

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.  
**Editor:** Wendy Wong, Pewaukee School District  
**Printing:** Rogers Publishing  
 Winneconne, 920-582-4541  
**Distribution:** WSPRA Office  
 Madison, 608-257-3220

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## Practical Tips

### Building Relationships

#### ■ Doreen Dembski. West Bend School District

#### Greet families and students everyday...

Are you in your office when the school day begins and ends, or are you out in the hallways saying hello in the morning and wishing the kids a good evening when they leave?

#### A True Story:

A high school freshman, nervous and sweating on the first day of school missed his bus to go home. The next day, the same thing happened: he just didn't know which bus to take among the 20 or so lined up. His mother suggested that perhaps he should ask an adult for help and the student said, "I would if anyone looked friendly enough to ask!"

The mother said, "Look for a smiling adult and just ask." So the next day, the boy looked for a smiling adult face. There was a man standing in the hall near the doors, smiling and saying good-bye to all the students as they exited. The nervous freshmen went to the man and told him his problem. This person walked him to the bus line, asked each bus driver until they found the right bus, and then shook the boy's hand. The man introduced himself and asked for the boy's name. The friendly greeter was the superintendent of schools, who was visiting school that day. You can believe that story went home, and a positive relationship was built! Add a few relationship-building tips to your daily routine and soon better public relations is just a handshake away! ❖

#### April/May Issue, continued from page 4

the combined efforts of Wisconsin's tribes, the Wisconsin Education Association Council and the National Education Association, educators across the state will have access to a package of materials that can be used to teach students about Wisconsin's rich Native American history.... "We have found that the public is woefully unaware of the strides that have been made and the challenges we face in our Native American communities," says Gloria Cobb, deputy director of economic development for the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council (GLITC).



WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

## Doyle Budget Maintains K-12 Status Quo

#### ■ Joseph Quick, Madison Metropolitan School District

Maintaining two-thirds funding and providing enough new resources to keep the reimbursement for special education and English Language Learners at the same level, Gov. Jim Doyle introduced his 2007-09 biennial budget to the Legislature in February.

The governor reiterated his commitment to education, saying, "We have a special and sacred obligation to the children of this state. This budget is not merely a set of numbers and actuarial tables. It is a statement of priorities and values ... our commitment to nourish the abilities, energy and creativity of every Wisconsin child." In his budget message related to providing modest revenue limit relief to school districts for security expenses, Doyle said, "I believe schools should never have to choose between teachers and police officers. We should give communities the flexibility to partner with local law enforcement ... put more police in the schools ... and protect our kids."

Doyle's budget proposal would allow a school district to expend \$25,000 per 500 high school students outside the revenue caps to put officers into schools, with a matching amount from the local municipality. School districts could also use the exemption to purchase safety equipment.

With the introduction of the biennial budget, the wheels of the budget process are set in motion. Generally, the Joint Finance committee (JFC) waits until the Legislative Fiscal Bureau does its analysis of the budget, which director Bob Lang told the JFC yesterday would take about a month.

The budget-writing committee is preparing for hearings in six cities: Milwaukee, Green Bay, Rhinelander, De Forest, Prairie du Chien, and Chippewa Falls. No dates have been announced, but JFC Co-chair Sen. Russ Decker said the tour could begin in mid-March. Historically, the JFC wraps up its work around Memorial Day and the month of June is when both houses make changes to the JFC's version. The budget bill will begin in the Senate this session. You can find the members of the JFC at this web link: [www.legis.state.wi.us/lfb/ljfc/ljfcmembership.html](http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lfb/ljfc/ljfcmembership.html).

In his budget address, the governor, noting the partisan split in the Assembly (GOP) and Senate (Democrats), urged the Legislature to pass the budget "on time," which would be around July 4<sup>th</sup>.

The following is a brief description of the budget's major K-12 provisions:

- **Equalization Aids** increase in each of the two years, to maintain the state's commitment to funding two-thirds, on average, of the cost of K-12 education. The aid provides property tax relief, but not resources for classrooms.
- **Special Education Categorical Aid** increase provides \$17.4 million (M) on 07-08 and \$36.2M in 08-09 to increase the current 28.6 reimbursement for special ed. to 29%.
- **SAGE** funding increase of \$250 per student, or \$21.2M for 07-09, for schools currently in the 15:1 K-3 class size reduction program.
- **Breakfast Program** increase of \$.05 per meal, from 10 cents to 15 cents.
- **Bilingual Aid** maintains the current percentage of state reimbursement at 12%. **Library aid** (Common School Fund) increase of \$17M for 07-09.
- **Pupil transportation** aid increase of \$40.00 for students transported over 12 miles.
- **4K start-up grants** provide no funding in 07-08 and \$3,000,000 state-wide in 08-09 for school districts using the "community model," which is a partnership between school district and private child care providers.
- **World languages Elementary school grant** would make \$500,000 available state-wide in 08-09 to start foreign language programs in elementary schools.
- **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math) grant** would make \$109,000 available state-wide in each of the budget years.
- **Elimination of QEO** repeals authority of a school district to avoid arbitration by offering a 3.8% salary/benefits package increase to its teachers. The proposal also would give *all* factors equal weight in arbitration, thus removing the weighted consideration of the impact of revenue limits and/or local economic conditions.
- **Declining enrollment** exemption increase from 75% to 100%, as a one-year "hold harmless" for declining enrollment districts.

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## From the President . . .



Dorreen Dembski

At our recent “New-To-Kindergarten” parent information night, I saw again the wide-eyed expectancy of parents as they considered sending the most cherished person in their life to our schools.

What would their days be like? Who will be their teachers? How do I know I’m making the best decision for my child? Their questions were the same questions all parents have when they send their first child to school.

Seeing the parents’ faces, listening to their questions, hearing the trepidation in their voices reminded me that public relations is about building relationships. It is through building relationships that people come to understand each other; it is through relationships that people come to trust; it is through relationships that communities support schools and work together to provide the best possible public education for our children.

There is a statistic that we use in WSPRA’s community engagement presentation. It says that 90 percent of people get their information from people with whom they have relationships. Not from a newsletter, not from websites, not from newspapers – but from the people with whom they have a relationship.

Therefore, this edition of WSPRAgram is dedicated to the “relations” side of public relations. Building relationships takes time: but it pays benefits, too. Perhaps after reading this WSPRAgram you will take some time to think about how you can build relationships with your various communities and a child will benefit from your effort. If that happens, then this WSPRAgram is priceless. ❖

## Person-to-Person Contact

### Can You Hear Me Now?

- Cheryl Schmidt, Howard-Suamico School District

In this era of email, voicemail, Ipods, text messaging etc. it is no wonder that we have to take the time needed to talk face to face. (I am not including the webcam ability to talk to a distorted face on your monitor.) The technology of today is fast and wonderful and it has its place. However, very few of us are adept at communicating effectively through electronic means. Much of what we try to communicate is prone to be misunderstood because it is one-way communication.

That is why a good public relations plan will include opportunities for people-to-people contact. It is more than an open-door policy. Instead, walk into the worlds of others. Join community service groups, attend local sporting events, and support student performances. Leaders who are visible open themselves up for opportunities to have people-to-people conversations and unleash the potential of hearing many perspectives.

Another strategy is to host formal person-to-person events. Superintendent chats, gabs, or town hall meetings provide the opportunity for people to listen, learn, and ask questions, one on one. A key communicator network is also important. Identify the people in your school districts that other people trust and who are viewed as credible. Invite them to quarterly meetings and share the needs, successes and challenges of your schools. Soon, others in your community will be able to tell your school district story with some accuracy. When people know the person behind the title, it is more likely that the leader will be believable when times are tough.

In our society of “you are guilty before proven innocent” these relationships are invaluable. Thanks to shows like ET, Inside Addition, E News and local news reporting, we can get the news “as it happens.” Media is often reporting rumors that are spreading before all the facts have been collected. Without a relationship, this may be damaging, especially if the truth is never fully revealed.

Instant news in many forms has increased the challenge to communicate the facts effectively. In the case of horrific events such as school shootings or misdeeds of employees there is probably no perfect public relations formula. But one thing remains clear: when trouble arrives we are, in the end, human beings. If school leaders have made themselves available and approachable before a crisis, it is more likely they will be believed during a crisis. If the media is asked to wait until all the facts are known, this courtesy is more likely to be extended if the leader has been forthcoming in the past. Sometimes, the best we can hope for at a time of crisis is that our media, the community, and school district family will consider all the information, as it is available. We want our comments, too, to reflect consideration for the person, their families, students, and other school administration affected by the crisis before opening the situation up for dialogue. It is a delicate line, communicating during crisis, and to have the benefit of a prior relationship is a valuable resource during crisis.

Face-to-face and person-to-person contact is still the most reliable and fair opportunity to communicate. It not only alleviates the impersonality of technology, but it puts the “people” back in public relations. ❖

### Doyle Budget, continued from page 2

- **Low revenue ceiling exemption** increases from \$8,400 in 06-07 to \$8,700 in 07-08 and \$9,000 in 08-09.
- **Mentoring of initial educators** provides a new exemption from the revenue limits for costs associated with mentoring activities for new educators.

For more information on the Governor’s budget, go to his Web site at: [www.wisgov.state.wi.us/budget.asp](http://www.wisgov.state.wi.us/budget.asp).

**Finance Co-Chairs Russ Decker (D-Weston) and Kitty Rhoades (R-Hudson) have announced cities for public hearings.** Dates and times for the committee’s six public

hearings on the biennial state budget are: Tuesday, March 20, 10:30 am-4:30 pm, Milwaukee; Wednesday, March 21, 10 am-4 pm, DeForest; Tuesday, March 27, 12-5 pm, Chippewa Falls; Wednesday, April 4, 12-5 pm, Prairie du Chien; Wednesday, April 11, 12-5 pm, Rhinelander; and Thursday April 12, 10 am-4 pm, Green Bay.

Specific facility locations for each hearing will be realised in the near future. ❖

## Media Relations: It’s All About Relationships

- Jean P. Giles, Cedarburg School District

School business is news in small communities. Student success is news, whether it’s sports, debate, or kindergarteners watching an owl demonstration. Taxpayers want to know what’s going on with tax dollars. In small communities, the local paper is the only link between citizens. Building a relationship with the reporters is essential.

There’s no doubt about it, relationship building with the media can be hard. Sometimes, it’s a real challenge. Yet, we need the media to work with us, and we need to work with them.

I love sharing my horse stories because I have a passion for horses, and I find horses often make more sense than we humans do. When I first got my two horses a few years ago, I read several books on relationship training with horses. Trainer Gawani Pony Boy tells horse stories that really hit home. He speaks about Native American horsemanship and the relationship of the herd. I have learned quite a few lessons from learning about relationships with horses.

**Have patience and understanding.** Know that reporters have deadlines, aspirations, and other stories besides yours. They have an editor with expectations that might be different from yours. Understand the demands of their job and be patient. Take those horses. I always say, “You can’t move a 1,000 pound animal by force.” Well, you can *try*, and boy, have I seen some “cowboys” try. But in the end, the horse can kick or rear up and probably break loose and run off. Clearly, a horse cannot be bullied into doing something, nor can people. Working with local media, or any human being for that matter, requires time: time for you to get to know each other, and time for each of you to do your work.

Give the gift of time: Reporters are able to be more accurate when they have advance notice of things happening in schools, and when they can contact people in a timely fashion. Save time for them by giving them press releases well in advance, and be willing to offer time for interview questions. Back to my horse analogy: If you really want the horse there for you when you need him, you need to build a trusting relationship first.

That investment of giving your time to a reporter may be returned to you later when you need the favor returned. There will come a time when you need an extra hour or so to gather accurate facts before making any media comments. It is fair to ask when you have given.

Be willing to serve: Let local reporters have a “heads up” when you can on incidents before they become full-scale catastrophes. Provide well-written press releases and let them use your words. Interviews are important to reporters — help them get interviews in your organization.

Patience, understanding, the gift of time, and a willingness to serve are key ingredients to trusting relationships. ❖

## Member Spotlight

- Anne Egan-Waukau, WEAC

Collaboration is the key to success in any school district’s public relations campaign.

Just ask teachers, staff, students, parents, board members and administration at the Merrill Area Public Schools who have united to get the word out about Merrill’s great schools by creating and distributing a colorful, professional-looking brochure.

“The joint effort of the Merrill teachers’ union, district level administration, and the Board of Education to produce a public relations brochure is a first for our district,” said Carole Witt Starck, director of curriculum and instruction at Merrill Area Public Schools.

“Merrill Area Public Schools provide students with many great programs and, most importantly, we prepare students to be life-long learners,” said Stacy Kleinschmidt, an elementary teacher who is part of the team working to produce the brochure.

“We wanted our community to be aware of what’s going on in our schools; so together with the district, the Merrill Teachers’ Association is working to promote our great schools,” Kleinschmidt said.

Before moving forward with the brochure, the local teachers’ association and administration decided to solicit help from outside the district, and they were able to do that through the Wisconsin School Public Relations (WSPRA), said WEAC Media Relations Specialist Anne Egan-Waukau, who is a WSPRA Board member.

“The WSPRA membership consists of extremely talented individuals who work in various capacities in school districts across Wisconsin and they are always willing to help each other out,” Egan-Waukau said.

The Merrill group invited Egan-Waukau and Mary Ellen Marnholtz, community relations coordinator for the Wausau School District.

The group’s goal was to produce a reader-friendly, cost-effective and professional brochure that captured the district’s accomplishments, Egan-Waukau said. By utilizing WEAC services, such as a graphic designer and print shop, that goal will be reached, she said.

“I’m sure this successful effort will open doors for more opportunities for joint projects,” Starck said. “Everyone says that ‘we all work together,’ but this is proof that in Merrill, working together really happens.”

Kleinschmidt agreed. “The experience of working with the district truly has been a good one. We are proud to be a part of a committed team that includes teachers, staff, administration, parents, community and students,” she said. ❖

### Look for this news in the April/May issue of WSPRAgram:

WSPRA board member Ann Eagan-Waukau will tell you how your school district stands to benefit from a recent collaboration with Wisconsin Native American Tribes and the Wisconsin Education Association Council

Wisconsin school districts have been required to teach Wisconsin Native American history and culture since 1991, however few resources are available to assist educators as they comply with the law. In April, thanks to

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