STATEWIDE STUDY OF SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS PERSONNEL:
ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, RELATIONSHIPS,
AND BUDGET VOTE OUTCOMES

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family. We are small in numbers but mighty in spirit.

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Abstract

STATEWIDE STUDY OF SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS PERSONNEL: ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND BUDGET VOTE OUTCOMES

Catherine Knight, Ed.D.

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Mentor: Bruce S. Cooper, Ph. D.

This two-part quantitative study expanded our understanding of school PR personnel in public school districts, particularly those who worked during the 2009-2012 budget years. Four cultural changes have redefined the paradigm of public education and served as a springboard for this study: technology-enhanced communications/ information retrieval, transparency in school district operations, accountability tied to student testing, and the Great Recession. The first section presented key facts, drawn from public information available from New York State, about school PR employment, including the number of school districts that employed PR personnel, the types of school districts most likely to employ them, and the relationship between their employment and budget vote outcomes. The second section included the findings of the researcher-developed School Public Relations Employment Survey, whose respondents represented over 90% of employed school PR personnel in New York State in 2012. The study revealed gender differences in salary, a misalignment of the workload and compensation between state PR employees and their national counterparts, a separation in the level of collaboration and responsibility placed on school PR specialists and their financial compensation, a need for school PR education and ongoing staff development for school administrators, and a need to increase graduate-level education for school PR specialists. The
results of this study can be used by district leaders and boards of education to provide the most effective communications to the voting public and examples of actions that predict longevity of school PR personnel as well as aid districts in reducing the potential for budget failure.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Educators can’t for a moment be complacent about our place in the public’s hearts and minds and consequently their wallets.”

Ben Levin (2009, p. 94)

This chapter provides an introduction to the dissertation. The chapter begins with the background of the problem, followed by the statement of the problem, the importance of the study, its theoretical foundation and limitations, and the organization of the remainder of the dissertation.

Background of the Problem

This study is an examination of the roles, responsibilities and relationships of school public relations (PR) personnel who worked in New York State’s public school districts during the 2009–2010 through 2011–2012 budget cycles (New York State Department of Education Educational Management Services, 2012a). Their employment will be shown to be fundamental to the maintenance of open, clear, and concise communications between school districts and the publics they serve in an increasingly complex and information-driven world.

Communication between these two groups is essential to maintaining the public’s trust in its public schools, outlining important issues to taxpayers, and fully informing voters regarding school budgets. Ultimately, the test of the relationship between the district and its taxpayers, and of the effectiveness of the school communication process, occurs each year, when registered voters cast ballots on the subsequent year’s school budget.

Just as in a general election, the school budget vote requires an information-gathering process by voters, based on available avenues of communications. Taxpayers’ perception of the
effectiveness and value of their local school district is dependent on the receipt of pertinent and timely information regarding school effectiveness and worth. This information is often distributed by district officials, including school PR personnel, but is also generated by the media, the Internet, blogs, collaterals generated by oppositional groups, and word of mouth. While parents with children in the public school district have a direct line of communication and feedback to their school, the majority of taxpayers are not parents; and, unless a strong school PR program is in place, these residents are left to obtain information from sources that may be only indirectly connected to the school district.

For these voters, public opinion of schools is tied to school and district success or failure. School PR personnel ensure that complete information is distributed to all district residents, as, ultimately, all property owners will weigh whether continued support of the district is worth the tax burden they will incur by supporting the budget.

If communication from the district and its schools does not effectively combat negative messages, or misinformation about school ineffectiveness is not addressed, taxpayers are likely to vote against the school budget. A failed school budget, representing a significant amount of lost revenue, may jeopardize school district operations.

In the past decade, the media has focused critically on education, citing cases of school ineffectiveness, poor performance of U.S. students on international testing, the escalating cost of education, and teacher and administrative wrongdoing. As a result, taxpayers are expecting the school districts to demonstrate prudent use of school budgets, especially under the global, national, and state economic downturn that has been experienced since 2008.

The culture of trust that was once extended by the public to educators has diminished and, subsequently, led to escalating centralization of school oversight in the form of high-stakes
testing, standardized curricula, and a focus on school spending. Four change factors of the past
decade, (a) the shift to technology-enhanced avenues of communication, (b) the expectation of
transparency in school district operations, (c) accountability tied to student testing, and (d) the
economics of the Great Recession, have resulted in new, high-stakes pressures on public
education in the U.S., including the practice of effective school communication.

Further, as school PR and parent involvement have been linked to the public school’s
goal of student achievement (Constantino, 2002; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2005; Epstein,
2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Moore, 2009; National School Public Relations Association,
2006; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2007), an involved community with a strong sense of purpose
and commitment to its public schools contributes to this important goal. Despite the tremendous
stakes, however, the process of public schools’ communication to its residents and the
practitioners needs much improvement.

For many New York State school districts, only the central administrators and boards of
education assume the school communication duties. This study will show that, for 50% of New
York State’s public school districts, those who fill the role of primary spokesperson, advisor, and
contributor are a public information officer, school-community relations administrator, or school
PR specialist. This professional is charged with managing a considerable amount of information
and communication to all publics the school district serves. This two-part quantitative study
presents these communication leaders: who they are; what their roles, responsibilities, and
relationships are as they function within New York State’s public school system; and why they
are necessary to school district survival.
Statement of the Problem

This study will highlight how school PR personnel have emerged as key players in school communications in New York State. As such, they are responsible for distributing essential and strategic messages of school effectiveness and assisting boards of education with talking points, feedback, and guidance; are pivotal to the maintenance of school-community relations and the public’s trust; and are charged with facilitating open communication between school districts as well as, according to Kowalski (2008), the four publics they serve: external publics (taxpayers), internal publics (school employees, parents, and students), media publics (all media and press), and regulatory publics (governmental agencies).

It is essential that school leaders, under pressure to meet time and budget constraints, understand how school PR personnel can benefit school districts. As described by one superintendent, “Budget failure would be catastrophic compared to the cost of the employee who handles our district PR.” Little is known, however, about how these school PR personnel function in the state’s public school system and what impact their employment has on the annual budget vote.

Purpose of the Study

Based on the critical need to maintain school funding through public approval of school budgets, the strong connections that support increases in student achievement, and the four change factors that challenge public education, the purpose of this study is to expand the educational research and knowledge base about school districts’ key communicators: the school PR personnel who work in New York State’s public school districts. Specifically, the study will be an examination of the roles, relationships, and responsibilities of school PR personnel as they function in the state’s school districts; will present analyses of variables that affect their
performance; and will show relationships of their employment to the State’s public school district budget vote outcomes.

**Significance of the Study**

Much of what is at stake for the continued success of New York State’s public schools rests on the effectiveness of school communications, but little is known about school PR personnel who act as key communicators for the state’s school systems. For this two-part, quantitative study, the researcher used public information from New York State, responses from the Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) superintendents and school superintendents regarding school PR employment, and the findings of the researcher’s 52-question School Public Relations Employment Survey or “SPRES” instrument (Appendix A) to fully inform boards of education and school administrators who are considering employment or continued employment of school PR personnel. This employment is significant for three reasons:

1. If the presence of school PR personnel reduces the chances of budget failure, then boards and school administrators must carefully weigh the financial pros and cons of their employment.

2. Because multiple studies have linked positive school PR and parent involvement with increased student achievement, it is important for boards and school leaders to consider the implications of school PR employment on student achievement.

3. SPRES respondent findings offer a framework for increasing the performance, effectiveness, satisfaction, and longevity of current school PR employees.
Theoretical Foundation

Scope and Function

Boards of education, school leaders, and school PR personnel operate in a complex world of communications that follow evolving, relationship-based paths. The paths of information flow include *incurrent* (incoming communications) and *excurrent* (information released to the public).

As illustrated in Figure 1, external publics deliver many types of incurrent information, from “big picture” indicators, such as the results of student assessments, to local concerns, such as a proposed school tax levy increase too great for the voting constituency to support. Input along these pathways is vital for the district and the voting public to assess their place in the educational plan.

Figure 1

*Information Incurrent/Excurrent External Publics Model*
Information excurrent from the district to its publics reiterates important information incurrent, such as news of student achievements, but also includes news of district or school initiatives, as well as messages crafted by boards of education and school leaders to inform the public on education issues, school budgets, and instances of crisis management. As such, information excurrent must be timely, easily understood by all audiences, and distributed through multiple channels. As shown in Figure 1, no one part of the school community exists in isolation; rather, each layer interacts and reinforces its role as a part of the larger educational system.

Figure 2 shows the paths of information to the school district’s internal publics—the immediate school community—as it functions within the larger, external publics. With communications to parents and residents (excurrent) and from parents and residents (incurrent), these paths of information flow are critical to the maintenance of the school-community bond.

Figure 2

*Information Incurrent/Excurrent Internal Publics Model*
These relationship-based pathways are used to communicate school value and effectiveness to the residents who fund the school district through tax dollars. Misinformation, if not addressed effectively by school leaders, can result in conditions unfavorable to budget passage. Yet, school leaders also must manage daily operations of multiple buildings, ensuring a safe and secure learning environment for hundreds, sometimes thousands, of students. However, devoting time to school PR is a difficult task for boards and superintendents who struggle to meet security measures, implement and manage government mandates, lead teachers and support staff, and provide the highest quality public education possible to a diverse student population.

School PR personnel facilitate communications and keep the pathways of information incurrent and excurrent open to support leaders of public education. As Vollmer (2010) stated, “In-house PR professionals are deeply involved in the outreach process, and they know the community. They are perfectly positioned to assume a central role in all phases of the formal track [of communications]” (p. 170).

In the past decade, however, a social and economic paradigm shift has taken place that sets even higher expectations for timely and relevant school-community communications for school leaders. This shift is characterized by four change factors.

**Four Change Factors**

Societal and economic changes have increased the need for school PR personnel. Public relations in 21st-century schools have been influenced by four change factors:

1. The availability and ease-of-use of technology for virtually unlimited communications and information gathering capabilities (both accurate and opined), from nearly any location, at any time.
2. The public’s expectation of full transparency to the smallest detail in school district operations.

3. The centralization of school accountability (student assessments and teacher/principal evaluation/employment tied to student performance).

4. The Great Recession.

**Change Factor 1: Technology-enhanced communications/information retrieval.**

Taxpayers rely heavily on technology and Internet use for access to information and communication. However, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the reports of education facts by media-employed journalists and articles that contain the opinions of citizen-journalists.

The increased use of personal hand-held devices has revolutionized the speed at which information, including misinformation, flows and, most importantly, is expected to flow. Unlike in previous decades, where avenues of communication were based on business-hour, face-to-face, telephone, or paper exchanges, a direct line of contact at any time is now available, and expected, between taxpayers and school district employees via email, websites, and social media. Taxpayers expect to be provided with answers to their questions at their convenience. This was not the case as recently as five years ago. Internet access has “flattened” our world (Friedman, 2007) and provided an overload of data to the voting public, making the hiring of school PR professionals crucial to information management.

School districts, even those with school PR personnel, are pressured to interact effectively with the public while delivering the transparency needed to maintain thresholds of credibility. Taxpayers expect to gather information they require to monitor, question, and form opinions about the activities of the school district and/or the efficient and effective use of their
tax dollars. Previous channels, such as those provided by the Freedom of Information Law ("FOILing"; New York State Freedom of Information Law, Public Officers Law §87 et. Seq. [New York State School Boards Association, 2004, p.52]), afforded time for districts to gather the requested information.

A great deal of information is readily accessible on the Internet on any topic. Consequently, digitally connected taxpayers expect district information to be similarly plentiful and accessible. Further, in the post-Roslyn (Lambert, 2005, p.1), post-William Floyd ("Auditors: William Floyd School District," 2006) world in New York State, any delay of information release can be perceived as suspicious. In addition, the public demand for information has led to an increase in time spent on communications by district leaders, effectively diverting them from their duties as educational leaders.

**Complications of Change Factor 1: Time deficits and the communications paradox.**

The volume of information demanded by the public can be overwhelming to school officials, who endeavor to fulfill their primary roles as educational leaders to their internal publics. Fiore (2011) noted, “Overworked superintendents can often forget the importance of school-community relations and experience a pitfall that can cause real damage” (p. 48).

As superintendents struggle to meet increased demands for communications, transparency, and accountability within the framework of a poor economy, they face unprecedented pressures. Due to predicted attrition rates of superintendents, it is in a school district’s best interest that boards of education offer the support of school PR personnel to offset the increased communications workload of school leaders.

Further, Fiore (2011) stated that these superintendents’ increased workload leads to hasty communications between schools/districts and their internal/external publics, with two
consequences. First, the use of instant methods (emails, memos, or delegation) to meet communication demands can be less effective than face-to-face or phone conversations. Second, hasty communications can produce mistakes and misunderstandings that “lead to their [school leaders] having to take more time to fix problems caused by their hurrying in the first place” (p. 85). Fiore defined this as the “communications paradox” (p. 85).

**Misinformation management.** As stated by Haas (2010), the Information Age “is also the Misinformation Age, for the equally quick and easy access to inaccurate, misleading, and biased ‘data’ and poorly informed opinion” (p. 28). The complexity of education issues and the increase in Internet-connected citizen-journalists is likely to cause misinterpretation of information. For example, a media feature regarding a perceived school district wrongdoing will have a predictable public reaction, and the potential for misunderstanding and misinformation during this exchange period is likely as the public seeks more information to render judgment. According to Fiore (2011), “While access to information is virtually limitless, so is access to misinformation” (p. 4).

Managing potentially damaging misinformation becomes equally important to budget vote outcomes. Consequently, the timely release of public information and the management/corrective actions required for misinformation are possible only with the commitment of a larger amount of time and resources, a need that school PR personnel can fill.

**Change Factor 2: Transparency in school district operations.** School districts are held to increasing levels of transparency to all the publics they serve. No longer are teachers and school officials trusted and respected without question. Fueled by the media’s focus on school districts’ poor fiscal management, redundancy of services, and inflated budgets, distrust of
government agencies and public officials has increased during the past decade and swayed public opinion against public schools.

**Complications of Change Factor 2: The public’s trust.** Full transparency in communications is required for the longevity of all public officials and government agencies, especially school districts. Because schools are trusted with the welfare of children and their preparation as tomorrow’s workers and leaders, schools are held to the highest standards of ethics and accountability. However, the past decade has been characterized by repeated questioning of the efficacy of the U.S. public education system. Respect and trust that were once understood now must be earned repeatedly. To counteract the loss of the public’s trust, schools must exhibit full transparency in communications, as transparency supports the development of an interdependent and mutually beneficial relationship.

This evolving relationship and need have theoretical roots in Giddens’ structuration theory (as cited in Hatch, 2006), in which organizations develop through a mutual evolution of structure (past action) and action (agency), and, for PR leaders, in situational leadership theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). School PR personnel assist school leadership in assessing where transparency issues compromise the community’s trust and are positioned to take corrective action.

**Change Factor 3: Accountability tied to student testing.** The results of international testing have indicated that the U.S. educational system is not preparing students as well as are other developed nations. These results, coupled with a fear that U.S. students will not be able to compete for jobs in the global marketplace, have caused government intervention in the management of public education to increase dramatically during the past decade.
Beginning with the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB; U.S. Department of Education, 2001) in 2002, significant movement has been implemented toward centralization of public education. Government has imposed increased levels of accountability, with consequences, on school districts through NCLB and, under the current administration, Race to the Top (RTTT; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). RTTT, a Department of Education fund, has $4.35 billion available to state education departments whose districts comply with higher accountability standards.

As a consequence of RTTT, government mandates on schools, especially in New York State, are being issued faster than schools can process them. Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR; New York State Department of Education, 2012a), New York State’s Race to the Top program, (New York State Department of Education, 2012b), the 2% Tax Levy Cap (New York State Department of Finance, 2011), and the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA; New York State Department of Education, 2010a) are examples of three such mandates imposed on state school districts during the past few years. Even though RTTT and APPR supply funding, implementation of the new mandates does not guarantee funding support at the district level. These interventions reinforce the public’s perception that school districts cannot function without government intervention, that tax dollars are not being used effectively, and that centralization is warranted to ensure that future generations of U.S. students can compete successfully for higher education and global marketplace employment.

**Complications of Change Factor 3: The public’s trust of the numbers.** School accountability tied to standards-based performance indicators has effectively summarized school effectiveness as a set of numbers. These numbers are periodically published in the media as an indicator of “product” (teaching and learning) performance.
When annual testing and longitudinal tracking data reveal deficit patterns in student achievement, the summary information can diminish a community’s confidence in their school district. In addition, summary performance numbers lack a contextual framework that a strong communications program can provide, and the public’s perception of school effectiveness can decrease significantly. At the local level, negative public perceptions manifest in a variety of ways through various avenues of communication: increased attendance and negative comments at board of education meetings; increased numbers of phone calls and emails to board members, district officials, and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) representatives; letters to the editor in the local press; and blog discussions on web media. These reactions can confuse the issues and further compromise the public’s trust in its school system.

Across the country, the accountability movement has included the opening of charter schools and initiated vouchers for school choice, both of which require funding from the “home” school district, effectively placing more financial strain on the public school system. The government’s recent national Common Core Learning Standards initiative further emphasizes the move toward centralization of education to equalize state’s educational outcomes for students who will be competing in the global marketplace.

At the local, budget-voting, school district level, PR efforts become increasingly necessary, then, to the maintenance of a positive public perception of the school district. Although New York State requires a “public information officer” to validate the results of the annual election and budget vote, the state does not require retention of a PR specialist. This study presents a case for why every school district must have access to school PR services.

**Change Factor 4: The great recession.** Finally, at a time of widespread economic distress, the perception of ineffective and unproductive publicly-funded schools is in contrast to
the continuation of past practice. That taxpayers want change was evident in New York State with the passage of the tax levy limit for school districts and the overwhelming passage percentage rate during the 2012 budget vote (96.46%), the first under the new cost-limiting mandate. Clearly, limiting school districts’ access to public funds is politically prudent for legislators who are seeking reelection, desirable for over-taxed property owners, and offers the perception of financial hope for the future.

**Complications of Change Factor 4: Budget vote risk factors.** The question for property owners/taxpayers when entering the voting booth, even under New York State’s 2% tax levy cap, is whether they can afford any increase in school taxes. The tax levy legislation does not change this fundamental question. A downturn in the local, regional, state, and national economies has had a predictable increase on taxes. With cuts to federal and state aid and no mandate relief, which school districts in New York State have experienced in 2008-2013 budget years, districts can only cut programs and personnel or increase school taxes to make up for lost revenues. They are often forced to make painful choices.

The effects of class size increases, a narrowing of the curriculum through cutbacks in arts education and extracurricular programs, and the rise in pension and health care costs for school employees further compromise schools’ abilities to maintain the positive community climate necessary to budget passage. Voting on a budget referendum is “the only opportunity citizens have to participate in tax decisions” (Kowalski, 2008, p. 40). The cost of misinformation, partial information, and taxpayer discontent may be a failed school district budget.

Until 2012, a New York State school district whose budget failed the initial vote or one where a re-vote resulted in a second failure was required by law adopt a contingency budget (New York State Education Law §§ 2022(4), (5), 2023(1), 2601-a(4), (5) (New York State
School Boards Association, 2004, p.735). Contingency budgets were limited to percentage increases equal to the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

However, New York’s 2% tax levy cap imposes even stricter standards, requiring districts with failed budgets to accept a zero percent increase. The likely outcome of a failed vote under the tax cap will be closed schools, class size increases, staff reductions, a decrease of program offerings, and a further decline in the public’s confidence in its public schools. Due to the four change factors and their complications listed above, this study will show that the need for effective and relevant school-community communications has never been greater.

**Assumptions**

This study includes multiple assumptions about the field of school PR. These assumptions include, but are not limited to: (a) most New York State school districts employed school PR, (b) school districts that employed these professionals enjoyed stronger community ties and higher budget passage rates, (c) larger and/or wealthier school districts were more likely to employ PR personnel, and (d) school PR personnel who enjoyed a close working relationship with their superintendent/supervisor felt more satisfied and effective in their roles and were more likely to remain in their positions. Through this study, the researcher sought to answer research questions and test hypotheses based on these assumptions.

**Limitations**

The first section of this study was limited to the 692 New York State public school districts that reported their initial May budget vote results for the 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012 budget years. It did not include the results for the 2012–2013 budget vote, as this was the first year under the state’s new 2% tax levy limit legislation, a new variable whose impact would render results inconsistent with the variables generally present statewide in
previous years’ budget vote outcomes. In addition, this study did not include the “Big 5” city school districts—Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers—whose public school funding originates from city budgets that do not rely on voter approval.

The second section included school PR respondents who self-selected to complete the researcher’s 52-question online survey. Respondents were instructed to complete the survey only if they worked in some capacity as school PR personnel in or for the public school districts in this study and were employed during the three-year timeframe.

Although the study will demonstrate that the respondents represented 319 of a possible 692 school districts, there was a small percentage who did not receive the online survey, or received it and chose to not participate in the study. Thus, although the findings represent the majority (92%) of school PR employees who were employed in New York State during the 2009–2010 through 2011–2012 school years, they do not represent the entirety of school PR personnel during these years.

**Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation**

In Chapter II, a review of the literature is presented. This chapter contains findings and information that support the goals of this study. The literature review presents the responsibilities of school PR personnel, the social constructs of school community relations and leadership theory, links to student achievement, and the cost effectiveness of school PR employment. The review also presents evidence of the increased demand for information management at the district and school level, the public’s perception of the efficacy of public education, and its trust in and the credibility of public school officials. The chapter concludes with a review of the literature about the annual budget vote, voter demographics and rationale, and budget vote risk factors.
Chapter III provides the data sources and the methodology used by the researcher to accomplish the research. This chapter contains the research questions and hypotheses for both sections of the study, the research design, variables, methodology and analyses, the design of the survey, and the sample.

Chapters IV and V contain the analyses section of the study. Because little information was found regarding school PR personnel who work in New York State’s public school districts, it was necessary to establish basic information and conduct descriptive, comparative, and correlative analyses in Chapter IV before presenting more specific school PR employee-level information and analyses in Chapter V.

Chapter IV presents the number of school districts that employed school PR personnel, revealing differences in budget vote outcomes between the districts that employed school PR personnel and those that did not during the three years prior to the state’s implementation of the tax levy legislation. In addition, this chapter presents the types of school districts that employed school PR personnel and what percentage of these employees were members of professional support organizations.

In Chapter V, respondents’ roles, responsibilities, and relationships (independent variables) are provided, including the effects of the dependent variables of satisfaction, efficacy, and longevity. This chapter includes important descriptive, comparative, correlative, and regression analyses, the results of which the researcher hopes to convey to the school boards and administrators so they may be aware of variables that affect retention and efficacy of these employees. Chapter VI contains a summary of findings for the two parts of this study, recommendations for practice and research, and a conclusion.
The remainder of the dissertation contains appendices important to the study. The appendices include a compilation of the superintendents’ and superintendents’ designees’ database, and the SPRES instrument.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.”

Abraham Lincoln
(as cited in Vollmer, 2010, p. 121)

This chapter presents the literature regarding school PR personnel who work in today’s public school systems. Key elements include the need for enhanced school-community communications/relationships, information/misinformation management, use of technology and the Internet, time and financial constraints, mandates for student achievement, and the public’s negative perception of schools, especially as portrayed by the media. These elements ultimately influence the constituency’s perception of its schools and, in turn, their voting practices in budget referenda.

School Public Relations Defined

According to the literature, the development of PR as an industry to serve the needs of organizations began at the turn of the last century. New companies were established as the U.S. moved from an agricultural society to one of manufacturing and industry. Available media provided a platform for advertising and sales, and PR departments developed, producing marketing plans to increase product demand.

Miller and Dinan (2008) tied the development of PR as an industry to big business in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, stating that “corporations invented public relations” (p. 1), and citing former General Electric PR executive Vonnegut’s definition:

that profession specializing in the cultivation, by applied psychology in mass communication media, of favourable public opinion with regard to controversial issues
and institutions, without being offensive to anyone of importance, and with continued stability of the economy and society its primary goal. (pp. 3-4)

Miller and Dinan (2008) asserted that PR “is a set of techniques for pursuing corporate interests rather than promoting common interests” (p. 4) and credit Edward Bernays for coining the phrase “public relations” in 1914 (p. 5). Ewen (1996) cited Bernays as having “repeatedly decreed that an effective public relations counsel must be a tireless student of the sociological terrain: of public propensities, opinions, and behavior” (p.181), and noted that, even prior to World War I in the U.S., “Business analysts began to see survey research as a commercially useful tool” (pp. 181-182).

Just as marketing techniques were developed to enhance sales in the world of business in the 1920s and 1930s, school district PR developed best practices to enhance the value of education. These practices included encouraging parents to send and keep children in school, as, in the first half of the 20th century, a high school diploma represented the best opportunity for a better life for students able to attain it, opening the doors to meaningful employment and financial stability.

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) was founded in 1935 to provide school communication “training, products and services to school leaders in the U.S., Canada, and U.S. Department of Defense Dependents School worldwide” (NSPRA, 2011b, p. 1). State and regional chapters, such as the New York State School Public Relations Association (NYSPRA) and the Long Island School Public Relations Association (LISPRA), were developed to provide similar school PR support.
In alignment with marketing and “brand” development in the business world, school PR seeks to build a supportive audience of taxpaying residents, based on an effective communications program. Defining school PR, Kowalski (2008) stated:

School PR is an evolving social science and leadership process utilizing multimedia approaches designed to build goodwill, enhance the public’s attitude toward the value of education, augment interaction and two-way symmetrical communication between schools and their ecosystems, provide vital and useful information to the public and employees, and play an integral role in planning and decision-making functions. (p. 13)

Multiple authors emphasized the wide scope of current school PR. Meredith (2010) explained, “Public relations encompasses a broader spectrum of communications with your audience” (p. 29). L. W. Hughes and Hooper (2000) emphasized that effective PR addresses “the needs of the customers (clients) of the school district” (p. 171).

NSPRA (2010), the nation’s largest school PR support agency, noted:

The role of school public relations is to maintain mutually beneficial relationships between the school district and the many publics it serves. Each school district has its own unique way of carrying out this role. (p. 1)

Cutlip (1994) identified two differences between school-community relations and school PR: School-community relations comprise direct involvement with students and are not controversial, whereas PR does not directly involve students and can, on occasion, be contentious. However, in disaggregating the two areas, Pawlas (2005) noted their interdependence:

Although the aim of public relations programs is to create favorable impressions of the local public school and community support for that school, the goal of the school-
community relations plan is to find ways to involve the community in the educational process in ways to help the students learn. (pp. 24-25)

By involving the community in decision making, the voting constituency becomes a PR asset to the school and district. Pawlas continued, “Also, when the public relations of a school are seen as part of our social responsibility, we broaden the sense of ownership for the plan” (p. 32).

Whether hired as a public information officer, community relations supervisor, director, or coordinator, a school PR employee has many of the same responsibilities assigned to employees in private industry. Moore (2009) stated:

Public relations often is used as a catchall term to describe a variety of communication and administrative endeavors, including media relations and publicity; crisis communication; meetings and special events; video, audio, and Web programming; publications; community relations; partnerships and fundraising; promotion and marketing; and so on. (p. 11)

Public education offers the service of college and career readiness for its students. The success of this service determines school worth, in turn relating real estate prices to school district effectiveness. Consequently, as parents seek to live in or purchase properties in districts located in “good” school districts to provide the best opportunities to their children, the service of education produces the by-product of real estate investment.

Communication of district successes such as graduation rates, number of Advanced Placement (AP) scholars, and achievements by all who are involved in the school community add to a school district’s desirability, enhancing property owners’ investment. However, as public entities, private industry and school districts exhibit significant differences in PR
practices. For example, school districts are restrained by government regulations from overt marketing and information control for advocacy goals, such as passage of the annual school budget.

Case law is clear regarding this type of PR use. The New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) and New York State Bar Association’s (New York State School Boards Association, 2004) handbook of School Law noted:

School districts must take care to avoid spending public money to encourage voters to vote in favor of the school budget or any proposition. District funds may not be used to express “favoritism, partisanship, partiality, approval or disapproval . . . of any issue, worthy as it may be” (Phillips v. Maurer, 67 N.Y. 2d 672 (1986)); see also Appeal of Hubbard, 39 Educ. Dep’t Rep. 363 (1999).

This prohibition is not limited to advocating a “yes” vote. Even subtle promotional activities are prohibited (Appeal of Meyer, 38 Educ. Dep’t Rep. 285 (1998). However, “it is not impermissible per se to state that rejection of the budget may result in the elimination of programs” (Appeal of Julian, 42 Educ. Dep’t Rep. 300 (2003)). In addition, there is nothing wrong with stating, as fact, in a district newsletter, that a particular proposition has the “unanimous support of the board of education” if indeed that is the case (Appeal of Brown, 43 Educ. Dep’t Rep. dec. no. 14,980 (2003)). (p. 91)

In fact, the State Commissioner of Education can annul a public vote if he/she discovers that budget advocacy affected the outcome “and order a new election (Appeal of Lemon, 38 Educ. Dep’t Rep. 683 (1999)” (NYSSBA/NYSBA, 2004, p. 94).
School Public Relations and District Leadership

School administrators face unprecedented PR issues. Today’s school officials must meet increased demands for information and responsiveness facilitated by technology and the Internet while maintaining thresholds of transparency and accountability. They must manage negative public opinion of school officials and teacher effectiveness as well as school inefficiency and ineffectiveness as portrayed in the media. In addition, school administrators must accomplish this in a poor economy as school funding is being capped at the local level by New York State’s 2012 tax cap and cut at the state and federal level, and while taxpayers are being asked to approve referendums for annual increases in school taxes.

This unique set of issues makes effective school communications more important than ever. However, many school leaders lack preparedness in effective school PR training, as academic leadership programs seldom include courses in PR.

Levine (2005) noted:

Despite acknowledgements that school public relations has evolved into an essential facet of educational leadership, Carlsmith and Railsback (2001) note that many university schools of education fail to provide any training in public relations, and that school administrators and teachers lack any experience in communications. The result of such a paradox is that schools need particular communication skills to survive, yet they lack those very skills in their own operations. (p. 8)

In keeping with Levine, Kowalski (2008) stated:

The communication challenge for administrators is difficult both because many administrators have not been prepared academically…and because they are expected to have positive relationships with diverse publics. (pp. 251-252)
As an example of how a lack of school PR preparedness can have serious consequences for a school district, in her first meeting with the School Overcrowding Task Force on January 14, 2011, as the New York City Public Schools Chancellor, Cathleen Prunty Black remarked, “Could we just have some birth control for a while?” and referenced the prospects for the 2011-12 budget as “Sophie’s choices” (Glassman, 2011). These comments were quickly picked up by the media and subsequently broadcast by the major news networks. Media commentators used her remarks as proof that Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s controversial appointment of Black was ill-advised. Chancellor Black’s public comments revealed her lack of training and experience in education and school finance, as well as a lack of meaningful school PR preparation. After only three months in office, Chancellor Black, under pressure from New York City Mayor Bloomberg, resigned on April 7, 2011.

Evaluating existing school PR is another area in need of attention at the leadership level. In addressing the issue of the quality of school PR, Moore (2009) stated, “Superintendents may need professional development in public relations functions and their effectiveness in order to monitor these efforts in the district” (p. 25). As a superintendent assigns a portion of community relations to PR professionals and regains time essential to operational and educational success of the school district, she/he must know the field well enough to judge the quality of the PR the district is receiving. School leaders with little or no preparation in school PR will find it challenging to address the issues of an educational system that has a significant PR problem. Further, school leaders whose districts do employ school PR personnel will find it equally difficult to evaluate these employees if they do not have the needed training to do so.
School Public Relations Needs Assessment

Even though it cannot expressly do so, a strong school PR program helps the public to recognize the connection between education cuts and a decline in real estate investment. L. W. Hughes and Hooper (2000) emphasized the need for school PR personnel to represent the school district to its voting constituency:

In today’s environment, however, one of the most important people hired in any school district is the public information officer. This person and others who may be hired to work in that department become ombudsmen for the district. (p. 125)

Kowalski (2008), in keeping with L. W. Hughes and Hooper, aligned the origins of the need for PR personnel to declining confidence in public education. He also emphasized the importance of school leaders’ communicating with its publics:

Two issues illustrate why PR is currently so important for schools. The first is the public’s declining confidence in traditional education systems; the second is the need for school officials to engage various publics in discourse so that acceptable purposes, programs, and outcomes can be established . . . Commenting on the seemingly endless chain of reform ideas generated in the decade following the publishing of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, Berlinger . . . observed that schools in this country were unfairly damaged by unsubstantiated claims that public education is expensive and wasteful, that students are lazy and unproductive, and that America’s productivity has fallen as a result of inadequate education. (p. 17)

The need for strong communications between public school districts and the publics they serve was stated by Fiore (2011) in reaction to the negative perception of school performance that began with the release of *A Nation At Risk*: “Contemporary school administration requires
positive, proactive, and purposeful communication to an extent unprecedented in public education’s history” (p. xvii).

Since that time, the business of education has shifted away from local control. NCLB (U.S Department of Education, 2001), RTTT (New York State Department of Education, 2012b), and New York State’s 2% tax levy cap (New York State Department of Finance, 2011) and APPR legislation (New York State Department of Education, 2012a) are examples of the federal government’s decentralization of school districts in reaction to taxpayer discontent at real or perceived wasteful spending and ineffective schools.

New York State also mandated the implementation of school site-based teams, comprised of stakeholder representatives (New York State Department of Education, 2009). Fiore (2011) noted, “The involvement of stakeholders in school-related decisions is now an expectation. The public owns the public schools, and perhaps for the first time they realize they do” (p. 3). Schools’ use of special councils, committees, and focus groups to make curricular and policy recommendations routinely include members of the community. These pivotal groups were previously exclusive to certificated school personnel.

With the governance of school systems’ moving away from local control, an excessive number of mandates, and the associated data reporting leaves little time for school leaders to lead, let alone devote the time needed for effective communications with their constituencies. NSPRA (2010) stated:

Most school administrators will admit that their jobs are requiring more time to deal with legislative mandates, litigation, personnel matters, curriculum reform, parent complaints and student issues. It leaves less time for them to handle news media calls, public
requests for information, employee relations, community engagement, marketing, and other tasks mastered by a full-time school PR professional. (p. 2)

Other educational leaders agree. Moore (2009), in an interview with Frank Basso, southern regional manager for the New Jersey Department of Education, inquired about the need for PR in today’s school systems; Basso replied: “No school district, regardless of the size, should go without public relations efforts…[PR is] critical to effective communication to internal and external publics” (p. 25).

Kowalski (2008) stated that all schools need PR goals to establish and maintain “goodwill and a sense of ownership” (p. 15). He noted:

In the current political climate, there is a considerable level of dissatisfaction with public education….Taxpayers often see their relationship with schools as one-sided; that is, they are forced to support schools financially, but receive little or nothing in return.

Recapturing goodwill and rekindling a sense of collective responsibility requires school officials to engage all publics in meaningful discourse—and in this vein, PR is an essential program. (p. 15)

Moore (2009) stated, “Given the decadeslong [sic] criticism of public schools, it’s nonetheless fair to say that most American schools are better than people think they are” (p. 79). It is marketing on behalf of school districts that can emphasize these trends and “turn this reality into the public perception” (Moore, 2009, p. 79).

Time and resources are being further stretched in school districts by the demands of technology-based communications. District websites, e-mail blasts, text messages, social media, and interactive parent portals are now commonplace. None of these systems existed in schools as recently as a decade ago. “We are finding ourselves spiraling more deeply into the
Information Age. [The public] insist that budgetary information, salaries, and curricular choices be made known to them and they want a voice in arriving at all school-related decisions” (Fiore, 2011, pp. 3-4).

School PR proponents have framed the need for school PR by identifying social and economic trends that predispose schools to inevitable decline if corrective actions are not taken. These actions include strong communications programs. Kowalski (2008) noted eight broad goals and objectives specific to school PR needs: (a) improving the quality of education, (b) encouraging open political communication, (c) building support for change, (d) managing information, (e) managing marketing programs, (f) establishing goodwill, (g) creating a sense of ownership, and (h) providing evaluation data.

L. W. Hughes and Hooper (2000) recognized six current-day “realities” under which school districts operate that affect PR:

1. School systems are very visible and ambitious, and historically have been asked (required at times) to provide services well beyond their original purpose.

2. Our society is characterized by conflicting value structures and expectations about what schools should be doing.

3. It is an age of skepticism – blind faith and good will are not characteristic.

4. Large groups of people are outside the mainstream of “the good life”; they know it and are unhappy about it. There is an expectancy gap.

5. In our highly mobile society, the character of many communities seemingly has changed overnight.

6. There is an increased competition from other important community and state agencies for a greater portion of the public purse. (pp. 27-34)
L. W. Hughes and Hooper also noted four objectives for school PR plans as a result of the six realities:

1. To develop a communications network that encourages a two-way information exchange between all community members and the school.

2. To implement procedures for involvement and participation of community members in school program development.

3. To have in place devices whereby the publics’ attitudes about schooling issues may be monitored on a continuous basis.

4. To facilitate face-to-face interaction between community members and school representatives. (p. 36)

Vollmer (2010) highlighted the importance of positive school PR in building support for today’s public schools, noting, “When it comes to public education, everyone is a shareholder. They pay taxes. They have opinions, and they are eligible to express their opinions at the ballot box” (p. 101). He listed 20 “terrible trends” that present challenges to building community support for schools/districts:

1. Changing demographics (“Less than 27% of adults have children in school.”)

2. Negative media (“If it bleeds, it leads. Negative, sensational stories are easier to report, and besides, they sell.”)

3. Fear of school violence (“The perception of unsafe schools—reinforced by the media—frightens parents, increases public anxiety, and pushes the public away.”)

4. Culture war (“Schools are ground zero in a war for control of America’s future.”)

5. The clanning of America (“People go to great lengths to associate exclusively with others who share their ideas and beliefs.”)
6. *The rights revolution* (“Ever since education was proclaimed by the Supreme Court to be a property right, students and parents act from a dangerously overdeveloped sense of entitlement. Collaboration and mutual respect have been replaced by confrontation and mistrust.”)

7. *The rise of special interests* (“The number of organized advocacy groups has tripled in thirty years.”)

8. *The plague of regulations* (“Nationally, the number of rules and regulations has exploded in a foolish and destructive search for legal perfection, and public education has been maimed in the process.”)

9. *Fear and loathing of the government* (“Public schools are often a community’s largest and most accessible government agencies, and, as such, they have become the focus of the free-floating antipathy of the left and the right.”)

10. *The frenzy of privatization* (“Government operation is assumed to be inherently inferior to private management.”)

11. *Anti-tax movement* (“Frustrated community members who feel as though they have no voice in national debates seize upon public school bond elections as rare opportunities to be heard.”)

12. *Schools as scapegoats* (“No social or economic problem is too remote or too absurd to be attributed to inferior schools and lazy, self-serving educators.”)

13. *Union bashing* (“The unions have made powerful enemies in their attempts to promote public education and advance the interests of their members.”)

14. *Public perception of alternatives* (“A growing number of Americans believe that there are many alternatives to public education, all superior.”)
15. *Demand for customization* (“Parents and students want schools to adjust to their specific needs.”)

16. *International comparisons* (“Politicians and the press emphasize our position in the rankings as opposed to the actual scores; they use tests as weapons instead of diagnostic tools.”)

17. *Standardized testing* (“Never before have America’s children taken so many standardized tests, and never before have they meant so much.”)

18. *Changing job market* (“The gap between what schools provide and what the economy demands causes parents and taxpayers to question their continued support.”)

19. *Ever-expanding expectations* (“Americans now expect their schools to teach the basics, create responsible citizens, prepare effective workers *and* respond to all the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of children living in a post-industrial society.”)

20. “*The Biloski Dilemma*”: Overworked parents who are not apathetic to school/education issues, but choose to spend their shrinking free-time at home or elsewhere. (pp. 106-112)

**School-Community Social Constructs and Leadership Theory**

As mutually bound social and political constructs, communities and school districts form as time and circumstances change. Districts work to provide successful educational outcomes for the community’s children, while supporting the taxpayers’ goal of maintaining or increasing real estate investment through the inherent property investment value gained in school districts with good reputations. As the interface between the district and the community it serves, school PR personnel work toward these mutually beneficial outcomes.

As cited in a discourse on successful marriage (Parker-Pope, 2011), spouses “sculpt” each other as relationships mature, much in the same way that school districts and the communities
they serve shape and fulfill each other as they move forward in mutually beneficial relationships. Dubbed the “Michelangelo Phenomena” theory in social psychology (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999), the concept applies equally well to school districts and their constituencies as they vote in the annual budget referendum.

In a discourse on the Michelangelo effect, Rusbult, Finkel, and Kumashiro (2009) stated:

People adapt to one another during the course of interaction, changing their behavior so as to coordinate with one another and respond to each person’s needs and expectations. However, adaptation is most probable, powerful, and enduring in highly interdependent relationships. (p. 305)

This interdependent sculpting is supported by structuration theory (Giddens, as cited by Hatch, 2006) that intuits a mutual evolution of structure (past action) and action (agency). The school district and the community it serves are simultaneously entrenched and facilitated to interact with and influence each other. “Giddens called this idea the ‘duality of structure’ and agency according to which agents of the organization are both enabled and constrained by structures of resources, routines, and expectations” (Hatch, 2006, p. 123).

Each school district/community construct is unique in its culture, needs, and outcomes. For this reason, school PR leadership is situationally dependent. PR leadership in a low-income, high-needs district would look very different from that in a wealthy, homogeneous school district, or a geographically large school district with a culturally/socio-economically diverse population.

The situational leadership approach “was developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1969) based on Reddin’s (1967) 3-D management style theory….and has been used extensively in organizational leadership training and development” (Northouse, 2007, p. 91). Although the
broad PR goal of community support is universal to all school districts, situational leadership strategies are appropriate to sculpt PR planning specific to each district/community culture.

Northouse (2007) defined the strengths of situational leadership as its history of success, practicality, prescriptive value, emphasis on flexibility, and subordinates’ unique needs. He stated, “Situational leadership stresses that leadership is composed of both a *directive* and *supportive* dimension, and each has to be applied appropriately in a given situation” (p. 91).

In this way, leadership theory provides scaffolding for the role of school PR personnel. A PR leader must know how and when to support the district and its leadership (*supportive behaviors*) and how and when to help school leaders as they actively sculpt or recalibrate their goals, messages, and interface with the publics they serve (*directive or task behaviors*).

Leadership styles as defined by Northouse (2007) are further classified into four categories: high directive-low supportive style, high directive-high supportive style, high supportive-low directive style, and low supportive-low directive style. By understanding how situational leadership theory relates to PR in schools, PR personnel can hone the practice of *supportive* and *directive* behaviors.

In the two *directive* styles noted by Northouse (2007), the high directive-low supportive style focuses on the goal, such as a PR leader’s initiative to increase parent-voter turnout for the annual budget election, with less emphasis on the support given to “subordinates” or parent, teacher, and/or community groups on how to accomplish the goal. With the high directive-high supportive style, the PR leader would focus on both achieving the goal (high parent-voter turnout) and coaching subordinates, key communicators, and parent group leaders as they work toward their common goal.
In the high supportive-low directive style, the *supportive* aspect of leadership is emphasized. In the case of the parent-voter initiative, the PR leader would focus on supportive behaviors “that bring out the employees’ skills around the task to be accomplished” (Northouse, 2007, p. 93)

The second *supportive* style, low supportive-low directive, a PR leader gives control to workers who show initiative “and refrains from intervening with unnecessary social support” (Northouse, 2007, p. 94).

However, Snowden and Gorton (2002) draw attention to a theoretical flaw:

The situational theory of leadership maintains that no particular style of leadership or personal qualities of a leader is appropriate for every situation. The theory places a high premium on the administrator’s adaptability and flexibility. (pp. 74-75)

Snowden and Gorton (2002) emphasize that many leaders would be highly influenced by their own personality tendencies, “which tend to be rather consistent and unchanging over time” (p. 75), and will be unable to adapt the most effective leadership style to the rigors of each new situation. To be most effective, then, the style of the PR personnel’s district leadership, from superintendents to union and PTA leaders, requires flexibility and adaptability by the PR leader as he/she works to accomplish both *directive* and *supportive* goals with diverse groups.

Context is critical to the effectiveness of PR leadership. In discussing case studies for education administrators, Kowalski (2005a) explained, “The application of knowledge and skills is affected by context. Factors such as school climate, prevailing problems, community culture, and people are contextual variables that often determine whether an administrator’s actions are successful or unsuccessful” (p. 119). To be effective, school PR leaders must work within the
social constructs of the district, applying appropriate initiatives and emphasis specific to the
district/community culture to build support, trust, and credibility with the constituency.

**Links to Student Achievement**

Multiple studies have linked positive school PR and strategic and responsive school/district communications; increased parent, student, and community involvement in decision making; and high-quality school facilities to increased student achievement (Constantino, 2002; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2005; Epstein, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Moore, 2009; National School Public Relations Association, 2006; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Further, as cited by NSPRA (2006), a meta-analysis of 51 research studies conducted between 1993 and 2002 by Henderson and Mapp noted the connection between family and community involvement in schools and increases in student achievement:

They found there is a positive and convincing relationship between family and community involvement and improved student achievement, including higher gradepoint \textit{sic}\ averages and scores on standardized tests, more classes passed, higher enrollment in more challenging academic classes, better attendance and improved behavior at home and at school. (p. 6)

NSPRA (2006) emphasized the same connection between collaboration, communication, and increases in student achievement:

Collaboration makes the home-school connection effective. And effective communication increases parent and family participation which has proven, study after study, to increase student achievement—our ultimate goal. (p. 14)

English (2005) noted that the parent/community involvement/empowerment reform movement resulted in raising student achievement in the Chicago public schools:
Research on this model of democratic localism demonstrated the contribution of parent and community participation to curriculum and instruction and to raising student achievement. But some of these researchers also found that decentralization efforts of this kind sometimes fail if they do not take into account the importance of social trust within the school environment. They suggest that the human resources of schools—culture, climate, and interpersonal relationships—may be more critical to school success than the structural arrangements under which the school operates (p. 243).

The role of a strong parent-school communications program also has been linked to specific learning groups within the school system. For example, in a study of the role of communications in educating students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2011) stated:

> The literature has documented that when schools develop successful communications strategies with parents, a variety of positive outcomes occur, including student improvement in grades and test scores in general…gains in reading and math achievement in particular…and a higher sense of self-efficacy for parents and teachers. (p. 49)

The National PTA (2000) associated parent involvement in the school and community with student achievement in its guidebook for building successful parent-school partnerships: “When parents are involved, students tend to achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents’ education level”; “Consistent parent involvement tends to improve communication and relations between parents, teachers, and administrators”; and, “When parents receive frequent and effective communication from the school or program, their
involvement often increases, their overall evaluation of educators often improves, and their attitudes toward the program are often more positive” (pp. 12, 15, 17).

The sense of ownership and pride that develops when communities are meaningfully involved in their school district is cumulative, leading to “success and more success” (Miller & Hart, as cited by NSPRA, 2006, p. 13). Further, school leaders whose practice includes strong communications with parents and community members are more likely to have support from these groups in their work to increase student achievement. Using multiple regression analyses of findings from 74 self-selected middle schools in Virginia, DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2005) found:

Theories that guide school leaders to view parents and community members as potential resources and to build bridges to productively engage these people in the work and the life of the school are more likely to help them achieve their goal of fostering student learning. (p. 70)

Conversely, less parent-school involvement has been shown to have a negative effect on student achievement. Hoy and Sabo (1998) and Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp (1991) studied the health of organizational culture in middle schools and found a correlative effect between the school’s dissuasion of parent involvement and lower student achievement. Their results show that student achievement is negatively affected by the degree that parents are kept out of schools. However, because school PR personnel work with school leaders to keep the school-community connection strong, their employment contributes to an increase in student achievement.

**Cost Effectiveness**

The worth of school PR employment can also be determined by the cost-benefit relationship between school PR personnel and the school district. In a mutually beneficial social
construct, a successful school district whose brand is characterized by effective educational practices and cost-effectiveness maintains taxpayers’ largest investment in their communities, their properties.

NSPRA (2006) noted, “Homeowners are further invested in their community’s schools because real estate investments frequently depend, in part, on the reputation of the local schools. Communities have a self-interest in developing and maintaining good schools” (p. 11). The relationship between high-performing school districts and the maintenance of property values, especially in a difficult economy, is an important reason why a strong communications program is necessary. Moore (2009) stated, “There is a direct relationship between property values and the quality of education in the community” (p. 25).

To determine the expense of school PR employment, NSPRA conducted surveys to learn what percentage of a school district’s operating budget was allocated for school communications (including the salary of school PR personnel). Former NSPRA Executive Director Bagin (National School Public Relations Association, 2000) explained:

Nationally, according to NSPRA surveys, less than one-tenth of one percent (.001) of an operating school budget is spent on communications. If we could “run schools more like a business,” we would be spending, conservatively speaking, up to 25% of our budget on communication. School communicators are among the most cost-conscious and talented communicators in the communication industry. (p. 1)

When parents are not involved in public schools due to a lack of time or apathy toward their children’s education, and/or have experienced or accepted the media’s view that districts are failing to adequately educate their children, enrollment numbers can decrease. Charter schools, vouchers, and private and parochial schools actively seek to attract these parents and
students. As state and federal aid are based on student enrollments, a decrease in enrollment is followed by a reduction in school aid.

Anderson, Evans, Kozak, and Peterson (1999) noted:

The negative perception of public schools is leading to a decrease in public support as evidenced in: demands to reduce funding, offer alternatives including vouchers to private schools, and provide national tests to guarantee that teaching and learning are taking place.

The public’s distrust of schools, and their willingness to believe the worst, has solidified into a perception so negative that any attempt to shed light on the subject is dismissed as educators’ attempt to refute the “facts.” In part, the negative perceptions of public schools are so deeply entrenched in the American psyche that educators doubt their own effectiveness and believe public schools are faltering.

(pp. 1-3)

To counteract the loss of confidence and attrition to charter and private schools, school districts across the country have turned to aggressive marketing and PR campaigns. Simon (2009) noted that school districts are spending significant sums of money to combat student attrition to local charter and private schools:

Administrators working on the public-relations push say the potential returns are high. State funding for public schools is based on attendance, so each new student brings more money, typically $5,000 to $8,000 per head. In addition, schools with small enrollments are at constant risk of being shuttered in this recession, and full classrooms help. (p. 1)

Simon (2009) further noted that the San Antonio Independent School District, which lost 25% of its enrollment in ten years, hired a marketing firm and committed $180,000 of public
funds to improve its profile. “‘Most public schools have a negative image,’ said James Howard, president of the school board. ‘We’re hoping that image can be changed’” (p. 2).

Other districts have hired PR companies to improve their image, Simon (2009) noted, including public schools districts in Denver, Washington, D.C., who committed $100,000 for PR, and St. Louis, who paid $1,000,000 (Simon, 2009) to showcase “a top-ranked high school and magnet programs in culinary arts, aeronautics and international studies” (p. 2).

Addressing the issue of cost effectiveness, McGuiggan (2011), president of the NSPRA Illinois chapter, stated:

If public relations and community engagement are important to a district (and should be a tenet of any public entity’s strategic plan), district leadership would be well served to recognize what they can get for the investment—increased parent involvement, increased public support, increased staff morale—in the ultimate goal of increased student achievement.

Additionally, in an important referendum or bond campaign, the PR professional can guide communication efforts that result in a direct return of dollars back to the classroom. (p. 2)

For the above-mentioned reasons culled from the literature, i.e., the maintenance of property values, the percentage of school districts’ operating budgets devoted to communications and school PR employment, and the state and federal aid based on enrollments, there is a positive cost-benefit relationship for schools that are planning to invest in or maintain a strong school community relations program. However, with student achievement’s being related to strong school-community involvement, the negative bias against schools, including the centralization of
control, and the time and resource constraints under which school leaders currently function, it is clear that schools need to have access to the services of a school PR practitioner.

**Responsibilities of School Public Relations Personnel**

One of the goals of this study was to determine the job responsibilities of school PR personnel who work in New York State’s public schools and to compare them to the job responsibilities of their national counterparts. Online resources of commonly assigned responsibilities are listed by NSPRA, the national support organization for school PR personnel. Although responsibilities vary by district, NSPRA (2010) listed 17 “essential duties” for school PR leaders:

- Serves as information liaison between the total school system and the community at large; represents the district with various community organizations.
- Sets annual objectives for and evaluates the district’s community relations program, to include budget planning for meeting those objectives.
- Serves as liaison person between the district and the news media and supervises the production and distribution of news releases.
- Serves as district spokesperson in areas of sensitivity and controversy.
- Cooperates with district administrators and other staff members, as appropriate, in programs sponsored by the schools and open to the public.
- Provides professional public relations counsel and assistance to the administration, Governing Board, schools, parent groups, and student groups.
- Oversees the writing and production of the employee newsletter.
- Prior to final publication, reviews and edits all district publications which will be disseminated to the general public.
• Recommends innovative avenues of communication for external and internal audiences.
• Solicits feedback through formal and informal means on activities, products, and purposes of the community relations program and the school district in general.
• Develops and maintains accurate records of the district’s public relations program.
• Provides logistical support for all meetings of the Governing Board.
• Expedites responses to inquiries and complaints received by the department from citizens, news media, and school personnel.
• Conducts recognition programs for employees and students.
• Coordinates and manages city, state, and national campaigns and programs.
• Conducts information campaigns for district elections.
• Researches and writes articles and speeches for the Superintendent and Governing Board.

(p. 3)

NSPRA (2010) also lists three “Marginal Duties” that may accompany the “essential duties”:

• Provides professional assistance in the development of various publications (brochures, newsletters, information bulletins) for school departments.
• Provides in-service training as required on public and community relations.
• Performs other tasks as assigned by the Superintendent. (p. 3)

School PR specialists’ job descriptions can vary significantly according to the school district’s demographics and needs. However, this study will show that, for school PR personnel who work in New York State, job responsibilities have expanded in recent years, without commensurate compensation.
The field of communications has changed dramatically during the past ten years. While print media are still viable forms of communication, the Internet is fast becoming the preferred means of obtaining information. Accordingly, schools, like all organizations, must adapt. Hines, Edmonson, and Moore (2008) noted:

Ten years ago, cell phones, email, Palm Pilots, wireless networks, and even voice mail were not common tools in the education environment. Today, administrators utilize all of them. The emergence of widespread technology has tremendously impacted the way school leaders perform their jobs and the way they manage information. Electronic communication is changing the way school organizations communicate. The amount of information at people’s fingertips is exploding, and the role of the administrator is changing. Administrators have observed a steady increase in the number and types of electronic communication and have found that a growing amount of time to respond to electronic communication and an exploding amount of information is required. (pp. 276-277)

The authors recommended that principal preparation programs include electronic communication and information management and drew attention to the changing roles of secretaries and administrative assistants (whose roles can include school PR) in electronic communications. Hines et al. noted, “Technology has become the catalyst for changes in so many areas related to school leadership. . . . Current textbooks on school leadership must provide more attention to this complex interaction” (p. 288).

Gladwell (2000) identified one of the problems of the Information Age in a discussion of “stickiness,” the concept of what people remember of the information presented to them. He
cited marketing studies by Levanthal, Singer, and Jones in retooling messages to target audiences
to increase effectiveness:

Much of what we are told or read or watch, we simply don’t remember. But Levanthal
and Wunderman’s examples suggest that there may be simple ways to enhance stickiness
into a message. This is a fact of obvious importance to marketers, teachers, and
managers. (p. 99)

In this Information Age, people are sifting through overwhelming amounts of information
and crafting messages for maximum effectiveness and stickiness with the voting public. Lacking
a PR administrator, school leaders are left to address issues themselves.

Further, with a great amount of information comes the possibility of misinformation. The
widespread prevalence of news and information that, two decades ago, was written by
professional journalists, now includes “citizen journalists,” blog sites that promote specific
agendas, and email chains. Letters to the editor and opinions posted online or emailed can be
harmful to districts as they prepare school referenda.

Hildebrand (2011) noted, “One reason [for budget failures], experts say, is that school
elections, whether in districts of affluence or more-modest circumstances, often are swayed by
local issues that outweigh purely economic factors” (p. A4). As an example of the how local
issues and groups can affect vote outcomes, Eyler (as cited in Levine, 2005) discussed a school
bond defeat in Rye, New York, and cited the power of a small group’s wielding misinformation
to sway the election. “Citing communication as a reason for the election failure, one board
member specifically blamed negative campaign flyers that contained ‘blatant misinformation and
hysteria’” (p. 3).
Levine (2005) further stated, “Simple, inaccurate messages can be persuasive tools in community-wide elections” (p. 3) and that opponents to Rye’s bond used letters to the editor and fliers that contained misinformation to drive the defeat “while school officials relied only on a limited amount of printed material to support their case” (p. 3). Fiore (2011) noted how school PR personnel can effectively address misinformation presented by splinter groups: “School leaders, skilled in all aspects of school-community relations, have the ability to keep information in check” (p. 4).

In an editorial on the amount of misunderstanding and misinformation regarding district issues in the general public, Vollmer (2010) stated:

Patiently and methodically, teachers, administrators, and board members across the country endeavored to show me what it was like to live and work inside their world. They helped me see that my opinions, like those of most people who have little contact with schools, were based on selective memories, misinformation, half-truths, and outright lies. (p. 17)

The power of misinformation to influence the public’s perception, then, can significantly affect their vote in school referenda, especially in the absence of sustained PR efforts by the school district. A school PR administrator can craft messages for maximum stickiness, uncover misinformation, and take corrective action, all within the confines of the law’s no-advocacy requirements.

**Importance of Public Perception**

The greatest challenge schools may face is changing the public’s perception of the state of the American public education system when that perception is based on negative news from the media. As bad news is making regular headlines, and the majority of residents do not have
children in the schools, support for schools is diminishing. A positive perception of a school
district’s brand, the sum of what the public knows and has experienced, is critical to ongoing
support. Fiore (2011) noted:

The image, in the eyes of the public, of an organization, such as a school, may not be
built on facts but rather on perceptions. These perceptions shape the image of a school
and the image that the public has of a school is an important factor in that school’s ability
to foster and maintain the kinds of relationships that are desired. (pp. 28, 56)

Results of recent public opinion polls, such as Education Next (Howell, Peterson & West,
2009; Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, 2010; 2011) provide a summary of the public’s perception of
school effectiveness on the issue of student achievement. When respondents of the Education
Next survey were asked to guess where 15-year-old U.S. students ranked in math skills against
those of 29 industrial countries, 31% ranked the U.S. as in the range of 16th-20th (roughly in the
low-middle, and higher than the actual U.S. student ranking of 24th). Only 3% ranked U.S.
students as placing in the top range (1st-5th). The same poll asked respondents to grade the
nation’s public schools as a whole, and 57% gave schools a “C.” On the same question, only 1%
ranked American public schools as worthy of an “A.” Peterson (2009) noted that the Education
Next poll results indicated that “public assessment of schools has fallen to the lowest level
recorded since Americans were first asked to grade schools in 1981” (p. 1).

Results of the Annual Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)/Gallup Poll (2010) aligned with the
Education Next poll, with a slightly downward trend in the grades respondents assigned: “18% of
Americans gave the nation’s schools either an ‘A’ or a ‘B’” (p. 12).
However, Kowalski (2008) noted:

Indeed, many experts have expressed concerns that members of the public do not understand how to interpret test scores; this, as a result, they use scores improperly to compare schools with respect to effectiveness or to make comparisons to other countries. (p. 68)

The 2010 and 2011 PDK/Gallup Poll indicated a contradiction in the public’s perception regarding schools:

The grades Americans assigned to the schools in their community have remained relatively stable over the past 35 years, trending slightly upward. This year, almost half of Americans give the schools in their community either an “A” or a “B.”

Overwhelmingly, Americans favor keeping a poorly performing school in their community open with existing teachers and principals, while providing comprehensive outside support. This finding is consistent across political affiliation, age, level of education, region of the country, and other demographics. (2010, pp. 10, 12)

The percentage of A’s and B’s that Americans gave their local schools continues at an all-time high at 51%, and the percentage of Americans giving an A to their local schools is the highest on record at 14%.

But American perception of the nation’s schools continues to decline—only 17% assigned a grade of A or B to the nation’s schools. (2011, p. 17)

This bias toward local schools, even if failing, indicates a local/national contrast in the public’s perception. In other words, the more closely a respondent identified with or was involved in the school or community, the higher the respondent ranked the school. However,
when faced with the issue of tax dollars required to support local schools, the public believes that education spending is problematic (PDK/Gallup Poll, 2010, 2011).

Peterson (2009) noted the impact of negative public opinion on fiscal support for schools:

- In another sign of declining confidence, the public is less willing to spend more money on public education. In 1990, 70% of taxpayers favored spending “more on education,” according to a University of Chicago poll. In the latest poll, only 46% favored a spending increase. That’s a 15 percentage point drop from just one year ago when it was 61%. (p. 1)

- The 2010 and 2011 PDK/Gallup polls identified school spending as the top problem faced by the education system. Their data (2010, 2011) showed that:

  - School funding has been identified as the biggest problem throughout this decade; this year alone, it increased 4% over last year’s findings. Public school parents consider it an even bigger problem—46% of them selecting it as the No. 1 challenge facing their schools. (2010, p. 12)

  - Again this year, in significant numbers, Americans said lack of financial support was the biggest problem facing their local schools (2011, p. 17)

- At the local school district level, the public’s positive perception of education effectiveness and efficiency is essential to budget passage. Taxpayers understand that school performance is linked to property values. The perception of declining school performance, even if not at the local level, negatively influences public opinion. At the district level, a Long Island superintendent remarked, “We get an annual referendum on how well we’re doing, so perception is very important, the beliefs are important, the budget-building process is important.”
As noted in the job responsibilities of school PR personnel, direct interactions with the public are critical to building and maintaining two-way communication. Further, they must continually be aware of the public’s perception of local education and diligent in fostering trust and credibility.

**Trust and Credibility**

As public opinion of national-level school performance has diminished and trust in school boards and administrators has declined (Berlinger, 1993; Carr, 2011; Fiore, 2010, Kowalski, 2008; Lashway, 2002; Levine, 2005), the employment of school PR professionals has become increasingly necessary to maintain positive district-community relations. Demonstrations of accountability, standards, expectations of continuous improvement, and transparency, the hallmarks of the new education paradigm for schools in the Internet-driven and post-NCLB world, are critical issues in the eyes of the voting public.

Trust and credibility issues regarding schools frequently appear in the literature. For example, as stated by Levin (2009):

> Every day, our schools ask millions of people to entrust their children to us. We also ask for billions of dollars in public funds to operate the school system. These aren’t trivial requests. The strength and future of public education depends on the extent to which people believe their children and their money are in good hands, especially given the many other demands for public funds. (p. 93)

These demonstrations of effectiveness and efficiency build a foundation of trust on which positive school-community relations rest. As schools are held to federal and state mandates, and crimes by public school officials have made headlines such as in Roslyn, N.Y. (Lambert, 2005),
sustaining a positive profile for all public schools has become increasingly challenging for the public, especially in a difficult economy.

School PR personnel help to reinforce trust and credibility in schools for taxpayers who are anxious to maintain their real estate investments. McGuiggan (2011) noted:

In a time when education is under fire like never before, the need for positive messages to be shared is as great as the necessity for accurate and timely information about critical issues. Additionally, a level of obligation exists that board members and school districts must consider: Taxpayers have the right to expect transparency and accountability that a public relations professional helps to provide. (p. 2)

Publishing a school district’s quarterly newsletter and holding board of education meetings to inform residents of district activities, especially in states like New York, where school tax rates are among the highest in the nation and expectations for education are high, is not enough to satisfy the public’s need for information. Demands for enhanced levels of communications, with the Internet as the preferred source of information, have become the “new normal.” “Establishing a sense of trust must be a priority,” NSPRA (2006) noted. “Direct personal communication can build a better understanding and a shared sense of purpose” (p. 13).

Carr (2011) explained:

With trust at an all-time low, school officials need to focus more on grassroots public engagement strategies and community relations activities. Telling public education’s story has never been more important, or more urgent. Letting lies pile up and attacks continue unabated allows them to take root in public opinion, diminishing trust and public support. (pp. 38-39)
Fiore (2011) posited that publics who are accustomed to receiving regular, positive news of student, school, and district achievement tend to “look with more favorable anticipation on any communication that he or she receives” (p. 86). Further, Moore (2009) noted that regularity and consistency in communications “helps to brand schools and creates familiarity that builds credibility for public relations materials over time” (p. 113).

The public’s perception of school effectiveness and its trust of school officials relate to the district’s performance record and effective, efficient, and prudent use of tax dollars. Within this arena of public opinion, school PR professionals function as two-way communication facilitators and trust-builders among the various publics and their agents: boards of education, education staff, and taxpayers. Accordingly, following are the responsibilities of school PR personnel: (a) ongoing assessments of the external tone of the constituency, (b) crafting of key messages to ensure the success of district goals, (c) designing of school-community activities to keep schools as hubs of activity, (d) dissemination of public information and news of educational successes that utilize the most effective information excurrent methodology (e.g., email blasts, press releases, website, social media, community meetings, PTA), (e) negotiation of misunderstandings and impasses, and (f) scaffolding of a communications framework to increase the possibility of budget passage.

Overview of the Annual Budget Referendum

Annual Budget Vote

Registered voters have the right and responsibility in a democratic society to vote on their school district’s annual school district budget. In New York State, the proposed budget document must be completed “at least seven days before the public hearing” and “must complete the budget 14 to 21 days prior to the date of the annual meeting and election (NYS Education
School boards must comply with timelines required by New York State for public notification and submission of the proposed budget to the State Department of Education.

A school district’s constituency must be informed, by mail, of a “Budget Notice” after the public hearing but “no later than six days prior to the annual meeting and election or special district at which a school budget vote will occur” (NYSSBA; NYSBA, 2004 p. 85). The Budget Notice must include “a description of how total spending and the tax levy resulting from the proposed budget would compare with a projected contingency budget” and be broken down by budget components (i.e., program, administrative, and capital) (§ 2022(2-a)(a))” (p. 86). The notice also must include “basic School Tax Relief (STAR) exemption and increase and decrease of school taxes from the prior year (§ 2022(2-a)(b))” (p. 86) and “state the date, time, and place of the budget vote (§ 2022(2-a))” (p. 86).

The preparation and mailing of the district’s annual Budget Notice in compliance with New York State law is typically assigned to the school PR professional. Additionally, the district must provide a detailed account of the proposed expenses for the public. Both documents must be divided into three categories: program, capital, and administrative. This often takes the form of a comprehensive budget brochure mailed to taxpayers, available at board of education meetings, and/or posted to the school district’s website.

Preparation of the Budget Notice and budget brochure are essential functions of school PR personnel, requiring comprehensive knowledge of the budget, the skill to create easy-to-understand graphs and charts, and the ability to present “purely factual” information clearly and fluently, without advocacy, regarding budget and tax impacts on the community. Highlights of district and student achievements can be included, along with information concerning programs
and services that would be discontinued if the budget should fail, e.g., “It is not impermissible per se to state that rejection of the budget may result in the elimination of programs’ (Appeal of Julian, 42 Educ. Dep’t Rep. 300 (2003))” (NYSSBA; NYSBA, p. 91).

Presenting budget information to the voters, answering their queries, and contributing to the school district’s supplemental presentations are further tasks of school PR personnel. In a mixed-methodology study of campaign strategies and school referenda approval, Johnson and Ingle (2009) noted that the following were associated with budget passage:

- Using board of elections data, identifying and targeting yes voters, explaining and justifying the need for the levy, limiting the campaign to 6 weeks or less, creating a sense of urgency, using more strategies than fewer, and using newspaper advertising. (p. 62)

The authors also identified six school district characteristics associated with budget success:

- “increased pupil density; increased reliance on commercial or industrial property tax base; effective designation (versus excellent); high poverty, rural/agricultural base (versus high median income, low poverty, suburban base)” (pp. 62-63).

**Voter Demographics**

School districts periodically conduct demographic studies to project enrollments and determine programmatic and facility needs. These studies, offered by a number of state and local agencies, including BOCES and New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA), inform districts how to formulate messages appropriate to specific groups. Estimates of non-parent voters vary by district and can be collected from demographic reports, but are estimated to make up approximately 70–75% of a school district’s population. As noted by G. Campbell (2003), school PR personnel “are the people who strategize to involve the 75 percent who do not have children in the school” (p. 1). As such, involving these voters in school-based activities,
such as focus groups, and/or school-sponsored events, such as plays and concerts, is critical to a successful budget outcome.

In addition, Gradstein and Kaganovich (as cited in Johnson & Ingle, 2009) found an association between age and vote outcomes. Their results showed that retirees were less likely to pass a referendum. Conversely, Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, and Zhang (as cited in Johnson & Ingle, 2009) found that “the higher the proportion of residents in a county that are 65 and older, the less likely an initial budget referendum would be defeated” (p. 53). This contradiction can be explained by Kenney (as cited in Johnson & Ingle, 2009), who found that older taxpayers with grandchildren in the district “exhibit the same school spending preferences as younger voters” (p. 53). Therefore, vested interest in student success plays a significant role in voter rationale.

**Voter Rationale**

The reasons voters cast their ballots in any election, including the annual school budget vote, have been studied to identify polarizing factors. D. E. Campbell (2006) posited that voters’ decisions depend on their relative position in society at the time of a vote. He determined voters’ rationale for voting in any election as falling under either the principles of Federalist James Madison or French political thinker and historian Alexis de Tocqueville; i.e., Madisonian voters participate in the election process because they are “protecting one’s interests,” while Tocqueville types are driven by “fulfilling one’s duty” (p. 2).

Levine (2005) offered three influential factors in voter decision-making: personal identity, personal ethics, and personal benefit. Personal identity is associated with voters’ identifying with a particular candidate and can be applied to taxpayers who identify themselves and their values and ethics as being in alignment with the school district, such as in a community that retains a high alumni population or has an active athletic program supported by
alumni/community groups. Levine’s second and third factors, personal ethics and personal benefit, align with Tocqueville and Madison principles, respectively. School PR professionals who understand voter rationale can present budget vote information and materials that appeal to both Madisonian and Tocqueville types, as well as to taxpayers who link their personal identity to a particular community, thus increasing chances of successful referenda.

However, this researcher proposes that a fourth rationale, similar to Madisonian principles, exists: voting for economic survival. Senior citizens who live on fixed incomes historically vote against school budgets. This constituency group may identify with the ethical and educational principles of the school district (personal identity), may vote out of a sense of Tocqueville-like duty, and may want to support their schools to protect their own real estate investment (Madisonianism), but cannot afford to survive on annually decreasing incomes caused by escalations in their property’s school taxes. Prior to New York State’s tax levy limit, this was especially true on Long Island, where Nassau County’s property taxes are the highest in the state.

Further, in the governor’s proposed 2011-12 state budget, Long Island, with 17% of New York State’s students, receives only 12% of state aid and carries an 8.9% school aid loss versus a 7.2% loss to the rest of the state (Bixhorn, 2011). Although the governor’s final budget increased aid to Long Island that year, the “downstate” discrepancy persists, even in the governor’s 2013-2014 proposed budget.

For seniors age 65 and above, many of whom have grown children and grandchildren on Long Island and who make up 15% of Long Island’s population (2010-2015 projections; J. T. Hughes, 2011), any school tax increase can place financial constraints on their households. The only option available for senior citizens to fight a school tax increase would be to vote against
the school budget, a budget they may support in principle for a district they may identify with, and a democratic process they may ascribe to, but cannot support in tax dollars.

The relationship between household finance and referenda outcome is supported by Ehrenberg et al. (as cited by Johnson & Ingle, 2009), who noted that “changes in income, statewide and at the local level, were positively associated with the proportion of school district budget referenda that passed in a given year” (p. 53). This association was not affected by percentage changes in the state aid received by a school district.

**Budget Vote Risk Factors**

**Impact of the Media**

In addition to the overall financial conditions that influence voters in their home district, negative media portrayal can affect prevailing opinion of school effectiveness. Gordon (as cited by NSPRA, 2006) noted:

> Our attitudes toward the nation’s schools come primarily from the news media, and most of this information is negative. The key for school districts is to communicate the successes of students to parents—and to non-parents as well, since they make up about 70% of the voting citizens in most communities. (p. 7)

Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup regularly conducts opinion polls focused on public education. NSPRA (2006) cited a 2003 Gallup poll that “concludes that Americans tend to base their perceptions of the state of the educational system on what they see and hear in the media, what they personally experience and the experiences of their peers” (p. 11).

School PR personnel can offset the effects of negative school perception in the media through regular release of good news. Howell et al. (2009) noted that, in responding to “a survey item, they [people] often draw upon a recent media report they have heard or conversation they
have had with friends, relatives, or co-workers. Individual responses, then, vary from week to week as people are exposed to different claims” (p. 3). By regularly supplying local media with information about school successes, school PR personnel can mitigate the negativity leveled against schools “in general.”

School District/Community-Specific Issues

Multiple risk factors, or a combination of factors, unique to the school district and community it serves, can lead to vote failure. Strategic school PR efforts can help to offset some, but not necessarily all, of these risks:

1. A proposed tax levy above what the voters will support (PDK/Gallup, 2010; Peterson, 2009; NYS Department of Finance, 2011).

2. An overriding negative perception of education in general and/or the district, in particular, including the distrust of district officials and school leaders with public monies (Anderson, et al., 1999; Carr, 2011; L. W. Hughes & Hooper, 2000; Kowalski, 2008; Levine, 2005; McGuiggin, 2011).

3. The district’s failure to comply with expected federal/state education and district mission statement goals, such as meeting NCLB requirements (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

4. The ability of splinter groups, or “pockets of leadership” (Fiore, 2011, p. 25), to overpower positive messages of educational success and integrity from the district (Levine, 2005; NYS Department of Education, 2010b).

5. Voter apathy (particularly parent groups) or low voter turnout. Hildebrand (2011) noted, “Fewer than 20 percent of voters typically participate in such elections” (p. A4).

6. Weak PTA and other school support groups.
7. Negative reaction to a recent successful bond referendum (an increase in school taxes, outside of the annual budget referenda).

The State Education Department’s 2005 analysis (NYS Department of Education, 2010b) of the unprecedented number of 2004 budget failures, especially on Long Island, found that the percentage of the tax levy was the greatest predictor of budget failure. The report noted, “It is an even better predictor than the percentage increase in spending” and additionally advised that boards and district officials should “pay considerable attention to their communication and voter outreach efforts” (p. 13), especially on Long Island.

Levine’s (2005) review of the ability of a splinter group in the 2001 Rye, New York, referendum to sway the vote outcome noted that counteractive PR measures are required to mitigate misinformation. However, little is known about how often this occurs in local referenda. Levine noted, “Scholars have yet to study how negative campaigning impacts school financial elections” (p. 11).

In addition, Carr (2011) advised that aggressive school PR is a necessity in today’s climate of negativity and warned, “It is not enough to spend taxpayers’ dollars well. School officials need to tell people how those dollars are making a difference in the lives of children” (p. 38). Today’s school referendum voters seek reassurance that school districts are making the best use of taxpayers’ funds while effectively educating its students.

**Summary**

The goal of this review was to present examples in the literature regarding how school PR personnel can contribute to student achievement, maintain a positive public perception by highlighting district/student achievement, and counteract negativity and misinformation produced by the media, local bloggers, and splinter groups, with an overarching goal of
enhancing school-community relations, trust, and credibility with both internal and external publics. In addition, school PR personnel, in providing support for the maintenance of strong schools with robust enrollments and enhancing the possibility of passage of budget referenda, help ensure districts’ financial security through the maintenance of federal and state aid and local revenue sources. Most importantly, school PR personnel deliver all of the above at a much lower cost for the same services in private industry.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count. Everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.”

Albert Einstein (as cited by Harris, 1995)

Overview

For the purposes of this examination, it was imperative to gather extensive data from school PR personnel who work in New York State to answer fundamental questions about their profession. Answers to the research questions posed in this study will enable boards of education and school leaders to make more informed decisions about school PR personnel and their employment. To explore the topic to its fullest, the researcher conducted this study in two parts. Once data were fully gathered, the two parts were analyzed individually as well as cross-referenced to reveal relationships.

Chapter IV presents data reported by New York State school districts to the State Education Department (2010), cross-referenced with responses to key questions on the SPRES instrument. The number of school districts whose budgets passed/failed (dependent variable) for the 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012 school years on the initial vote were compared between two groups to calculate any budget advantage: school districts that employ school PR personnel and those that do not employ school PR personnel (independent variable). Other data were examined to reveal any patterns to school district/BOCES/private vendor employment across counties and the state. Chapter V presents the original electronic survey, the School Public Relations Employment Survey, or SPRES instrument (Appendix A), administered through “Zoomerang,” a survey-generating website (now Survey Monkey).
Because there was no centralized database of school PR personnel in New York State other than a New York School Public Relations Association’s membership list, the first step in accessing as many of these professionals as possible was to obtain the emails of all 692 school superintendents, including the 37 BOCES superintendents, and inquire whether they employed school PR personnel during the study’s three-year timeframe. The completed list was organized by county and BOCES to reveal any patterns that arose by geographical area (Appendix B).

The email to superintendents (Appendix C) was begun in February 2012 and included an introductory letter that bore Fordham University’s IRB approval stamp, an endorsement letter from Victoria Presser, the then-president of the New York School Public Relations Association (NYSPRA; Appendix D), and the embedded link to the researcher’s SPRES instrument. Superintendents were requested to forward the email to their head school PR employee, if they employed such a professional since the 2009–2010 school year, or to respond that they did not employ a school PR professional during the years of the study.

The email explained that a “yes” response to employing school PR personnel required the following detail: part-time or full-time employees, and in-district/BOCES/ private vendor employees. Four email attempts were made over several weeks to attempt to obtain a high number of responses from the state’s superintendents.

The SPRES survey, whose link was embedded in the email forwarded to the lead school PR professional, was designed to gather descriptive data about who they were and where they worked (independent variable); information about their roles, responsibilities, and relationships (intervening variables); and outcomes of their employment, i.e., did they feel satisfied and effective, and did they plan to remain in their occupation (dependent variables). The SPRES
instrument included 52 questions designed to reveal data critical to understanding the dependent, independent, and intervening variables of this study.

The goal of the second section of this study was to gather findings to run multiple descriptive, comparative, correlative, and predictive analyses using SPSS. Information gathered from the two parts of this study was cross-referenced to obtain additional insight, testing multiple hypotheses and research questions.

**Merging the Research Questions and SPRES Instrument**

Questions on the SPRES instrument were divided into six sections to gather independent, intervening, and dependent variables. The first two sections of the SPRES instrument included questions about school PR personnel background information, such as gender, age, and teaching certification, as well as employment information, such as district size and wealth, and the respondent’s employer (independent variables). Information on the intervening variables (school PR personnel’s roles, responsibilities, and relationships) was collected in the next three sections. Finally, information on the dependent variables (satisfaction, effectiveness, longevity) was gathered in the final SPRES section, employment outcomes.

**Research Questions**

For Chapter IV of this study, the researcher utilized public information, the information compiled in the superintendents’ database, and related data gathered from the SPRES instrument. Research questions for this chapter included:

2. Were larger and/or wealthier New York State public school districts more likely to employ school PR personnel?

3. Was there a difference between school PR employment and their districts’ budget vote outcomes in the years studied as compared to all state budget vote outcomes for the same years?

4. Did SPRES respondents achieve a higher percentage than the state’s average of budget passage rates for the years studied?

5. What percentage of SPRES respondents belonged to the state (NYSPRA) and national (NSPRA) professional organizations?

6. Did SPRES respondents who were members of NYSPRA and NSPRA have a higher percentage than the state’s average of budget passage rates for the years studied?

The researcher used the SPRES respondent data in Chapter V to develop a comprehensive picture of these professionals. Research questions included:

1. What characteristics describe New York State school PR respondents (e.g., gender, age, backgrounds, compensation)?

2. What responsibilities and actions were typically assigned to the SPRES respondents?

3. Did school PR personnel believe their work had a favorable impact on the annual budget vote?

4. How much work-week time was devoted to Internet-facilitated communications in the execution of school PR personnel’s responsibilities?

5. How did SPRES respondents’ salaries compare to those nationally?

6. To what degree were school PR personnel directly involved with district leadership/management/communications?
7. How satisfied and effective did school PR personnel feel in their positions?
8. How likely were they to remain in their district and profession?
9. Was there a relationship between the intervening variables (roles, relationships, and responsibilities) and the dependent variables of satisfaction, efficacy, and longevity?

**Hypotheses**

To achieve the goal of the study, the researcher tested the hypotheses related to the Chapters IV and V variables. Hypotheses for this study were developed from topic assumptions and the study’s research questions about school PR personnel and the New York State school districts that employed them.

Through the hypotheses in Chapter IV, the researcher examined the employment/non-employment of school PR personnel (independent variable) and the districts’ budget vote outcomes (dependent variable), and tested for the intervening variables of district size and wealth. These hypotheses included:

2. School districts are more likely to employ school PR personnel if the school districts are large and/or wealthy.
3. School districts that employed school PR personnel during the 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012 school years were more likely to pass their budgets on the initial vote in the corresponding years.
4. School PR personnel are more likely to belong to professional organizations that support their practice.
Chapter V presents findings from the online SPRES instrument that informed about school PR personnel (independent variables) and their roles, responsibilities, and relationships in their school districts (intervening variables), and how the intervening variables are related to the dependent variables of job satisfaction, feelings of efficacy, and longevity.

Chapter V hypotheses include:

1. School PR personnel were more likely to be involved in district leadership at the highest level.

2. The public’s increase in Internet use was more likely to require an increase the amount of time needed by school PR for district/school-community communications.

3. Independent variables of gender, salary, age, employment status, budget outcome, and teaching background were related to feelings of efficacy and satisfaction in school PR employees.

4. School PR personnel who spent more time collaborating with district leadership were more likely to feel satisfied and effective.

5. School PR respondents were more likely to remain in their positions if:
   a. They had a strong relationship with district leadership.
   b. They held the belief that his/her role had a positive impact on the budget outcome.

**Research Design**

The general strategy for the two parts of the study was to examine different but related variables with the goal of creating a comprehensive understanding of school PR personnel. This included any impact their employment had on budget vote outcomes.
Chapter IV: Public Information and Related SPRES Findings

Figure 3 illustrates the research design for Chapter IV of the study. The chapter includes information for the variables, gathered from public information from New York State, results of the researcher’s superintendents’ and superintendents’ designees’ response list, and findings from related SPRES questions. The research design included the independent variable of school PR employment for the three years studied, the dependent variable of budget passage/failure for the corresponding years, and the impact of district wealth and size on school PR employment. Percentages of school district referenda passage/failure (dependent variable) served as the basis for a comparative analysis of the public information gathered from the list of responses from the state’s superintendents/superintendents’ designees for the employment of school PR personnel (independent variable).

Figure 3

Chapter IV Research Design

Chapter V: SPRES Respondent Findings

Results of the researcher’s SPRES instrument were the source of information for Chapter V. As illustrated in Figure 4, the research design for Chapter V included three sets of variables
gathered from SPRES respondent data: the independent variables of who these professionals were and where they worked; the intervening variables of their roles, responsibilities, and relationships; and the dependent or outcome variables of how they felt about their positions and whether they intended to remain in their profession.

Figure 4

Chapter V Research Design

Variables

Chapter IV: Public Information and Related SPRES Findings

The variables for Chapter IV are as follows: The independent variable was the employment of school PR personnel by the 692 school districts for the three years studied. The dependent variable for this section was whether (a) the school district passed their budget for all three years or (b) failed their budget for one or more of the three years. These two variables were used to establish differences between the two groups. Both variables were nominal levels of measurement. “Nominal variables just have categories which can’t be ordered in any way. Any numbers given are merely a descriptor of that category (e.g., 1 = ‘boy’)” (Muijs, 2008, p. 97).
To establish whether types of school district affected likeliness to employ school PR personnel, the researcher used district wealth and/or size as the intervening variables. Wealth was determined by six levels of budget size, six levels of per-pupil spending, and four levels of the state’s need/resource capacity category. Because the state’s need/resource capacity includes students per square mile and enrollment numbers, this category was utilized, along with five levels of enrollment, to determine district size.

Chapter V: SPRES Respondent Findings

Chapter V presents information on the school PR employees. The data source for this section of the study was information gathered from the SPRES instrument.

The independent variables for Chapter V included descriptive data, such as gender, age, background, salary levels, employment status, degrees earned, PR department size, and employer (in-district/BOCES/private vendor). The researcher used Likert-scale questions on the SPRES instrument to collect additional interval levels of measurement for the intervening variables of these professionals’ roles, responsibilities, and relationships. These questions also were used to gather information regarding the dependent, outcome variables of job satisfaction, feelings of effectiveness, and longevity (intent to remain in the position for three years).

Methodology/Analyses

The two parts of this study employed various descriptive, comparative, correlative, and regression analyses in SPSS. Each analysis section contains answers to the research questions as well as test results of the hypotheses posed in this study.

Descriptive Data

Descriptive data was gathered from the data sources for the two sections of this study. Descriptive data was highly informative, as most of this information was previously unknown
and/or undocumented. Analyses appropriate to testing the hypotheses and answering the research questions for each section were conducted.

Descriptive data for Chapter IV included basic characteristics of each district in the study, such as district name, county location, whether the county had a BOCES that offered services, information about the district’s size and wealth, the district’s budget outcomes for the three years, and whether they employed school PR personnel during the study timeframe. The data also included related findings on the SPRES instrument.

Chapter V explains the findings for the second section of this study, the data gathered from school PR personnel in New York State from the online SPRES instrument. The first two sections of the SPRES collected descriptive data about school PR personnel, such as gender, age, and background, and helped define groups, such as school PR personnel’s working in-district for BOCES or private vendors.

**Comparative Data**

The researcher sought to establish whether employment of school PR had an effect on budget outcomes for the years studied. Consequently, Chapter IV includes the results of analyses of the impact of employment, using the superintendents’/superintendents’ designees’ database and budget results reported to the state.

Chapter V includes comparisons (t-tests) run in SPSS for various groups, including gender, salary level, age, full-time or part-time, teaching certification, and budget vote outcomes. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) noted:

In causal-comparative research, the researcher attempts to determine the cause, or reason, for existing differences in the behavior or status of groups or individuals. In other words,
established groups are already different on some variable, and the researcher attempts to identify the major factor that has led to this difference. (p. 218)

Analyses of the groups for each category of the independent variables were conducted in SPSS. The intervening variables (roles, responsibilities, and relationships) and the dependent, outcome variables of job satisfaction, feelings of efficacy, and longevity also were compared and analyzed.

**Correlative Data**

Next, the researcher used correlative data in the analyses for both chapters to determine whether any correlations existed among the variables, and to what degree. “The degree of relation is expressed as a correlation coefficient. If two variables are related, scores within a certain range on one variable are associated with scores within a certain range on the other variable” (Gay et al., 2009, p. 196).

Muijs (2008) explained:

The method we will use to analyse the relationship between two continuous variables is called the *correlation coefficient*. Basically what a correlation coefficient…does is look at whether or not a high score on one variable is associated with a high score on the other. (p. 142)

Analyses in Chapter IV show relationships between district budget and size types; e.g., the wealthier the district, the more likely it was to employ school PR personnel. Chapter V presents factors that affect school PR personnel retention, including an understanding of how employees’ beliefs were related to the dependent variables of job satisfaction, feelings of efficacy, and intent to remain in their position. It also includes the dependent variables in relationship to the intervening variables.
**Predictive Data**

Predictive data were used in this study. In Chapter V, for example, if a strong correlation was found between the intervening variables (roles, responsibilities, and relationships) of school PR personnel, then it may be predictive of a dependent variable, or outcome, such as longevity in the profession. Gay et al. (2009) noted, “If two variables are highly related, scores on one variable can be used to predict scores on the other variable” (p. 203). Understanding how an intervening variable affects the dependent variables would aid superintendents in maximizing the performance and retention of these professionals.

Multiple regression analyses were conducted in SPSS to determine the relation of this study’s variables. Gay et al. (2009) noted:

Multiple regression is an extremely valuable procedure for analyzing the results of a variety experimental, causal-comparative, and correlational studies because it determines not only whether variables are related but also the degree to which they are related. Understanding how variables are related is beneficial both for researchers and for groups needing to make data-based decisions. (p. 346)

**Survey Instrument: SPRES**

The 52-question electronic survey SPRES instrument (Appendix A) was developed and tested for reliability. The survey was forwarded to the head school PR personnel through an email request to all 692 New York State superintendents and the state’s 37 BOCES superintendents in the spring of 2012 (Appendix C).
The SPRES was divided into six sections, as follows:

1. School PR Personnel Background Information: Gender, age, college degrees earned, teaching certification, content area, experience, and NSPRA/NYSPRA membership and awards received.


4. School PR Personnel’s Responsibilities in the School District: Job responsibilities and importance ranking, technology usage, avenues of communications, and changes in school PR as a result of Internet use.

5. School PR Personnel’s Relationships in the School District: Relationships to superintendent and cabinet, PTA/community groups, mentor/collaborator information, and frequency of school board interaction.

6. School PR Personnel’s Outcomes: Job satisfaction, feelings of efficacy, reasons cited for feelings of ineffectiveness, future job intentions, and reasons for leaving school PR, if applicable.
Sample

The sample for Chapter IV includes all New York State public school districts that met the study criteria: reporting budget vote outcomes to the State for the 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012 budget elections. Chapter IV also included the SPRES respondents’ answers to related questions, as well as the public information gathered from the state’s website and the superintendents/superintendents’ designees.

Chapter V of the study includes the responses of the volunteer school PR personnel to the online SPRES instrument.

Summary

Chapter III included the research questions and hypotheses to be tested in the study, the research design and data sources used for the two sections of the study, defined the variables, and explained the methodology and analyses applied to the collected data. The chapter outlined how descriptive, comparative, correlative and predictive data would be analyzed in SPSS using findings from the researcher’s SPRES instrument.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSES: PUBLIC INFORMATION AND SPRES FINDINGS

“Did you ever try explaining a $40 million school budget to a person with a $27 checkbook balance?”


Overview

The results of this study are presented in two sections: Chapters IV and V. In Chapter IV, public information from the New York State Department of Education and findings from the researcher’s email list of superintendents and superintendents’ designees were analyzed with related data gathered from the SPRES.

Chapter IV also presents answers to six research questions and results of four hypotheses, including whether school PR employment practices were affected by two intervening variables: district size and wealth. Chapter V presents answers to nine research questions and results of five hypotheses using the SPRES respondents’ findings to inform multiple analyses in SPSS to gain insight into the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of PR professionals who work for New York State’s public school systems.

Prior to this study, little research had been conducted on school PR personnel in the state. Even though school district PR employment is public information, there was no centralized and comprehensive database of their employment. Assembling a database was critical, therefore, to understanding patterns in employment practices and the variables that affect those practices. Excluded from both chapters of this study were the Big 5 city school districts, whose funding comes from city budgets and not from annual public budget votes. The researcher received approval for the study by the Institutional Review Board at Fordham University (Appendix E).
Data Sources for Chapter IV

Chapter IV presented data from three sources, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Data Sources for Chapter IV

Public Information from the New York State Department of Education

The researcher used the following public information from the New York State Department of Education (NYSED) for analyses in Chapter IV:


3. New York State School District Need/Capacity Categories (2009–2010) from the Office of Information and Reporting Services (derived from Estimated Poverty Percentage...
[percentage of students receiving free-and-reduced-price-lunch programs] and Combined Wealth Ratio [district wealth per pupil]), a composite ranking of all state school district wealth in 2011.

**Superintendents’ and Superintendents’ Designees’ Database**

The superintendents’ and superintendents’ designee database was assembled by county in an Excel spreadsheet (Appendix B) and included all 692 school districts and the State’s 37 BOCES. Public information from New York State Department of Education (NYSED) for the three years studied was added to the database and included six categories for each district:

1. “Yes,” “No,” or “Part of Study Time” for school PR employment
2. District budget size
3. District per-pupil spending
4. District enrollment
5. District need/resource capacity
6. Budget outcomes for the three years studied.

**SPRES Respondents**

SPRES respondents included a large sampling of school PR personnel who represented urban (9.4%), suburban (66%) and rural (24.5%) school districts with varying budget sizes, enrollment numbers, and student needs.

The first important finding showed that school PR personnel worked for approximately half of the state’s total number of public school districts, excluding the Big 5 city school districts, during the study’s timeframe, the budget election years 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012. This employment distribution was previously unknown.
School PR survey respondents represented 46% of all of the 692 New York State school districts in this study and 92% of the state’s school districts that employed school PR during the timeframe. To maintain the confidentiality of the SPRES respondents and their school districts, no names were included; the list presented only the employment practices of school districts/BOCES during the study timeframe.

Survey Deployment

The SPRES instrument was created as an online survey using Survey Monkey. An IRB-approved introductory letter explaining the goals of the study was emailed in four attempts, by county, as follows:

1. On February 27, 2012, using the researcher’s Optonline account to all New York State school superintendents.
2. On February 29, 2012, by the President of the New York School Public Relations Association (NYSPRA) to the organization’s member database.
3. On March 9, 2012, using the researcher’s email account to all New York State school superintendents.
4. On March 22, 2012, to all 37 New York State BOCES superintendents (to capture BOCES PR employees who worked for NYS public school districts but whose school district superintendents did not forward the SPRES instrument to them).

Additionally, the researcher distributed survey log-in information at the March 26, 2012, annual NYSPRA conference in Albany, NY. Follow-up phone calls were made to representatives of all districts who did not respond to the email queries.

School PR recipients of the SPRES instrument were introduced to the survey with a letter of consent (Appendix F) that explained the purpose of the study. Respondents were informed
that their responses and links to their district would be kept anonymous. By clicking on “Start Survey” at the bottom of the online letter, the respondents voluntarily agreed to take part in the study.

The SPRES survey was launched for respondent input on February 27, 2012, and closed on June 9, 2012. It was administered to PR personnel, whether they worked in a school district, for a school district through BOCES, or for a private vendor. Only school PR personnel who worked for their school district through BOCES or a private vendor for all three years of the study timeframe were asked to self-select to complete the SPRES instrument.

The total number of visits to the survey was 241, with 89 completed surveys and 18 partially completed surveys, for a total of 107 respondents. Because one of the goals of this study was to determine the percentage of school districts that employed or did not employ school PR personnel, all surveys, both completed and partially completed, were included in these findings unless otherwise noted.

**Number of New York State School Districts That Employ School PR Personnel**

The first research question of this chapter concerned the percentage of school districts that employed PR personnel during the 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012 school years’ budget votes. This section presents the number of school districts that employed school PR personnel, the percentage that were members of the professional organizations that support school PR practice, the categories of school districts that employed PR personnel (wealth and size), and whether budget outcomes were related to employment.

The superintendents’/superintendents’ designee’s database (Appendix B) showed that the total number of school districts during the study timeframe was 692. The total number of
BOCES contacted was 37, the total number of these agencies in the state. The total number of potential respondents, therefore, was 729.

To calculate the employment percentage, and because some school PR employees represented multiple school districts, it was important to establish who their primary employers were (i.e., school districts, BOCES, or private vendors). The findings indicated that, of the 106 respondents who answered this question, 47% (50) worked directly for their school district, 48% (51) worked for BOCES, and 4.7% (5) worked for private vendors.

These results show that the primary employer of school PR respondents was almost equally divided between in-district and BOCES, with private vendor employees’ representing the smallest percentage. Because BOCES and private vendors are known to assign multiple public school districts to their school PR employees, the study disaggregated the number of school districts represented by the BOCES and private vendor employees.

As shown in Table 1, 29 SPRES respondents worked for multiple school districts through BOCES or a private vendor. These respondents represented 251 school districts. Twenty-three others worked for only one school district through BOCES or a private vendor. Two others worked exclusively for BOCES or a private vendor, not a school district, and were not included in this tabulation. Therefore, this finding shows that 274 school districts were represented by the SPRES respondents who worked for multiple school districts through their employment by a BOCES or private school PR vendor.
Table 1

School Districts/BOCES Represented by BOCES/Private Vendor Respondents
(N = 54)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOCES/Private Vendor Employee Type</th>
<th>PR Personnel (n)</th>
<th>School Districts/BOCES Represented by Employee (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worked for multiple school districts</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked for only one school district</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked for only BOCES/private vendor PR</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 52 respondents who indicated that they worked in-district, 7 indicated that they held other positions in their school districts: three were superintendents, three were secretaries, and one was the District Clerk. Therefore, subtracting these 7, a total of 45 survey respondents worked exclusively as in-district school PR employees.

Table 2 shows the results of the first research question of Chapter IV, which concerns the total number of school districts the SPRES respondents represented. The results indicate that 319 or 46.1% of the state’s total number of school districts (692) are represented in these findings. This sample size shows that a very large percentage of the 692 New York State school districts that employ school PR personnel (319 of a potential 346 or 92% of NYS school districts that employed school PR personnel) are represented in the findings.
Table 2

*Total School Districts/BOCES Represented in SPRES (N = 319)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPRES Respondents</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% of All Districts (n = 692)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Districts represented by BOCES/private vendor PR employees</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-district PR employees</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total school districts represented by SPRES respondents</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Superintendents’ and Superintendents’ Designees’ Responses**

Appendix B data included all 692 public school districts and the 37 BOCES that could have employed school PR personnel in the study timeframe as reported by superintendents or superintendent designees. As shown in the compilation of the researcher’s superintendents’ and superintendents’ designees’ database (Appendix B), by adding together the responses to the three columns indicating school districts’ reporting of school PR employment practices (yes = 39.8%; no = 39.8%, employed for part of the study time = 03.2%), an 82.8%, return rate was obtained. This high percentage of response shows a good indication that the data reflects an accurate picture of statewide school PR employment practices.

A comparison of the SPRES results and the superintendents’ responses shows that 319 school districts were represented in the survey, while superintendents and superintendents’ designees indicated that 276 school districts employed school PR personnel during the study timeframe. The difference between these two employment numbers is attributed to the 17% of school districts that did not respond to the researcher regarding school PR employment. The two data sources described in this section (public information from the superintendents/superintendents’ designees database and the SPRES findings) show that approximately half the state’s school districts employed school PR during the study timeframe.
Patterns in School PR Personnel Employment Practices

After the superintendents and superintendents’ designees’ email list was compiled into a spreadsheet, three countywide school PR employment tendencies arose:

1. If the local BOCES did not maintain a school PR/community services or public information department, districts in that county were less likely to employ school PR employees.

2. Countywide, proximal districts were more likely to follow the example set by one district’s school PR personnel employment practices. These school districts tended to behave more similarly than differently. Further, Appendix B shows that, because property values are tied to the voting public’s real and/or perceived success of the school district, school PR employment practices were more consistent across counties than not. Of the “yes”/”no” responses gathered from superintendents and superintendents’ designees, only Fulton, Orange, and Sullivan counties were equally divided between employment and non-employment of school PR personnel.

3. Almost all districts tended to follow what they had in place regarding school PR employment practices during the years studied. Of the 23 districts who changed school PR employment practices, 13 school districts indicated that they hired school PR employees (new positions), one dropped their private vendor in 2009 only to rehire them one year later, and nine eliminated the position.

Further, the district that rehired the PR firm indicated that they did so because they found that “we could not do it ourselves.” In addition, three districts reported that they increased the hours of their part-time school PR employee. One longtime superintendent’s clerical assistant explained, “Districts tend to keep good people.” This may indicate that the quality, efficacy, and
strength of relationships built by school PR personnel play a role in their retention. Many superintendents who did not employ school PR personnel volunteered that they were their district’s “de facto” PR spokesperson, but felt they would benefit greatly from the assistance of a school PR specialist. The need for increased communication to taxpayers that explained the new state mandates was a recurring theme with this group.

Past practice, i.e., whether or not a school district employed school PR in the first year studied, proved to be an accurate indicator of subsequent years’ employment practices for BOCES school PR services offered to school districts. New York State has 57 counties that contain school districts that annually vote for school budgets, but only 37 BOCES agencies. BOCES agencies frequently offer services to school districts across an entire county; however, multiple BOCES serve school districts in more than one county. Alternately, Erie, Monroe, and Suffolk counties maintain two BOCES each.

Further, of the 37 BOCES, 26 (70.3%) maintained PR departments during the timeframe. Seven BOCES (18.9%) did not have a PR department that offered school PR services, and one BOCES (2.7%) dropped its PR department during the study time. Three BOCES (8.1%) did not respond after multiple attempts were made to contact them.

These findings show that, of the 92% of BOCES superintendents and superintendents’ designees who responded to the researcher, over 70% of BOCES maintained school PR departments during the study timeframe. These departments had various titles but offered district support services in school-community relations. With such a high percentage of BOCES’ maintaining PR departments, school districts were clearly utilizing these services.

Contracts between BOCES and school districts for PR services are issued on an annual basis and cover essential services such as crisis management and developing periodic content for
press releases, newsletters, and websites, as well as basic services such as graphic design for newsletters, annual calendars, and websites using content developed by the district. Private vendors offer similar support services with annual contracts specific to the districts’ needs.

**School PR Personnel Employment and District Size and Wealth**

**Descriptive Analysis of Public Information**

Next, the study presents the types of school districts that employed school PR professionals. This section shows the independent variables of district size and wealth, along with evidence from public information that supports one of the hypotheses of this chapter: School districts are more likely to employ school PR personnel if they are large and/or wealthy.

Accessible through its website, New York State’s Need/Resource Capacity Category Index is categorized by district size and wealth. According to the New York State Department of Education Information and Reporting Services (2012),

The need/resource capacity index, a measure of a district’s ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources, is a ratio of the estimated poverty percentage (expressed in standard score form) to the Combined Wealth Ratio (expressed in standard score form).

(p. 1)

The calculation takes into account the number of students per square mile, enrollment, and need. It is important to note that a school district in the “High” need/resource category indicates poor financial resources, and the “Low” need/resource category indicates a “wealthy” district.

The index includes an estimated poverty percentage (approximate percentage of students in the district who receive free-and-reduced-price meal programs) with a school district’s combined wealth ratio (ratio of district wealth per pupil to state average wealth per pupil; the
combined wealth ratio is based on the school district’s property owners’ tax returns). Because
the index is a measure of budget size, enrollment, and percentage of students enrolled in free-
and-reduced-price meal programs, it represents a good size and wealth measure to identify where
the school PR personnel were employed.

Table 3 shows the categories of school districts that employed school PR personnel. It
does not include the 23 districts that employed school PR personnel for only part of the study
time.

Table 3

*School Districts’ Need/Resource Capacity as an Intervening Variable for School PR
Employment (N = 540)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need/Resource Capacity Category</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>PR n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High need/resource capacity urban/suburban</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23 (8.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High need/resource capacity rural</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>31 (11.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average need/resource capacity</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>146 (53.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low need/resource capacity</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>72 (26.47)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table presents four important findings regarding the categories of school districts
that employed school PR personnel:

1. Twice as many high need/resource urban/suburban (financially poor) districts employed
   PR personnel as did not (23 did; 13 did not). These districts tend to be large, with at least
   100 students per square mile, or enrollments greater than 2,500, and more than 50
   students per square mile. This finding indicates that the poorer urban and suburban
districts had a greater demand for school PR services.
2. High need/resource rural districts (financially poor) were three times less likely to employ school PR personnel (31 did; 94 did not). These are the typically rural districts that have fewer than 50 students per square mile or fewer than 100 students per square mile and an enrollment of fewer than 2,500.

3. In the average need/resource districts, the distribution of employment was approximately even (146 did employ PR personnel; 132 did not).

4. Low need/resource districts (wealthy) were more than twice as likely to employ school PR personnel (72 did; 29 did not). This category includes many of the state’s wealthiest school districts in Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester counties.

**Comparative Analysis of Public Information**

The researcher examined, as a second source of information to test the wealth and size/school PR employment hypothesis, the findings from the superintendents’ and superintendents’ designees’ database and three categories of public information available from the State Education Department:

1. District budget size
2. District per-pupil spending
3. District enrollment

Only the 535 school districts that reported “yes” or “no” to school PR employment on the superintendents’ and superintendents’ designees’ database were utilized in this section.

**District budget size.** To analyze a district’s likelihood of employing school PR by budget size, districts were sorted by six budget levels and cross-tabulated for school PR employment. Table 4 presents the results from the superintendents’ database (51.21% did employ) and shows the frequencies of any type of school PR employment (part-time/full-time;
BOCES/private vendor/in-district), with the category of school districts’ total budget size as a measure of wealth.

Table 4

*Cross-Tabulation of District Budget Size and School PR Employment (N = 535)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Budget Size in Millions</th>
<th>Below $30 n (%)</th>
<th>$31-50 n (%)</th>
<th>$51-70 n (%)</th>
<th>$71-90 n (%)</th>
<th>$91-110 n (%)</th>
<th>Above $110 n (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>82 (31.41)</td>
<td>44 (45.83)</td>
<td>43 (78.18)</td>
<td>37 (80.43)</td>
<td>25 (89.28)</td>
<td>43 (87.75)</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings indicate that, by a margin of more than 2:1 (179 did not employ; 82 did), districts whose budgets were in the lowest budget size category of “Below $30 Million” tended not to employ school PR employees. Conversely, 43 districts whose budgets were in the highest budget size category of “Above $110 Million” tended to employ school PR (43 did; 6 did not).

Further, only 31.41% of school districts in the lowest budget category employed PR, while 89.28% and 87.75% of school districts in the highest budget categories (“$91-$110 Million” and “Above $110 Million,” respectively) employed school PR. In a Pearson chi-square of district budget size and school PR employment, a $df$ of 5, and value of 116.210 (cells have expected count less than 5; the minimum expected count is 13.66), $p = .000$ (2-sided), indicating the relationship is statistically significant.

To understand the strength of the relationship between district budget size and school PR employment, the researcher calculated the effect size, or phi, for the chi square “by taking the square root of the calculated value of chi square divided by the overall sample size. The effect size varies between 0 (no relationship) and 1 (perfect relationship). Therefore, the closer to 1 the
stronger the relationship” (Muijs, 2008, p. 126). On a value scale from <0.1 = weak to ≥0.8 = very strong, a moderate effect value of <0.466 (phi) in the relationship between district budget size and school PR employment was noted in this analysis.

**Per-pupil spending.** Next, the researcher examined whether per-pupil spending, another category used to determine school district wealth, was a factor in school PR employment. Using this measure is problematic, as school districts with similar enrollment numbers may have widely varied per-pupil spending costs, depending on factors such as transportation costs and special education expenses. Nonetheless, to fully explore this measure of school district wealth, the researcher conducted several analyses using 534 valid cases from the superintendents’ database.

In a cross-tabulation of school districts’ per-pupil spending using six spending levels and school PR employment, the frequencies indicated a closer distribution of employment than the cross-tabulation analysis of district budget size and school PR employment. Table 5 indicates that the PR employment percentage by per-pupil spending ranges between 41.22% for the second lowest per-pupil spending level to 59.72% for the mid-range per-pupil spending of $23,000–25,999. The lowest per-pupil spending level did not have the lowest relative employment level, while the highest per-pupil spending level (above $30,000) did not have the highest percentage of employment.
Table 5

Cross-Tabulation of District-Per-Pupil Spending and School PR Employment (N = 534)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per-Pupil Spending</th>
<th>$13,000-17,999</th>
<th>$18,000-19,999</th>
<th>$20,000-22,999</th>
<th>$23,000-25,999</th>
<th>$26,000-29,999</th>
<th>Above $30,000</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(56.20)</td>
<td>(41.22)</td>
<td>(46.90)</td>
<td>(59.72)</td>
<td>(55.31)</td>
<td>(51.42)</td>
<td>(51.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>534</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To test whether a relationship existed between the two, the researcher conducted a Pearson chi-square in SPSS. With a df of 5 and a value of 9.358 (0 cells have expected count less than 5; the minimum expected count is 17.11), $p = .097$ (2-sided): No relationship was found to be significant between per-pupil spending and school PR employment. The phi calculation confirmed the weak phi (effect size) between school PR employment and districts’ per-pupil spending. At .132, only a weak relationship was shown between the variables.

**District enrollment.** For the next test of the wealth and size/school PR employment hypothesis, the researcher examined the relationship between school district enrollment and school PR employment. In 535 valid cases, where 51.21% of school districts employed school PR, a steady increase in the percentage of employment was shown, i.e., the higher the enrollment, the higher the percentage of employment for that enrollment group.

Table 6 shows that only 43 (25.44%) of the smallest school districts (enrollments below 1,000 students) employed school PR personnel, while 8 of the 9 school districts with enrollments over 10,000 employed school PR. Table 6 indicates a relationship that supports the wealth and size hypothesis.
Table 6

*Cross-Tabulation of District Enrollment and School PR Employment (N = 535)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Below 1,000</th>
<th>1,000-1,999</th>
<th>2,000-4,999</th>
<th>5,000-9,999</th>
<th>10,000 and above</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>43 (25.44)</td>
<td>67 (45.57)</td>
<td>110 (70.51)</td>
<td>46 (85.18)</td>
<td>8 (88.88)</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To test whether this enrollment/school PR employment relationship was significant, the researcher conducted a chi-square analysis in SPSS. In 535 valid cases, the \( p = .000 \) (2-sided) in a Pearson chi square analysis (\( df = 4; \) value = 100.0982; cells [20.0\%] have expected count less than 5; the minimum expected count is 4.39), the relationship was shown to be statistically significant. With a <0.433 value, a modest to moderate relationship was shown in a nominal by nominal phi test of the strength of the relationship between school PR employment and district enrollment in our sample of 535 New York State school districts.

**School PR Personnel and Implications for Budget Vote Outcomes**

**Descriptive Analysis**

The research question posited in this section refers to the connection between school PR employment and budget vote outcomes. The hypothesis is that employment of school PR was linked to positive budget outcomes for the years studied. In this section, the data is examined and compared from three sources:

1. Public information from the State Education Department.

The analysis of this information indicated that, with an average passage rate of 94.28\%, the overwhelming majority of school districts passed their budgets during the study timeframe.
A three-year average of only 5.72% of school districts failed their budgets. Table 7 shows the total initial budget passage results for all reporting school districts for the studied years, as reported by the New York State Department of Education (2010).

Table 7

2009-2012 New York State Passed Budgets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>School Districts</th>
<th>Passed</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009–2010 (May 21, 2009)</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>97.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–2011 (May 18, 2010)</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>92.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–2012 (May 17, 2011)</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>93.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>94.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. SPRES findings for budget outcome.

The above information was examined to learn whether our SPRES respondents and our SPRES respondents who were members of NSPRA and NYSPRA had a higher average passage rate for the three years. Accordingly, Table 8 shows the SPRES respondents’ school district budget passage rates as compared to school district results published on the state’s website. The table indicates that SPRES respondents had an average passage rate 1.05% higher than the state average, while respondents who were members of both NSPRA and NYSPRA had a 3.85% higher average passage rate. With regard to BOCES/private vendor individuals who worked for multiple school districts, respondents were asked to answer the budget question about only one school district: the district with the highest enrollment they represented during the study’s timeframe.
Table 8

*SPRES Respondents’ Average Budgets Passed Compared to All Districts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Passed All NYS Districts</th>
<th>% Passed SPRES Respondents</th>
<th>% Difference from NYS Average</th>
<th>% Passed by NSPRA/NYSPRA Members</th>
<th>% Difference from NYS Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>97.33</td>
<td>96.00</td>
<td>-1.33</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>92.17</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>97.2</td>
<td>5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–2012</td>
<td>93.36</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>97.2</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean %</td>
<td>94.28</td>
<td>95.33</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As previously mentioned, the average failure rate was 5.72% of all 692 school districts who reported results to the state during the budget cycles examined. Hence, the increased passage rates for the two groups points to some advantage for (a) SPRES respondents and (b) respondents who were members of both NSPRA and NYSPRA.

To establish respondents’ perception of why their budgets were voted down, the researcher directed respondents to choose a ranked reason from five choices: “Too high a tax increase,” “Challenge by a community group,” “Poor voter turnout,” “Poor community understanding of budget goals,” and “Other.”

“Too high a tax increase” ranked first with 57% of respondents. This finding is important because the consequences of selling a budget higher than the community’s threshold for acceptance—the number one predictor of budget failure, according to state’s analysis of budget vote risk factors (2005)—may present too great a challenge for any school PR employee to overcome.
3. Public information from superintendents and superintendents’ designees.

The researcher examined the above information to understand whether the SPRES respondents’ failure rate paralleled the public information on the superintendents’ and superintendent’s designee list. Consequently, Table 9 shows the dependent variable of budget failure and school PR employment. With 51 failures each, both groups experienced the same total number of budget failures for school districts for the three years; therefore, the impact of school PR employment did not support any significant relationship between employment and budget outcomes. However, the only district that failed its budget all three years on the initial vote did not employ school PR. Only school districts that reported their initial vote results to the state for the three studied years were included. Seventeen districts did not report their results (692 - 17 = 675).

Table 9

*Superintendents’ and Superintendents’ Designees’ Reporting of School PR Employment and Initial Budget Vote Failures (N = 675)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Employ</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed for Part of the Study Time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This result does not align with the findings from the SPRES respondents and SPRES respondents who were NSPRA and NYSPRA members, which showed a small budget passage advantage of 1.95% and 3.85%, respectively. However, because nine districts hired or eliminated school PR positions during the three-year timeframe and four did not respond after
multiple attempts were made to contact them, we do not have the complete picture. For example, it is not known why some districts eliminated the position during the years studied (perhaps a cost-saving measure) and why other districts created a new school PR position (perhaps to fill a PR need because of budget failure). As conditions of the survey guaranteed anonymity for both respondents and his/her school district(s), there was no method available to the researcher to directly connect the SPRES respondents to their corresponding data on the superintendents’ database.

**Comparative Analysis**

The researcher used the districts whose employment practices were known during the study timeframe from the superintendents’ and superintendents’ designees’ database (535 valid cases) to show the frequencies of budget passage rate and PR employment. The data in Table 10 show that 274 (51%) did employ during the study timeframe and that 261 school districts (49%) did not employ school PR. This nearly even split for school PR employment aligns closely with the SPRES findings for the same data. This cross-tabulation was run to confirm both the percentage of school districts that employed school PR during the study timeframe and any differences between the two groups, and there is a fairly consistent pass rate across all three years for both groups, confirming the findings in Table 9.
Table 10

*Cross-Tabulation of School PR Employment and Districts’ Budget Vote Outcomes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Budget Outcomes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>270 (51.82)</td>
<td>248 (50.81)</td>
<td>253 (51.00)</td>
<td>274 (51.21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>535</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlative Analysis**

Using the same 535 valid responses from the superintendents’ and superintendents’
designees’ database, and utilizing the correlation coefficient in the Pearson model, the researcher
conducted a correlative analysis between the known independent variable (school PR
employment) and the known dependent variable (budget passage) for the three initial votes. In a
2-tailed test, $p = .996$ (correlation is significant at the .01 level) with a coefficient of -.043, no
statistical significance was found in the relationship between the independent and dependent
variables. Statistically, no relationship, positive or negative, was shown between the budget
passage rates and PR employment.

As previously mentioned, the findings from the SPRES instrument showed a small
budget advantage for respondents and respondents who were members of NSPRA and NYSPRA.
In addition, the only district to fail their budget all three years did not employ school PR
personnel. Therefore, an appropriate research area for a future correlative study between PR
employment and budget outcomes might be to examine budget failures, especially consecutive
ones, and school PR employment over a longer span of budget cycles than the three years
examined in this study.
Percentage Belonging to School PR Professional Organizations

Descriptive Analysis

Administrators at the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), the national professional organization of public school PR personnel, and the New York School Public Relations Association (NYSPRA), the state chapter, expressed interest in learning what percentage of the researcher’s SPRES respondents were current (2012) members of these organizations. These data are shown in Table 11 and inform another research question posed in Chapter IV.

Table 11

Respondents Who Were NSPRA or NYSPRA Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Total Membership (June 2012)</th>
<th>Responses (n)</th>
<th>Organizational Membership (%)</th>
<th>SPRES Respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSPRA in U.S.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYSPRA in N.Y.</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>49.60</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With a membership of 1,501 (self-reported: Tommy Jones, NSPRA Business Manager, June 11, 2012), 3% of NSPRA’s 2012 membership was represented in the findings. Of the 107 SPRES respondents, 73 (68.2%) were NYSPRA members. With a membership of 147 (M. E. Bryne, NYSPRA Secretary, Personal communication, June 11, 2012), 68.2% percent of NYSPRA’s 2012 membership was represented in the SPRES findings.

These data show that 24.4% more school PR personnel belong to the state organization than to the national organization. Since membership in each requires annual dues, if a choice
were made due to financial considerations (some districts do not reimburse for membership fees), a preference for belonging to the “local” state organization may account for the difference.

The need to use personal finances to pay for membership dues may also explain why membership percentages among the SPRES respondents were not higher: 56.2% of respondents did not belong to NSPRA and 32.8% did not belong to NYSPRA. Because a budget advantage was demonstrated for respondents who were members of both NSPRA and NYSPRA, further research is recommended at the state and national level in this area.

**Summary: Findings and Hypotheses**

The researcher utilized public information for Hypothesis 1 (“Most school districts in New York State did not employ school PR personnel during the 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012 budget cycles”); however, the hypothesis was not proved by the data. Appendix B, the summary of the superintendents’ and superintendents’ designees’ database, indicated that a nearly equal number (51.21 did; 48.79 did not) of school districts employed school PR personnel as did not employ during the study timeframe.

Hypothesis 2 (“School districts are more likely to employ school PR personnel if the school districts are large and/or wealthy”) was proved in two ways:

1. The researcher used descriptive public information for the intervening variables of district wealth and size using the State Education Department’s school district need/resource capacity categories and employment information from the superintendents/superintendents’ designees. Table 3 shows that the poorest districts (high need/resource capacity) employed fewer PR personnel as compared with the wealthiest districts (low need/resource capacity), who employed more school PR personnel.
2. In a second test of the relationship and the strength of any existing relationship between
district wealth and size and its strength, the researcher conducted multiple SPSS analyses
using the superintendents’ and superintendents’ designees’ database for three categories:
district budget size, district per-pupil spending, and district enrollment. Using the
Pearson model for the correlation coefficient, the researcher determined that the chi-
square and phi analysis confirmed a moderate relationship between district budget size
and PR employment, no relationship between per-pupil spending and school PR
employment, and a moderate to modest relationship to enrollment and school PR
employment.

Hypothesis 3 (“School districts that employed school PR personnel during the 2009–
2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012 school years were more likely to pass their budgets on the
initial vote in the corresponding years”) was weakly supported by the SPRES results (1.05%
increase in budget passage rates for SPRES respondents). However, it was not supported by a
Pearson correlation of data from the superintendents’ and superintendents’ designees’ list of
known budget vote outcomes and known school PR employment during the study timeframe.

Further, the SPRES respondents who were members of both NYSPRA and NSPRA
showed a 3.85% advantage for budget passage. Belonging to this subgroup of respondents had a
positive, but unqualified, impact on the budget passage rate.

Hypothesis 4 (“School PR personnel are more likely to belong to professional
organizations that support their practice”) was partially supported by the data. Table 11 indicates
that less than half (43.8%) of the respondents belonged to the national organization (NSPRA)
while more than half (68.2%) of the respondents belonged to the state organization (NYSPRA).
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND ANALYSES: SPRES FINDINGS

“Measurement is the first step that leads to control and eventually to improvement. If you can’t measure something, you can’t understand it. If you can’t understand it, you can’t control it. If you can’t control it, you can’t improve it.”

Dr. H. James Harrington (as cited in Good Reads, 2013)

Overview

Chapter IV of this study presented the “where” of our school PR subjects, i.e., how many and what type of school district employed them, and what percentage belonged to professional organizations that support the practice of school PR. In Chapter V, the researcher establishes the “who” by analyzing descriptive data, much of which was previously unknown, about the independent variables of gender, age, educational backgrounds, the respondents’ roles, responsibilities and relationships (intervening variables), and the dependent variables of job satisfaction, feelings of efficacy, and intentions for continued employment in the field (longevity). Findings for this chapter were based on the findings of the SPRES instrument and include both partial and completed surveys unless otherwise noted.

Profile of SPRES Respondents

Descriptive Analysis

Table 12 presents a profile of the 107 SPRES respondents who addressed the first research question for this chapter: What characteristics describe New York State school PR respondents (e.g., gender, age, backgrounds, compensation)? The independent variables of gender, age, and background are presented.
Regarding gender and age, Table 12 shows that 80 (75.5%) of the respondents were female and that 66 (62.2%) were ages 40-59, with the highest number of respondents (35;
32.7%) in the 50-59 age group. These two findings show that respondents were predominantly women with a level of maturity, indicating the possibility that:

1. Superintendents, supervisors, and boards of education prefer this employee type, or
2. The pool of potential PR candidates was made up of this employee type.

In addition, Table 12 reveals a diverse background of school PR personnel. The smallest percentage (24.3%) of employees indicated backgrounds in education, while 60.7% had experience in communications. Those with PR backgrounds represented 43.0%. A percentage greater than 100% was possible, as respondents were asked to indicate all background experience that applied from a list of “Education,” “Public Relations,” “Communications,” and “Other.”

Of those who responded “Other” backgrounds, 10 reported a background in journalism, 7 had worked in marketing, and others ranged from “Professional Artist” to “Government–Former School Board Member.” Clearly, many different types of experience qualified candidates for these positions.

Backgrounds were disaggregated among the 107 respondents. Of these respondents, only 17 (15.9%) possessed a teaching certificate, and 3 (2.8%) possessed certification as school district administrators. This finding was surprising, as much of the work of school PR personnel involves a depth of understanding regarding what goes on at the instructional level.

Next, degrees earned by our respondents were examined. Of the 107 respondents, 3 (2.8%) had earned Doctorates, while the majority held Bachelor’s degrees (66; 62.6%). In addition, 26 respondents (24.3%) held Masters degrees, and, in the “Other” degrees category, 1 held a law degree, and 1 held 3 Masters degrees. Again, the data indicated a diverse path to school PR.
School PR Job Parameters

As a diverse path to school PR was demonstrated, respondents’ titles were disaggregated, along with full-time or part-time employment status, the size of their school PR department (including clericals), if they were part of a union/bargaining unit, their salary range, and the number of years they served in their current position.

Table 13 presents the respondents’ titles as open-ended responses. Various descriptors appeared along with the following titles, such as “Community Relations Specialist,” “Director of Communications” or “Public Information Officer.” The wide variety of titles again shows the diverse paths to school PR and the categories under which districts place these employees. As districts attach different titles with current commensurate pay tiers, the “Specialist,” “Coordinator,” and “Director” titles may be an indication of an existing compensation scale and/or a reflection of the scope of job responsibilities. Findings indicated that 80% of the 105 respondents were full-time employees and 19.8% were part-time. Of the part-time employees, five had additional roles in the district, including “Audio-visual and Webmaster,” “Teacher,” “District Clerk,” “School-to-Work Liaison,” and “Career Development/Shadow Program Coordinator.” In addition, 56 respondents (52.8%) indicated that they were not members of a bargaining unit, including the administrators/supervisory, teachers, and CSEA (Civil Service).
Table 13

*School PR Personnel Employment Descriptive Profile by Title (N = 105)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent’s Secretary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Clerk</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An unexpected finding is shown in Table 14: the size of the respondents’ PR departments. Of the 105 respondents, 72 (67.9%) of school PR personnel are the sole PR employees in their school district and work without clerical support; this may signal the tenuous nature of the position. In the difficult economy during the study’s timeframe, respondents may have elected to be employed without support rather than be unemployed.
Table 14

*School PR Department Size (N = 105)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department Size</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a members’ salary survey by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA, 2011a, p. 1), the organization reported that, nationally, 38.2% of NSPRA members comprised a "one-person shop." With 67.9% of school PR personnel in New York State’s working in one-person departments, this study’s SPRES respondents were almost twice as likely to be their school district’s sole practitioner than were their national counterparts.

As multiple studies have linked strong school-community relations with increases in student achievement (Constantino, 2002; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2005; Epstein, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Moore, 2009; National School Public Relations Association, 2006; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2007), the reliance on one-person PR departments suggests the possibility of compromised efficacy in keeping the school-community relations and student achievement link strong.

**Retention and Salary Range**

Findings indicate that the highest reported percentage of employment duration for school PR respondents was the group that had been retained by their districts for 10 or more years. These leaders’ salary ranges typically are a reflection of their seniority in the organization, i.e.,
show a salary level comparable to the step increases of teachers and administrators for degrees earned and years of experience.

However, NSPRA’s (2011a) review of public school salaries by the Educational Research Service (ERS) shows that:

After the highest ranking increase of an average of 4% in salaries paid to PR/public information professionals for the 2009–2010 school year, the results for 2010–2011 took a nose dive of an average decrease of -2.2% according to a survey from Educational Research Service (ERS). The survey is based on data from public schools across the United States. (NSPRA, 2011a, p.1)

Table 15 shows the salary ranges of full-time SPRES respondents. These findings were indicative of the scrutiny of school PR expenditures in New York State during the study timeframe. According to NSPRA’s (2011a) reference of ERS’s salary survey for PR personnel for 2010–2011, the mean of average salary nationwide for PR employees was $84,629. The table shows that 60.2% of the full-time school PR respondents earned $69,999 or less—well below the national salary level for school PR in a state with one of the highest costs of living.

Table 15

*Full-Time SPRES Respondents’ Salary Range (N = 83)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary Range</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $50,000</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000–69,999</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000–89,999</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90,000–99,999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* As cited by NSPRA (2011a), the mean school PR salaries nationwide was $84,629.
Table 16 presents the comparison of salaries between men and women respondents who were employed full-time. As shown, there is a disparity by gender for full-time school PR employees who work for New York State’s public school districts. Male respondents earned far more as school PR leaders than did women. For males, the fewest number of respondents earned less than $50,000 compared to the female respondents, where the highest percentage (36.1%) fell into this category. For men, 31.8% earned over $100,000, whereas only 3.3% of women earned this amount—a nearly ten-fold difference.

Table 16

*Respondents’ Full-Time Salary by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary Range</th>
<th>Men (n = 22)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Women (n = 61)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $50,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000–69,999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000–89,999</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90,000–99,999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also of note, when filtering SPRES findings for part-time employment, the researcher discovered that, while only 3 male respondents worked part-time, 17 women were employed part-time. This indicates that, for any number of reasons, more women than men were willing to accept part-time employment.

**Profile Summary**

This section of descriptive data about our school PR personnel respondents revealed:

1. The majority (75.5%) were mature women.
2. The majority (62.6%) held Bachelor’s degrees.
3. The minority (15.9%) held a teaching certification.

4. A diverse path to school PR was evidenced.

5. The majority (67.9%) were the sole PR person in their departments.

6. The respondents were paid less than their national counterparts.

7. Full-time male respondents earned far more than did their female counterparts.

This section answered the first research question for this chapter (“What characteristics describe New York State school PR respondents (e.g., gender, age, backgrounds, compensation)?”) by providing a wealth of descriptive information about our SPRES respondents.

**Respondents’ Role in the School District**

The next section of the survey regarded respondents’ roles in their school districts, and the findings were noteworthy. As shown in Table 17, 73.8% of respondents reported that their immediate supervisor was the superintendent of schools. Of the 107 respondents, 11 indicated an assistant superintendent as their immediate supervisor, and 3 who listed “Other” indicated that they worked directly for the board of education. These findings are evidence of the high level of involvement, collaboration, and trust that exist between the PR respondents and school district leadership.

Table 17

**Immediate Supervisors of School PR Personnel (N = 107)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immediate Supervisor</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director or Coordinator</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further evidence of collaboration was seen in the responses regarding the release of information to the public: Of the 106 respondents, 9.4% always needed approval from their superintendent or supervisor before releasing information, 70.8% needed approval some of the time, 13.2% needed approval most of the time, and 6.6% never needed approval. That the majority of respondents only needed approval some of the time confirms the high level of trust that existed between superintendents and the respondents.

This trust level was also noted in the responses that identified the person who served as the district’s chief spokesperson: Of the 105 respondents, 13.3% were the principal spokesperson, 25.7% took the role of advisor to the chief spokesperson, and 52.4% responded it was either of the above, depending on the situation. At a time in educational history when even one misspoken word or phrase can spread virally through the media and on the Internet, this autonomy is another indicator of the trust placed in the respondents.

Further evidence of PR employees’ involvement at the highest level of district operations and district-community communications was indicated by the number of respondents who were required to attend board of education meetings. Of the 100 responses to this question, 55% answered that they are required to attend all board meetings, 34 were required to attend “often” or “sometimes,” and only 4 respondents were never required to attend these public meetings with the community.

Next, respondents were asked how strongly they agreed/disagreed that their role had a favorable impact on the annual budget vote. Figure 6 shows that 87.0% of 100 respondents believed that his/her role in the district had a favorable impact on the annual budget vote, with 8% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 5% disagreeing/strongly disagreeing that his/her role made a favorable impact on the vote. The third research question for this chapter was addressed
as follows: Respondents’ believed that their roles in the district favorably affected the annual budget vote.

Figure 6

*Respondents’ Beliefs that Their Role has a Favorable Impact on the Annual Budget Vote (N = 100)*

Finally, to ascertain what respondents’ felt their greatest challenge would be in the future, the researcher analyzed 92 open-ended responses. According to the survey’s frequency filter, the top five words appearing in these responses were: “tax” (40x), “cap” (35x), “levy” (21x), “budget” (20x), and “community” (20x). These responses indicated that PR employees were deeply involved in the budget preparation process.

**Role Summary**

This section presents the roles and characteristics of the school PR personnel respondents who worked in New York State, including:

1. The majority (73.8%) worked directly for the superintendent.
2. A high level of trust and collaboration with district leadership was evident.
3. The autonomy level for information release was high.
4. The majority (87.0%) felt their role in the school district had a positive impact on budget outcomes.

5. Budget issues were anticipated to be the greatest challenge for these employees in the years to come.

This section supported the first hypothesis for this chapter: School PR personnel were involved in district leadership, management, and communications at the highest level.

**Respondents’ Responsibilities**

This section presents the increased scope of PR responsibilities of our respondents. Respondents answered that his/her responsibilities included writing and producing press releases, district newsletters/e-newsletters, district website contributions, district budget/bond information, district calendar, and district/school community events. Additional responsibilities included crisis management, lobbying, audio-visual set-up, television production, internal security, speechwriting, alumni relations, adult education, “Freedom of Information Law” (FOIL) requests, “Talking Points” for the board of education, strategic planning, and staff development.

Of the 96 respondents who ranked job responsibilities, 37 (40.7%) ranked website/website contributions as most important. District newsletters/e-newsletters ranked closely as the next most important responsibility (26.4%), and district budget/bond information ranked next in order of importance.

Of the 99 respondents who answered the question regarding technology, 77.8% indicated they used technology between 76% and 100% of the time during a typical work week. In a typical work week, 89.6% of 97 respondents ranked email and Internet-facilitated communication as the avenue of communication they used most frequently. Phone communication was second, face-to-face was third, and paper communication was ranked last.
Respondents were asked whether they agreed/disagreed that the Internet has increased the amount of time needed for district- and school-community communications. Of the 99 respondents, 82% strongly agreed (46.5%) or agreed (34.3%) with the statement, with only 7% disagreeing (4 respondents) or strongly disagreeing (3; rating average = 4.17). Finally, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that New York State’s tax cap could jeopardize his/her future employment in the district on a Likert scale of 1-5. A mean score of 3.35 indicates only a slightly elevated level of concern and uncertainty about whether school spending for PR purposes may compromise future employment of the 97 respondents who answered this question.

**Responsibilities Summary**

This section presents the features of the respondents’ responsibilities, including:

1. Additional job responsibilities were expected of the respondents beyond those listed by NSPRA.
2. The majority (77.8%) used technology 76%–100% of the time in a typical work week.
3. The majority (89.6%) indicated that email and Internet-facilitated communications were the avenues of communications they utilized the most in a typical work week.
4. The majority (80.8%) agreed that Internet use has increased the need for district- and school-community communications.
5. The majority (6.05%) indicated that they used social media for communications.
6. A slightly elevated level of concern was shown by the 97 respondents who were asked whether the state’s tax levy limit legislation would jeopardize their future employment.

This section presented the proof for the second hypothesis for this chapter: The Internet has increased the amount of time needed for district- and school-community communications.
Respondents’ Relationships

The next section of the survey dealt with the respondents’ relationships in their districts and further confirmed the high degree of involvement at the top tier of district leadership. Of the 99 respondents, 18.2% indicated that they met with their superintendents/supervisors more than once per day, 33.3% at least once per day, and 24.2% of respondents met 3–4 times per week, for a total percentage of 75.7%. This finding presents compelling evidence for more research in this area.

Further, as 73.8% of respondents indicated that they worked directly for the superintendent, and 75.7% of all respondents indicated that they met with their superintendent and/or cabinet members at least 3–4 times per week, it is clear that there is a high degree of interaction between district leadership and PR personnel. Additionally, with a rating average of 4.36 (Likert 1–5), 88.9% of 99 respondents believed they had a close working relationship with their superintendent or immediate supervisor. Only 4 of the 98 respondents disagreed with having a close relationship. In general, the findings indicated an ongoing partnership of consequence in school governance.

Responses to working with the PTA and other community groups indicated that 57.2% of the 98 respondents felt that they had a close professional working relationship (rating average = 3.59). Often, school PR personnel will act as an intermediary between community groups and superintendents/boards of education. This buffer allows community members to air concerns and the school PR employees to work toward issue resolution.

When asked who respondents confided in when seeking advice, 68 of the 96 respondents (70.83%) listed the superintendent, and 18 (18.75%) named a cabinet member. This finding
further reaffirms the close working relationship that exists between district leadership and school PR personnel.

This study’s findings align with the situational leadership theory. The style revealed in the findings supports Northouse’s (2007) “S3” or “high supportive-low directive style” category where the leader’s role involves “listening, praising, asking for input, and giving feedback . . . and facilitate[s] problem solving” (pp. 93–94). Because this study’s findings indicated that women filled most of the PR positions, Northouse’s suggestion that “female employees expressed a stronger desire for supportive leadership” (p. 99) aligns this gender well with the “high supportive-low directive” style.

The relationship between the school PR personnel and board of education members was weaker, with 41.2% of 97 respondents indicating they “hardly ever” interact, and 44.3% responding they interact once or twice a week. As boards consist of elected community members, and school PR are district employees, a close relationship between the two may constitute a conflict of interest or be perceived as collusion on issue resolution.

**Relationships Summary**

This section presents the characteristics of the respondents’ relationships in their school districts, including:

1. The majority (75.7%) of respondents met with their superintendent and/or cabinet members three to four times per week.
2. Of 99 respondents, 88.9% believed that he/she had a close working relationship with his/her superintendent or supervisor.
3. The majority (70.83%) listed the superintendent as the person from whom they most frequently seek advice when facing difficult decisions.
4. The majority (57.2%) felt that they had a close working relationship with the PTA.

5. The majority (85.5%) interacted with the board of education one or two times per week or less (“hardly ever”).

These data provide further proof for the highest level of involvement hypothesis.

Outcomes for SPRES Respondents

Descriptive Analysis

Multiple hypotheses for this chapter related to the outcome variables of respondents’ feelings of satisfaction and efficacy based on their roles, relationships, and responsibilities (intervening variables). With a rating average of 4.14 (Likert 1–5), 85.9% of 99 respondents indicated positive feelings of satisfaction, and, with a rating average of 4.31, 93.4% felt somewhat (50.5%) or very effective (43.4%) in their jobs. Both measures indicated strong feelings of workplace worth.

When asked what compromised their efficacy at work, 34 of 44 respondents indicated that there was not enough time to do the job. Further, 20 did not have enough resources, 19 indicated there was not enough collaboration/support, and 9 replied with open-ended responses, mainly listing deficits of time and support.

In terms of longevity, of the 96 respondents, 66.7% indicated they intended to remain in their positions, 26% didn’t know, and 7.3% intended to leave. Those who intended to leave the profession were directed to state the reason(s) why. Open-ended responses indicated that 5 were retirements; 13 indicated that they wanted to seek employment outside of education, and 4 indicated they wanted to stay in the profession but move to a different school district. In addition, financial reasons were cited by 8 of the 13 outgoing respondents. Of these, retirement was reiterated, and a lack of time/job security was noted. One simply responded, “I’m tired.”
Overall, the open-ended responses for those who were leaving their position indicated an inequity between the demands of the job and appropriate remuneration, respect, and prospects for job improvements.

**Comparative Analysis**

The previously discussed descriptive findings were the basis for comparative analyses of the key outcome (dependent) variables of satisfaction and efficacy for our respondents. The following tables present comparative findings from various groupings by (a) gender, (b) salary, (c) age, (d) employment status (full-time; part-time), (e) budget outcome, and (f) teaching background, and address the third hypothesis for this chapter.

Table 18 presents the results of the *t*-test analysis by gender for the outcome variables of satisfaction and efficacy. The table shows a statistically significant gender difference for satisfaction. At $p = .035$ (2-tailed), the difference in job satisfaction between male and female respondents was proved significant. As this study has demonstrated (Table 16), men received greater compensation than did women for comparable school PR work and were nearly 10 times more likely to place in the highest income category. Although near the limit of .05, the difference ($p = .053$) between male and female respondents’ feelings of efficacy is not statistically significant.
Table 18

**SPRES Respondents: Job Satisfaction and Efficacy by Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.500</td>
<td>0.513</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.141</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>1.007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.600</td>
<td>0.503</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.963</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4.216</td>
<td>0.832</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Scores range from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

To reveal whether salary differences between those who earn less than $50,000 (the majority of which were females) and those who earn more than $50,000, a *t*-test was run for the dependent variables of satisfaction and efficacy. Because the majority of women respondents earned less than $50,000 (Table 16), the finding in Table 19 that there was no statistical difference between the two salary groups was unexpected. In addition, respondents’ feelings of satisfaction and efficacy were found not to be statistically significant for the independent variable of salary level. Respondents’ indication that the position provides a great deal of flexibility and autonomy may be two reasons why satisfaction and efficacy were not shown to be related to gender differences in salary.
Table 19

*SPRES Respondents: Job Satisfaction and Efficacy by Salary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary Range:</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $50,000</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4.170</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>.714</td>
<td>.477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 or more</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.026</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $50,000</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4.359</td>
<td>0.762</td>
<td>.760</td>
<td>.449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 or more</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.231</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20 presents the *t*-test findings for feelings of satisfaction and efficacy between two age groups: 40 years old and over, and less than 40 years old. No significant difference (2-tailed) was noted by age group for the outcome variables of satisfaction and efficacy; both age groups felt equally satisfied and effective in their positions. This finding may show that age does not always equate with experience, as experience could be anticipated to play a role in the dependent variables of satisfaction and efficacy.

Table 20

*SPRES Respondents: Job Satisfaction and Efficacy by Age*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 or older</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4.147</td>
<td>0.919</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>.502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>1.020</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 or older</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4.353</td>
<td>0.768</td>
<td>1.098</td>
<td>.275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.154</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, Table 21 presents the dependent variables of two groups: SPRES respondents who were employed full-time and those who worked part-time. Employment status was not proved to be statistically significant in this analysis for the dependent variables of satisfaction and efficacy,
although the elevated mean for part-time employees indicated that they are slightly more satisfied.

Table 21

*SPRES Respondents: Job Satisfaction and Efficacy by Employment Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4.026</td>
<td>1.006</td>
<td>-1.706</td>
<td>.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.444</td>
<td>0.511</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4.276</td>
<td>0.826</td>
<td>-0.543</td>
<td>.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.389</td>
<td>0.608</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because the positions in which the respondents were working had likely been designated as part-time or full-time at the time of their job application, the data may indicate that respondents had self-selected their preferred employment status. These data may indicate that respondents’ satisfaction and efficacy levels were independent of the positions’ being part-time or full-time.

The researcher analyzed the outcome variables of satisfaction and efficacy between those who were certified in teaching and those who were not certified; the results are presented in Table 22. There is no statistical significance (2-tailed) between the teaching and non-teaching groups; however, the data show that the group with a background in teaching felt slightly more satisfied and effective than their non-certificated counterparts. The difference indicated by the mean scores may be attributable to certificated personnel’s feeling more knowledgeable about the complexities of public school education.
Finally, the researcher examined the dependent variables of satisfaction and efficacy between those respondents who passed their budgets for all three years and those who did not. The results of a 2-tailed test for significance are shown in Table 23; the data indicate no statistical significance for the dependent variables. However, a comparison of the mean scores of the two groups indicates that those respondents whose budget passed (row 3.00) for all three years felt slightly more satisfied and effective than those whose budget failed in at least one year (row 1.00). This difference may be explained by respondents’ concern that budget failure may be linked to job performance.
Table 23

**SPRES Respondents: Job Satisfaction and Efficacy by Budget Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Outcome</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.091</td>
<td>1.136</td>
<td>-.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>4.114</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.182</td>
<td>0.874</td>
<td>-.0474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>4.304</td>
<td>0.790</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* 1.00 = Budget not passed at least one year; 3.00 = Budget passed all three years.

**Correlative Analysis**

The Pearson model correlation coefficient was determined in an analysis of the dependent variables of feelings of satisfaction, efficacy, and longevity for school PR personnel for five Likert items:

1. Belief that his/her role favorably impacted the budget vote outcomes
2. Belief that the tax cap will jeopardize his/her future employment
3. Belief that he/she had a close professional relationship with the superintendent or immediate supervisor
4. Belief that he/she had a close professional working relationship with the PTA and/or other community groups
5. The amount of time spent collaborating with his/her superintendent and/or cabinet members in an average work week.

In Table 24, the five intervening variables noted above for relationships to the dependent, outcome variables of satisfaction, efficacy, and longevity are shown. For the first intervening variable, there is a weak, positive relationship between respondents’ beliefs that his/her role had
a positive impact on budget outcomes and feelings of satisfaction and efficacy. However, at $p = .003$, significant for this variable was the correlation between the respondent’s beliefs that his/her role had a positive impact on the budget vote and longevity, i.e., his/her intent to stay in the profession for the next three years. This supports the second part of the final hypothesis for this study: The respondent was more likely to stay in his/her position if he/she felt his/her role in the school district had a positive impact on the budget outcome.

Table 24

Correlation Between Intervening Variables and Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervening Variables</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Efficacy</th>
<th>Longevity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief role had a favorable impact on budget outcome</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that tax cap will affect future employment</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>-.156</td>
<td>-.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief respondent had a close professional working relationship</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>.423**</td>
<td>.256*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with superintendent/immediate supervisor</td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief respondent had a close professional working relationship</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with PTA and/or other community groups</td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>.187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of times respondents collaborated with superintendent</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>.385**</td>
<td>.232*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and/or cabinet in an average workweek</td>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

The budget vote results during the study’s timeframe align with the SPRES finding (Question 11) in that the three-year budget passage average for SPRES respondents was 95.33%.
(1.05% above the average 94.28% passage rate for all school districts). However, there were too few budget failures to complete a regression analysis to predict whether respondents’ belief, or lack thereof, of a favorable impact on budget outcome was predictive of that outcome. This would be an important area to research further with a larger sample over a greater number of budget vote years at the state or national level. For example, if a regression analysis of a larger sample showed that school PR employees’ beliefs affected budget outcomes, then school superintendents would be well-advised to support PR employees’ beliefs that their roles favorably influenced the vote outcomes.

Next, as shown in Table 24, the researcher examined respondents’ beliefs about the state’s imposition of the tax levy limit legislation and their future employment. The results show no positive relationship between respondents’ beliefs that the tax cap will affect their future employment and the dependent variables of satisfaction, efficacy, and employees’ intent to stay in their position. The weak, negative relationship indicates that respondents’ feelings of job satisfaction, efficacy, and longevity were based on factors not related to the state’s implementation of the tax cap.

The next row in Table 24 concerns correlations between respondents’ belief that he/she had a close professional working relationship with his/her superintendent or immediate supervisor and two of the three outcome (dependent) variables. Feelings of satisfaction and efficacy were shown to be statistically significant at the $p = .000$ and $p = .013$ levels, respectively. There also is a correlation between respondents’ feelings of job satisfaction and feelings of efficacy, and their working relationship with the superintendent or immediate supervisor. This analysis supports the hypothesis that a close working relationship between the
respondent and his/her district leader was essential for job satisfaction and efficacy. However, longevity was not proved significant in this correlation.

No correlation between respondents’ relationship to the PTA and/or other community groups and the three outcome variables was noted in the next row in Table 24. This finding is not surprising. In the execution of their jobs, school PR personnel do not interact extensively with the PTA and other community groups. These groups are made up of taxpayers who are aligned with their own specific agendas. The role of the PR professional is to support the school district and liaison with community groups. Substantial interaction may, in fact, represent a conflict of interest for the school PR employee.

The final row of this table relates again to the topic of time spent between the respondents and the district leaders, and the respondents’ feelings of satisfaction, efficacy and longevity. As previously noted, the majority of respondents met with his/her superintendent/supervisor at least three to four times per week. Similar to the intervening variables of professional relationship with the superintendent/supervisor, Table 24 shows a strong correlation between all of the outcome variables and the time spent collaborating with district leadership in an average work week.

With statistical significance at $p = .000$ for satisfaction; .025 for efficacy; and .038 for longevity, this finding supports the fourth hypothesis for Chapter V: School PR personnel who spent more time collaborating with district leadership were more likely to feel satisfied, effective, and remain in their positions. In practice, the correlation between collaborative interactions and outcome variables, especially for longevity, is important to note for district leaders who wish to apply this finding to maximize the probability of retaining their school PR employees.
Regression Analysis

Several regression analyses were completed in this study to establish variance predictors for the outcome variables. The first, as shown in Table 25, was to determine the amount of variance in respondents’ relationships with district leadership as a predictor of job satisfaction. In addition to a correlation with the level of professional relationship and respondents’ satisfaction and efficacy, correlations were proved between the amount of time spent in collaboration with district leadership and all three outcome or “effect” (Muijs, 2008, p. 160) variables.

Table 25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with superintendent/supervisor</td>
<td>0.342</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>0.317</td>
<td>2.986</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent collaborating with superintendent/cabinet in an average work week</td>
<td>0.197</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>0.242</td>
<td>2.282</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R = .479, R^2 = .229, Adj \ R^2 = .211, df = 89, SE = .851, F Ratio = 12.925, p = .00$

In Table 25, the analysis presents the combined effect of the respondents’ relationship with district leadership and shows that 21% of the variance in job satisfaction is attributable to this combination ($Adj^2 = .211$ at the .000 level). This data informs that time spent with district leadership is predictive of a positive impact on respondents’ feelings of satisfaction. This is important for district leadership to know, as a sense of satisfaction can strengthen an employee’s willingness to successfully comply with the rigors of the position, such as working long hours and weekends to realize efficacy as a member of the district leadership team.
Next, the amount of variance in respondents’ relationships with district leadership as a predictor of job efficacy was tested. Table 26 shows that the combined effect of the respondents’ relationships with district leadership explains .06% of the variance in job efficacy ($Adj R^2 = .062$ at the .021 level). These data show that feelings of job efficacy were less dependent on respondents’ relationships with district leadership, although time spent with district leadership had a higher level of significance at $p = .203$.

Table 26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with superintendent/supervisor</td>
<td>0.170</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>0.189</td>
<td>1.665</td>
<td>.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent collaborating with superintendent/cabinet in an average work week</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>1.282</td>
<td>.203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R = .287, R^2 = .082, Adj R^2 = .062, df = 92, SE = .766, F Ratio = 4.035, p = .021$

These findings are not surprising, given the amount of independence required of the job. As 67.9% of our respondents represented one-person departments, it would be common practice for these respondents to make unilateral decisions, determine how to be effective in their jobs as they support district initiatives and outcomes, create and make editorial decisions about strategic talking points and content/story “leads,” and select the best methods to broadcast important information to the community and its various constituencies. Many of these responsibilities are typically accomplished with the awareness of district leadership but executed independent of this group.

A future study might measure self-efficacy levels by collecting longitudinal data on two factors: incidences of community discontent and misinformation reflected in information
incurrent, such as negative letters to the editor, increased number of phone calls/emails, attendance at school-related public meetings, and district student achievement results.

In the final analysis of this study, the researcher examined the variance in the outcome variable of longevity (intent to stay in the position for the subsequent three years) for two findings:

1. Time spent with district leadership in an average work week
2. Respondents’ feelings that their role in the district has a favorable impact on the outcome of the school district’s annual budget vote.

Table 27 shows that the combined effect of these two survey findings is predictive of .08% of the longevity outcome ($Adj \, R^2 = .087$ at the .008 level). Both findings proved significant, with the respondents’ belief their role had a favorable impact on the budget’s being a slightly stronger longevity predictor. It is not surprising that school PR employees would experience positive reinforcement and willingness to stay in their positions if they felt they had a strong professional relationship with district leadership. Equally, the PR employee’s belief that they had a favorable impact on the budget outcome, a district’s means to fund the entire educational program, and a school district’s strongest indicator of community approval would be essential to continued intent to remain in the position. These data support the final hypothesis of this study: The stronger the respondent’s relationship to district leadership and the belief they had a favorable impact on the budget, the more likely they were to remain in their position.
Table 27

*Relationships with Superintendent/Supervisor and Beliefs of Favorable Budget Impact as Predicting Longevity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with supervisor</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.237</td>
<td>2.299</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents’ beliefs</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.223</td>
<td>2.159</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(R = .328, R^2 = .108, Adj R^2 = .087, df = 86, SE = .569, F Ratio = 5.078, p = .008\)

Even with the low financial compensation and the pressures of being a one-person department, most respondents (66.7%) indicated they intended to stay in their positions. Clearly, the majority of respondents had sufficient reasons to continue in the profession.

**Summary: Findings and Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1 was supported by three descriptive analyses: the majority (75.7%) of respondents met with his/her superintendent/supervisor at least three to four times per week; nearly 88.9% agreed that they have a strong working relationship with their superintendent/supervisor; and the majority listed the superintendent as the person from whom they most frequently seek advice when making a difficult decision. Hypothesis 2 was supported by the 80.8% of respondents who agreed that the Internet has increased the amount of time needed for district/school-community communications.

Hypothesis 3 presented the relationship of the independent variables of (a) gender, (b) salary (c) age, (d) employment status (full-time; part-time), (e) budget outcome, and (f) teaching background to respondents’ feelings of satisfaction and efficacy. The hypothesis was not supported for any of the independent variables except for gender. Gender differences were
significant in that male respondents were proved to be more satisfied in their positions than were female respondents. Testing these variables with a larger sample, e.g., at the national level, is recommended, due to the significant gender differences in salary levels noted in New York State.

Hypothesis 4 was strongly supported for the outcome variables of satisfaction, efficacy, and longevity. Time spent collaborating with district leadership was significant for all three variables. Regression analyses showed that time spent and the respondents’ relationship with the superintendent/supervisor was predictive of job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 5 regarded respondents’ longevity based on two factors: the relationship with district leadership and the belief that they had a favorable impact on the budget vote. Both dependent variables were proved significant in a regression analysis, thus proving the hypothesis.
CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

“I believe that if you show people the problems and you show them the solutions they will be moved to act.”

Bill Gates (as cited by Brainy Quote, 2013, para. 20)

Introduction

Every aspect of public school operations and employment practices in New York State is highly scrutinized, with the possible exception of school PR employees. Meaningful knowledge about these professionals was gained at the district and/or county level, and been confined to information disseminated by the NYSPRA, local or regional PR organizations, local BOCES agencies, list-serves, and collegial circles. This study, however, has provided a substantial amount of new knowledge about school PR personnel who work in New York State. As such, it provided a motive for further research in this area at both the state and national level.

Nevertheless, some reluctance was encountered by the researcher in school district leaders or their designees when assembling the database of school PR employment practices. This included one reverse-dial to the researcher’s phone to establish why a cell was being used. In general, it was not uncommon to meet some resistance in the reporting of school PR employment practices.

Working as a coordinator of public information for a Nassau County, Long Island, New York, public school district, the researcher has built a case for why, in the paradigm shift characterized by four recent change factors—increased demand for information facilitated and cultured by technology-enhanced communications, the demand for transparency in school
operations, accountability linked to student assessments, and the economic pressures of the Great Recession—school PR specialists are needed more than ever before by public school districts.

This study was conducted in two parts to fully explore and understand the topic of school PR personnel. Chapter IV presented information from three sources: the responses from over 700 public school district and BOCES superintendents (excluding the state’s Big 5 city school districts whose constituencies do not vote in annual school budget elections), public information from the State Education Department, and SPRES instrument responses on related to Chapter IV research questions and hypotheses. Analysis of these data to answer six research questions and test the chapter’s four hypotheses revealed new information through descriptive, comparative, and correlative analyses and presented a possible cause for budget failure in local districts’ annual referenda.

Chapter V presented a self-reported baseline of data for school PR personnel who work in New York State. This section served as a basis for multiple descriptive, comparative, correlative and regression analyses; through these, the researcher answered nine research questions and tested five hypotheses. These data were essential to understanding this little-known group of professionals, the characteristics they share, and how the group compares to their counterparts in public school districts across the U.S.

**Major Findings**

This study presented information about school PR personnel employed in New York State for the 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012 budget cycles. Where findings were numerous, finding summaries were included at the end of that section. Below are the major findings presented in Chapters IV and V.
Chapter IV

School PR personnel employment. Containing data from three sources, this chapter showed that approximately 50% of all public school districts in New York State employ PR personnel either part-time or full-time. Of the 692 school districts in the study, 276 school superintendents/superintendents’ designees confirmed school PR employment during the study timeframe, and 276 confirmed they did not employ school PR personnel. After several attempts were made to contact them, 17% of districts did not respond regarding their employment practices.

Despite the poor economic climate and budget pressures that school districts faced during the study’s timeframe, 13 districts hired school PR personnel for a new position, while 9 eliminated the school PR position.

Respondents were split nearly equally in who directly employed them: a school district, or BOCES on behalf of one or more school districts. Only 5% of respondents worked for a private school PR vendor. Further, 47% indicated they were members of a bargaining unit, and 66% characterized their district as “suburban.”

Patterns noted by the researcher regarding employment of school PR specialists during the study’s timeframe appeared to be guided by three factors:

1. Past employment practice held true for the majority of school districts.
2. County-wide districts’ employment practices were similar.
3. If local BOCES agencies did not retain a school PR department, then districts were less likely to employ PR personnel.

These findings align with Weber’s theory of ideal bureaucracy in that they reflect “the division of labor, the hierarchy of authority and formalized rules and procedures” (Hatch, 2006,
These three factors typified school districts’ and BOCES’ practices during the study’s timeframe.

**Membership in professional organizations.** Regarding membership in school PR professional organizations, 44% indicated they were members of NSPRA, and 68% were members of NYSPRA. These numbers were lower than expected. Annual dues may be covered by school districts and BOCES for school PR employees, but this information is not known.

Teachers and administrators belong to professional organizations as part of their professional development. However, similar expectations are not part of school PR employees’ professional growth; most are seen to be outside of the certificated teacher/administrator system. This is unfortunate, as these professionals are expected to be effective communicators who have scholarly knowledge of all aspects of school operations, from classroom lessons and learning standards to budget planning, implementation, and execution, and membership in a professional organization would assist them in their own professional development.

Further, because salary scales are based on certification, and, as this study has demonstrated, the majority of school PR personnel have Bachelor’s degrees, they are not considered on the salary scale continuum or held to the professional development rigor expected of teachers and administrators. This would serve as a disincentive toward participation of these professionals in advanced degree programs.

**School PR employment and budget vote outcomes.** After examining initial budget outcomes as self-reported by districts to the State Education Department and school PR employment practices as reported by school superintendents/superintendents’ designees, the researcher conducted a Pearson analysis, which indicated no correlation between the dependent variable of budget outcome and the independent variable of school PR employment. Two
findings are of note, however. First is that respondents who were members of both NSPRA and NYSPRA had an average of nearly a 4% higher budget passage rate than non-members for the three years studied (98.1% for NSPRA and NYSPRA versus 94.2% for non-members).

Second, the only New York State district to fail its budget all three years of the study did not employ school PR personnel. This informs future researchers that using a broader timeframe and budget revote data might yield answers about how budget failure and not employing school PR personnel might be related.

However, limiting the study data to the SPRES respondents’ self-reported budget outcomes (initial vote), more than 95% of the respondents reported budget passage during the study, a 1.05% increase over the state average. The failure number was not significant enough for conclusive support of the employment/ budget outcome hypothesis using the SPRES findings. The 1% advantage of budget passage by districts that employed school PR personnel was noted in Table 8.

**Intervening variables that affect employment.** This study has shown that the intervening variables of district size and wealth affected school PR employment practices. First, using the state’s need/resource capacity index, a measure that takes into account multiple annual factors such as the school district’s property wealth, pupils per square mile, and percentage of students enrolled in free-and-reduced-price meal programs, the researcher determined that twice as many financially poor urban/suburban districts (“high need/resource capacity”) employed school PR personnel as did not, while poor rural school districts were three times less likely to employ them. New York State’s wealthiest school districts (“low need/resource capacity”) were two times more likely to employ these PR specialists.
To further disaggregate the intervening variables, the researcher analyzed wealth by budget size and per-pupil spending. As shown in a cross-tabulation of budget size and school PR employment, districts in the lowest category tended not to employ, while districts in the highest budget category tended to employ school PR personnel. A chi-square confirmed the significance, with a moderate effect size shown in a phi calculation. In two similar analyses, the relationship between per-pupil spending and school PR employment was shown not to be significant.

District enrollment was the second category used to measure the relationship between district size and school PR employment. In 535 valid cases, the relationship proved significant in a chi-square test, with the phi effect size’s showing modest to moderate.

These analyses indicated that large and wealthy public school districts are more likely to employ school PR personnel. As strong school-community ties are associated with increases in student achievement (Constantino, 2002; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2005; Epstein, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Moore, 2009; National School Public Relations Association, 2006; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2007), and school PR personnel provide much of the information excurrent the public needs to form an opinion of school effectiveness and, most importantly, to make informed budget vote decisions, then poorer, smaller, and/or rural districts may, in many ways, be at a disadvantage.

**Chapter V**

For Chapter V, the researcher utilized the results of the online SPRES instrument to establish a baseline of information for school PR personnel by using multiple descriptive, comparative, correlative, and regression analyses. Eighty-nine respondents completed the survey, while another 18 partially completed the survey. Table 5 in Chapter IV shows that 319
school districts were represented by these respondents; the total number of public school districts in the study was 692.

**Descriptive analysis of SPRES respondents.** Major findings in this area indicate that 75.5% of the SPRES respondents were female, with the highest number in the 50-59 age group. Surprisingly, only 16% of the respondents held teaching certificates.

Also surprising was the fact that New York State school PR employees were almost twice as likely to be “one-person shops” with no clerical support, compared to their national counterparts (68% versus 38%). Further disparity was found in salary ranges. While the national average salary for school PR employees was $84,629 in 2011 (NSPRA, 2011a, p.1) and updated in 2012 by NSPRA to a median salary range of $70,000 to $79,999 (NSPRA, 2012, p. 2), over 66% of the SPRES respondents in New York State, a state with one of the highest costs of living, made $69,999 or less.

In equality of pay, the results were disconcerting. While the highest percentage of women respondents (36%) occupied the lowest income category (“Under $50,000”), the highest percentage of men respondents (32%) occupied the highest income category (“$100,000 or more”). In fact, men were ten times more likely than women to occupy the highest salary level.

In contrast, a female teacher in her 10th year of teaching would be at the same base salary as a male teacher in his 10th year of teaching. The researcher’s survey indicated a highly inequitable salary distribution for school PR professionals. The findings show that the majority of women were paid one-half the salary earned by the majority of men. This disparity requires the attention of school officials and raises another concern within the tenets of public education: school PR personnel, unlike teachers and administrators, do not experience gender equality in salary distribution.
Respondents’ role in the school district. This section of Chapter V shows that 74% of respondents indicated their immediate supervisor was the school superintendent. In addition, 52% stated that they were either the chief spokesperson for the district or advisor to the chief spokesperson, indicating an involvement at and with the highest level of district leadership.

Also of note, 87% of respondents believed that their role in the district had a favorable impact on the annual budget vote. As Chapter IV showed that slightly more than 95% did pass their budget in the three years studied, the reality aligned with the belief. Further research may determine whether the reality followed the belief in the negative, i.e., by comparing budget vote failures and beliefs over a longer period of years. Another important finding in this section was the respondents’ focus on district budget issues as their greatest future challenge, especially noting the constraints of the State’s 2% tax levy cap.

Respondents’ responsibilities in the school district. A number of additional responsibilities were noted by the respondents as compared to the list of “essential duties” typically assigned to school PR personnel as noted by NSPRA. These additional duties included being in charge of or contributing to social media, blogs, audio-visual, cable TV, data reporting, adult education, alumni association, grant writing, and lobbying. The significant difference between the lists of responsibilities is that NSPRA’s list contains a greater amount of PR oversight, while the respondents’ job realities included much more “on the ground” work typical of what would fall to the one-person departments that typify school PR work in New York State. In addition, the majority of respondents were involved with district operations/management/communications at the highest levels of governance.

Indicative of communication expectations in today’s culture of immediacy, 81% of respondents agreed that the Internet has increased the amount of time needed for school-
community relations. This confirms that one of the four change factors for school districts, technology-enhanced communications/information retrieval, is an area in which school PR has taken on significant responsibilities.

**Respondents’ relationships in the school district.** In this section, collaboration between school PR personnel and district leadership at the highest level is reaffirmed. Even though 74% of respondents indicated that their immediate supervisor was the superintendent, 77% of respondents met with their superintendent/supervisor 3–4 times per average work week; 33% indicated they collaborated at least once per day; and 18% collaborated with district leadership more than once per day.

Further, nearly 90% of respondents believed that they had a close professional relationship with their superintendent/supervisor. This finding aligns school PR personnel’s relationships with district leadership in the high supportive/low directive style of situational leadership theory, where the respondents collaborate on daily issues that involve school-community relations and communications.

With regard to the respondents’ answers about relationships with other groups that are central to school-community relations, 57% indicated that they had a close working relationship with the PTA and other community groups, while 41% “hardly ever” interacted with board of education members.

**Comparative analyses of dependent variables.** Using t-tests, the researcher analyzed comparisons between the two dependent, outcome variables of respondents’ feelings of satisfaction and efficacy and six groupings of independent variables (gender, salary, age, employment status, budget vote outcome, and teaching background).
In the $t$-test for gender differences, statistical significance ($p = .035$) was found to exist for feelings of satisfaction. With a mean score of 4.500, men were more satisfied than women (4.000). In terms of efficacy, at $p = .053$, the score was very close to the limit for significance ($p = .05$), so a gender difference for feelings of efficacy falls just short of statistical significance, although the mean score for men (4.600) is higher than for women (4.216).

Because the salary differences by gender were shown to be dramatically different, a $t$-test was run for the two outcome variables. Even though women comprised the majority of respondents who earned less than $50,000 annually, no statistical significance in feelings of satisfaction and efficacy was found between this group and those who were paid higher salaries.

No statistical significance was found to exist between the remaining four variables (age, employment status, budget vote outcome, and teaching background) and satisfaction or efficacy. However, with a $p = .061$, the variable of having a teaching certificate was close to statistical significance for satisfaction for this group. This is not surprising, as a PR professional with a teaching background would be more familiar with many aspects in the field of public education and may feel more satisfied and comfortable in his/her work.

In terms of a positive budget outcome and feelings of efficacy, respondents whose budgets passed for all three years during the study had higher feelings of satisfaction (mean score of 4.114 v. 4.091) and efficacy (mean score of 4.304 v. 4.182). In addition, on a Likert scale of 1-5, the majority of respondents believed their role had a favorable impact on the budget (mean score of 4.13), and more believed that their greatest challenge in the coming years was passing the budget under the constraints of the state’s 2% tax levy cap mandate than those who did not (mean score of 3.35).
These scores indicate a high level of involvement with the budget process, yet the $t$-test analysis for feelings of satisfaction and efficacy were not statistically significant between the respondents who passed their budgets all three years and those who experienced one or more budget failures during the study’s timeframe. This finding indicates that other variables were present for the SPRES respondents, and/or the respondents were reluctant to place too much emphasis on feelings of satisfaction and efficacy tied to budget outcomes.

**Correlative analyses of dependent variables.** Using the Pearson model for correlation coefficient, the researcher tested five variables: (a) belief that role had a favorable impact on budget outcome; (b) belief that tax cap will impact future employment; (c) belief respondent had a close professional working relationship with superintendent/immediate supervisor; (d) belief respondent had a close professional working relationship with PTA and/or other community groups; and (d) number of times respondents collaborated with superintendent and/or Cabinet in an average work-week) against three dependent variables: respondents’ feelings of satisfaction, efficacy, and longevity (intent to stay in the position for the subsequent three years). Three areas were shown to have correlations to the outcome variables (Table 24). With a significance of $p = .033$, the variable of respondents’ longevity was correlated with a belief in having a favorable impact on the annual budget vote.

Also shown to be significant was the correlation between feelings of satisfaction and efficacy and the respondent’s working relationship with his/her superintendent/supervisor. The closer the relationship, the more likely the respondent was to feel satisfied and effective. In a 2-tailed test of significance, $p = .000$ for satisfaction, and $p = .013$ for efficacy.

Further evidence of the importance of relationships to the outcome variables was the amount of time the respondents spent collaborating with the superintendent and cabinet
members. Not only was this intervening variable significant for feelings of satisfaction \( (p = .000) \) and efficacy \( (p = .025) \), but it was also significant for longevity \( (p = .380) \).

This study has demonstrated that the majority of school PR personnel in New York State work as one-person departments, under expanded job responsibilities, and for less pay than their national counterparts. Respondents’ feelings of satisfaction, efficacy, and the intent to stay in their position can be challenged by these stressors. However, this analysis has indicated that the respondents’ stress can be reduced by (a) believing that his/her role has a favorable impact on the annual budget vote, (b) having a strong positive relationship with his/her superintendent/supervisor, and/or (c) spending more time collaborating with the superintendent and/or cabinet members in an average work week.

This is an important finding, as these relationship variables can be affected by school leadership. Therefore, leaders who want to increase the likelihood of retaining school PR personnel should cultivate their working relationship with the school PR professional by investing time in collaboration with them.

**Regression analyses of dependent variables.** Because the two intervening variables of the respondent’s professional relationship with the superintendent/supervisor and the time spent collaborating with district leadership were correlated to the three dependent variables of job satisfaction, feelings of efficacy, and intent to stay in the profession, the researcher conducted three regression analyses for these variables to predict outcome variables.

The regression analyses confirmed that the combined effect of the relationship with the superintendent and time spent collaborating with district leadership is predictive of 21% of a positive impact on respondents’ feelings of job satisfaction. For efficacy, the combined effect is predictive of only 6%. Because the majority of our respondents were one-person departments,
this low percentage is understandable, as much of the work of school PR personnel is executed independently.

Surprisingly, when longevity, a dependent variable shown to be correlated with respondents’ belief that their role had a favorable impact on the budget, was combined with the relationship with district leadership (shown to be correlated to satisfaction and efficacy), the combined effect was predictive of only 8% of respondents’ longevity. In addition, at 21%, the strongest predictor of job satisfaction for the SPRES respondents was revealed in the regression analyses for the intervening variable of the district leader/school PR employee relationship.

**Recommendations for Practice**

In framing this study, the researcher has cited four change factors that have significantly influenced communications and school-community relations for school districts in New York State in the past decade: technology-enhanced communications, transparency in school operations, accountability tied to student testing, and the Great Recession. These factors have strained district resources of time and money at a time when the districts are required to share the complex and vast amounts of information that are critical to the public’s understanding and perception of school district worth.

The results of this two-part study have revealed where and how school PR personnel have been positioned to contribute to and support district leadership in a climate that will change the future of public education. It presented data about New York State’s school PR personnel and their roles, responsibilities, and relationships in the school districts they represent. As such, the following recommendations are strongly suggested:

1. Rectify gender-related salary inequalities. This study has shown a marked disparity in full-time salaries between men and women who have school PR responsibilities. The highest
percentage of male respondents occupied the highest salary level ($100,000 and over), and the highest percentage of female respondents occupied the lowest salary level (under $50,000) by a nearly ten-fold difference. This inequality is unacceptable in 21st-century society, especially in the public sector. This inequality should be immediately addressed.

2. Require all New York State public school districts, regardless of size or wealth, to employ a dedicated school PR/information specialist. This study has shown that school PR personnel, whether part- or full-time, present advantages in a variety of areas. These include the interpretation and timely release of critical information such as budget, bond, and educational initiatives to the public; PR advisement to district administrators and boards of education; monitoring and maintenance of positive school-community relations; and training and skills to relieve overburdened district officials. Further, employment of PR personnel could be an advantage against failure in the annual budget elections. However, a longitudinal study that cross-tabulates school PR employment in New York State and budget outcomes over a decade is necessary to more fully test this hypothesis.

In addition, through multiple analyses, the researcher has found that the state’s large and wealthy districts, excluding the Big 5 city school districts, whose budgets are funded through municipal funds, tend to employ these professionals. Because the state’s public school districts’ constituencies vote in annual budget elections to fund school district operations, these districts may not have the funds to hire PR personnel, which presents an inequality for poorer and/or smaller school districts. Accordingly, superintendents and boards of education in these districts must serve as the PR specialists. Further, this study has shown that the only school district to fail its budget for all three years examined did not employ a school PR specialist.
A failed budget represents a great deal of lost revenue for school districts. Further, the losses due to a failed budget are typically not recoverable in future budget cycles. If employing a PR specialist presents any advantage against budget failure, then these districts are clearly at a disadvantage, and, as this study has shown, this is the reality for nearly half the public school districts in New York State.

3. Require college-level training and ongoing staff development in PR for all school administrators. School administrators have little, if any, training in school-community relations. This area is underrepresented at the college level, hindering those who take courses in preparation to lead in the field of public education. Further, although there are school leaders whose natural-born leadership traits place them at an advantage in the public arena, as mentioned earlier in this study, even a few misspoken words can lead to their dismissal.

Indeed, school leaders are held to the highest standards, and, with technology-enhanced communications, any misstep is broadcast to the public through blogs and social media in a matter of seconds. Therefore, training and ongoing staff development in PR is critical to leadership survival, and all colleges that offer educational leadership programs should be required to teach school PR. School employees, from superintendents and boards of education to classroom teachers, should be required to complete staff development in PR on a regular basis.

This study also has provided evidence that superintendents and school district leaders rely heavily on interactions with school PR specialists, with 76% of respondents’ indicating meeting with the superintendent or cabinet members at least three to four times per average work week. Additionally, this study has shown that 33% of these respondents met with district leadership once per day, and 18% met more than once per day, for a total of more than 51% of respondents who interact daily with districts leaders.
Finally, nearly 90% of respondents’ indicated that they enjoyed a close professional working relationship with their superintendent or supervisor (with 74% indicating that they worked directly for the superintendent). This demonstrates the important role of these PR professionals in the districts that benefit from their expertise.

4. Improve working conditions, compensation, and systems of evaluation for New York State’s school PR specialists. This study has shown that New York State school PR employees have more responsibilities, are paid less than their national counterparts, and have no standardized system of evaluation.

With regard to the expanded scope of respondents’ responsibilities, school PR personnel in New York State are asked to do more with considerably less support than their national counterparts. Considering the four change factors cited in this study (technologically-enhanced communications, accountability, transparency, and the Great Recession), the increased responsibilities of school PR personnel have outpaced compensation for the volume and critical importance of the work they do for school districts. A comprehensive and standardized template of job responsibilities and a system of national benchmarks for evaluation would assist both employers and school PR employees in negotiating appropriate compensation and clarify performance expectations.

However, evaluation practices and frequency appear to vary widely. A standardized evaluation template for school PR personnel would be a positive addition to the field, assisting superintendents and supervisors in recognizing and supporting best practices. Opportunely, a task force at NSPRA is currently preparing recommendations for such a template to be introduced in 2013. Annual professional evaluations for school PR personnel that are based on
benchmarks developed by NSPRA would add much to guide best practices and elevate the credibility of the position and its place in the school organization.

5. Incentivize New York State’s school PR personnel to seek graduate-level and advanced degree education. The results of the SPRES instrument showed that PR personnel took a diverse path to school PR employment in New York State public school districts. Respondents included civil service personnel, certificated teachers and administrators, and independent agents who may have Bachelor’s degrees in communication or even accreditation in public relations (APR). Our respondents worked for school districts (46.7%), BOCES (48.6%) agencies, and private vendors (4.7%). As such, compensation upon hiring is dependent on each candidate’s background qualifications.

In a public school system, teachers make up the largest bargaining group. As such, salary scales are published and salary advancements are aligned with years in the school system and credits and degrees earned. Our survey showed that 62.6% of all respondents had Bachelor’s degrees, the lowest level on the teachers’ pay scale. State law mandates that new teachers are probationary, and these employees are subject to a timetable for staff development and achievement of a Master’s degree. Because only 16% of our school PR employees are certificated in teaching, this may explain the low salary levels of our respondents (38.5% made below $50,000).

In a 2012 members’ survey, NSPRA identified education level as having a positive effect on salary level, “with those members who’ve obtained their Masters degrees earning a majority average $30,000–$39,999 more than their Bachelor-degree counterparts” (NSPRA, 2012, p. 2). The study results regarding SPRES respondents who had Master’s degrees and were full-time employees corroborated this finding, as shown below.
For our respondents, 22% earned under $50,000; 33% earned $50,000–$69,999; the largest percentage (39%) earned $70,000–$89,999; and 6% earned over $100,000. For our SPRES respondents who had earned Bachelor’s degrees and were full-time employees, the largest percentage (35%) reported salaries of under $50,000; 33% earned $50,000–$69,999; 19% earned $70,000–$89,999; 6% earned $90,000–$99,999; and 7% earned over $100,000. Therefore, presenting school PR personnel with this information will incentivize them to pursue higher degrees and accreditation.

6. Increase employee membership in school PR support organizations. This study has shown that 56% of respondents did not belong to NSPRA and 32% did not belong to NYSPRA, the national and state organizations, respectively, that support the practice of school PR professionals. These organizations provide online resources for school PR professionals, host annual conferences with informative workshops for school PR employees, provide opportunities for collegial networking, have support staff available to answer questions and concerns, and host annual competitions to highlight best practices across a wide range of categories.

Important to note was the elevated budget passage rate in those districts in which respondents were members of both NSPRA and NYSPRA. These districts had an average budget passage rate of nearly 4% higher than the state average for the three years studied.

Finally, increasing membership in these organizations is another way to raise professional standards in the field of school PR. This is done by providing access to best practices and support materials provided by these organizations and having the opportunity to connect to and collaborate with colleagues practicing in school districts and BOCES organizations.
Recommendations for Research

Through this study, the researcher has established a baseline of knowledge about school PR employees who work for public school districts in New York State during a three-year timeline. As such, future research could further enhance school leaders’ knowledge of best practices in school PR employment. Examples include:

1. Analyze budget and bond vote outcomes with school PR employment over a longer period of years. This study has documented only one case of a New York State school district that did not employ school PR personnel and failed its budget all three years. In addition, superintendents and superintendents’ designees linked school PR employment to budget outcome.

The findings also have shown that respondents who were members of both NSPRA and NYSPRA had a nearly 4% higher rate of budget passage during the studied years, and public information has shown that the annual budget failure rate for the state’s public school district in the three years studies averaged 5.7%. Therefore, this finding deserves further research.

To further understand the relationship between school PR employment and budget vote outcomes, future researchers require more data. This study presented three years’ initial budget vote outcomes and school PR employment in New York State during the bowl of the Great Recession. Analyzing outcomes and employment practices over a ten-year period, including re-vote data in New York State, and/or extending the study to include all U.S. states, would yield greater understanding of any correlations between these variables and their effect size.

2. Analyze additional causes for budget failure. A review of the literature revealed two studies that presented the causes of budget failure in the state: one predictive of failure as the proposed tax increase rose above 4% (analysis done in 2005, prior to the state’s 2011 mandate of
a tax levy limit), and the second, to organized splinter groups of registered voters. Both of these factors are difficult, but not impossible, for school leaders and PR specialists to overcome.

However, other variables might be found to predict budget failure. A method to help identify additional reasons for budget failure in New York State, especially under the tax levy limit legislation, would be to conduct an exit poll of school budget voters who did not support the budget referenda.

3. Explore reasons for districts’ school PR employment practices and the relationship between school PR employees and district leaders. This study presents the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of school PR personnel and implications of their employment on budget vote outcomes. A similar, “reverse” study from the superintendents’ point of view that explored the reasons school districts employ or do not employ school PR personnel would reveal useful knowledge. An approach to accomplish this would be to conduct a survey of New York State public school district and BOCES superintendents.

One major finding of this study was the high level of collaboration between school PR specialists and district leadership. Researching the relationship, from the superintendent’s viewpoint, and running comparisons of similar SPRES findings would reveal any differences in the two groups’ perceptions.

4. Explore the differences in school PR employees among the three employers: school districts, BOCES on behalf of school districts, and private vendors on behalf of school districts. By using these three employers as a variable, a researcher could explore how the school PR employees vary by group; e.g., do qualifications for in-district employees differ from BOCES or private vendor employees? Which group is older? Which group stays in the profession longer? Which is more likely to be employed full-time? Which group has higher earning potential?
Which group works more closely with the superintendent? The findings could assist superintendents in learning which employee type could most benefit the unique culture of their school district.

**Conclusion**

This study provided a baseline for research about school PR employees who work in New York State. These professionals work closely with the state’s educational leaders and, in turn, affect every student, parent, and resident of their respective school districts. Accordingly, they help school districts to focus stakeholders on maintaining a district’s brand and value, and uniting all stakeholders for the highest chance of district survival.

This study has presented the literature and data regarding the importance of these professionals to the functioning of school districts, advisement of district leadership, and the maintenance of strong school-community relations, linked to increases in student achievement. It also has presented the roles, responsibilities, and relationships that characterize school PR professionals, and shown that, despite the low pay and the higher expectancy of autonomy with increased job responsibilities, most respondents felt satisfied and effective in their jobs and intended to remain in their positions for the next three years.

However, this study also revealed that nearly 40% of those who leave the school PR profession indicated that they would seek employment outside the field of education. Immediate steps should be taken to educate, attract, retain, and support qualified individuals who can actively contribute to and support teachers, administrators, students, parents, property owners, and communities.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS EMPLOYMENT SURVEY (SPRES)
School Public Relations Employment Survey
SPRES

This instrument has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). All responses will be kept confidential. No district or employee names will be linked to the survey responses. All surveys will be printed, kept in a locked cabinet, and destroyed after one year.

Respondent instructions:

Whether employed full-time or part-time, the SPRES instrument should be completed by the school district’s lead school public relations administrator. If you receive this survey from multiple sources, please complete and submit only one online survey.

Note: If you are a BOCES/private vendor employee who works for more than one school district, select the school district with the highest enrollment to answer survey questions.

Please indicate answers by checking the line next to the number that best describes your answer. For open-response question, please summarize as briefly as possible.

A. Background Information

1. Gender:

   (1) _____ Male
   (2) _____ Female

2. Your age group:

   (1) _____ 21-29
   (2) _____ 30-39
   (3) _____ 40-49
   (4) _____ 50-59
   (5) _____ 60+

3. In what area is your training? Please check all that apply:

   (1) _____ Education
   (2) _____ Public Relations
   (3) _____ Communications
   (4) _____ Other; please specify________________________________________
4. Do you have, or have you had, a teaching certificate?

(1) _____ Yes
(2) _____ No

5. If you have or have had a teaching certificate(s), in what content area(s) is/was your certification? Please check all that apply:

(1) _____ Elementary Education
(2) _____ English Language Arts
(3) _____ Social Studies
(4) _____ Mathematics
(5) _____ Science
(6) _____ The Arts
(7) _____ Other; please specify_____________________________________

6. Indicate the highest level of education you have completed:

(1) _____ Doctorate
(2) _____ Master’s
(3) _____ Bachelor’s
(4) _____ Associate’s
(5) _____ Other; please specify_____________________________________ 

7. Are you currently a member of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)?

(1) _____ Yes
(2) _____ No

8. Are you currently a member of the New York School Public Relations Association (NYSPRA)?

(1) _____ Yes
(2) _____ No

9. Do you regularly enter NSPRA and/or NYSPRA annual communications awards competitions?

(1) _____ Yes
(2) _____ No
10. If you regularly enter NSPRA/NYSPRA communications awards competitions, please indicate the combined number of awards you have received since January, 2009:

(1) _____ 0
(2) _____ 1-3
(3) _____ 4-6
(4) _____ 7-9
(5) _____ 10 or more

B. School District and Employment Information

11. Check each year that your annual school budget PASSED on the INITIAL budget vote:

_______ May 2009 (the 2009–2010 school year budget)
_______ May 2010 (the 2010–2011 school year budget)
_______ May 2011 (the 2011–2012 school year budget)

12. If your district’s budget failed on the INITIAL vote for the 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and/or 2011–2012 school budget vote, please RANK which of the following that you believe were the causes/issues, i.e., 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.

(1) _____ Too high a tax increase
(2) _____ Challenged by a community group
(3) _____ Poor voter turnout
(4) _____ Poor community understanding of budget goals
(5) _____ Other

13. In addition to the annual budget vote, if your school district presented a bond referendum for public vote in the 2009-2012 timeframe, check the appropriate year(s) (If not, skip to Question 15):

____ 2009–2010
____ 2010–2011
____ 2011–2012

14. If your school district presented a bond during the 2009-2012 timeframe, please indicate the OUTCOME and AMOUNT of the bond: ____________________________
15. Indicate the total amount of your school district’s 2011–2012 budget:

(1) _____ Below $30 million
(2) _____ $31-50 million
(3) _____ $51-70 million
(4) _____ $71-90 million
(5) _____ $91-110 million
(6) _____ Above $110 million

16. What is your school district’s total current student enrollment?

(1) _____ Below 1,000
(2) _____ 1,000-1,999
(3) _____ 2,000-4,999
(4) _____ 5,000-9,999
(5) _____ 10,000+

17. How would you characterize your school district?

(1) _____ Urban
(2) _____ Suburban
(3) _____ Rural

18. Please indicate the percentage of students in your school district who are currently enrolled in free-and-reduced meal programs:

(1) _____ 0-5%
(2) _____ 6-10%
(3) _____ 11-20%
(4) _____ 21-40%
(5) _____ Over 40%

19. Are you directly employed by:

(1) _____ School district
(2) _____ BOCES
(3) _____ Private vendor

20. If you are employed by BOCES or by a private vendor, how many school districts are you responsible for?

____________
21. Please indicate your TITLE as a full- or part-time school district/BOCES/private vendor/school public relations/information employee (for example, District Coordinator of Public Information):

____________________________________

22. Is your position:

(1) _____ Full-time
(2) _____ Part-time

23. If part-time, do you hold another position in your school district?

(1) _____ No
(2) _____ Yes (please specify): ________________________________

24. How many school public relations personnel, including clerical staff, are employed by your school district:

(1) _____ I am the only employee
(2) _____ 2-3 employees
(3) _____ 4-5 employees
(4) _____ 6 or more employees

25. Are you a member of a bargaining unit/union?

(1) _____ No
(2) _____ Yes (please specify): ________________________________

26. Please indicate your current (2011–2012) salary range:

(1) _____ Under $50,000
(2) _____ $50,000-69,999
(3) _____ $70,000-89,999
(4) _____ $90,000-99,999
(5) _____ $100,000 or more

27. How long have you worked in your current position?

(1) _____ 0-3 years
(2) _____ 4-6 years
(3) _____ 7-9 years
(4) _____ 10 years or more
C. Role in the School District

28. In your school district’s governance tree, who is your immediate supervisor?

(1) _____ Superintendent of Schools
(2) _____ Assistant Superintendent
(3) _____ Director or coordinator
(4) _____ Other, please specify: ____________________________________

29. Do you need approval from your immediate supervisor before releasing information to the public?

(1) _____ Never
(2) _____ Some of the time
(3) _____ Most of the time
(4) _____ Always

30. In your school public relations/information role, are you expected to be the:

(1) _____ Principal spokesperson to the public
(2) _____ Advisor to the spokesperson(s) to the public
(3) _____ Both of the above depending on the situation
(4) _____ Other, please specify: ____________________________________

31. How often does your job require you to attend Board of Education Meetings:

(1) _____ Never
(2) _____ Sometimes
(3) _____ Often
(4) _____ Always

32. Would you agree/disagree with the following statement:

As my school district’s school public relations/information leader, it is my belief that my role favorably impacts the outcome of the annual budget vote.

(1) _____ Strongly Disagree
(2) _____ Disagree
(3) _____ Neither Agree/Disagree
(4) _____ Agree
(5) _____ Strongly Agree
33. Please explain what you believe will be your GREATEST CHALLENGE in the coming years in your role as your school district’s public relations/information leader (e.g., communications about the changes/impact of the new two percent tax levy cap):

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

D. Responsibilities in the School District

34. Please indicate the items below that completely or partly describe your job responsibilities. Please check all applicable:

(1) _____ Press Releases
(2) _____ District Newsletters/e-Newsletters
(3) _____ District Calendar
(4) _____ District Budget/Bond Information
(5) _____ Other District Publications
(6) _____ Website/Website Contributions
(7) _____ District/School-Community Events
(8) _____ Other, please specify: ____________________________________________

35. Of your job responsibilities, please RANK the importance of the following:

(1) _____ Press Releases
(2) _____ District Newsletters/e-Newsletters
(3) _____ District Calendar
(4) _____ District Budget/Bond Information
(5) _____ Other District Publications
(6) _____ Website/Website Content Contributions
(7) _____ District/School-Community Events
(8) _____ Other, please specify: ____________________________________________

36. What percentage of your work week do you spend utilizing technology?

(1) _____ 0-25%
(2) _____ 26-50%
(3) _____ 51-75%
(4) _____ 76-100%
37. Indicate the avenues of communication you utilize in the execution of your job responsibilities by checking all that apply and leaving those not applicable blank:

(1) _____ Print News Media
(2) _____ Web News Media
(3) _____ Parent/Staff/Community e-Mail Blasts
(4) _____ District/School Website
(5) _____ Phone/Auto-calling/Emergency Notification System
(6) _____ Social Media
(7) _____ Newsletters/Brochures/Fliers/Posters
(8) _____ Public Presentations
(9) _____ Other, please specify: ____________________________________

38. Please RANK the following methods of communications (most to least) by how much time you spend using them in a typical work week:

(1) _____ Phone Communications
(2) _____ Email and/or Internet-Facilitated Communications
(3) _____ Face-to-Face Communications
(4) _____ Paper Communications

39. Would you agree/disagree with the following statement: The Internet has INCREASED the amount of time needed for district/school-community communications.

(1) _____ Strongly Disagree
(2) _____ Disagree
(3) _____ Neither Agree/Disagree
(4) _____ Agree
(5) _____ Strongly Agree

40. Would you agree/disagree with the following statement: New York State’s new 2% tax levy cap may jeopardize my continued employment as a school public relations/information leader.

(1) _____ Strongly Disagree
(2) _____ Disagree
(3) _____ Neither Agree/Disagree
(4) _____ Agree
(5) _____ Strongly Agree
E. Relationships in the School District

41. How often would you say you formally or informally collaborate with your district’s superintendent and/or Cabinet members in an average work week?

(1) _____ Hardly ever
(2) _____ 1-2 times per week
(3) _____ 3-4 times per week
(4) _____ Every day
(5) _____ More than once per day

42. Would you agree/disagree with the following statement: I have a close working relationship with my Superintendent or immediate supervisor.

(1) _____ Strongly Disagree
(2) _____ Disagree
(3) _____ Neither Agree/Disagree
(4) _____ Agree
(5) _____ Strongly Agree

43. Would you agree/disagree with the following statement: I have a close working relationship with the PTA and/or other community groups.

(1) _____ Strongly Disagree
(2) _____ Disagree
(3) _____ Neither Agree/Disagree
(4) _____ Agree
(5) _____ Strongly Agree

44. Indicate the title of the person in the school district with whom you most frequently consult when facing difficult decisions:

_____________________________________

45. How often do you interact with your district’s Board of Education members?

(1) _____ Hardly ever
(2) _____ 1-2 times per week
(3) _____ 3-4 times per week
(4) _____ Every day
(5) _____ More than once a day
F. School Public Relations/Information Personnel Outcomes

46. How satisfied do you feel in your current position in the school district?

   (1) _____ Very Dissatisfied
   (2) _____ Somewhat Dissatisfied
   (3) _____ Neither Satisfied/Dissatisfied
   (4) _____ Somewhat Satisfied
   (5) _____ Very Satisfied

47. How effective do you feel in your current position in the school district?

   (1) _____ Very Ineffective
   (2) _____ Somewhat Ineffective
   (3) _____ Neither Effective/Ineffective
   (4) _____ Somewhat Effective
   (5) _____ Very Effective

48. If you indicated that you feel somewhat/very ineffective, what factor(s) do you feel compromise(s) your effectiveness? Please indicate all that apply.

   (1) _____ Not enough time to do the job
   (2) _____ Not enough resources to do the job
   (3) _____ Not enough collaboration/support to do the job
   (4) _____ Other, please specify: ____________________________________

49. Are you planning to remain in your current position in the school district for the next three years? If yes, skip to question 52.

   (1) _____ Yes
   (2) _____ No
   (3) _____ Don’t know

50. If you plan to leave your current position in the school district in the next three years, please indicate which of the following applies:

   (1) _____ Obtain employment outside the field of education
   (2) _____ Stay in school public relations/information but move to a different school district
   (3) _____ Stay in school public relations/information but move to a BOCES
   (4) _____ Stay in school public relations/information but move to a private vendor
   (5) _____ Move to a different position in the field of education
   (6) Other, please specify: ____________________________________
51. Indicate your MAIN reason for wanting to LEAVE your current position in the school district:
   (1) _____ Financial
   (2) _____ Job satisfaction
   (3) _____ Better hours/days/benefits/working conditions
   (4) _____ Better opportunities for advancement
   (5) _____ Other, please specify: __________________________________________

52. Please indicate your MAIN reason for wanting to STAY in your current position in the school district:
   (1) _____ Financial
   (2) _____ Job satisfaction
   (3) _____ Other, please specify:____________________________________________

Thank you for completing the SPRES instrument. If you would like to receive a copy of the survey results, please email Catherine Knight: cbknight@optonline.net
APPENDIX B

SUPERINTENDENTS’/SUPERINTENDENTS’ DESIGNEES’

DATABASE SUMMARY (N = 692)
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*Note.* The data do not include counties that encompass the Big 5 city school districts whose residents do not vote on school district budgets. Some BOCES agencies serve school districts in multiple counties. BOCES typically offer services in more than one county. PST = BOCES employed for only part of the study time.
APPENDIX C

EMAIL TO SUPERINTENDENTS FOR FORWARDING

TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS
February 29, 2012

Dear Superintendent:

I am a public information officer employed by a public school district in the State and am currently working towards my doctorate in Educational Leadership at Fordham University. For my dissertation, I need to collect data that will be compiled to highlight the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of school public relations personnel who work in or for New York State Public School districts in the 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012 school years and the implications of their employment for referenda outcomes for those years.

Attached please find a link to the researcher-developed School Public Relations Employment Survey (SPRES) online survey. I would greatly appreciate if you would forward this email and its attachments to your district’s lead school public information/relations/communications officer, whether employed in-district, through BOCES, or by a private vendor. The survey is completely anonymous for both the respondent and the respondent’s school district. All survey data will be compiled on my home computer for analysis. Any printed survey data will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home for a period of one year after the completion of the study, after which all printed survey data will be destroyed.

If you did not employ a school public information/relations/communications officer, whether in-district, through BOCES, or through a private vendor, for all or part of the studied years (2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012), kindly email me a response that indicates this.

The findings of the research will help to deepen our knowledge base on school public relations personnel who work in or for the state’s public school districts, reveal these professionals’ similarities and differences, highlight best practices, and demonstrate public information/relations/communications assets such as enhanced school-community relations and cost-effectiveness vis-à-vis referenda outcomes.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have in regard to this study or if you would like to request a copy of the findings.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Catherine Knight
APPENDIX D

LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM NYSBPA TO MEMBERSHIP
Dear NYSPRA members:

Attached please find a survey by Catherine Knight, Coordinator of Public Information at Garden City Public Schools, and doctoral candidate at Fordham University. She is studying our profession (bless her heart!). Your completion of the attached anonymous survey would greatly aid in highlighting school public relations personnel who are working in New York State public school districts.

The survey has been approved by Catherine’s dissertation committee at Fordham University and the process has been approved by the Institutional Review Board. NYSPRA is also endorsing the study.

The survey is completely anonymous for the respondent and the school district. It takes approximately 10-15 minutes to finish. Please add your voice to the data and help us to learn what similarities and differences, roles, relationships, and responsibilities characterize our profession as well as school budget/referenda implications.

An email request in regard to this survey was previously sent to your superintendent. If you have already received, completed, and returned this survey, or if you receive the survey forwarded to you from your superintendent after completing the attached, please do not complete a second survey.

Catherine has agreed to share the study findings with NYSPRA members. You may request a copy of the findings when the analyses are complete by emailing Catherine: cbknight@optonline.net

Thank you,

Victoria Presser
President, New York School Public Relations Association
APPENDIX E

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

APPROVAL AND REPORT OF ACTION
Your response to the initial Report of Action has satisfactorily addressed the concerns of the Fordham IRB and you are now free to proceed with data collection. Site approval letters should be on official letterhead and signed by an authorized representative.

The IRB approved the protocol for one year as described in your application, by expedited continuing review under category 7 of Federal Regulation 45 CFR 46.101.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note the following:

- Multiple year projects require continuing review. It is the responsibility of the researcher to submit an IRB protocol prior to the end of the approved period, February 2013.
- Copies of the enclosed letterhead must be used in obtaining informed consent. If there is a need to revise or alter the consent form(s), please submit the revised form(s) for IRB review and approval prior to use. If this protocol concerns an online study, you do not need to include the Fordham letterhead. However, you should make sure you upload the IRB stamp so that participants know that your study has been reviewed and approved by the Fordham IRB.
- Please remember to submit the most recent versions of your consent/assent forms as well as your revised protocol to the IRB office. You also must have a site agreement letter on file, if applicable, prior to data collection. The investigator(s) identified above are required to retain an IRB protocol file, including a record of IRB-related activity, data summaries and consent forms. This file is to be made available for review for internal procedural (audit) monitoring.

Please also note that changes to procedures involving human subjects may not be made without prior IRB review and approval. The regulations also require you to promptly notify the IRB of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated side effects, adverse reactions, and any injuries or complications that arises during the project.
If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the IRB office or me. Best of luck with your research.

Akane Zusho, Ph.D
For the Institutional Review Board

Phone: 212-636-7946 email: irb@fordham.edu Facsimile: 212-636-6482
APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANTS’ LETTER OF CONSENT
Informed Consent Letter (Letter of Consent)

Protocol Title: New York State School Public Relations Personnel: Roles, Responsibilities, and Implications for School Districts’ Budget Vote Outcomes

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research: The goals of this quantitative study are twofold:


2. To answer some fundamental questions about school public relations personnel employed in New York State public school districts during the 2009–2010, 2010–2011, and 2011–2012 budget cycles, and reveal the extent of their roles, responsibilities, and relationships as they performed their duties for their school districts.

What you will be asked to do in the study: You will be asked to complete an online survey.

Time required: The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Risks and Benefits: There are virtually no risks associated with this study. All surveys are anonymous for the respondent and the school district. Benefits include revealing data that may prove useful to all public school districts in New York State for:

1. Public school districts seeking to improve their profile in the community, to increase future chances of successful budget/bond referenda outcomes, and to improve student achievement, and maintain student enrollment.

2. Public school superintendents/administrators and boards of education to formulate strategic plans and prepare sufficient public relations budget allocations.

3. Public school superintendents/administrators to assist in maximizing communications within/out the district and community while minimizing the time spent doing so.

4. Existing school public relations personnel working in the state to enhance their knowledge and effectiveness.

5. Those seeking employment as a school public relations administrator, public information officer, or school-community relations specialist.
6. Advancing the knowledge base about school public relations in 21st-century public school systems.

**Compensation:** You will **not** receive compensation for this research study.

**Confidentiality:** There will be no way to connect the respondent or the respondent’s school district to the SPRES survey responses. You and your school district’s identity will be anonymous. Any completed surveys printed after receipt by the researcher will be kept in a locked file in the researcher’s home. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the printed surveys and all electronic files will be destroyed.

**Voluntary participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. You may also refuse to answer any of the survey questions.

**Right to withdraw from the study:** You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

**Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:** You may contact the researcher, Catherine Knight, if you have any questions about the study.

**Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:** You may contact E. Doyle McCarthy, Chair of the Fordham University Institutional Review Board

113 W. 60th Street, New York, NY 10023-7484
Phone: 212-636-7946
Facsimile: 212-636-6482
E-mail: IRB@fordham.edu

**Agreement:** I have read the procedure described above. By clicking “Start Survey,” I voluntarily agree to participate in this online study.

PLEASE PRINT THIS PAGE FOR YOUR RECORDS BEFORE CLICKING “START SURVEY.”

**Principal Investigator:** Catherine Knight  
**Date:** February 29, 2012

113 W. 60th Street ♦ New York, NY 10023-7484 ♦ Phone: 212-636-7946
♦ Facsimile: 212-636-6482
♦ e-mail: IRB@fordham.edu

Catherine Knight ♦ 18 Morahapa Road, Centerport, NY 11721 ♦ 631-757-1205
♦ e-mail: cbknight@optonline.net
VITA
## VITA

### CATHERINE KNIGHT

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