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The ABCs(continued from page 3) people can get more information.

- 12. Provide regular reports at your board meetings.
- 13. Invite the community in to “see for themselves” what our children are learning.

For more information on NCLB and AYP, go to the Department of Public Instruction’s ESEA web site, <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/esea/index.html>, or the U.S. Department of

Image Builders or Breakers

■ Mark McLaughlin, McLaughlin & Associates, Manitowoc

The secretarial staffs at the district and school offices play an extremely important role in maintaining a positive — or negative — image. They are often the employees who make the first impression on people who contact the district.

To help the secretarial staff better understand that role and to provide tips on how to be more effective at developing a positive image for the district, WSPRA offers a customer service program called “Image Builders or Breakers.”

The program utilizes a PowerPoint program supported by a workbook. The interactive presentation includes group and individual exercises to help the participants understand how the principles and ideas being presented apply to their individual roles within the district. Each participant also receives a tool kit with tips on topics such as The Role of PR in Front Line Staff, Dealing with Complaints, 20 Strategies to Help You Cope, Dealing with Difficult People and E-Mail Communications.

The “Image Builders or Breakers” presentation can be individually tailored for a group of 10 to a group of 50 people and will last from 2 to 5 hours. For more information about the program and costs or to schedule a workshop, contact WSPRA at 608-257-3220 or e-mail pwelch@wasb.org. ❖



WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

GOP Picks Up One Seat in Both Houses Leaders say Property Tax “Freeze” Tops 2005-07 Agenda

■ Joseph H. Quick, Madison Metropolitan School District

State Republicans picked up one seat in both the Senate and Assembly to fortify their control of the state Legislature. The 19-14 margin in the Senate is the largest partisan split for Republicans since 1970; for Assembly Republicans, the 60-39 margin is their largest majority since 1956.

In his post-election comments Assembly Speaker John Gard (R-Peshigo) said, “It is clear that the voters of this state support our agenda of reducing taxes, creating jobs and reforming health care. I look forward to working together with the Republican leadership in the state Senate and the governor to make our vision of a stronger, more competitive Wisconsin a reality.”

TABOR and “Tax Freeze”

Gard identified the property tax “freeze” as a measure that will move quickly when the Legislature reconvenes in January. Gov. Jim Doyle, who vetoed GOP-passed property tax “freeze” language last session, said he would do so again. Gard said, “The property-tax freeze is a temporary measure, and the taxpayer’s bill of rights (TABOR) is a permanent measure.”

Gard said TABOR would pass sometime next year, but Senate Republicans seem less inclined to forge ahead with TABOR. There is no TABOR bill draft. Conceptually TABOR restricts state and local spending to inflation, allowing increases in local spending only in accord with local growth and economic development (infrastructure needs such as roads, water, sewerage).

In post-election comments Doyle said, “I’ll do what I have to as governor, and I will veto those kinds of measures (voter photo-ID and property tax “freeze”). Doyle downplayed the partisan split in the Legislature, contending that the Legislature’s makeup will be similar to the last two years. He added that if Democrats hold together, the GOP does not have enough votes to override gubernatorial vetoes. A two-thirds majority in both houses is needed to override a veto.

Not surprisingly, Gard’s take on the election outcome was decidedly different, terming the GOP majorities a

“resounding mandate.” Capitol insiders speculate Gard plans to either challenge Doyle in 2006, or run for US Rep. Mark Green’s 8th Congressional District seat, if Green decides to challenge Doyle.

2005-07 Budget

The most important piece of legislation in every two-year legislative session is the state’s biennial budget. The \$52 billion document finances all state programs – natural resources, agriculture, state patrol, aids to local units of government (cities, towns, villages, school districts), the University of Wisconsin System. The budget bill is the only bill that must pass every session and will be introduced by the governor in February.

Budget analysts project a deficit by June 30, 2007, the estimated amount ranges from \$1 to 1.5 billion. In the last budget, where the state had to overcome a \$3.2 billion deficit, the state backed-off from its two-thirds commitment for funding K-12. Although the governor reduced school aids in his original 2003-05 budget, Doyle vetoed a major legislative cut in school aids, so the state currently funds about 64% of the state’s total

K-12 costs. The GOP-controlled Legislature provided a .7%

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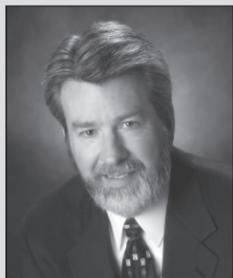
WSPRA celebrates Darlene Hovorka’s many contributions to the organization at WSPRA’s Annual Fall Conference in November. Darlene also received an Honorary Lifetime Membership, presented by WSPRA President Mark McLaughlin. From Left: Darlene Hovorka, CEOE, Adams-Friendship Area School District and Mabel Schumacher, Ph.D., WSPRA secretary and past-president. (For conference hi-lights, see insert enclosed.)

WSPRA LUNCHEON — REGISTER NOW!
 Join us at noon for lunch on Wednesday, Jan. 19, 2005 during the WASB • WASDA • WASBO State Education Convention at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Milwaukee, tickets are required — \$15. Go to www.wasb.org/convention/convention2005/05conreg/registform05.html to register. See you there! ❖
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From the President . . .



Mark
McLaughlin

After attending another very successful annual WSPRA conference, I've had time to reflect on some observations I made during the conference.

There were twice as many "first-timers" compared to the past several years. Hopefully, these people were attracted by our timely conference topics. With increasing responsibilities and diminishing budgets, it is imperative that our WSPRA board strive to provide topics of interest that will expand your areas of expertise and help you perform in a more effective and efficient manner.

Many people I talked to were tired; "beat" was a word several people used. That implies more than being tired from an honest day's work. I encourage you to evaluate your responsibilities. If some of your activities are not directly supporting district goals, determine if they should be delegated or terminated. By running yourself into the ground, you are not helping yourself or the district. Do your best at what is most important.

Finally, there seems to be a growing interest in marketing. Presenters and attendees were using words like target markets, competition and marketing strategies. My presentation on developing a marketing plan was well-attended. As Mary Ellen Marnholtz noted in her presentation, "When I started in school community relations, I never thought I would be writing marketing plans." The time has come. Public relations will continue to be an important part of the mix but building positive relationships with a district's many publics is requiring more than traditional public relations efforts.

I look forward to seeing more members, with more energy, who are involved in school-community

GOP Leaders (continued from page 1)

increase in school aids for 2003-04, and a 1.1% increase for 2004-05 — both lower than the estimated annual rate of inflation. The Legislature could again pare back school aids.

Doyle has also focused on early childhood education and has been a strong proponent for expanding 4-year-old kindergarten. Legislative Republicans are lukewarm toward 4-year-old kindergarten, with some members adamantly opposed to any state funding for 4-year-old kindergarten. Interestingly, over 80 private schools in Milwaukee receive state funding for 4-year-old kindergarten through vouchers, without a note of opposition by GOP legislators.

The Value of a First Impression

■ Mark McLaughlin, McLaughlin & Associates, Manitowoc

As the shampoo commercial told us, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." That applies to each first impression with people who contact the school district. The responsibility for making a first impression often falls on "front line staff" — secretaries and receptionists in the district and school offices. However, everyone shares that responsibility.

While people form opinions about the school district based on many factors — academic reputation, appearance of buildings, graduation rates, standardized test scores — first impressions can have a lasting and influential impact on a person.

Often people cannot distinguish strengths between one district and another. Or, when strengths and weaknesses are compared, districts appear to come out even. It is the feeling the person receives from their contact with district personnel that is the deciding factor. After all, education is a "people business" and so it is judged by how well the district relates on a personal basis.

In general, consider that people rely on district employees as sources of information. Therefore, have some basic information available so that you can share it at any time. This information should include positive features of the school as well as typical facts and figures. Positive features could include awards students and teams have received; educational experiences of the staff; community involvement of school board members; and improvement in building and grounds.

Typical facts and figures include the number of schools, staff and students; percentages of students who graduate and of how many go on to secondary education; and the results of standardized tests in comparison to area, state and national figures. Figures that highlight the positive economic impact of the district can also be helpful.

Consider how you have the opportunity to make a positive first impression by following these simple behaviors.

- ◆ **Phone calls.** Answer with a smile on your face; it gives your voice a more pleasant tone. Clearly identify yourself by name, position and location. Be sure you understand the reason for the person's call and respond accordingly.
- ◆ **E-Mails.** Respond in a timely manner. Check spelling and grammar before sending. Remember that e-mail can be forwarded and printed to be shared with other people.
- ◆ **Personal contact at work.** Smile and make eye contact. Ask how you can help or to clarify a request. Give clear and specific answers or direct the person to the most appropriate contact.
- ◆ **Personal contact outside of work.** Like it or not, people who know you work for a school district form impressions about the district based on your behavior even outside of work hours.
- ◆ **Appearance.** As more and more businesses are returning to more traditional

business attire, presenting a professional appearance is becoming more important. Even if no detailed dress code exists, take pride in your profession and dress appropriately.

Let each time another person makes an impression on you be a reminder that people are basing their opinion about the school district from their impressions of you. ❖

The ABC's of AYP, NCLB ...

■ Mary Pat Pfeil, Wauwatosa School District

With the proficiency standards being raised this year to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under Wisconsin's implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools and districts can be preparing how best to communicate with their various publics about the federal legislation and the possibility that a school or district may fail to meet AYP, as a whole or for one of the subgroups.

Adequate Yearly Progress is determined by four factors:

- ◆ 67.5 percent of the students in the school or district as a whole and in any measurable subgroup must be proficient or above in reading, based on scores from the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concept Examinations (WKCE);
- ◆ 47.5 percent of the students in the school or district as a whole and in any measurable subgroup must be proficient or above in mathematics, based on scores from the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concept Examinations (WKCE);
- ◆ Ninety-five percent participation on the state's fourth, eighth and tenth grade tests; and
- ◆ A graduation rate (for high schools) or attendance rate (for elementary and middle schools) of 90 percent of the state average OR a growth in the applicable rate.

For 2003-04, Wisconsin had 108 schools and 30 districts that missed AYP. One district and 51 schools were identified as in need of improvement, having failed to make AYP for two consecutive years. As the required proficiency levels increase and students at more grade levels are tested, it is likely that those numbers will increase. How will schools and districts deal with the challenges of communicating with staff members, parents and the community about AYP?

Following are some suggestions, adapted from materials prepared by the Michigan School Public Relations Association and the Oregon School Boards Association:

1. Take control of your communication early. Ask: What do our staff, parents and residents already know about the No Child Left Behind Act? What do we want people to know?
 - a. Explain that the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a list of schools that need improvement.

- b. Tell school/district staff, students, parents and community leaders whether or not your building(s)/district expect(s) to be on the NCLB AYP list. Explain the associated required actions **BEFORE** they read about it in the newspaper.
- c. You have a story to tell about the strengths and challenges of each school building and the steps that have been taken toward improving student achievement. Tell your school's story **BEFORE** the media does through building newsletters, web sites, message boards, and small group meetings with staff, parents and community leaders. Be sure to mention specific things the staff, students, parents and community members can do to help improve student achievement.
- d. Principals may want to identify and meet with key members of the neighborhood in which their school building is located. Brainstorm a list of things these neighbors can do to help. Ask one leader to spearhead this community group to ensure that action is taken.

2. Identify your target audiences (including staff, parents, community and the media). Communicate with them often.
3. Avoid making district comparisons. (Don't brag if you met AYP. Don't make excuses if you didn't. Things can change quickly.)
4. Avoid making building comparisons. Each has its strengths and challenges. Remember to note that school improvement is districtwide and building specific.
5. Be proactive. Tell your story first.
 - a. This is how we're going to use the AYP report to be even better.
 - b. Here are the challenges/opportunities we face (include subgroups).
 - c. Here are the places we excel, focusing on our strengths and points of pride.
6. Inform school employees, unions, PTAs, boosters and other members of the school family so they can carry the message. Develop key messages.
 - a. We want to ensure that no school, no child is left behind.
 - b. Explain disaggregated groups.
7. Remind school employees that they are public relations ambassadors for the schools. This includes school secretaries, bus drivers, custodians and food service staff, not just teachers and administrators.
8. Use your district's communication vehicles to reach audiences.
9. Hold information sessions for parents and interested community members, especially in Title I schools.
10. Include city or town officials in information meetings.
11. Always include a contact number or e-mail address where

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