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since no one knew what the others were doing. Sometimes we get so involved in the rush of daily activities, in getting the job done, that we forget the most important element — communicating with others. Sometimes we are working diligently on a task, assuming that everyone knows what we are doing. Yet, hearing nothing from us, they form their own opinions about progress that is being made (or not made). Lack of communication can lead to strained relationships. It is our responsibility as educators to forge relationships that value and maintain lines of

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the reader want to know more. Use the opening paragraph to tell your story in a nutshell, starting with an attention-getting lead sentence. Forget the “academese,” advises one pro. Instead, write as though there’s a tax on words. No filler, no fluff. Don’t be afraid to let your passion shine through. That’s the element that will make your proposal stand out.

- ◆ **Suppose the news is bad.** Try, try again. If your proposal doesn’t make the cut, just remember that you have lots of company. If writing grants were easy, everyone would be doing it. Think of this year’s application as the foundation for a better, stronger presentation next time around. And if the news is good? Keep the celebration short, because your work has just begun. *(Sandy Watts is a free-lance writer from Hermann,*

Mark Your Calendar!

2002 WSPRA Annual Fall Conference - 35th Year Celebration!
November 6-8 • Heidel House Resort & Conference Center • Green Lake

For Registration Information, watch your mail for details, check WSPRA's website, www.wspira.org under Upcoming Events, or contact the WSPRA office, 608-257-2622, pwelch@wasb.org. ❖



WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

Senate Adds \$27.4 Million for Special Ed; Conference Committee to Reconcile Assembly-Senate Differences

■ Joe Quick, Madison Metropolitan School District

Senate Democrats added \$27.4 million for special education for 2002-03 in their version of the budget repair bill, the first increase for special education since 1999. Current state reimbursement for special education expenses is about 31 percent. The differing versions of the Senate’s and Assembly’s budget repair bill will be reconciled in a conference committee.

A final vote by the full Legislature is expected in the next couple of weeks. Legislators may not amend the conference committee report and must vote it up or down before sending it to Gov. McCallum. Wisconsin’s governor has the most powerful veto of any state’s chief executive.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Chvala (D-Madison) told his Democratic colleagues, “When I talk to teachers, school administrators and school board members, the area most troubling to them is special education funding. It’s important that we provide some relief. (Special education) is severely under-funded. This (increase) is probably the most significant piece in the (education) package.”

Democrats were able to increase special education funding by cutting state subsidies for the Milwaukee voucher program. Currently, vouchers are \$5,780 per student with over 10,000 participants. The funding change, spear-headed by Sen. Russ Decker (D-Schofield), would cut the private school vouchers next school year to \$2,000 for K-8 students and \$3,000 for 9-12 students.

For the 2003-04 school year, the voucher would fall to \$1,000 for K-8 participants and \$1,500 for 9-12 students. Voucher students would also be required to take state assessments required of public school students. A voucher school would have to adopt a nondiscriminatory policy. The move saved \$23 million.

With the state facing a \$1.1 million deficit and scouring virtually every governmental program to fill the hole, members of both the Joint Finance Committee and the state Assembly kept their hands off the K-12 provisions in the budget repair bill. However Senate Democrats, who hold the majority in the upper house, made several changes to the budget repair bill’s K-12 provisions.

A brief description of the Senate changes follows:

- ◆ **Revenue limit increase** – Sets the 2002-03 revenue limit at \$230.67 per student. McCallum, Joint Finance and the Assembly set the increase at \$210 and would have required a 2/3 vote of the school board to increase to \$230.67.
- ◆ **Cyber schools** – Establishes a 2-year moratorium on creating charter schools that offer courses on-line.
- ◆ **TEACH Wisconsin** – Eliminates the technology-funding Board as a separate entity, transferring existing staff and functions of TEACH to the DPI. Eliminating the TEACH executive director saved over \$100,000.
- ◆ **Milk in machines** – Requires milk to be offered in vending machines for any school district entering into an exclusive agreement with a soft drink company.
- ◆ **QEO** - Requires that a new contract maintain all of the conditions of employment of the previous contract or a board of education could not offer the QEO.
- ◆ **Teacher prep time** – Requires planning time and IEP meetings to be mandatory subjects of bargaining beginning with the 2003-05 contract.
- ◆ **Impact fees** – Would allow a school district to assess impact fees for housing development within its borders. A district could use the fees to defray the cost of building a new school due to the development.

The Assembly and Senate versions of the budget repair bill differ on the **SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education) program**, designed to reduce K-3 class size. Both fully fund SAGE, but the Assembly version allows districts to participate in “one or more grades,” rather than K-3 as is current law. The Assembly also restricts school district referenda to regularly scheduled election dates — an issue that was removed from the conference committee bill dealing with the last state budget.

All versions of the budget repair bill remove the \$3.275 million base funding for the High School Graduation Test and delay
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WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION



From the President . . .



Mabel
Schumacher,
Ph.D.

My husband and I recently went to see the movie *Panic Room*. Yes, it has received mixed reviews, but for whatever reason, we liked it! After the movie (not during since it was suspenseful), I got to thinking about some communication issues in the movie that schools deal with every day.

Planning. First of all, a “panic room” is

a carefully planned part of a house. The individual owning the house has thought about what could happen and what would need to be in the room in case of an emergency including a way to communicate with the outside world. Most school districts now have a safety plan in place to react to any number of unthinkable situations. An important element in these safety plans must be a communication plan specifying how the district will communicate externally with the public and internally with district staff. To forget the communication piece is to set the safety plan up for failure.

Body Language. Audiences of the *Panic Room* found out very quickly that body language was critical to communication. Believe me, in the movie facial expressions, hand gestures, body posture, and movement spoke volumes. It is estimated that 55 percent of what people learn from other people is based not on words or tone of voice, but on body language. This concept translates to the educational setting. Sometimes we forget that our body language is a constant flow of communication that others are reading. People read how we are truly reacting to them despite our words!

The Real Stress Producer. At one point in the movie, the homeowner cuts off all communication with the intruders. It was amazing to watch the stress levels of everyone rise significantly

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implementation to the 2004-05 school year. However, without resources to design the test, implementation seems doubtful.

As of this writing, members of the Conference Committee have not been named, but will include Assembly Speaker Scott Jensen, 211 West, State Capitol, P.O. Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708, 266-3387, Rep.Jensen@legis.state.wi.us and Sen. Chvala, 211 South, State Capitol, P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707, 266-9170, Sen.Chvala@legis.state.wi.us. Contact them to support the special education

Who are the People in Your Neighborhood?

■ Amanda Brooker, Green Bay and Ashwaubenon School Districts/CESA 7

Mandated testing. Budget cuts. Aging facilities. Public schools need community support more than ever. How do you build that support?

Start with your school’s neighborhood. Gather a group of your school’s staff or your district’s principals. Block out at least two hours of uninterrupted time, preferably away from the office (for better creativity). Brainstorm who your neighbors are. A general list may include: school families, senior citizens, empty nesters, small businesses, transient (renters) and churches

Some groups can be subdivided, such as school families (single parent, two parents, grandparents as guardians, blended families, etc.).

Next, take each group and identify the characteristics that make up that group. For example, senior citizens may be described as: long-time residents, disconnected, fixed income, voters, patriotic, etc.

The group then takes one category, studies the descriptions and brainstorms engagement activities.

For example, one of our high schools (like many) has had complaints from neighbors regarding litter and students parking in the neighborhoods. Complaints were always handled personally by the school administration, but the principal wanted to include the neighbors as part of the school community. With help of the School and Community Relations Department, the principal has created an engagement plan to implement over the next year. Items include:

- ◆ Adding all immediate neighbors to its newsletter mailing list. This keeps the neighbors informed of all school activities.
- ◆ Providing immediate neighbors with a free pass and a schedule to sporting and fine arts events.
- ◆ Delivering a “thank you” gift, such as a potted plant from the FFA, to all immediate neighbors.
- ◆ Having students pick up trash in the neighborhood.
- ◆ Holding “principal coffees” to talk not only about issues, but about the great things the school is doing.
- ◆ Using the school sign to celebrate student and staff achievements along with events.

The school also recently held its first “Senior Prom,” planned by the student council. More than 80 senior citizens danced to the school’s jazz band, partook in refreshments, and enjoyed decorations from the school’s real senior prom. Several senior citizens were alumni who haven’t been back to the school since they graduated.

Taking two hours to do creative planning may seem impossible — but the end product will compensate for those hours out of the office. Neighborhood engagement does not require a large budget, or a lot of time. The payoff may not be immediate,

Money for the Asking

■ Sandy Watts

Reprinted as an excerpt from the “School & Community” magazine, Spring 2001, with permission from the Missouri State Teachers Association.

There’s good news about that wonderful idea you’ve been kicking around. You know, the one that’s going to revolutionize your classroom, if not the entire teaching profession. You probably can get a grant to fund it. Odds are that somewhere out there in that vast sea of state, federal, charitable and corporate grants, you could find the money for your worthy project. The catch is that it’s like losing weight or learning Latin — of course you could, but in the final analysis, will it be worth the struggle?

- ◆ **Explore the options.** The private sector is an increasingly important source of outside funding for schools. Options here range from large, well-heeled foundations, to local businesses that belong to a larger parent company. Here’s where some research can really pay off — it’s not just the McDonald’s and Wal-Marts of the world that sponsor grant programs. Some grants are available directly from the U.S. Department of Education. Depending on which direction the political winds are blowing, federal programs can have deep pockets.
- ◆ **Find your ideal mate.** The number of funding sources available is truly mind-boggling. It’s important not to shortchange this part of the process. Applying for the right grant — one in which your needs and the funder’s objectives are closely aligned — increases your chances for success. The best grants grow like trees. They start with a healthy root system and branch out into something really great.
- ◆ **Read the fine print.** Ok, you’ve found the grant that’s right for you. The rest of your work is nicely spelled out. Just follow the guidelines — to the letter. “Follow directions” is the mantra of grant makers everywhere. Most applications that get tossed into the reject pile are there for the simple reason that the grant writer didn’t take time to read and follow directions. Respect the deadline. Grant deadlines are utterly inflexible — miss it and your proposal is dead.
- ◆ **Rally the troops.** Don’t try to do everything yourself. Involve as many people as possible in the development stages of the project. Then pass around the finished proposal. You can assume that any parts your colleagues don’t understand will give the grant reader trouble as well.
- ◆ **Ask for help.** The ideal grant is a partnership in which you and the grant maker share the same goals. The grant maker wants to succeed, so don’t let pride of authorship get in the way of asking for help. Think of grant writing like an open-book test — all the guidelines and scoring rubrics are there for your benefit. Likewise, there’s a lot you can learn from those who have walked the path before you. Most schools will be pleased and proud to share their successful grant applications. Out-and-out copying is verboten, but there’s nothing wrong with borrowing a little inspiration.
- ◆ **When you take pen in hand.** For some state-administered federal grants, there’s no narrative at all. The scoring rubric

is based strictly on check-offs and fill-in-the-blank answers. Telling your story is still an important component of most grant proposals. The emphasis is on strength, not length. Write a one-page executive summary. Describe your project in a paragraph or two. Then make a bulleted list of the talking points that you’d want to cover if you were trying to persuade an audience to support your project. This exercise will help you pass what private funders call the 30-second test — that brief window of opportunity you have to make
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The Clerical Key

■ Mary Kappen
East Troy Community School District

I was asked to share some of the great tips that I learned at the WSPRA *Creating Effective Newsletters* workshop held in Green Bay in March. It will be extremely difficult to keep this article short, because there was so much excellent information given to us. Here are some of the highlights:

- ◆ Be consistent and simple in design and language. Try to convince your authors to limit articles to two paragraphs.
- ◆ Keep language at a 5-6 grade reading level for ease and speed of reading. Microsoft Word can check the level for you by checking *Show readability statistics* in the spelling and grammar drop-down menu window.
- ◆ Describe the article with the title — a long title is OK.
- ◆ Limit fonts to 2 or at most 3 per newsletter.
- ◆ Use a serif font (like Times New Roman) for the body text. Titles and body text can be different fonts.
- ◆ Put only one space after a period (this takes practice!) because today’s software automatically adjusts spacing for font and case size. You can eliminate two spaces by doing a search and replace.
- ◆ Use bold and italic sparingly. Try using small caps for emphasis. Avoid underlining.
- ◆ Use three or more columns per page to achieve the most flexible layout resulting in a “friendly” and inviting newsletter.
- ◆ Allow appropriate white space to frame columns, graphics, and pull-out quotes — don’t overfill a page.
- ◆ Use graphics sparingly. The graphic should describe the article. Less is best.
- ◆ Crop photos appropriately. If placing more than one photo on a page, one of them should be significantly larger than the other(s) to be interesting and effective.
- ◆ Adjust the dots per inch (dpi) of digital photos to 300 dpi in a photo editor program. Also, adjust brightness/contrast, etc., for a good quality printed copy. Adjusting the photo in any other type of software makes no quality improvements.

This is a brief summary of the info-packed workshop. There is much to learn about the design, layout and content of creating a newsletter. I didn’t include the tips for actually writing the articles! For more details or to contact the