

It Sure Looks Like Magic!
The Art and Science of Effective Communication



WSPRA Annual Fall Conference 2007
Radisson Paper Valley • Appleton
Nov. 8-9, 2007

E-letters and Websites • Crisis Communication • Referendums •
Community Engagement • Understanding Your Publics

Join us at the annual WSPRA Fall Conference and see how you can
create communication magic in your community.

Thursday morning will feature **national public relations expert, Nora Carr, APR**, as she unlocks the secrets of effectively using new, emerging communication technologies and shares her expertise on the art of successful communication planning.

Then get the most out of this professional learning opportunity at the other sessions all designed to strengthen your strategic communication efforts. Keynotes and break-out sessions will include crisis communication, public engagement, and understanding where referendum information campaigns and advocacy campaigns cross lines. A special Thursday evening event is planned to share the magic of networking.

Plan now to maximize your communications investment and attend the 2007 WSPRA Fall Conference!

Watch your mail and wspra.org for details! ❖

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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August 2007
Vol. 33, No. 1
wspra.org

Getting a Fresh Start with Media

■ Roseann St. Aubin, Milwaukee Public Schools

Summer recess may be the perfect time to assess key relationships and decide how to make them better. Ask yourself—is it time for a fresh start with reporters? Reporters ask the questions that our students' parents would ask, if our parents only knew who to call. Learning how to make the best use of the conduit that reporters represent can gain us ground with our families.

Consider starting the school year with an individual briefing with each of the reporters who cover you most. The briefing could take the form of a *deskside chat*, where you as a district administrator, offer to visit the reporter in her office, or invite the reporter to your work setting. Allow the discussion to be free-ranging. Use the setting to explain initiatives on which you will focus for the year, and why you see them as critical.

Not interested in a one-on-one approach? Schedule a *reporters' or editors' roundtable*. Picture a roundtable event as a gathering of news people with your district's senior staff members. Suggest two or three topics and provide information on those topics, but allow the conversation to roam where it will. The informality of this setting will stand in sharp contrast to a formal news conference on one topic, and may help you get a gauge on how news professionals think and interact – or how they will view a coming initiative. Milwaukee Public Schools used an *editors' roundtable* before announcing its strategic planning process, and fielded questions critical to public acceptance of the effort.

Make use of invitations to attend *editorial board briefings* that many news organizations host on regular intervals. These invitations signal a news organization's readiness to weigh in on an issue in an editorial statement for the morning paper, and also signals their willingness to hear your thoughts before they decide their stance.

As you venture into deeper relationships with reporters, you may be tempted to share more information than you previously would have. *Know what the rules are.* The rules

that govern what is on or off the record are the rules you negotiate with the reporter. Establish these at the start of the interview. "On the record" means you can be quoted directly in the story by name. "On background" means information may be attributed to its source in some way, either by occupation or some other description, but not by name.

"Off the record" means the information you provide is not to be used at all in the story. Be careful about the use of this rule. If you choose to go off the record, make sure to say it before you make the statement, NOT AFTER. But a word to the wise—if you really don't want to read it in the paper or see it on television, don't say it at all!

Be certain the news person knows the district's rules in putting the story together. Explain the limitations you have in sharing information from student records. Provide access to students only after there's been sign-off from the student's parents or guardians. In the Milwaukee Public Schools district, we created release forms for news media coverage and translated the forms from English to Spanish and Hmong. Our parents decide who takes pictures of their children, or interviews them for a story.

Do not expect a chance to review an article or see a story before it runs. And – make it a rule to *give feedback* on stories. Did the reporter get something wrong? He deserves the chance to set the record straight, and you want to be certain that the error is not repeated in future stories. Don't be afraid to ask for a correction. By the same token, give praise when the story was on the mark. Media representatives like knowing their efforts were appreciated.

Vow this year *never to ignore* phone calls, say "no comment," or state something in anger or in haste. Vow to remember to share information with staff, parents and your other important stakeholders before they see it in the newspaper or on TV. It may be time for a fresh start all around, and it's best to resolve that now – before the beginning of a new school year. ❖

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From the President . . .



Dorreen Dembski

I hope everyone had time off to enjoy family, friends, vacations, and perhaps reflections on the year past. As it happens every year, August offers an opportunity to start anew. I would like to reflect on WSPRA's past year and look forward to the new year, too.

At the July national conference, WSPRA received national recognition from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). We earned Distinguished Project for the ABC's of WSPRA and Distinguished Chapter – Honorable Mention. It was a proud moment to represent Wisconsin.

In 2006-07, WSPRA completed a financial audit, developed an updated budget reporting system, delivered a well-received fall conference, presented on PR topics at several locations including at the State Education Conference. We began the logo and web site redesign project. (Do you see the new logo in this newsletter?) If any of you are also WASDA members, there is a new program in their video library prepared by WSPRA that overviews the value of school PR.

There is much to be excited about when we look forward to a new year. We are welcoming four people to the Board and anticipate fresh perspectives. We also have some dedicated folks who have been the rock of WSPRA and we are so thankful for them. The Board, together with Patti Welch, coordinator of operations, and Mabel Schumacher, executive director, worked this summer to develop a strategic plan, and format a calendar of events, and continued to work on the logo and web site redesign. The new web site will include a "members only" section to provide members with the public relations information that they need to build strong school public relations programs. The new web site will be unveiled at the November conference.

WSPRA is your organization, dedicated to connecting schools, families and communities. Welcome back to a great new school year. Welcome back to WSPRA. ❖

News About WSPRA

WSPRA Earns National Recognition

At the July conference of the National School Public Relations Association, WSPRA earned three awards:

Distinguished Project

The ABC's of WSPRA is a comprehensive manual that documents operational items. It has become the Board of Directors go to place for answers about how to effectively run WSPRA. The ABC's of WSPRA earned top spot in the special projects category from NSPRA.

Distinguished Chapter – Honorable Mention

To earn Distinguished Chapter designation, it requires (1) hard work by all WSPRA members to reach into the communities with quality public relations work, and (2) the Chapter to report it. Mabel Schumacher, executive director, is masterful at reporting activities. With her diligence, we reported an incredible

amount of work completed by our members, and again won National honors. WSPRA has been a distinguished winner four years in a row:

- 2004 Distinguished Project (Negotiations Handbook)
- 2005 Distinguished Chapter Honorable Mention
- 2006 Distinguished Chapter
- 2007 Distinguished Project (ABC's Binders)
- 2007 Distinguished Chapter Honorable Mention

Will you help us continue this distinguished tradition in 2007-08?

Blue Ribbon Chapter

The Blue Ribbon designation also places WSPRA among the very best chapters in the country. To earn Blue Ribbon designation, NSPRA requires many activities and outcomes of its chapters. WSPRA has won Blue Ribbon chapter year after year. ❖

George Tipler Founders' Scholarship 'Call for Nominations'

In 2006, WSPRA instituted the George Tipler Founders' Scholarship to recognize Tipler's contributions to the formation and growth of the Association. Scholarship recipients are awarded a one-year membership to the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). Criteria for the scholarship are an individual who (1) is currently a WSPRA member, or is willing to join, (2) is currently not a member of NSPRA, (3) demonstrates dedication to school public relations, and (4) desires to grow professionally.

Please complete the enclosed nomination form, recommending an individual deserving of this WSPRA honor. Attach a separate page responding to the questions on the form. Self-nominations, are accepted. Nominations must be received no later than Oct. 1, 2007. The award will be presented at WSPRA's conference on Nov. 8. ❖



Your WSPRA Board of Directors is proud to present to you a fresh contemporary look for WSPRA. The new WSPRA logo sports new colors of bright blue and yellow because we wanted our new look to be upbeat, inviting, and professional. Our new slogan *Connecting Schools Families Communities* highlights the role that an effective public relations program plays in nurturing the incredibly important school-community connections.

The new logo was the first step to redesigning WSPRA. Developing a new website that provides WSPRA members is our next step. We hope you like WSPRA's new groove! ❖

Equity Corner

Reduce Prejudice and Build Community Connections Through Service Learning

■ Mabel Schumacher, Ph.D., Fort Atkinson

Have you heard the TV ad that touts, "You don't need a separate painkiller for backache, headache, and joint pain... just take Brand X"? It seems effective since it provides people with a remedy that addresses several needs. As educators, we look for solutions that address a number of issues because we know that the educational process is complex and interrelated. Often when we take one positive step, it fosters benefits in other areas. If we look carefully at Service-Learning, we find that this program provides many benefits—both direct and tangential.

Student Achievement. Service-Learning experiences are positive, meaningful, and real. They involve students in complex issues and promote deeper learning. Students apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in the classroom in very practical ways. They take control of their own learning, and most importantly have a structured time to reflect about the service they provided and what they have learned.

Character Education. Service-Learning projects help teachers to address those elusive character traits in a meaningful way. Caring, values, self-esteem, and social responsibility result naturally from meaningful interaction with others. Students also gain experience with leadership and teamwork; they see the benefit of taking the initiative to solve problems.

Community Benefits. Real needs in the community are addressed through Service-Learning. The community derives actual benefits from student involvement while gaining a better understanding of the students, their learning, and the district.

Communication. Service-Learning projects provide a strong foundation for increased two-way communication between the district and the community.

"Service-Learning projects can help teachers reduce prejudice, identify stereotypes and help students increase their awareness of diversity."

Tips You Can Use

Encourage Return Visits to Your Website

Website surveys indicate that parents who are new to a school district first look to the District's front page site for information and then visit school websites. Existing parents first visit the website of their child(ren)'s school's, rather than the district's site. Also, the front page of a site should feature something new everyday. Additionally, websites are not newsletters. They are visual medium that people scan for information.

- To share district information with existing parents, post it to the district's front page and also post it to each individual school web site.

But there is more....

In addition to all of the above benefits, Service-Learning projects can help teachers reduce prejudice, identify stereotypes, and help students increase their awareness of diversity. According to Jennifer Holladay, Interim Director of Teaching Tolerance, there are four things that teachers can do "to help ensure an anti-bias outcome."

1. **Include student reflection ...a critical element.** Throughout the service-learning project, students must be provided with opportunities for self reflection. They need to think about their own learning, possible stereotypes of the population with whom they are working, and the concerns that are at the heart of the project—for example, hunger, homelessness, or ecology.
2. **Promote student collaboration with the community.** According to Holladay, teachers must "create opportunities for students to collaborate with and learn from the population being served." In addition, there should be opportunities to "work side by side" to accomplish common goals and to learn from one another.
3. **Work with students to identify real community needs.**

Conversations with community representatives will help students to identify real needs that can be addressed. As a result, students will be dealing

with significant issues rather than surface "quick fixes."

4. **Provide students the opportunity to study issues that contribute to "need."** As students deal with various needs in the community, they also have the opportunity to delve into underlying issues. In this way, they can develop a sense of advocacy that can contribute to the community.

To read Jennifer Holladay's entire article, visit wspira.org and click on *Equity Corner*. You will also find there The Multicultural Service-Learning Planner to help teachers assess their service-learning projects to "ensure anti-bias aims." For more information about Service-Learning, contact Therese Dary, service learning consultant at the Department of Public Instruction, teri.dary@dpi.state.wi.us.

Additional links on this topic:

- <http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?ar=729>
- <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/fscpl/slhpmpage.html>
- <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/fscpl/sl-teach-tools.html> ❖

- Welcome new people: include contact information on the front page of your website.
- Feature short, concise summaries of information that people can scan, with a link to the full article or web page.
- Ask key people who regularly deal with the public to keep a log of general questions or comments that they receive via E-mail or phone calls. Use this list to generate ideas of information to place on your website, questions to answer, or as a way to review if frequently requested information is easy to find on your site. ❖