

Research in Community Competency of School Administrators within Professional Standard Development

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Keywords: community competency, professional standard, school administrator, school stakeholders, professional competence, professional development, teacher training, quality assurance, external communication, school brand

Abstract: This paper deals with the research in the Community Competency as an aspect of the multi-faceted professional competency that secondary school administrators are to feature. This appears to be a current issue in the context of the present-day development of the Russian national Professional Standard of School Administrators. Particular attention is vested in the structure and the development of the Community Competency. The key research methods employed in this study were literature review observation and analysis of administrative practice, and content analysis of official documents. The challenges of the realization of the Community Competency development formats are scrutinized, and practice-proved solutions are offered.

1. Introduction

The relevance of the present research associates with the public and governmental drives for the development of the Russian national Professional Standard of School Administrators. Similar international experience may be referred to here [1; 2; 3]. Under the modern conditions, there is a need for the top management of a school to determine and translate the needs and interests of the school. Thus, it is crucial for the school principles to be able to make the adequate choice of both the directions and the format of communication with government, local educational authorities, public organizations, community, etc. Competently lined communication is a powerful tool for improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the school [2]. The communication challenges confronted by the school leaders may involve the legal framework for the interaction of school administration and parent community; preparation of responses to appeals of authorities; preventing and overcoming the conflict of interests of the school administration and teachers; formation of a positive image of the educational organization, and its branding; building long-term relationships with the local community, other educational and other organizations. All those aspects of the school principal's routine require special competencies for the leadership of educational organizations that may be successfully shaped in the course of advanced professional development courses/programs [4].

Taking into consideration the present-day challenges (i.e. globalization, digitalization and technologization of society), the requirements put forwards by the stakeholders of education are established to be significantly diversified. In order to respond to these challenges, schools need to attract certain newer resources from their environment (i.e. financial, material, informational, human), improving communication strategy and tactics. In addition to its resources, a school needs a verified system of partnerships to improve the quality of the educational services provided and to better present the 'picture of the world' to its learners. Thus, the so called 'Community Competency' appears to become a growing issue for the school leaders.

The Community Competency is understood here as a complex of knowledge, skills, and personal features that a school administrator needs to possess in order to deal with the challenges that are posed

within the profession-related interaction with diverse stakeholders (i.e. students, parents, local educational authorities, national governments, food suppliers, publishers, etc.) [5].

Respectively, the four research questions put forwards by the author would read as follows:

- What would be vitality of the Community Competency of a school administrator?
- What would be the structure of the Community Competency of a school administrator?
- What would be the role of the Community Competency in the holistic structure of the professional competency of a school administrator?
- What would be the possible formats of the Community Competency development feasible of the current practice of a mediocre vs. advanced school administrator?

In the author's attention focus here was the structure (i.e. element system) and the development issues (including personal growth strategies, training schemes, staff motivation, etc.) of the said Community Competency.

2. Materials and Methods

Within the *content analysis* and *literature review* of over 100 documents of professional and administrative bodies (including professional performance standards) and academic publications (i.e. books and peer-reviewed journal articles in both English and Russian) was employed as the key research method.

Other research methods employed in this study were the *observation and analysis of administrative practice*, *content analysis* of official documents, *modelling* of the professional activity, *questionnaire-based survey* of the school stakeholder requirements, *experience-based observations* of school administrators, and the *synthesis* of the requirements to be incorporated in the Professional Standard of school administrators and the academic course/program development recommendation.

3. Results

As one of the key background hypotheses in the present research was that the development of the Community Competency may be possible by means of not only the specifically targeted courses, but, as well, through the realization of the competency potential [5] of each academic courses incorporated into the Master's degree curricula or professional re-training programs taken by the in-service or potential school administrators, the *content analysis* of the relevant sources was employed. That reveals that a number of educational experts recognize this realization of the competency potential of an academic course to be a promising approach in the context of the ongoing revision of the content and technology of teacher training at all levels, which makes professional development more interdisciplinary, profession-oriented, and ergonomic [6].

The quality of school life in general and the level of saturation of the cultural and educational environments depend largely on the implemented strategy of external school communications and the communication technologies used. By means of accumulating various types of resources from the external environment and transforming those into some additional elements of educational activities through communication technologies, schools improve the quality of teaching [7; 8]. The external communication network of a school involves a cluster of stakeholders which interaction determines the functioning and development of the school. The stakeholder of the school management that are the most notable and vital for consideration are those presented in Fig. 1.

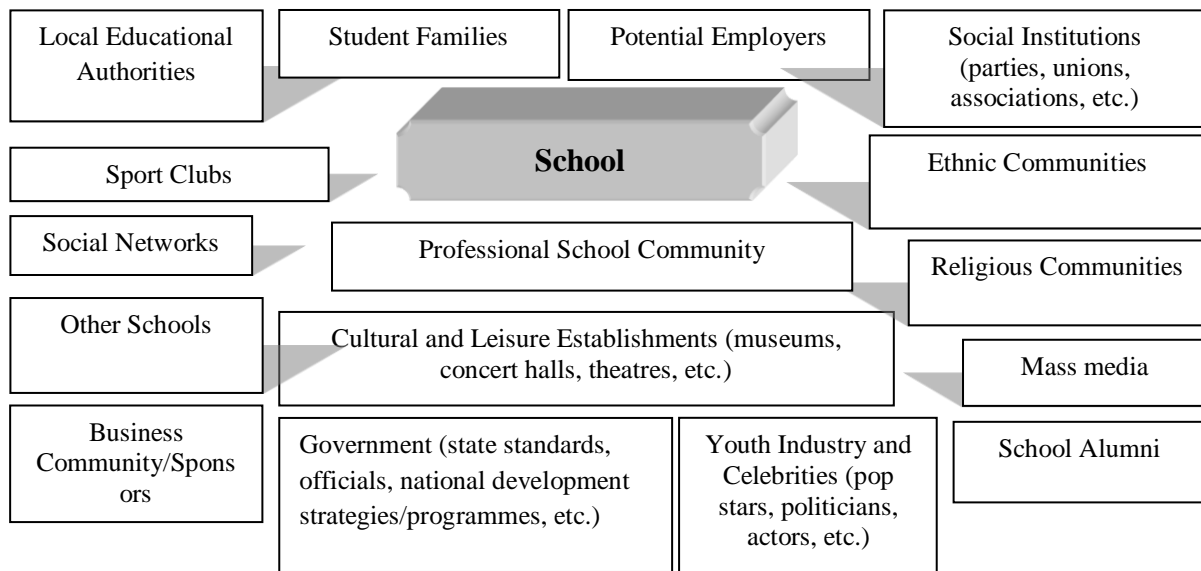


Fig. 1. School stakeholders.

The key challenge here is in the revision of school management objectives. The latter should be true to the needs and expectations of various groups of stakeholders. And those needs should be re-addressed in terms of the requirements of the new Russian educational standards and participation of stakeholders in school development. their implementation in the USA is carried out by the School Organizations of the Parents and Teachers of the PTO (Parent-and-Teacher Association).

The school's interaction with the stakeholders may potentially result in, on the one hand, attracting the extra financial resources and additional opportunities for school branding and advancement of graduates' professional opportunities. Establishing relationships with businesses and community may introduce new master classes, sports and cultural events, career fairs, etc. For this sake, it is worth doing additional work on building external communications.

4. Discussion

One of the mechanisms for attracting additional resources to an educational organization is an endowment. This mechanism is based on raising funds from sponsors [9; 10]. And the largest share in the formation and constant replenishment of the endowment funds of schools is through the contributions of graduates. To direct their significant but diffused potential energy in targets wisely, it is necessary to effectively built the mechanism of school interaction with graduates, including launching and managing the alumni associations and their projects. Shrewdly organized, the respective joint projects cannot only be of mutual interest, but will also contribute significantly to the development and prosperity of the school [11]. Graduates' partnerships with the school may equally be carried out in different forms too, including their participation in extracurricular school activities as guests, consultants or organizers. The success of these activities depends heavily on the competency of principals in the field of PR, their ability to develop projects, establish contacts with potential partners, etc. School administrators should also know the methodology of making their projects understandable to financiers and decision makers [12; 13].

Interaction with learners' parents is equally vital. The issue is so high that its implementation, for example, in the USA is carried out by a socially set-up social networking establishments, i.e. the School Organizations of the Parents and Teachers, or the Parent-and-Teacher Associations [13].

According to international experience, "managing communications effectively is a key dimension of leadership ... Effective communication underpins the knowledge, skills, and disposition principals required to have a direct and indirect influence on student outcomes ... Communications may be deliberately planned or ad hoc; face to face or virtual; written, video or verbal; digital or non-digital" [14]. In terms of community communication, personal mood, actions, and demeanor of a school principle are scrutinized, as they are public figures and convey powerful messages. Among the communication channels, researchers and policy-makers [15] offer both the optimal Internet presence,

as well as initiate and administer school events (as all events are treated as great communication opportunities). In this context, a school principle is to consider these questions: ‘What is my school’s digital footprint like?’, ‘What are the platforms that are easy to use for my school and for the audience(s)?’, ‘Am I clear, concise, professional, and safe in my school’s content?’, ‘Are my school’s key messages, values, and beliefs clearly presented?’, ‘In my posts and speeches, do I keep the focus on student achievement and my school’s current goals?’, ‘Do I normally mention and reward my students, parents, and other community members for their effort that they pay to our school?’.

One of the peculiar technologies of external communication of schools is the constant work on the development and maintenance of the school’s brand. A sustainable brand enhances the competitiveness of a school with little or no additional resources [9]. The most important tools for promoting a schools’ brands are: advertising, special events, PR, mythologization, school identity development, and school’s representation in the Internet [8; 12].

Now that the level of digital communication tools with the main subjects of educational relations has reached certain climax, every school should have a professional in public relations [2]. Though, modern development of digital communication channels and technologies do not reduce the role of traditional, time-proven technologies. In the United States, since 1935, the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) has been uniting the efforts of the education stakeholders to provide the engagement of school principals as communicators in the continuous professional development [3].

5. Conclusion

As it has been established in this research, it is challenging and turbulent time now for school administrators. The concept of an educational establishment as an ‘ivory tower’ with internal, public-closed academic processes has left irrevocably. Therefore, an actual plan for strategic communications should be drawn up and reviewed annually in order to correlate with the emerging of the newer communication needs, contexts, and tools. The most important communications are those communications with the school’s ‘immediate community’, i.e. teachers, learners, and parents.

The considered technologies and methods of external communication are part of the communication school space. As both Russian and international practices have shown, the use of school external communication technologies – within the realization of the Community Competency of school leaders – would allow for the following:

- To improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- To advance learners culturally and educational level-wisely;
- To further the equal favorable conditions for the educational process of learners from families featuring different social and economic backgrounds;
- To make available new social and career opportunities for learners and graduates;
- To meet the requirements of the Russian Federal State Educational Standards in terms of the organization of the extracurricular activities;
- To make the school an attractive object for current and potential school employees in terms of the prestige of the place of work;
- To create a rich cultural and educational environment of the school.

The relevant professional development courses/programs for school leaders are to developed and launched for different levels of the leaders’ career path, and at difference educational institutions.

As a result of the research, the problems of the realization of the Community Competency development schemes/formats are scrutinized, and practice-proved solutions are offered for the development of professional standard of school administrators, as well as the perfection of the relevant curricula and syllabi of Russian and international teacher-training institutions.

6. Acknowledgement

This research has been conducted with the financial support of the Ministry of Enlightenment of the Russian Federation (grant № 073-00089-19-01 for 2019).

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