

WSPRAgram is published five times annually. It is the official newsletter of the Wisconsin School Public Relations Association. Please address any questions or comments to WSPRA, 122 West Washington Ave., Ste. 400, Madison, WI 53703.
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Printing: Rogers Publishing
 Winneconne, 920-582-4541
Distribution: WSPRA Office
 Madison, 608-257-3220

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WSPRA Conference Packed with Key Information



Whether you are new to school public relations or a seasoned veteran, you'll be glad you invested in WSPRA's FALL CONFERENCE.

COMMUNICATION: A Key Investment in School Success

Bridgwood Resort & Conference Center
 Neenah, Wisconsin • November 9-10, 2006

The keynote addresses are led by PR pros. Breakout sessions are led by skilled practitioners. Conference topics provide the keys to effective communication planning, implementing, and assessment; address the complexities of communicating in difficult settings; and discuss communication with diverse audiences. We think you'll find a wealth of information at this year's conference!

Find all the information you need to invest in WSPRA's annual conference at www.wspira.org/conference/index.html.

A special hotel rate for WSPRA conference attendees is available through October 9! Hotel rate includes breakfast; conference registration includes Thursday lunch and dinner, and a special field trip opportunity, too. Register Now! ❖



WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

Why 'Marketing' Isn't a Four-Letter Word (Part I)

■ Mary Ellen Marnholtz, Wausau School District

When you say marketing and schools in the same sentence, people tend to run for cover. It's one of those combinations that freezes some district administrators and school board members to the bone. It shouldn't though, because whether we realize it or not, we're marketing our schools every day. Some marketing signals are obvious—some are not. Some marketing signals are positive—some are not. There are marketing implications in everything we do.

How many businesses would survive, let alone prosper, without marketing their product or services? No business would sustain without marketing, especially a business whose product is a service. Education is a service business.

Add to this equation the ever-expanding educational options available to families. What formerly was a decision between public and private school is now a decision between public, private, parochial, charter, virtual, magnet, home, open enrollment, and everything in between. You are facing competitors who know the return of the marketing investment.

But you may say, "We don't have a marketing budget." Marketing doesn't have to be a big-ticket item. It takes some time, strategic thinking, some work, and yes, some monetary investment, but it is well worth the effort and it is not out of reach. Here are a few of ideas to start you thinking about marketing your schools.

Branding Your District

In much the same way ranchers distinguished their cattle from their neighbor's stock on the open range, your brand can identify your organization in your community and beyond. When someone sees a publication from your school district—a letter, a newsletter, a calendar, a lunch menu—do they instantly know that it is from your district? Take a look at the publications in your school or district. Lay them out in front of you. If they don't have a similar look, it's time to work on your "brand." If you don't know how to start designing a brand or look, ask a marketing professional from your community for some pointers as a business partner. You will

October 2006
 Vol. 32, No. 2

www.wspira.org

improve the look of your publications, develop your brand, and as a bonus, build a new community relationship. Create that look for your school district and put it everywhere!

Developing Key Messages

There are many great things happening in your district right now—initiatives that create opportunities for students. As you set your goals, whether for the 2006-2007 school year or goals that span a decade, let people know what you're reaching for and how you hope to get there. Put the communication keys in the hands of your staff. Assure that everyone in your school community: administrators, teachers, custodians, secretaries, classroom aides, food service workers, bus drivers, volunteers, even your vendors, know what you are working toward and how you are getting there.

Celebrate Success

Find great facts and celebrations about your schools and put them on everything—lunch menus, websites, school newsletters, the district newsletter, your chamber of commerce newsletter, school and community marquees, athletic, school concert, and theater programs, and on small pocket cards that staff members can keep with them with some to share. Call them "points of pride" and soon other positive facts will emerge and be shared throughout your district and your community. Give people something to brag about and they will do it with passion!

No, marketing isn't a four letter word. Instead, it will take you on a path toward a much better place—SUCCESS! *Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part series on the role marketing has at school district's planning table. In the next edition of WSPRAgram, Mary Ellen Marnholtz will discuss creating ambassadors for your schools and infusing quality service into all aspects of your organization. Want to know more? The WSPRA conference in November focuses on many key ingredients of school public relations success! ❖*

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From the President . . .



Dorreen
Dembski

The year is in full swing! Are your communication and marketing efforts in full swing, too? If you're like most of us with hectic schedules, you may not be able to say confidently – "Why of course my communication efforts are in full swing!" Not to fear, WSPRA is here to support you!

1. WSPRA has purchased a series of nine POWER HOURS from the National School Public Relations Association that WSPRA members can attend free of charge. These are like mini-inservice days focused on a single topic. The dates and times are listed in this edition. If you want to host a Power Hour, please let me know. WSPRA provides this professional development as a time for colleagues to come and learn together on timely topics. Join in!
2. Remember that WSPRA offers powerful training seminars that have been used by many school districts including *Image Builders and Breakers* and *Communicating During Difficult Times*. Publications are also available on the Web site for purchase. If your professional association or district needs a speaker on the topic of school public relations, contact us.
3. There are member resources that may be accessed by visiting the WSPRA Web site, www.wspra.org. Check out the Legislative Updates, articles on Equity, helpful hints about the School Wellness Policy, and tips for communicating about No Child Left Behind.
4. The Fall Conference is rapidly approaching. Take a serious look at the slate of offerings for the

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Power Hours Help You Power Up Your PR Skills

■ Julie Grotophorst, Greendale School District

The WSPRA Board is again offering members the opportunity to participate in the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) Power Hours this year. Power hours are teleconferences hosted by national experts arranged through NSPRA. A variety of topic areas are discussed throughout the school year on selected Fridays at 11 am. WSPRA is trying to offer this opportunity close to many member districts therefore, rotating locations are being established. The locations that are confirmed for this year are listed.

Upcoming Dates/Topics include:

- **December 1, 2006** - *Getting Board Members on Your Team: How to Make Your Board Members Your MVPs* - hosted by WSPRA Administrative Liaison Brian Hanes, Oostburg School District
- **January 19, 2007** - *What Does It Take to Win? How to Ensure Fiscal Security for Your District Through Finance Elections*, - hosted by WSPRA Member Sandy Stefczak, CESA #1
- **February 23, 2007** - *Starting From the Basics: Building a Strategic Communications Plan*, - hosted by WSPRA Director Julie Grotophorst, Greendale School District
- **March 9, 2007** - *Make Your Staff Media Savvy: How to Train Your Staff Members for Their Next Media Encounter* - Location to be determined
- **March 30, 2007** - *Feeling Like a One-Person Show? How to Succeed When You Are the PR Staff* - Location to be determined
- **April 27, 2007** - *Prove It! How to Make the Value of PR Clear to Your Key Leaders* - hosted by your WSPRA Board, at its Madison office

Take advantage of these great opportunities to get to know your colleagues and learn more about important PR issues facing schools! ❖

President's Column (continued)

November WSPRA conference in Neenah. It is packed full of useful information. We guarantee you'll learn and have fun, too.

When you come to the conference, please attend the annual meeting as well. Your Board of Directors will present the strategic goals for WSPRA because we are planning that WSPRA will be strong long into the future. Together, connecting and learning through WSPRA, we can all be leaders in school public relations and communications. I hope to see you in Neenah. ❖

Equity Corner: Bullying

■ Mabel Schumacher, WSPRA Executive Director

"My child has been the victim of repeated bullying—that's why he (or she) acted that way." The topic of bullying has again been brought to the forefront as claims of bullying have been made surrounding the recent Green Bay East and Weston



High School incidents. As educators, we all recognize the crucial role that schools play in establishing an environment that is conducive to learning and providing for the well-being of students. Within this context, the prevention of bullying is critical. There are several elements that are important factors in the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs.

Know the targeted behaviors. Bullying can be defined as repeated and systematic harassment and attacks on others. These actions can be physical, verbal, threats and intimidation, extortion or stealing, and exclusion from a group. Both boys and girls are involved in bullying. Although boys' bullying may take a more visual tack, such as fighting and aggression, girls may bully by more emotional attacks such as rumor and exclusion from a group.

Debunk the myths about bullying. Despite often-held opinions, (1) Bullying is NOT just a part of growing up, (2) Hitting back does not prevent future bullying, (3) Not only victims get bullied—most bullying happens without an obvious reason, and (4) It is *likely* that bullying problems exist in schools—even if it is not recognized. Part of implementing an effective campaign against bullying involves helping staff overcome misperceptions about the nature and extent of bullying.

Get a school policy in place. A beginning step to combat bullying is to have a school district policy in place. If you need assistance in the development of this type of policy with its accompanying administrative rules, contact your legal counsel and/or the policy representatives at the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. Also, make sure that the bullying policy extends beyond the classroom to the playground, the lunchroom, the bus, and the Internet.

Communicate the policy and the expected behaviors. It is not enough to have a policy addressing bullying; it is necessary that the policy is communicated to everyone. Students, all staff, administration, and parents need to know the existence of the policy, acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, procedures to report bullying, consequences, and most importantly, the district's commitment to enforcing the policy. According to Russell Skiba, co-director of the Safe and Responsive Schools Project, "If the conditions in a school support bullying, a policy isn't worth the paper it is printed on."

Make a school-wide commitment. To be truly effective, the policy must be translated and infused into the very culture

of the school. No matter where a person looks, there must be a district-wide message that bullying behavior is not acceptable. This message cannot come only from the administration or the teaching staff. Everyone has a role to play—including custodians, secretaries, teaching aides, lunchroom staff, bus drivers, and school nurses.

Understand that relationships are the key! The most important deterrent to child violence is that the child has a concerned adult who they recognize will take care of them. Children must feel that they are able to approach and develop a relationship with an adult who will listen to and understand them. This relationship can be with anyone who is willing to reach out to the students and to be vigilant when it comes to maintaining a safe and caring educational environment. That's the message that needs to get out.

There are many resources available to help schools in the area of bullying and student violence. Check out the WSPRA web site at www.wspra.org to find a list of some web sites and organizations that can provide help. ❖

Putting Your Best Image Forward

■ Dorreen Dembski, West Bend School District

In the constant rush to complete a day's work, sometimes it is the little things that prevent us from putting our best image forward to the public. Things like websites that are out of date, messages on outdoor signs that are no longer relevant, and phone messages left unanswered can tarnish your PR efforts. Here are some tips from a WSPRA program called *Image Builders and Breakers*,* that can help you present your school's best image every day!

Take a simple test: Within 10 seconds of approaching or entering your school, what do people see? Take an inventory of all those things on the outside of the building and immediately upon entering your building that everyone sees. What is the impression that these things create? Lights unlit on your signage or the cleanliness of garbage cans will impact the first impression. To improve your "curb appeal" be sure that the things that most people notice in the first 10 seconds are in order so that you are ready to receive guests everyday.

Equally important are the impressions given by the people who work in your schools, in all roles. Is everyone practicing good customer service? The five p's of good service are: Be Proud; Be Professional; Be Polite; Be Prompt; and Be Personal. Put these five "p's" into play everyday and you will polish your image almost immediately. Visitors to your school or district will gather first impressions from two primary sources: your building and grounds, and your people. What is the impression that your district creates?

Want to learn more about school public relations? The WSPRA conference in November is packed with PR pros. Please consider joining us!

**Image Builders and Breakers is a presentation owned by WSPRA and available as a training tool for districts. Member districts receive a discounted presentation rate. ❖*