings</li> <li>Ability to ensure confidentiality when needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data provided to decision makers as needed</li> <li>Modifications in school policy, instructional approaches, organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scope of evaluation effort, completeness, relevance</li> <li>Usefulness of final reports</li> </ul>
Advisory Committee of Community Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a "consumer" viewpoint</li> <li>Offer immediate reactions to administrative ideas</li> <li>Provide specific expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exact purpose of group defined by school and accepted by committee</li> <li>Sound management plan stating objectives and tasks of committee</li> <li>Individual responsibilities clearly stated and advisory role accepted</li> <li>Adequate training of committee members to provide educational, practical, economic, political, legal, political feasibility</li> <li>Consistency of information and support</li> <li>Ability of committee to work cooperatively with each other and with school administration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community support on controversial issues such as school closings</li> <li>Brief disappointment when advice is rejected</li> <li>Praxis on a direct communications link between community and school administration</li> <li>Unrealistic proposals or goals if training insufficient</li> <li>Self-made lobby group with no political accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timeliness of actions</li> <li>Practical recommendations based upon reality</li> <li>Amount of advice implemented into practice</li> <li>Number of recommendations adopted</li> </ul>
Public Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public statements (resolutions, editorials, letters, and so on)</li> <li>Respondent to survey</li> <li>Unsolicited comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate representation of all community viewpoints</li> <li>Adequately documenting source and purpose of statements</li> <li>Validity of survey instruments and sampling plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistical summaries</li> <li>Anecdotal information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reliability of collected data, expressed statistically</li> <li>Sufficient number of survey respondents</li> <li>Use of summary data by decision makers</li> </ul>
Review Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review/respond to school documents or plans</li> <li>Edit reports</li> <li>"Rubber stamp" administrative actions, decisions, plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoidance of community intrusion into administrative actions and decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organized opposition to administrative actions</li> <li>Less relevant planning by administration</li> <li>Distrust of administration by the public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timely cooperation</li> <li>Passiveness of public acceptance of information</li> </ul>

Copyright © 1982 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.