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#### Power Hours (continued from Page 3)

*Transitions, Growing Diversity, Shifting Enrollments and More.* **Presenter:** Deb Haviland, director, communications/community relations, Adams County (Colo.) School District #50; **Anji Husain**, corporate communications manager, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, Hamilton, Ontario, Can., **John Landesman**, director, Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools Study Circles. **Moderator:** Karen Kleinz, APR, associate director, NSPRA.

- **March 10, 2006** — *E-Newsletters and More: Power-Up Your Digital Solutions for Reaching Key Audiences.* **Presenters:** Jennifer Caracciolo, public information specialist, Forsyth County (Ga.) Schools; **Tim Carroll**, APR, director, public information, Allen (Texas) Independent School District; **Jim Dunn**, APR, director, communication services, Liberty (Mo.) Public Schools, and past president, NSPRA. **Moderator:** Edward H. Moore, APR, associate director, NSPRA.
- **March 31, 2006** — *Buzz Marketing: Using Those Person-to-Person Conversations to Build Support for Your Schools.* **Presenters:** Mary Ellen Marnholtz, community relations coordinator, Wausau (Wis.) School District; **Tom Salter**, senior communication officer, Montgomery (Ala.) Public Schools; **Colin Sokolowski**, public relations director, Mounds View (Minn.) Public Schools. **Moderator:** Bob Noyed, APR, assistant to superintendent for community relations, Elk River (Minn.) Area School District.
- **April 28, 2006** — *Using Data-Driven Communication to Boost Influence and Results: How Numbers Can Help Chart Success and Build Support for PR.* **Presenters:** Gary Aungst, director, community affairs/marketing, Tempe (Ariz.) School District #3; **Gay Campbell**, APR, director, communications, Everett (Wash.) School District and president, NSPRA; **Edward H. Moore**, APR, associate director, NSPRA. **Moderator:** Rich Bagin, APR, executive director, NSPRA. ❖



WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

## Educate New School Board Members for Success

■ Janay Wittek Balke, APR, Franklin Public Schools

*With April showers come May flowers. With school board elections, come new board members.*

School districts across Wisconsin welcome new board members each spring to serve an important role for our schools. Thanks to community members committed to kids, they agree to serve in what is often a thankless and demanding job with little to no compensation.

Facing difficult budget decisions and responding to parent concerns are often unexpected and confusing situations to new members. So how do we assist and mentor them on the role of the board? How do we educate them on all the jargon and organizational processes related to running a district?

### Board School

It is important to note although we assume citizens understand the operation of our districts, the reality very often is the opposite. Parents and community members run for the school board with a limited amount of understanding of how we do business. Developing a format where you schedule several meetings or classes is a great way to help new members become familiar with the district and is a good way to bring them up to speed.

1. Introduce the policies and administrative rules of your district along with reviewing the impact of state statues on schools.
2. Thoroughly explain and review the budget and the budget process. School funding and tax issues are top of mind for many new board members. The complexity of school budgets and school funding formulas is often an unknown to new board members. The budget is a significant item of board discussion and decisions are in full swing when they join the board in April.
3. Union contracts should be explained and reviewed. This is especially important if negotiations are underway for any and all union groups.
4. Review your strategic plan or organization goals to let them know the priorities of the district.

5. Briefly outline the curriculum, process for textbook and course adoptions and professional development programs.

### Mentor Program

Designate an experienced board member to serve as a mentor to a new member. This will help develop relationships and build your board team. Informal conversations are a good way for new members to begin to understand the dynamics of the group.

### Board Handbook

Develop a handbook for board members outlining procedures, calendars, and other general rules and operations of the board. If the board has yearly goals or norms, include them in the handbook.

### Face-to-Face Conversations

1. Getting to know someone on a personal level is a key component to building a good rapport and a relationship of trust. This is especially important for the district administrator. Schedule one-on-one breakfast meetings with your new members to create a more relaxed conversation. Get to know them and the expectations they may have for their term in addition to understanding the superintendent's role with the board.
2. Invite your administrative team to a small reception to introduce the new members to your district leadership. It is often uncomfortable for a principal to meet a board member for the first time when presenting a controversial topic at a meeting.
3. Take them on a tour of your schools. It is likely they have only visited the schools their children attend or have not visited the schools if they do not have children currently enrolled.

There are many ways to engage and welcome new members to your school board. These are only a few examples to consider in your district. The most important point to realize is it is not as important **what** you do to welcome them to your district, but your willingness and effort to facilitate a smooth and comfortable transition. ❖

**Special Hotel Rates:** Reserve your room now at super special NSPRA rates. Don't delay. Room block is limited. (Rooms filled quickly in Boston last year and people were referred to other hotels! Don't be left out!) For more information, go to: <http://www.nspira.org/entry.htm>

**SPECIAL EARLY BIRD SAVINGS: Register and pay by May 26 and SAVE \$50!**

**2006 NSPRA National Seminar**  
 July 9-12, 2006, Marriott Downtown, Chicago, Illinois

**REGISTER NOW! You will be glad you did!**



**IF YOU HAVEN'T HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND A NATIONAL SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE, THIS IS THE YEAR TO DO IT!**

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## From the President . . .



Lori Holly

The importance of clear communication and what it takes to achieve that with diverse audiences was made clear to me last week during a trip to the Dominican Republic. For an entire week my daughter and I found ourselves in hotels, on buses and in airports with people from all over the world, many of whom spoke little or no English. We simply had to find other ways to communicate with them—and we did.

As I reflected on that experience, it occurred to me that the communication barrier that we had to overcome—in this case the fact that we didn't speak Spanish, German, or French—was not that different from what many of us in education experience as we try to communicate with our various publics. Sometimes we're simply not speaking the same language.

Whether the issue is a referendum, safety, or test scores, we as communication professionals have to be sure our message is reaching everyone, and that it is being understood. That means communicating the same message in many different ways, with the perspective of our audience in mind.

We have to do it in our districts and we have to do it here at WSPRA. As an organization we have to ask ourselves: Are we succeeding in getting the message out about the importance of clear communication? Is the message being heard? Are we as an organization fulfilling our mission?

The Board of Directors has begun exploring those questions and brainstorming some new ideas that we hope will help us improve service to our members and help grow the organization.

I'd like to extend an invitation to all of you to become part of the excitement! We will soon be putting the ballot together for next year's Board of Directors. This is your chance to get involved in furthering school communication. Please consider running for a seat on the Board or serving on a committee. The rewards are many!

If you'd like more information please contact me. The nominating committee will be formulating a ballot throughout the month of March. We

(Educate New School Board Members) continued

## Doyle Outlines K-12 Education Priorities

■ Joseph H. Quick, Madison Metropolitan School District

In the last State of the State address before the 2006 elections, Gov. Jim Doyle outlined his priorities and programs to keep Wisconsin's education system at the forefront of the nation's schools.

While Doyle's speech addressed health care, stem cell research, taxes, the overall strength of the economy and other issues, he was clear about what is most important.

"Anyone who knows me will tell you my first priority as Governor has been education.

It's why I said no when Republicans in the Legislature tried to cut schools last year by hundreds of millions of dollars."

"It's why I'm fighting to give more families access to four-year-old kindergarten and smaller classes. It's why I'm fighting for competitive teacher salaries ... so we can recruit and retain the best educators for our kids," the governor said.

Doyle commented on the Milwaukee voucher program by referencing specific examples of questionable activities in some of the voucher schools. Voucher proponents have been running radio and TV commercials urging Doyle to lift the enrollment cap for the voucher program.

Current law restricts participation in the voucher program to 15 percent of Milwaukee Public Schools' total enrollment. Doyle said voucher students should take the same assessments as students enrolled in public schools

Doyle highlighted a new initiative called the Wisconsin Covenant, designed to give assurances to eighth-graders that they will be able to go to college. "If (students) pledge to stay in school, take challenging courses, stay out of trouble, apply for state and federal financial aid and maintain at least a B average in high school, we'll do our part and guarantee their family a package of financial aid that lets them walk through the doors of one of our University of Wisconsin campuses," Doyle said.

Doyle said the program will be available to all students and that students from low-income families would receive grants, while others might receive a mix of loans, grants and work study. Doyle challenged the business community and private foundations to help fund the initiative, as was done in a similar program in North Carolina.

The State of the State speech outlines themes that will be repeated during the coming year and represent the issues the governor will campaign on for re-election this fall. ❖

## Passing a Referendum

■ Anne Egan Waukau, WEAC

A school district's message is the most important piece to any referendum campaign and it should be clear, consistent and backed with supporting points and repeated throughout the campaign.

That is the advice of Kit Dunn, strategic communications adviser at First Trust Portfolios L.P., who has won 41 out of 45 referendum campaigns that she has managed over the last eight years.

A message is more than a slogan or logo; it is a framework for organizing your position on the issue, Dunn said.

"More simply, it is how you want to be perceived," she said. "I try and encourage my clients to use the same messages in a variety of formats."

These formats include newsletters, frequently asked questions, individual fact sheets, Web sites and meetings, Dunn said.

Each school district needs to determine its own format, she said, adding that each district has to have a slightly different approach based on the character of the community—whether it is urban, suburban or rural.

"In Wisconsin, that is a major factor," Dunn said. "You have huge differences in your communities like Kenosha, Sun Prairie and Madison versus districts in the middle of nowhere."

"Each district really needs to know its community and needs to know what it's going to take to effectively reach citizens because this is not a cookie cutter. There are strategies that are proven, and there are things you shouldn't do," she said.

Dunn said the ideal referendum campaign should start a year in advance.

"The earlier you can engage the community in the development of the process, the better off you'll be," she said.

"A successful referendum campaign means you have to have all of your ducks in a row, including the ballot. You have to be able to answer the questions once you are on the ballot."

Dunn cited an example:

"Your district is going to a referendum and is asking for \$50 million to build a new high school and that cost includes the land it will be built on. However you tell voters that you don't know where it's going to be but that they should just trust you to pick the best site. That is completely unrealistic. The taxpayers and parents will not trust the district if you don't know where it's going to be."

In fact, she said there are times a district should just decide not to put a referendum question to the voters.

"If you can't address the most fundamental questions on the referendum, you need to question whether you should be on the ballot at this time," she said.

"If you aren't ready to go, and you aren't confident that you can address the questions, then wait because the integrity of the plan is compromised forever," Dunn said.

Another key to a successful referendum campaign is your communication techniques, she said.

Dunn cautioned that a district needs to communicate effectively, yet it cannot spend a lot of money on a referendum campaign, "nor can they look like they do."

A good communications tool can be the district's Web site, she said.

"A district's Web site can be a really effective communications tool for a referendum because you can put so much information on there and it doesn't cost anything," Dunn said.

For more information about running a successful referendum campaign, contact Dunn at: [kdunn@fportfolios.com](mailto:kdunn@fportfolios.com). ❖

## School Surveys Provide Two-Way Communication Opportunities

■ Lori Blakeslee, Green Bay Education Association

Administrators, school board members, or public relations professionals communicate with members of the community everyday. It may be tempting to assume these encounters reflect how one's school district is perceived within the community.

However, the question to ask is, "Whom are we communicating with?" More often than not, two groups are heard from, those who are supportive of what one's school district is doing and those who have a specific complaint.

Community surveys provide an effective way to hear from the silent majority. What issues are people concerned about? Are they supportive of the district's current direction? What

issues are specific to subgroups in the community?

While a district may desire to develop a survey internally to save money, hiring a third-party survey firm gives the survey results a level of credibility that a do-it-yourself survey lacks. There are many research firms in Wisconsin that can create and deliver a paper, phone or on-line survey. However, one firm stands out for its focus on schools—School Perceptions. School Perceptions was founded to help educational leaders gather and analyze the data necessary to plan and improve. What makes School Perceptions unique is its ability to compare your data to other school districts that have completed similar surveys and provide perspective on the answers your survey generated. To learn more about School Perceptions visit [www.schoolperceptions.com](http://www.schoolperceptions.com).

An important thing to remember when creating a community survey is to avoid asking about issues that are nonnegotiable. If the school board and administrators know that individuals have expressed concerns about bussing, but there is no better alternative to the current situation, asking for parent or community input gives the false impression that their opinions will be considered. A district should only ask for input on issues where there is a willingness to change.

In addition, once a survey has been completed, the district should be willing to share the results with the public. A press conference may be used to communicate what the district has learned and what plans will be in place to address the concerns raised.

A community survey is a great tool for any district because it closes the communication loop, and enables districts to confidently plan for the future. ❖

## NSPRA Power Hours Offered to WSPRA Members Free of Charge

■ Lori Holly, Menomonee Falls School District

As WSPRA members you have the opportunity to gather insight from some of the best school PR practitioners in the country by attending an NSPRA Power Hour teleconference. WSPRA has purchased two subscriptions to these wonderful seminars so that we can bring them to our members. The four remaining seminars will be hosted at two sites:

1. School District of Menomonee Falls, host Lori Holly, [hollor@sdmf.k12.wi.us](mailto:hollor@sdmf.k12.wi.us), N84 W16579 Menomonee Avenue, Menomonee Falls.
2. Green Bay Education Association, host Lori Blakeslee, [BlakesleeL@GBEA.WEAC.org](mailto:BlakesleeL@GBEA.WEAC.org), 2256 Main Street, Green Bay, WI (Get directions at [http://www.gbea.org/about\\_us\\_directions.asp](http://www.gbea.org/about_us_directions.asp))

The seminars begin promptly at 11 a.m. and last an hour. Don't miss the opportunity! Please RSVP to the host so they know how many people to expect.

Listed below are upcoming speakers and topics:

- **February 24, 2006** — *Managing Change: How School Communication Helps Schools Navigate Community*

(continued on Page 4)