

# Voices

## The Principal

JOANNE ROONEY

### A Principal's Time to Muse

The office door is closed—a layer of new dust covers the glass-topped desk of the secretary. School doors have been closed for two weeks and, without children, the building resembles a deserted bomb shelter.

Chipped desks and chairs, whose first owners have long since graduated from high school, line dimly lit corridors. Custodians, looking toward the long hot days of summer, work at their usual steady but far from energetic pace. School's out. I'm free.

A half-scrunched sheet of paper catches my eye. Reaching down, half out of curiosity, half out of the habit of picking up strewn paper, I pick up this remnant of a hectic school year. Sitting down at my desk, I straighten out the paper, a last-day assignment, to read Jimmy Drews' "Thank You for the School." It is printed in inimitable 2nd grade fashion.

My mind wanders to Jimmy: a special child, lovable, and surely gifted in a way no test could ascertain. Jimmy who passed competency because his teacher stood next to him and urged him forward. Who loved grasshoppers and read every story the reading teacher could find on that subject. Who ate hot lunch at school every day because the noon-hour supervisor fudged a bit on deadlines for money. Who made it to 3rd grade because a

**School doors have been closed for two weeks and, without children, the building resembles a deserted bomb shelter.**

whole bunch of loving people were able to compensate for some very tough times he and his family were experiencing.

Jimmy's "thank you" says it all:

My teacher always has a pencil when I lose mine. When I got a big sliver in my finger, she took it out. I learned my math good because she said it was O.K. to count on my fingers. I love Mrs. Wallen very much.

Thank you for the school.

Jimmy D.

I recollect the last few months:

- paper stacked on my desk, with more waiting impatiently in the outer office;
- phone calls returning phone calls that were returning phone calls;

- meetings that came too often and lasted too long;

- rainy day lunch hours, when children seemed to bounce off walls and teachers, usually rational, complained about imagined and real wrongs;

- parents whose overwhelming concern for their own child seemed to negate a sense of the "common good."

But then there were the Jimmy Drews of the school, many in number. Harry, who went to junior high school with a reading score above average and at least two good friends. There was Kim, who read her part in the 1st grade play without a flaw. And Juan, who made friends with Michael and helped him learn a little Spanish. And Brad, who pulled the curtain in the school play like a pro. And Maggie and Erin and Joseph and on and on.

I call my reminiscing to a halt. Time, even now, cannot be wasted. The empty halls, void of the vitality, humanity, and beauty that possess them for the long months of each school year, are surprisingly depressing. Vacation lies ahead and, thank God, August will usher in the real world again. □

**Joanne Rooney** is Principal, Pleasant Hill School, Community Consolidated School District 15, 434 W. Illinois, Palatine, IL 60067.

## The Principal

GAIL SMARTT

### Site-Based Management: One Principal's Perspective

When I was hired in 1986 as principal of High Plains Elementary School in Academy School District 20 in Colorado Springs, I looked forward to my "new administrators'" orientation. To my surprise, however, I received no curriculum guide, no budget docu-

ment, no personnel handbook, no organization chart. No one set forth for me the expectations of the district about the daily operation of its elementary schools. All my questions, including the most basic ones of all—"How do I know what to do and what or whom to do it with?" and "Who is responsible for knowing that I've done

it?"—were met with the same answer: This is a site-based management district—always has been—and the principal is in charge (*really* in charge) of his or her own building—from curriculum to budget to staff development to personnel selection.

Although I had had five years' experience as a principal elsewhere, I felt

Copyright © 1990 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.