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WSPRA to Present at State Education Convention

■ Anne Egan-Waukau, Wisconsin Education Association Council

“What’s in Your Community Engagement Tool Box?” is the title of a presentation that WSPRA will host at the 85th State Education Conference in Milwaukee.

The session will help attendees understand what public engagement is, as well as the five public engagement principles.

Why is public engagement so important? Research shows that the relationship between public schools and the public is fraying. That is why collaboration is necessary because it creates support and ownership.

The presentation by Brian Hanes, WSPRA Director and Oostburg School District Superintendent; and WSPRA Past President Janay Wittek Balke, APR, Franklin School District’s Manager of Communications, will be held at 1:15 p.m. Thursday, January 19, in room 202D at the Midwest Airlines Center.

Please join your WSPRA colleagues at a luncheon during the 85th State Education Convention in Milwaukee from Noon-1:00 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency’s revolving rooftop restaurant, the Polaris.

The price of the luncheon is \$18 per person. WSPRA will hold a drawing during the luncheon for one free WSPRA membership for the upcoming year. The luncheon is open to all conference attendees. Pre-registration is required. Please register online at www.wasb.org/convention.

Don’t forget to mark your calendars for Wednesday, January 18, 2006. ❖

Presidents Column (continued from page 1)

wrap-up inserted in this issue.

If you have suggestions on how we can improve on the conference or if you’d like to suggest a session topic or speaker, please email me at holllor@sdmf.k12.wi.us. Your ideas will be passed onto the planning committee for next year’s conference. On behalf of the Board of Directors I’d like to wish everyone a happy holiday season and a wonderful new year! ❖

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WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

Service-Learning=Meaningful Connections

■ Mabel Schumacher, Ph.D., Fort Atkinson

School districts today are searching for ways to forge meaningful connections with the community. What better way to accomplish this daunting task than to use the concept of SERVICE-LEARNING?

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, service-learning combines service to the community with student learning in a way that improves both the student and the community. Research shows that students participating in high quality service-learning:

- ◆ Demonstrate higher academic performance.
- ◆ Have fewer attendance and behavioral difficulties.
- ◆ Develop stronger civic and social responsibility.
- ◆ Are more engaged in school and motivated to learn.

The characteristics of service-learning focus on elements that strengthen the relationship between the district and its community:

An Integral Part of the Curriculum

Service-learning adds authenticity to the curriculum as students experience activities that create an understanding of the relevance between their academic experiences and their role in the “real world.” These projects enhance academic performance by applying classroom learning by addressing issues in the students’ everyday world.

A Time for Meaningful Reflection

Service-learning projects provide students with structured opportunities to reflect on their work throughout a project, enhancing the probability that students will “see the big picture.” Better yet, as they evaluate their service, students will develop better, improved ways to meet identified needs.

The Development of Youth Leaders

As a result of service-learning, students develop a myriad of “intangibles.” Today, districts strive to foster those hidden values that remain at the core of education, yet are so difficult to solidify in day-to-day teaching. Through embracing youth leadership, tangible rewards of service-learning include

developing citizenship and personal values such as empathy, beliefs, self awareness, self confidence, and social responsibility.

The Desired “Reciprocal Relationship”

The concept of service is critical because service-learning identifies and meets real community needs. Students forge a strong, indestructible connection between themselves, the school, and the community. Because service-learning is authentic, collaboration exists at several levels. Students collaborate with each other to identify needs, opportunities, and methods. Collaboration extends to the community as services are provided to various agencies and individuals in society. Parents, too, can be drawn into the equation as they provide assistance in the logistics of service-learning projects. Civic responsibility is born and prepares students for a future of giving back to their community and the world.

Creating the Foundation for Service-Learning

Preparation

How do schools begin to use service-learning as an instructional strategy? Administrators and Boards of Education set the tone, recognizing that schools function within a community. Often the spark begins with a teacher who sees the value of involving students in their society. The goals of the curriculum are then linked to a learning experience that involves students in creating a solution to an identified community need.

Training

Because service-learning is such a powerful teaching strategy, educators are trained in how to incorporate the method into their classroom. Districts find that having multiple teachers trained strengthens the practice and leads to greater collaboration.

Implementation

Educators use this new strategy to incorporate service-learning projects into the existing curriculum. Core academic skills are enhanced by immersing them in meaningful service to the community.

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From the President . . .



Lori Holly

I would like to thank those of you who took time away from your office and busy schedules to attend the annual fall conference in Green Bay.

As hard as it is to be away from the office, taking time to learn new strategies from other professionals is essential to keeping your communication efforts fresh and on track.

I hope everyone enjoyed the new venue and the evening event at Lambeau Field. A special thanks goes out to the Green Bay Packers for allowing our members into the Packer Hall of Fame free of charge, and for staying open a half hour longer to accommodate our visit!

I would also be remiss if I did not thank **Barb Flemming**, WSPRA's coordinator/tainer, for all the details she worked through with the Packers and the Regency Suites/KI Convention center to ensure our conference ran smoothly. Barb works tirelessly behind the scenes to make each conference a success.

Congratulations to all of the Spectrum Award winners, especially **Mary Ellen Marnholtz**, who received the "Lighthouse Award" for her outstanding video about the Wausau School District.

Congratulations to **Mabel Schumacher** who was honored for her incredible service with the Past-President's Award. Mabel's contributions to WSPRA are immeasurable and she is truly deserving of the recognition. Mabel, **Mary Pat Pfeil** and **Gerry Freitag** were also honored with the Lifetime Membership Award. We are lucky to have so many talented, dedicated people on our team.

If you missed the conference, be sure to read through highlights of each session included in a special conference

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(Meaningful Connections, continued from page 1)

Consider these projects:

- ◆ Students serve as mentors to English Language Learners
- ◆ Students earn money to purchase books, travel to a metropolitan area, and read to low income students
- ◆ Spanish students earn money to buy Spanish children's books for doctor and dentist waiting rooms
- ◆ Students develop a "Peace Park" where citizens can have a place to sit and enjoy the concept of peace in a community
- ◆ Students work with the Wisconsin Commissioner of Railroads to increase public safety by installing an electronic gate at an unsafe railroad crossing.

When all is said and done, service-learning makes a difference. The community, the schools, and the students all benefit from the relationship. ❖

Student Voices Key to Successful School Planning Process

■ Lori Holly, Menomonee Falls School District

School leaders today know that if they are to be successful, communication with the publics they serve needs to be two-way. However, one key group is often overlooked—the students.

Even those who involve students, often only do so on a peripheral basis. In many cases, the students are merely "token" representatives without any real voice, according to Adam Fletcher, founder and director of the Freechild Project, a youth-driven think tank that offers training, research and consultation to schools and community-based organizations.

"Research shows that when educators work with students in schools—as opposed to working for them—school improvement is positive and meaningful for everyone involved," Fletcher said.

Several school districts in Wisconsin have recognized this and have put practices in place to amplify the voices of students. In the School District of Menomonee Falls administrators conduct a "Student Summit" every other year. Students spend a full day out of the classroom with consultants who lead them through a series of activities and discussion groups aimed at gauging their perceptions of the district. The data collected during those summits aid administrators in everything from curriculum planning to facility planning.

Students also serve on the district's Strategic Planning Committee and sub-committees, taking active roles in discussions and drafting of plans. Students have also served on every facilities study committee that the district has convened.

"Who can tell you better what is working within your system and what is still needed than those we are trying to educate?" said Superintendent Dr. Keith Marty. Marty works with districts around the state facilitating strategic planning efforts and encourages districts to truly engage students in the process.

The West Bend School District includes students in its Performance-based Budgeting process. The students, like others on the committee, have a real say in how the district's funds are budgeted.

The Green Bay Area Schools have formed an Intra-City Student Council that includes representatives from all four of the district's high schools. The Board of Education meets with them monthly to discuss issues.

But student engagement doesn't always have to be in formal settings. Green Bay Superintendent Dan Nerad often invites a student to bring five friends in for pizza. The group sits and discusses several issues in a very informal setting. Having one student choose five friends for the meeting ensures they will all be comfortable with each other.

In Brown Deer junior and seniors serve on the Board of Education's Committee on Instruction. The committee is a standing committee of the board, which deals with instructional issues.

For students truly to have a voice in their schools they need to have a decision-making role as well as being asked for their opinion, Fletcher suggests.

"For the sake of the future of education, it is time for students to be more than heard, and it is time for schools to take action. It is time for students to be partners in school change. It is time for meaningful student involvement," Fletcher said.

Fletcher's recently published booklet, *Meaningful Student Involvement: A guide to students as partners in school change* can be found at www.soundout.org/MSIGuide.pdf. ❖

Equity Corner—Celebrating Martin Luther King Day

The source of the following information was an article by Gary Hopkins, *Education World*® Editor-in-Chief, Copyright © 2004 *Education World*

Martin Luther King Day has been described as a "day on," not a "day off." Rather than viewing Martin Luther Day off as a possible day off of work or school, it should instead be seen as a day to devote to learning about Martin Luther King, Jr. and

the principles that he advocated.

Here are just a few ways schools might consider celebrating Martin Luther King Day.

Read aloud. Read aloud one of many Martin Luther King, Jr. biographies to motivate interest in creating a timeline of his life. Teachers at the lower grades might focus on books that emphasize a "getting along" theme.

Geography. On a U.S. map highlight places of importance in the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. Place a pushpin at each location and extend a strand of yarn from the pin to a card at the edge of the map. On the card explain each place's importance.

History/Role playing. Make a list of events that are included on your Martin Luther King, Jr. timeline (e.g., Rosa Parks' bus ride, integrating Little Rock's schools, a lunch counter protest, the "I have a dream..." speech). Let students work in groups to write short plays in which each group acts out one of the events.

Writing. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream..." speech is one of the most famous and often-quoted speeches of all time. Read the speech aloud; listen to the speech. Write on a chart some of the "dreams" that Martin Luther King expressed in it.

Music. Discuss the meaning of the words to the song *We Shall Overcome* in light of Martin Luther King's life and the civil rights movement.

Poetry. Write poems about Martin Luther King.

Discussion. Invite students to think about and to respond to the question *Why, do you think, so many people look upon Martin Luther King, Jr. as a "true American hero"?* ❖

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

It's 'Kool to be Kind' at Oostburg High

■ Mary Dantzler, Beacon Correspondent
(reprinted with permission)

In a society of profuse telemarketers, online prizes, sale scams and obscured marketing ploys, it has become almost natural for the red flag to raise and suspicious caution to emerge when we are offered a product or service that is presented to be complimentary.

Experience has warned us "buyers beware," taught us "nothing is free," and nurtured our skepticism and doubt.

But, are we overly cynical to believe that if something comes too easy, it is no good, or that kind deeds do not come without attached strings?

Is it possible that altruistic dogooders still exist in a fast-paced, competitive world, helping those in need with no expectations of reimbursement, except the gratification and satisfaction of helping their fellow man?

The students of Oostburg High School believe so, and through the guidance and leadership of Athletic Director Lynda Garbe and homeroom teachers, freshmen through senior classes will dedicate their day tomorrow, offering gratis services to nonprofit organizations and citizens in need.

The concept, which evolved into the named "Kool to be Kind" project, was developed by Garbe and put into motion last year, modeled after the "pay it forward" inspiration.

Garbe experimented with the idea of having students perform random acts of kindness for several years before proposing total

participation from the high school.

After reading about three Canadian college students who spent three months traveling and offering random acts of kindness, Garbe wondered why the same could not be done through the efforts of Oostburg staff and students.

Following the approval of high school Principal Scott Greupink, the first "Kool to be Kind" day involving all high school students and teachers initiated last year.

The program offers the opportunity for students who are hard workers, but struggle in some academic areas, "to shine for the day."

To date, Garbe has not seen any negative aspects to the program, and believes the students are both proud and eager to donate their time and labor.

The considerate deeds of the students are not restricted to Oostburg, but distributed where help is sought throughout surrounding areas.

This year, the voluntary services will be offered to various homes and nonprofit organizations.

The tasks include, but are not limited to the cleanup of Harrington Beach, Kohler-Andrae and Sheboygan Falls YMCA.

Participants will paint the Oostburg park tables, build park benches at the Hingham Athletic Field, and socialize and play games with the residents of Rocky Knoll Health Care Center.

Although all of the hours of tomorrow's day are reserved, the recipient list was primarily comprised of referrals rather than direct requests.

Perhaps wariness of involvement as a receiver derives from those subliminal guards our trained minds have crafted.

But, when it comes to the high school's random acts of kindness program, don't bother looking for the small print—there is none.