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Mark Your Calendar!

Spring WSPRA Workshop

Creating Effective Newsletters

Wednesday, March 13, 2002 • Green Bay Area Public School District Office, 3rd Floor • 200 S. Broadway • Green Bay, WI • 9:30 am - 3:00 pm

FOR PRINCIPALS, SCHOOL SECRETARIES AND NEWSLETTER EDITORS.

\$45 per person, lunch and materials included

Registration Deadline: Wednesday, March 6

For Registration Information, watch your mail for details, check WSPRA's website, www.wspira.org under Upcoming Events, or contact the WSPRA office, 608-257-3220, pwelch@wasb.org. ❖

NSPRA Annual Seminar • Catch the Wave in San Diego!

Rebuilding Trust and the Tradition of Support for Education

July 14-17, 2002 • Hyatt Regency Hotel • San Diego, CA



WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

Schools Spared As Budget Ax Falls

2/3 BOE Vote Needed for Revenue Limit Increase

■ Joe Quick, Madison Metropolitan School District

Struggling to fill a \$1.1 billion hole in the 2001-03 biennial budget, Gov. Scott McCallum unveiled his proposed cuts, leaving K-12 education mostly spared. However, the Budget Reform Act of 2002 does cap, at the current level, state spending for capital construction costs and also allows a local board of education, with a two-thirds vote, to increase the local property tax levy to increase per pupil spending related to the state-imposed revenue caps.

"The Governor recognizes that significant increases in spending by schools on building projects have strained the state's ability to maintain its two-thirds commitment," notes the Department of Administration's (DOA is the governor's budget office) analysis of the budget proposal. "To address the dramatic increase in spending on debt, the Governor recommends freezing the amount of debt service included in the state's calculation of its two-thirds obligation at the fiscal year 2001-02 level," a savings of \$20 million.

According to a source in the Governor's office, the budget also shaves \$23 off the per pupil expenditure increase allowed under revenue limits, dropping the increase for the 2002-03 school year to \$209, instead of \$232. However, with a 2/3 vote of the school board, the local property tax levy could be boosted to provide for the original \$232 per pupil increase.

In his speech to the Legislature McCallum was emphatic, "I won't raise taxes; taxes are already too high. I will prioritize spending. My family and your family have to live within a budget, so should government." McCallum identified education as one of his priorities.

"I will fully fund elementary and secondary education. I will fully fund smaller class sizes, school breakfast and special education," McCallum said. By fully funding special education McCallum means he merely maintains the current spending level. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) estimates

that reimbursement to local school districts for special education expenditures will fall to about 30 percent for the

2002-03

school year.

When the 2001-03 budget was signed by McCallum in August, he maintained that resources for the high school graduation test (HSGT) would be forthcoming from the federal government. Apparently, the federal resources are insufficient. According to the DOA analysis, the HSGT is delayed until the 2004-05 school year. It is unclear at this writing what happens with the DPI's contract with CTB McGraw-Hill for test development. Some legislators believe this may be the death knell of the HSGT.

McCallum also highlighted consolidation in his budget address, noting that within a 10-mile radius of Appleton there are over 50 units of government — 3 counties, 4 cities, 5 villages, 8 school districts, 16 towns and 19 sanitary districts. He maintained that there is much duplication of services and the budget crisis provides the impetus for change.

While many in K-12 education are breathing a sigh of relief, the budget proposal is far from a "done deal." McCallum is pushing for quick dispatch of the budget, but Democrats immediately called for hearings on the proposal, arguing that legislators need to hear from local service providers and elected officials.

The Legislature adjourns its spring session on Thursday, March 14. The governor has called a special session to run concurrently with the regular session. The special session will run until the budget review bill is passed. Historically, the Legislature has adjourned at the conclusion of the spring floor period to ready for the fall elections, but many observers believe the budget difficulties may keep legislators in Madison into April.

The budget will be reviewed by the Joint Finance Committee before the bill is debated by both the Assembly and Senate. Legislators need to hear from parents and school personnel about programs they've already cut, dealing with declining enrollment, rising health care costs and other pressing issues confronted by

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From the President . . .



Mabel Schumacher, Ph.D.

Have you ever been in a situation — a class reunion, a wedding anniversary, a meeting with longtime friend — and you looked at the other person and said, “Where have all the years gone?” Well, that is exactly where WSPRA members find themselves this year. WSPRA received its charter from the National School Public Relations Association on August 1, 1967. That means we as an organization are celebrating our 35th anniversary! Those who have been longtime WSPRA members can look back over the past 35 years and recognize all that has happened.

WSPRA has grown as an organization, both in membership, but also in the scope of services provided to members and the educational fabric of Wisconsin. Its mission — *specializing in school community relations, providing visionary leadership and service to Wisconsin schools by equipping its members with effective communication management skills* — reveals a commitment to service and to its vision.

WSPRA is planning to celebrate its 35th year at the fall conference. Many creative ideas are “in the works” now to make this an exciting event. We plan to honor all past presidents at the Wednesday night opening session. Also, a special video is being created to chronicle our history within the changing educational climate over the past 35 years.

Don't miss a moment of this special occasion. Mark your calendars now to be with us for the Wednesday evening celebration and plan to stay for the entire conference, November 6-8, 2002 at Heidel House in Green Lake.

Help us wish WSPRA a happy Anniversary! ❖

Ready, Set, Engage Your Community

■ Mary Ellen Marnholtz, Wausau School District

So, you want to connect with your community, but you're just not sure how to go about it. By now most educators have heard about community engagement and some may even have an inkling about what it takes to make engagement work. However, before you dive in and invite your community to be engaged in a dialogue about your schools, here are a couple of things you should consider and some resources that can help.

We know why engagement is so important. Research tells us that people don't make their minds up about issues from reading brochures, seeing advertisements, or reading articles. Communities make decisions about how they feel and how they will act from having significant conversations with those involved in an issue. Therefore, if you want people to understand and support your schools, your best strategy is to get them involved in meaningful dialogue with members of your school community — teachers, parents, students, and volunteers. That means engagement.

Just remember that community engagement is a great deal of work. It is a lot easier to blanket your community with a brochure full of facts than it is to bring groups together in meaningful discussion and dialogue. After all, the very act of engagement means that you are going to reach out and bring together particular publics in a different sort of conversation than they are used to. David Matthews, president of the Kettering Foundation, says, “Publics have to be created and re-created out of a multitude of self-interests, which don't always include an interest in the schools.” Your role will be to create publics, groups of stakeholders if you will, who do have an interest in the topic at hand. And the “public” you will bring together to study and discuss elementary redistricting will be drastically different than that which may study use of your buildings and athletic facilities by outside organizations. Just remember that each engagement process should be tailored to the issue at hand.

To use engagement as a strategy you have to be a risk-taker. Engagement, by its very nature, is a community-driven process. If you feel you must arrive at one certain conclusion from your decision-making process, do not use engagement as your vehicle. Presented with the facts and asked to discuss them and bring recommendations forward, your group just might offer the answer you hope for. However, true engagement lies in the will of the people and that will is thwarted if the process of engagement is misused.

Engagement takes time. People must come together and discuss—this takes time. Often, engagement means bringing people back together to synthesize and affirm previous work. You cannot rush to judgment when you truly engage your community. Yet planned engagement can be the most worthwhile initiative in which you have ever been a part.

If you have considered these facts and are interested in utilizing community engagement strategies in your district, you can obtain more information by contacting the WSPRA office at 608-257-3220 or check out the resources of the following organizations on the web: Public Agenda at www.publicagenda.org, Study Circles Resource Center at www.studycircles.org, or National Issues Forums at www.nifi.org.

WSPRA's 2002 Annual Fall Conference

November 6 - 8, 2002 • Heidel House, Green Lake

■ Janay Wittek-Balke, Franklin Public Schools

If you have always thought of attending the WSPRA Conference, but just haven't had the chance, this is the year you don't want to miss!

◆ **Pre-Conference, November 6** — We are very fortunate to have Gary Marx, author of the “Ten Trends That Will Profoundly Impact Education in the 21st

Century.” He will lead a full day discussion on the Trends and how you can prepare to lead your schools into the new century. This is a “must attend” for superintendents, school board members and anyone who is a school leader!

◆ **Conference Preview** — Have you started to talk about marketing your school? Is your web design effective? Do you have a communication plan? If your answer is no, you need this conference! We are in a new era of public education and the stakes are increasing each year. This year's conference will provide attendees with the skills that they need to position their schools in the new age of education.

◆ **Board Member Sessions** — This year there will be several special sessions aimed to fit Board members' needs. There will be sessions on managing community relations in your district, running productive and effective meetings and more.

As always there will be sessions that provide WSPRA members the tools needed to run a successful public relations program. Web sites, newsletters, referendums, and recruitment will be among the topics you will take back to your district.

Calling All Blue Ribbon Contributors!

■ Mabel Schumacher, Ph.D. Fort Atkinson

The deadline for submitting our Distinguished/Blue Ribbon Chapter application is approaching rapidly. We need your help to earn this prestigious NSPRA designation. Please take time to fill out the *hot pink* insert in this *WSPRAGram* and send it to Mabel Schumacher, WSPRA president.

If you have done any of the following between May 16, 2001 through May 14, 2002, please list it and send some type of documentation—the program, a PowerPoint handout of a presentation, a copy of the article you wrote, the syllabus of the course you taught, etc. Eligible activities include:

- ◆ Being a speaker/presenter/panelist at a local, state, or national conference
- ◆ Publishing an article in a newspaper or educational magazine
- ◆ Teaching a session on public relations for a college or university class
- ◆ Developing a local project focusing on building support for education

WSPRA members are involved! Thank you for your help. Please submit your information no later than May 1. Mail to: Mabel Schumacher, 848 Messmer Street, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538 or e-mail schu848@charter.net ❖

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

WSPRA is looking for a few of its past presidents and honorary lifetime members. We just don't like those letters returned. If you know the whereabouts of any of the following individuals — Sherman Weinrich and Richard Wenzel — please contact Patti Welch at the WSPRA office, pwelch@wasb.org or Mabel Schumacher, 848 Messmer Street, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538, schu848@charter.net. ❖

NSPRA 2002

■ Mabel Schumacher, Ph.D., Fort Atkinson

The theme for this year's NSPRA conference is *Rebuilding Trust and the Tradition of Support for Education*. The conference will be held July 14-17, 2002 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in San Diego, California. In typical fashion, NSPRA will present a multitude of informative, inspirational, and challenging general and skill-building sessions designed to meet the needs of all conference goers. You WILL find something designed just for you.

This past year in Minneapolis proved to be a fun-filled learning experience that benefited attendees. To check out further details about the conference, to get a registration form, or to find out what to do in sunny California, check out www.nspranet.org.

Princeton HS Students Assist at Fall Conference

■ Barb Fleming, Brown Deer School District



Students from Princeton High School volunteered time to greet conference attendees at the Annual Fall Conference held in November at the Heidel House.

Mabel Schumacher conceived of the idea of volunteer student support and contacted Jean Rigden at Princeton High School. Heather Diebert, Katie Otto, Kristina Szews, Mindy Whitemarsh and Krista Sosinsky volunteered to distribute handouts and assist at the registration table.

In appreciation for the students' help, Princeton High School received a donation of \$100 from WSPRA for the school's scholarship fund. Thank you to these outstanding young women and best wishes as they graduate in the spring. ❖