

2011 National School Public Relations Association Mark of Distinction Award

The Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) currently has 194 members and of those 71 are NSPRA members (as of May 2011). Therefore, MSPRA falls in Category A: Chapter has less than 50% NSPRA membership. This year, we are submitting an entry under Section II: Special Focus Areas: Professional Development/PR Skill-Building.

Section II: Special Focus Areas

1. Professional Development/PR Skill-Building –

Each year, the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) plans and provides a variety of programs/activities designed to support the professional growth and status of its members and improve the communication skills of all educators including administrators, board members, teachers, and support staff. This submission includes four examples of professional growth support: 1) MSPRA's Annual Conference, held this year in concert with the Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA), 2) A half-day Drive-In conference, 3) MSPRA's Annual Communications Contest, and 4) The Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award.

This entry shows documentation and evidence of chapter programs/activities, including:

- A.** Explanation and overview of overall effort (follows in this section);
- B.** Statement of chapter goals and objectives for programs/activities (follows in this section);
- C.** Documentation and copies of conference/workshop/meeting programs and agendas, marketing materials, tip sheets and/or PowerPoint presentations distributed to participants (See Section A and B.);
- D.** Examples of specific programs/activities for contests and awards (See Section C, D, and E.);
- E.** Identification of target audience and participation/attendance lists (See participant list in Section A and B.);
- F.** Documentation/demonstration of measurable outcomes, effectiveness and success of the program/activity (See conference evaluation in Section A and drive-in workshop evaluation in Section B.);
- G.** Explanation of how program/activity relates to NSPRA's Goals and Objectives (follows in this section).

Note: An MSPRA Stick Drive is included with supporting documents as mentioned in this application.

Michigan School Public Relations Association

Overview of MSPRA Professional Development & Skill-Building Activities

Professional development and skill-building is a major focal point of the Michigan School Public Relations Association. By design, this area gets a great deal of our human and financial resources, and results in some of the best communication skill-building in the state. The strength of our efforts drives our membership retention and, despite a severe economic downturn, continues to drive conference attendance as well.

Our professional development activities are primarily in:

- Annual Conference: two days of intensive skill-building workshops, networking and learning, with a topical pre-conference that reaches out to superintendents
- Half-day Drive-in Conferences: topical workshops with expert speakers to equip members with knowledge and skills
- Annual Communications Contest: competition to recognize member skills, encourage sharing of high quality projects and programs, with “how you can do it” sessions offered at the Annual Conference. The contest includes an Outstanding Superintendent Communicator award to recognize the critical role of communication at the top of our organization and to showcase the state’s best examples.

The MSPRA Board appoints a minimum of three members to Professional Development: one to manage the annual conference, one to manage our MSPRA Communications Contest and the third to serve as a resource for APR certification. Typically, 1-3 additional board members are also either conference co-chairs, assist with the contest, or coordinate regional drive-in conferences.

The Board has several goals for our professional development activities. For the annual conference and drive-ins, these include:

- Skill-building for all levels of members, those who are new to the profession and those with many years of experience
- Preparing members to address current hot topics in Michigan education
- Networking at all levels of Michigan’s educational community to strengthen professional relationships
- Recognition of the skills and sharing of the successful strategies of our contest winners (annual conference)
- Exposure to some of the topics, trends, and speakers identified at the National School Public Relations Association conference.

The goals for the Communications Contest are to:

- affirm school districts’ communication efforts,
- inform districts on how they can improve, and
- provide a venue to exchange best practices among the people providing communication services in Michigan’s public schools.

Together, the Communications Contest, Annual Conference and Drive-in Conferences provide unparalleled opportunities for members and others in the school family to learn and improve how they communicate. All of these activities generate broad participation from education staff across the state and we have been able to maintain our numbers in each.

Our evaluations from the activities are mined for improvement ideas and member suggestions are implemented on a continual basis. Every few years, these activities are re-invented to ensure their relevance, value to our members and high quality of programming. We are using new media and technology to promote our organization and events, and finding new ways to use these tools for professional development as well.

Our reputation for professionalism and excellence means we are the group other state education-related associations turn to for advice, toolkits, presentations and workshops for their members. Our Board members can be found at the conferences and meetings of many of these partner organizations, helping to equip other members of the school family with the communication skills they need.

The professional development activities of MSPRA mirror the goals and objectives of NSPRA.

- MSPRA is the go-to organization for strategic communication.
- MSPRA is a leader in the use of technology to advance education through responsible communication.
- MSPRA provides valuable services and resources to our membership to help them acquire and sharpen the skills they need to:
 - ✓ plan and implement an effective public relations program.
 - ✓ be recognized and valued as critical members of school/district leadership teams.

Every workshop, every breakout session, every speaker, is chosen to build the abilities of our members. Every contest entry helps advance the use of the RACE formula as well as shine a bright light on our profession and excellent communication practices.

As a result of the deliberate planning and expert implementation, our chapter elevates the role of communication, the skill of our members and the value we each bring to our schools and communities.

The 2010-2011 Annual MSPRA Conference

MSPRA held its annual two-day conference on January 25-26, 2011 at the Radisson Hotel in Kalamazoo. The MSPRA Executive Board – along with the organization’s conference committee – works to provide member access to the conference by convening it in different locations throughout the state. Past conference locations have included Grand Rapids, Lansing, Kalamazoo, and Ann Arbor.

Nearly 100 individuals, including presenters, members and other education administrators, attended the conference. This factor was important this year for MSPRA because – as a way to save costs – MSPRA partnered and collaborated with the Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA), sharing room blocks, speakers, and professional expertise. MASA’s Mid-Winter Conference – held January 26 to 28 was themed Integrated Technology: A Peer-to-Peer Sharecase. The shared location, shared speakers, and overlapping date, allowed superintendents and lead administrators from school districts across the state to spend time at both the MSPRA conference and the MASA conference.

Evaluations of the conference were positive, with frequent references to the outstanding structure of the conference in terms of providing compelling keynote speakers, holding useful breakout sessions, building in reflective time for planning, and networking and “group therapy” among members.

For the second year, we promoted the conference electronically, without using printed materials. Conference teaser and reminder e-mails were sent to target audiences with a link to MSPRA’s website for the details. We offered online registration in addition to the traditional paper system. Additionally, we marketed the MSPRA conference to MASA members and superintendents to increase our attendance numbers and encourage superintendents to become members of MSPRA.

Unique Features

Three unique features were part of the 2010-2011 Annual Conference:

- MSPRA featured a pre-conference session entitled “Making the Most of Mandatory Communications” featuring Dan Pappas, associate executive director of the Michigan Association of School Administrators. Dan facilitated an interactive presentation of “Everyday Creativity,” on how we – as school communicators – can harness creativity to transform everyday experiences and challenges. Following a DVD presentation by National Geographic photographer Dewitt Jones, Dan led an exercise with participants who learned:
 - Creativity is a matter of perspective.
 - There’s always more than one right answer.
 - Reframe problems into opportunities.
 - Don’t be afraid to make mistakes.
 - Break the pattern.
 - Train your technique.
 - You’ve really got to care.

- Through our partnership with MASA, we were able to feature two unique keynote sessions. Author and former Houston school district communicator and United States Department of Education official Terry Abbott spoke on: The Permanent Campaign: Winning Hearts and Minds through Media and Community Relations. Plus, author Tim Burress, covered topics featured in his best selling book, “The Hamster Revolution: How To Manage Your Email Before It Manages You.” These well-received keynote sessions would not have been possible without the partnership between MSPRA and MASA.
- Attendees were also treated to former MSPRA President and current NSPRA President Ron Koehler addressing the importance of communication during a time of change. Again, because of the MASA/MSPRA partnership, superintendent attendees who chose to partake of the MSPRA conference were able to hear from one of the nation’s top school public relations communicators right in their own backyard. The session provided superintendents with an opportunity to put communication in perspective and appreciate its value for their school districts.

The Conference—Day One

Immediately following the pre-conference session and a welcome from MSPRA President Michelle Ready, the conference convened with our day-one keynote speaker, Tim Burress, who – through his award winning book “The Hamster Revolution: How To Manage Your E-Mail Before It Manages You” – was able to enlighten our conference by sharing amusing anecdotes and interesting allegories associated with using email and social media to manage your work life and alleviate stress. Tim gave us tips on managing email accounts through handheld devices (many of us learned things about our own Blackberries that we didn’t even know), and offered concrete strategies to help us use our inboxes to our advantage, mainly by sending clear and concise emails with well-crafted subject lines.

During lunch, communication contest winners (see narrative on page7) were honored as part of the festivities. After lunch, attendees participated in back-to-back general mini-sessions featuring the following topics: The Public Relations Profession: An Update and Future Direction by Blaine Lam, Owner of Lam and Associates; and Financial Transparency with the Grosse Pointe School Team: Christian Fenton, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Support Services; Thomas Harwood, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Labor Relations; and Brendan Walsh, Treasurer, Grosse Pointe Board of Education.

After the general mini-sessions and a break, participants had the option to attend six breakout sessions, including Managing Stress in the Workplace with Dick Egli, APR, Egli and Associates; BrandSense & NoCents: Leveraging Internal Resources for Maximum Competitive Advantage with a team of professionals from Kalamazoo Valley Community College; Communications Planning for Bonds and Millages with Janet Roberts, APR, Director of Community Relations and Fund Development, Huron Valley Schools; Working with the Media: An Education Reporter’s Perspective with Julie Mack, Kalamazoo Gazette; The Reality of Social Media with Cyndee Harrison, VP of Assistant Services and Emergent Media, Frontier 3 Advertising; and, Communicating During Negotiations with Thomas Harwood,

Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Labor Relations, Grosse Pointe Schools.

MSPRA Conference Evening Networking Event

Our annual MSPRA Conference is an opportunity for members to develop and share new ideas and participate in skill-building for school communicators from across the state. We do our best to ensure that the two-day experience is packed with learning. And, while structured learning is key, time and time again, members tell us in surveys and informally that one of the most important aspects of our conference is networking and building relationships.

So, at this year's conference, we used the Kalamazoo environment to our advantage, taking our group across the street to the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts— a unique Kalamazoo treasure in its own right. In addition to excellent camaraderie, light appetizers, and refreshments in the Institute lobby, members were able to view a national exhibit. The Wyeths: America's Artists featured three generations of artists from that family for a special discounted admission price.

The Conference—Day Two

After reviewing the annual report, attendees participated in the conference's second keynote session (and MASA's pre-conference session) presented by Terry Abbott, entitled "The Permanent Campaign: Winning Hearts and Minds through Media and Community Relations." Side by side with Michigan superintendents, MSPRA members heard the latest communication strategies from Abbott.

At lunch, MSPRA members heard Ron Koehler give his learned perspective on conducting communication in a challenging environment, such as the one Michigan is currently experiencing, both from a budgetary and school-climate experience.

Finally, attendees were able to participate in the MASA's first plenary session, featuring Terry Abbott – entitled "Back to the Future – Communications 2.0." This session was a continuation of the MASA pre-conference session. It linked communication objectives with district performance in a host of areas, and highlighted practical communication strategies for daily school district operations.

We believe that MSPRA's collaboration with MASA will benefit our organization in several ways. The exposure from partnering with MASA will lead to increased membership numbers from the superintendent ranks, while raising our profile and reminding district leaders that communication has been – and will continue to be – an important function for all school districts throughout Michigan. Our work continues in this vital area; our overarching, long-term marketing goal is to have every school district maintain an MSPRA membership.

MSPRA Drive-In Conference

This year, MSPRA took a slightly different approach to its annual drive-in conference by tapping the expertise of our members to create a social media professional development opportunity: “Social Media and Electronic Communication in Schools.”

Social media is all the rage, and today many schools aren’t sure how much use is appropriate. Communicating with parents via social networks is just the beginning. Today, teachers are using Facebook and web logs, among other electronic tools, to deliver instruction. Schools across Michigan continue to struggle with creating policy and guidelines to direct proper use without missing a great opportunity to communicate with important audiences and improve instruction.

This sold-out, highly-rated workshop was held on April 12 from 9 to 11:30 a.m. at the Michigan Education Leadership Group building in Lansing, with more than 50 members and non-members in attendance.

Featured speakers included:

- Brad Banasik, Michigan Association School Boards Legal Counsel and Director of Labor Relations
- **Portage Public Schools’ Social Media Team**
 - Tom Vance, Community Relations Manger
 - Kyle Herm, Information Coordinator
 - Mollie Templin, Communications Specialist
 - Rhonda Rasmussen, Technology Integration Specialist

MSPRA’s Annual Communications Contest

Each year, MSPRA provides a framework in which individuals who direct communication and public relations programs in school districts and ISDs can:

- Attend conferences and workshops designed to enhance skills in personal and organizational communication.
- Exchange ideas and strategies with specialists from other school districts.

One of the best ways to exchange ideas and strategies is through MSPRA’s Annual Communications Contest. Each year, MSPRA invites schools throughout Michigan to nominate their best programs, campaigns, and communication products for a juried review.

Product categories range from writing to print and multi-media publications (i.e., electronic, interactive, video, and podcast).

MSPRA’s Gold Medallion Award recognizes outstanding programs or projects that advance responsible school communication. Entries may come from public and private schools, education agencies, regional MSPRA groups, and any public relations agency or private business serving education entities.

MSPRA’s Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award annually recognizes a Superintendent for leadership in school district communication.

2010 Communications Contest

MSPRA's executive board members facilitated this year's contest. The judging process remained virtual; judges were mailed original entries and then were able to input their evaluations via an online Zoomerang Survey.

The judging panel included approximately two judges per category. The Gold Medallion Award and Outstanding Superintendent Communicator categories had more than two judges.

For next year's contest, MSPRA is in the process of securing a panel of public relations practitioners outside of the education community—communication experts in other areas of practice. The opportunity to have work critiqued by communication professionals from other industries should help increase the number of entries.

2010 Entry Recap

- Total 2009 Entries - 35 (equates to approximately 20% of MSPRA membership)
- Total Judges – 23 (Judges includes members of the MSPRA Executive Board and rank-and-file MSPRA Members)
- Total Awards - (11 Distinguished, 8 Commendable, 1 Gold Medallion, 1 Outstanding Superintendent)
- 54% of entries received some level of recognition

Entry Breakdown

- 3 Electronic Newsletter
- 6 Electronic & Interactive Media
- 9 Writing
- 3 Web Site
- 5 Publication
- 3 Project or Program
- 3 Gold Medallion
- 3 Outstanding Superintendent

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award annually recognizes a Superintendent for leadership in school district communication. In 2010, we received 3 nominations.

The contest judges chose Kevin Konarska, Superintendent of the Kent Intermediate School District (ISD), as MSPRA's 2009 Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award recipient.

MSPRA President Michelle Ready presented Kevin with his award at a Kent ISD Board meeting in February 2011.

Other examples of increasing PR visibility and providing PR counsel:

1) NSPRA Power Hour – This year, MSPRA offered a free professional development session in four locations across Michigan in December 2010 (see specific locations in this section). As part of the opportunity, MSPRA Executive Board members agreed to host the December NSPRA Power Hour at four different locations across the state. We used the certificate that MSPRA received for being a 2009 Mark of Distinction Award Winner to pay for one of the four hosted sites.

NSPRA Power Hour Agenda

Grassroots Advocacy: Nurturing Support with Strategic Communication

Panelists: **Ron Koehler, APR**, assistant superintendent, organizational and community initiatives, Kent Intermediate School District, Grand Rapids, MI; **Joe Krumm, APR**, director, community/government relations, North Clackamas School District 12, Milwaukie, OR; and **Christine Davis**, director, district communications, Brevard Public Schools, Viera, FL.
Moderator: **Rich Bagin, APR**, executive director, NSPRA, Rockville, MD.

In today's tough economy, it is essential for school districts to develop a strong grassroots advocacy movement for our schools. This work must go beyond traditional lobbying efforts and key communicator networks in order to build a broad-based community effort supported by research, targeted outreach, and strategic media relations. The care and feeding of a strong grassroots network requires constant communication, organized events, activities and a good amount of hand-holding – the type of work in which communicators excel. This panel of experts will share their winning techniques and help you plant the seeds of support in your district.

This e-mail was sent to all MSPRA members inviting them to the December PR Power Hour. Your regional MSPRA Board members and colleagues will be gathering at the following locations to join the NSPRA PR Power Hour. **Please register for this free event with the representative for the location you plan to attend:**

Kent ISD (2930 Knapp Street NE - Grand Rapids, MI 49525) **11:30 AM Networking, 12-1 PM PR Power Hour**

Contact: Allison Kaufman, Director of Communications & Marketing; MSPRA At-Large Board Member at [616.365.2227](tel:616.365.2227) or allisonkaufman@kentisd.org

Oakland Schools (2111 Pontiac Lake Road, Waterford, MI 48328) **11:30 AM Networking, 12-1 PM PR Power Hour**

Contact: Danelle Gittus, APR, Public Relations Specialist; MSPRA Past President at [248.209.2181](tel:248.209.2181) or danelle.gittus@oakland.k12.mi.us

Traverse City Area Public Schools (412 Webster Street, Traverse City, MI 49686) **12-1 PM PR Power Hour**

Contact: Alison Arnold, Director, Marketing & Communications & Volunteer Services; MSPRA Awards Committee Chair at [231.933.8995](tel:231.933.8995) or arnoldal@tcaps.net

Washtenaw ISD (1819 South Wagner Rd, Ann Arbor, MI 48103) **11:30 AM - 1:30 PM, 12-1 PM**

PR Power Hour

Contact: Gerri Allen, Supervisor, Communication Services; MSPRA Issues Management Chair at [734.994.8100](tel:734.994.8100) ext.1321 or gallen@wash.k12.mi.us

2) Let's Talk – Using Effective Communication To Manage Change – MSPRA entered into a unique communication subcommittee opportunity with the Education Alliance/Michigan State University Performance Evaluation Grant Project. A component of the project – entitled Let's Talk: Using Effective Communication To Manage Change – provided MSPRA members with the chance to convey the importance of communication to attendees of the Michigan Department of Education Best Practices Conference on April 15, 2011. (The Powerpoint presentation is attached on the enclosed stick drive.)

Individual participants and MSPRA members included Bob Harris, Grant Project Manager; Linda Wacyk, Michigan Association of School Administrators; Kacie Kefgen, Middle Cities Education Association; Jan Ellis, Michigan Department of Education; Anita Banach, Clarkston Community Schools; and Gerri Allen, Washtenaw Intermediate School District. To prepare for the presentation, the subcommittee surveyed members of MASA, the Michigan Association of School Personnel Administrators (MASPA), MSPRA, and the Michigan Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (MASCD), on the following questions/topics:

- Rate your awareness of Michigan's new requirements for annual employee evaluations for teachers, principals, and other district administrators.
- How far along are you in developing annual performance systems that take student achievement growth into consideration when measuring the effectiveness of teachers/administrators?
- How far along are you in negotiating a way to tie compensation to employee effectiveness, as measured at least in part by student achievement growth?
- Rate the importance of communication in your progress – or lack of progress – in developing and implementing employee evaluations that incorporate student growth measures and that tie compensation to employee effectiveness.

Conference attendees received the survey results. They were also given instruction on communicating about evaluations using the RACE formula, and taught how to produce a communication plan for this important topic. Finally, participants were given tips for talking with the media, working with reporters, getting out the good word, and evaluating their communication plans. Participants were all given links to the MASA Employee Performance Evaluation Resource Center – where communication is a critical facet of the web site.

3) Social Messaging Tips For Schools – Given the increased focus on using social messaging and electronic tools to convey district information to internal and external audiences, MSPRA saw a need to help educate members on the ins and outs of social messaging. The MSPRA Technology Committee prepared and distributed a social messaging tips bookmark to members. It includes information on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, Websites, and Social Media. These bookmarks have been well received by members; as evidenced by continuing

requests for copies to share with employees in local and intermediate school districts.

4) Redoubling MSPRA efforts to market to current and prospective members –In February 2011, the MSPRA Board decided to improve its member marketing efforts. With a desire to retain current members, seek new members and subsequently increase association revenue, the MSPRA Executive Board enlisted the assistance of Lambert, Edwards & Associates, one of Michigan’s largest and most accomplished public relations/investor relations firms, to assist with member marketing and communication. In May 2011, the MSPRA Board approved a comprehensive marketing and communication plan designed to increase membership and provide additional value to our members wherever possible. (The approved plan is included on the enclosed stick drive.) LE&A has agreed to assist MSPRA at-cost because it believes in the value of our organization and the importance of maintaining communication as a vital function for school districts.