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Editor: Wendy Wong, Pewaukee School District
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Equity Corner (continued from Page 3)

- **Use art and theatre to help children understand the effects of discrimination and celebrate their differences.** At Southeast Whitfield High School in Dalton, Ga., an ESOL class painted a mural on their classroom wall. The activity provided an outlet for immigrant students to share part of their culture and discuss the challenges of moving to a new country.
- **Teach older children to look critically at stereotypes portrayed by the media.** Ask them to close their eyes and imagine a lawyer, doctor, rap musician, gang member, bank president, hair stylist or criminal. What did they “see” and why? Confronted with their own stereotypes, children begin to question how they’ve been shaped by the media.
- **Teach mediation skills to kids.** At Mill Hill Elementary School in Fairfield, Conn., a group of fifth-graders, selected because of their reputations as bullies, respond anonymously to letters from younger students seeking advice on a range of school-related problems, like bullying and harassment. The program helps students develop empathy. ❖



Find The Keys to Successful School Public Relations at the WSPRA Annual Conference November 9-10, 2006 Bridgewood Conference Center, Neenah, WI

Unlock the impact effective public relations can have on your schools! Find the keys at the WSPRA Annual Conference. With guest presenters from the private and public sectors, conference sessions will provide multiple insights on successful communication strategies. Topics include *the role and function of public relations in schools, how to strategically plan for communication, communicating with diverse audiences, effective referendum strategies, gathering and using input*, and more! And of course, it wouldn't be a public relations conference if we didn't take time to build relationships! During facilitated sharing sessions and at an evening social, we will take time to open new doors to learn and share with each other.

Please watch for complete conference registration materials coming soon! ❖



Punch Up Your PR Efforts for the New School Year

■ Dorreen Dembski, West Bend School District

You've all heard it again and again: if you want to be successful—communicate! That's easy to say, but it's tough to answer “HOW?”

Recently, some of WSPRA's members attended the National School Public Relations Association Conference. It is always exhilarating to gain new ideas, share war stories with colleagues, and get fired up by public relations gurus and novices, alike. Each year, there are golden nuggets to pick up from the conference. Here are a few ideas to help you punch up your PR efforts this year:

Catch 'em in the Headlines

Did you know that we have between four and 11 seconds to grab the attention of our readers—and we should grab them in the headline. In this age of electronics, it makes perfect sense that today's consumer is visual. Our students' parents have grown-up with computers, e-mail, instant messenger and television. (The average age of video gamers is 33!) If we want to catch their attention in print (our most traditional form of PR) we must catch them quick—in the headline.

Even Blast E-mails Should Be Personal!

If your method of communication is e-mail, it is the subject line that must grab the reader as he or she races through his or her inbox. If we don't want our email deleted, be sure your subject line interrupts your reader's thinking and makes him or her want to read more by opening it.

Speaking of electronic communication, if you are using e-mail newsletters to key communicators, make the content personal. Anyone can send an e-mail—literally anyone. When you write yours, consider this as a letter to people that you hold in high regard, not an advisory of upcoming events. Like in all communication, make your audience the most important part of your message. Make your reader feel as if your letter was written just to them—not to the database of names you keep in your address book.

Make Your Message Important to the Audience

In public speaking situations, begin your speech with a call to action. Ask yourself, “Why is what I have to say important to my audience?” What you have to say may be important to you, but until you know why it is important to your audience, and what you want them to do, you don't have an effective message. Don't talk for the sake of talking. Talk because what you have to say is something your audience can relate to and wants to know more about.

Generate Positive Publicity

Positive publicity is another aspect of positive public relations. How can you generate positive publicity? One district shared this wisdom. The communication director gathered his staff and as a team, they reviewed all the school and district planned events. They made a publicity worksheet for each month that listed what events they would write into press releases. The “to do list” included the event, who would write the release, where the releases would be sent, and how they would follow-up to insure that the releases were being published. In this way, they preplanned publicity, pleased their media with advanced information, and successfully found themselves in the newspaper with positive news more often. Who couldn't benefit from that piece of advice? Gather your team and plan your communication efforts! It will reap you many benefits.

Remember if eight people have a good experience, they will tell eight people. If eight people have a negative experience, they will tell 16 other people (at least!) Positive PR is in the numbers—the more times you effectively tell your school district's story, the more times you will positively impact your district and your students. It is a very worthy goal. ❖

From the President . . .



Dorreen Dembski

Dear WSPRA Members:

As it happens to all of us, life changes just naturally occur. In the best interest of WSPRA, our elected President Anne Egan-Waukau decided to decline the presidency this year. Thank you Anne for your self-less dedication to our organization—your leadership will be missed! As President-elect, I have been asked to move into the presidency this year, with Mary Ellen Marnholtz serving as President-elect.

As a long-time WSPRA member, I always marvel at the people I meet through my work with the organization.

From my experiences, it is the collective knowledge of so many diverse members that makes WSPRA extraordinarily special. Regardless of your individual professional roles, whether you are a teacher, superintendent, support staff, board member, PR director, or human resources person, each WSPRA member seems to intuitively know that communication and public relations are critical components of his or her personal and professional success. It is the value our members place on public relations and their appetites to learn more that makes each WSPRA meeting seem like a lunch date with old friends—we have so much to talk about and so much to learn from each other!

You are invited to take advantage of the opportunities we schedule this year. Please join the small groups at NSPRA's PR Power Hours. Come to our annual conference in November or volunteer to write *WSPRAgram* or WASB's *Wisconsin School News* articles. Perhaps you'll be called to assist on a committee or special task. These are opportunities for you to become better acquainted with each

Your Community Trust Fund

■ Linnae Riesen, WEAC

"Trust is like the air we breathe. When it's present, no one notices. When it's absent, everyone knows." Warren Buffet sums up trust with this statement, and Danielle Clark and Dianne Pavia spoke about this issue at the 2006 NSPRA Conference in Chicago.

Why should you invest in building your community "trust fund"? Danielle and Dianne spoke about the everyday issues we face in our jobs—teachers under the influence of drugs, students protesting immigration issues, negotiations that turn ugly—and why it's important to call upon the community during these crucial times. Your community trust fund is what you draw upon when these issues and situations arise, as they undoubtedly will. A healthy trust fund, constituted by community support and understanding, will see you through these difficult crises, and if well-managed, can result in even greater support for your schools.

If you already have a reporter on the phone wanting a comment about the latest crisis, it's too late. It's important to start building your community trust fund and making regular deposits before a crisis:

- Spread good news through your key communicator network, at the Superintendent's Roundtable, PTA Council, and to your local realtors.
- Be sure that your internal communication is strong with staff, and the lines of communication are open.
- Build solid relationships with the local media. Become the go-to person for the media when they have a question, and they will seek you out as the source of truth.
- Train all administrators to be approachable and accept bad news, to listen for the drumbeat of dissatisfaction, and to conduct timely investigations.
- Be aware of bigger implications—small issues have a way of spiraling into something bigger. And never, ever assume something won't get out. Make decisions as if you are certain it will.

When crisis hits and it's time to use your trust fund, use your key communicators network to get the real facts out. These key communicators will trust you as a knowledge source. Communicate with staff, communicate with parents, and keep everyone updated—be constant and consistent.

In the aftermath, wrap up with your key communicators and the community, and communicate activities and outcomes with staff. Follow up with the media with op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, or pitch a follow-up story to the paper. Evaluate activities for results, and gather input. Learn from your missteps and determine what you can do better next time. And continue making "deposits" in your trust fund by getting positive stories out there.

As Alexandra Stoddard said, "What we do today, right now, will have an accumulated effect on all our tomorrows." ❖

Presidents Column, continued

other, with school PR, and with WSPRA. You'll be glad you did!

It is that spirit of sharing, valuing each other, and promoting the critical role that effective public relations play in the future of education that will continue as a central theme to the WSPRA activities this year. I will do my very best for you, my education colleagues, whom I value so very much.

I wish your students and you a terrific school year ahead, and I look forward to meeting more of you as the year rolls on! ❖

WSPRA Wins National Award

■ Mabel Schumacher, WSPRA Executive Director



WSPRA Executive Director Mabel Schumacher is presented with the Distinguished Chapter Award from NSPRA's North Central Regional Vice President Nancy Krackee

It was an exciting time for WSPRA this year at the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) seminar in Chicago during July 2006. We are pleased to report that based on the hard work of its members and board, WSPRA earned both a Blue Ribbon Chapter and the Distinguished Chapter Awards.

According to NSPRA's application guidelines, these awards are presented to "state chapters for efforts to work toward NSPRA's mission, goals and objectives." For well over a

EQUITY CORNER

Teaching Tolerance

Public schools are in the business of teaching and promoting learning. Learning can be defined as "a relatively permanent change in knowledge, understanding, or behavior." One of the most critical needs in today's society is learning tolerance—changing the understanding and behavior related to all the issues surrounding tolerance.

Schools are an ideal environment to counter bias, because they mix youth of different backgrounds, place them on equal footing and allow one-on-one interaction. Children also are naturally curious about people who are different.

The following classroom suggestions were taken from *Tolerance.org* (http://www.tolerance.org/10_ways/teach/index.html) as suggested methods schools can use to promote tolerance. Visit their web site for further information.

Classroom Ideas to Promote Tolerance

- **Acknowledge differences among students and celebrate the uniqueness of everyone.** In Debra Goldsbury's first-

decade, WSPRA has consistently been awarded Blue Ribbon Chapter status for its work to improve education in the state of Wisconsin.

The required efforts to earn national recognition include: serving as public relations counsel to the education community; broadening and expanding the number and types of publics with which chapter collaborates; promoting racial minority membership and cultural diversity; presenting programs to assure lifelong learning; and improving education through responsible communication and interpersonal relationships.

Each year, WSPRA members are invited to participate in the Distinguished Chapter application process by submitting their individual activities for inclusion in the document. These activities have been critical to the success of WSPRA's application. WSPRA members contribute to the field of education through their presentations, articles, service to other districts and agencies, and play a significant role in the professional growth of other professionals. These contributions exemplify the qualities that make a state chapter worthy of national recognition.

NSPRA described our chapter as "one of NSPRA's hardest working chapters (that) delivered a stellar year of professional development programs.... Education leaders, support staff and students across Wisconsin have all benefited from WSPRA's commitment to advancing education through strong school communication. We congratulate WSPRA on a truly outstanding year!"

The WSPRA Board of Directors thanks all members for their participation in WSPRA. YOU are the ones who make WSPRA great. Be sure to continue submitting your activities this year to WSPRA. You make a difference. ❖

grade class in Seattle, children paint self-portraits, mixing colors to match their skin tone. They then name their colors, which have included "gingerbread," "melon" and "terra cotta." They learn that everyone has a color, that no one is actually "white."

- **Create an "I Have a Dream" contest, in which students envision and describe an ideal community.** In North Berkshire, Mass., winning essays are reproduced and rolled onto highway billboards donated by the Callahan Outdoor Advertising Company.
- **Promote inclusion and fairness, but allow discussions of all feelings, including bias learned at home and the street.** Establish a "peace table" where children learn to "fight fair," perhaps with hand puppets in which conflict is acted out.
- **Promote diversity by letting children tell stories about their families, however different they may be.** Diversity embraces not just race, but age, religion, marital status and personal ability. Remember that charting "family trees" can be a challenge to some children, such as those who are adopted or living with single parents.

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