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Professional Courtesy (continued from page 2)

Recently in Wisconsin, a school administrator commented to a local reporter about another district's operation, indicating, "I was very surprised," by the other district's cost for a program, with the reporter adding that the interviewee indicated there is no reason the other district couldn't bring its costs down. The individual commenting never contacted the district they were passing judgment on, but relied solely on the information provided by the local reporter.

The National School Public Relations Association Code of Ethics stipulates educational professionals should be guided by "truth, accuracy, good taste, and fairness" and further stresses "cooperating with professional colleagues." There's nothing wrong with saying, "This is how we do things, but I can't accurately comment on another school district's operations without talking to them." It's a simple courtesy and one you would want extended to you in a similar circumstance. ❖

From the President (continued from page 2)

fact, we've dedicated our fall conference to "Creating Winning Relationships." I hope you will plan on attending this year's conference November 10 and 11 in Green Bay.

Before the rush of the school year begins, take time to reflect on the great things you do for students. You may not be in the classroom teaching, but the relationships you build on behalf of your district truly do affect student learning. Without everyone working together, communicating, and moving in the same direction, children don't flourish. That's where you come in. You guide that critical communication.

Have a great year! ❖

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!
WSPRA ANNUAL FALL CONFERENCE
NOV. 10-11, 2005 • NEW LOCATION: Regency Suites • Green Bay, Wisconsin.
 Stay tuned for details! ❖

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Doyle Preserves Revenue Limit Increase

Says Budget Protects Schools, Property-Tax Payers

■ Joe Quick, Madison Metropolitan School District

Gov. Jim Doyle vetoed the Legislature's less than inflation increase in revenue limits back to current law, preventing school districts from having to cut more from the budget for the 2005-06 school year. Protecting revenue limit authority was the highest budget priority for school districts across the state.

Republicans had cut the allowable revenue limit increase from \$248 to \$120 in fiscal year ("FY") 06 and from \$252 to \$100 in FY 07 and in years beyond. In his veto message Doyle noted that, "Since 1993, the state has subjected local school districts to the most stringent revenue controls imposed on any unit of local government in order to slow the growth of property taxes.

"What (GOP) proponents fail to explain is that general school aid, while critical for property tax relief, has little to do with what school districts can actually spend," adding that "revenue limits do." Doyle's vetoes also return the state to funding two-thirds of the total cost of K-12 in the state by FY 07. Using information from the Congressional Budget Office, Doyle said under the GOP plan, school districts would have had to cut per pupil spending by 10 percent in the next decade.

Doyle chided the Legislature in his veto message saying that while lawmakers cut public school spending, they allowed increases for the Milwaukee voucher program and Milwaukee charter schools. "The Legislature's priorities are clear," the governor said, "and they do not include public schools."

Looming over the budget is the partisan equivalent of "gaining the high ground" by delivering on property tax relief promises. For the most of Doyle's first term, Republicans and the governor have sparred over the best way to deliver on promises to keep property taxes in check. Doyle met the Legislature head-on, maintaining, "It is no secret that Wisconsin property taxes are too high and that we must continue to find ways to reduce this burden.

"In combination with my veto that partially restores

my proposed increase to the school levy credit (line item tax credit on property tax bills), we can restore current law revenue limit authority to public schools, preserve educational quality and freeze property taxes for the average Wisconsin homeowner," the governor said in his veto message. Partisans will anticipate this December's property tax bills and the public's perception on the issue will surely be pivotal in the 2006 gubernatorial campaign.

Doyle used his veto pen 139 times, and used it extensively to transfer resources from different accounts into school aids, occasionally eliminating lines of text to come up with one sentence and a new dollar amount. Doyle's vetoes pale in comparison to former Gov. Tommy Thooompson, who vetoed 457 items in 1991 and 315 a decade later in 2001.

Doyle vetoed other K-12 items, summarized below.

- ◆ **Milwaukee Vouchers** - The governor vetoed the pupil eligibility expansion of the voucher program. He said modifications in the program are needed, but it can't be piecemeal; rather, changes need to be part of a comprehensive proposal. "While the No Child Left Behind Act requires annual testing of all public school students, the (voucher program) still does not require testing in any grades despite the expenditure of more than \$87 million in state tax dollars," Doyle said.
- ◆ **Private School/Home School Tax Credit** - Doyle vetoed the "midnight madness" provision inserted by Senate Republicans in the wee hours of the morning to ensure enough votes to pass the budget. In the five months of legislative work on the budget, this item was never discussed. Doyle said the annual \$14 million tax credit took resources from public schools, and the credit was actually opposed by many homeschoolers "objecting to additional government involvement in homeschooling. The budget includes several favorable provisions for public schools.

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From the President . . .



Lori Holly

Every year, public education and those of us who advocate for, and promote it, face greater challenges. Tighter budgets, legislative restraints, disgruntled taxpayers – the list goes on.

Thankfully, each summer I have the privilege of attending the National School Public Relations Association's conference. It always provides that proverbial "shot in the arm" needed to plan for another challenging year. This year's conference in Boston was no exception.

Once again NSPRA provided the opportunity to engage in thought-provoking discussions with colleagues, to learn new skills and strategies, and to hear important messages from entertaining and uplifting keynote speakers.

As I reflect on this year's conference, I am reminded of one simple fact. The key to this "business" of education is people and the relationships we build with them. Every relationship — be it with students, staff, administration, parents, community members, government, or business leaders — is critical to the success of public education. As public relations practitioners we must keep our focus on fostering new relationships and nurturing existing ones. The biggest mistake we can make is to take those relationships for granted.

As one speaker in Boston reminded us, "just because it worked last year doesn't mean it will work this year." We have to continually work to find new ways to connect with all of our publics — internal and external.

The need to build relationships through solid, planned communication is crucial. Your WSPRA Board of Directors has been working hard to find new ways to help you do just that. In

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- ◆ **Equalized Aid** - Using his veto pen, Doyle restored \$330 million in equalized aid to return to his original budget amount of \$700 million. The budget allows negative tertiary aid districts to use the fund balance for unfunded pension liability without impacting equalized aid.
- ◆ **Transportation Aid** - The budget increases transportation aids to \$12.8 million over the biennium. The bulk of the resources go to districts that transport children the greatest distances.
- ◆ **Revenue Limit Carryover** - The budget permits districts to carryover 100 percent of unused revenue limit authority from the previous school year.
- ◆ **Low Revenue Ceiling Exemption** - The budget increases the exemption to \$8,100 in FY 06 and \$8,400 in FY 07.
- ◆ **High-cost Special Education** - The budget creates a new categorical program in FY 07 to reimburse school districts for 90 percent of the costs of a special education student whose expenses exceed \$30,000.
- ◆ **Special Education Aid** - The budget increases special education aid by \$12 million in FY 07 and also allows guidance counselors and school nurse positions to be eligible for state reimbursement. The DPI estimates special education reimbursement will be about 27 percent in FY 07.
- ◆ **SAGE** - The budget provides a \$6 million increase to fund current law. Doyle proposed increasing the current level of aid from \$2,000 per low-income pupil to \$2,500, but it was rejected by the Legislature.
- ◆ **Bilingual-Bicultural Aid** - The budget increases aid by \$2.4 million, enough to ensure that the reimbursement to school districts will stay at 12 percent.

Republicans can override any of Doyle's vetoes in September when the Legislature goes back to the floor to debate bills, but the GOP concedes getting support from six Assembly Democrats and two Senate Democrats will be difficult. The \$53 billion biennial budget is the most important bill that passes in every legislative session. With state tax collections continuing to show modest growth, any bill that passes during the rest of the session will generally be policy changes having limited fiscal impact.

Be sure to take a moment to thank the Governor for protecting Wisconsin's public schools and making them one of his top priorities. Focus on how the budget will help your district. Gov. Jim Doyle, 608-266-1212, P.O. Box 7863, Madison, WI 53707, wisgov@gov.state.wi.us. ❖

Professional Courtesy

■ Joe Quick, Madison Metropolitan School District

As school budgets continue to be slashed, more media outlets are scrutinizing school spending in an effort to inform the public about why school districts are cutting budgets annually. Some media outlets attempt to frame budget stories in a way that are unflattering to school district personnel.

Television stations in one area of the state can have a reporter interview someone locally for a different reporter working at a station elsewhere. A reporter you feel comfortable talking to, may actually be conducting the interview for another news outlet. A general rule of thumb is to not comment on a situation in another school district when you haven't discussed the circumstances with them and don't really have a solid understanding of the issues involved.

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Making Your District an Equal Player in School-Business Partnerships

■ Mary Ellen Marnholtz, Wausau School District

When we think about business/education partnerships we are apt to think of businesses providing schools with human or monetary resources or donations of products. The scale is inevitably tipped in favor of the schools. So, how can education step up and bring something meaningful to the table too? This is an important question that each school district must answer. Knowing the kind of support your businesses need should guide your efforts.

In the Wausau School District our main marketing goal for the past two years has been to position the District as an equal player with business and industry. Though our District has a long history of working with local business, we recognized that our business community could and should be a resounding voice in support of the educational initiatives happening in our schools. We set about obtaining this goal in a number of ways.

One of the main strategies we employed was the development of a compact disc (CD) full of great information for local businesses to use for employee recruitment. The District had already produced an award-winning CD to use in teacher recruitment. This allowed the District to modify the existing product for much less than the cost of creating a CD from the very beginning. The District's teacher recruitment CD included several items: A welcome letter from the District on the opening page; the District's video, *Preparing Students To Be What They Want To Be*; a locally-produced video, *Tomorrow Calling*, that was developed to fight brain drain in central Wisconsin; interviews with two first-year WSD teachers on the level of support they received as new teachers; and a page with important Human Resources information.

- ◆ We decided to retain both award-winning videos that would give the viewer an excellent look at both our community and our District.
- ◆ A new welcome page shares our excitement about calling Wausau home.
- ◆ The two interviews with new teachers were replaced with interviews that were conducted with four professionals who had relocated to our area and had chosen to have their children educated in the Wausau School District. Their comments are compelling and make a much more credible statement about the high quality of our schools than those of us employed by the District could make.
- ◆ We rounded out the CD by including a page where people could contact us for more information. Included on this page are a handful of links to family-friendly local websites. Additionally, we included a link to a special online viewer

survey to provide the District with valuable user information on how we can improve the product for our employers and their recruits.

Promotion of the CD was accomplished primarily through our local Chamber of Commerce. We developed a promotional brochure for the CD that was mailed to Chamber members in their monthly "Chamber Pak" on two different occasions. The Chamber also chose to promote the CD in its own monthly magazine, *Chamber Matters*, and again in its annual promotional magazine, *Images of Wausau*. The District shared information with the entire community through its community newsletter, *The WSD Dialogue*, which reaches 28,000 homes and businesses in the School District. Our brochure cover copy brings the key message to light. It says: *When families relocate, the first questions they ask is "How are the schools?"* Inside the brochure cover we let them know by responding, *We have the answer.*

The CD is enclosed in the back of the District's brochure, so everyone who receives the CD also has all the information they need to enroll their children in our schools. The CD requests are distributed to area businesses at no charge. Businesses can request up to 10 CDs at a time and they are packaged in special boxes with an easily-distinguishable label that again shares the message, *We have the answer.*

Only 1,000 CDs were produced in this initial run. Following a year's distribution, little more than 50 CDs remain. This speaks volumes about the popularity of this product as a Human Resources tool.

Today we are in the process of updating our District video. This new production will have a more defined edge. You can feel the focus on business and industry and community partnerships pulsing throughout. The District's main goal for this piece is to become a part of its business and industry recruitment CD and we have targeted this message to fit our audience after working with the Chamber of Commerce.

We're excited about the new relationships we are building with business and industry. Today the Wausau School District is coming to the table as an equal partner and our entire community is benefiting because of it. ❖

