

NSPRA 2021

**Mark of Distinction
Award Application**

**Professional Development
and PR Skill-Building**

Respectfully submitted by



INDIANA-NSPRA.org

[Twitter.com/INSchoolPR](https://twitter.com/INSchoolPR) • [Facebook.com/INSchoolPR](https://facebook.com/INSchoolPR)

The [Indiana School Public Relations Association](#) (INDSPRA) board is submitting one Mark of Distinction entry under Section II, Special Focus Area: Professional Development/PR Skill Building. INDSPRA is a Category A with less than 50% of our members being NSPRA members.

INDSPRA meets NSPRA's requirements of being in "good standing" with the Association, which requires the chapter to:

- Maintain a minimum of 10 NSPRA members among the membership as required in NSPRA Policy 260.1 Chapters – Purpose and Formation;
- Meet at least once during the fiscal year;
- Submit the required Annual Chapter Cash Flow Report by Oct. 30 of the year;
- Submit a current chapter membership contact list by Oct. 30 of the year;
- Submit the names of newly elected chapter officers following an annual election;
- Adhere to its chapter bylaws.

All activities shared below were completed between May 1, 2020 and April 30, 2021. The professional development activities, projects or programs shared in this application were developed and implemented under the auspices of the chapter.

Overview of INDSPRA Professional Development/PR Skill Building Year-Round Program Entry

Chapter professional development goals and objectives:

With the onset of the pandemic, the INDSPRA board re-evaluated its programs designed to support the professional growth and status of members. We launched initiatives, not only to improve the communication skills of all educators during this particularly challenging time, but also provide tools to support their health and wellness during this challenging time.

Anticipating that this pandemic would challenge our members and their school districts in ways never anticipated, we pivoted to provide more intentional support and connection with and to our members.

Despite the pandemic challenges, our INDSPRA board plowed ahead with achieving many of our goals and objectives outlined in the [strategic plan](#). Through this Professional Development/PR Skill Building Year-Round Program Entry, INDSPRA plans to demonstrate how we supported our INDSPRA members with professional development, skill building, and provided new networking support and opportunities for connections to thrive.

Through our annual Spring conference "Survive & Thrive," Fall Boot Camp, Wellness Wednesdays, a new regional director program, a new INDSPRA private members' Facebook group, on-call crisis support, and a partnership with the Central Indiana Education Service Center, INDSPRA has been able to maintain a

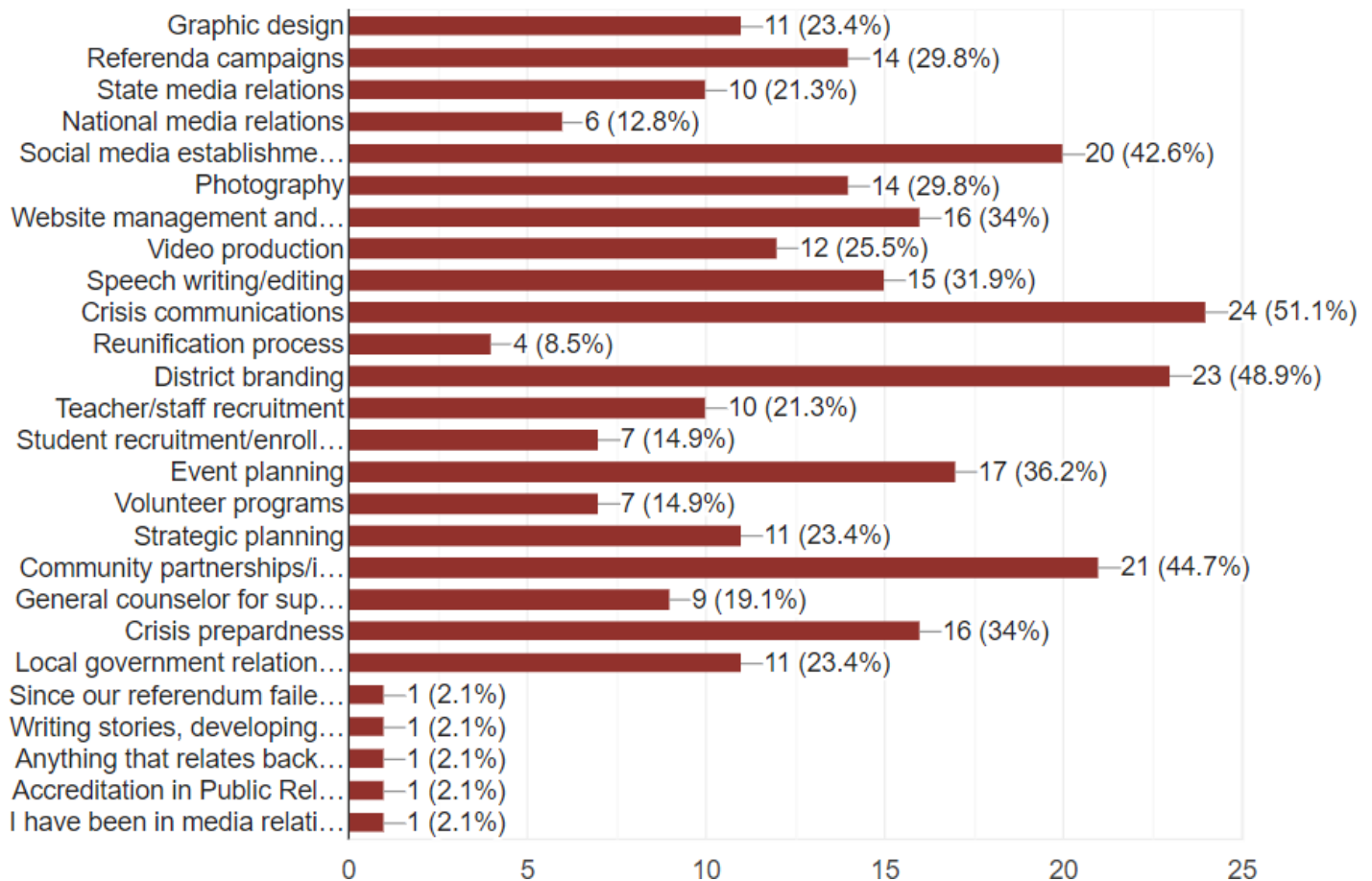
regular virtual support and professional learning network, serving our members with effective communication tools. This entry will detail the success and impact of each of these seven initiatives.

INDSPRA's initiatives shared here align with NSPRA's mission of building support and trust for education through responsible public relations that leads to success for all students. Through INDSPRA's actions this year, we have provided more value in our membership through our leadership in the education industry.

In November 2020, INDSPRA asked our members to respond to a survey that we standardly distribute every other year. Through this survey, we had 51 members share their area of expertise in which they felt comfortable advising another colleague. This data provides INDSPRA with potential future advisors and professional development opportunities from our experts in each respective field.

What are some notable experiences and/or training that you would feel comfortable advising another INDSPRA member on? Check all that apply.

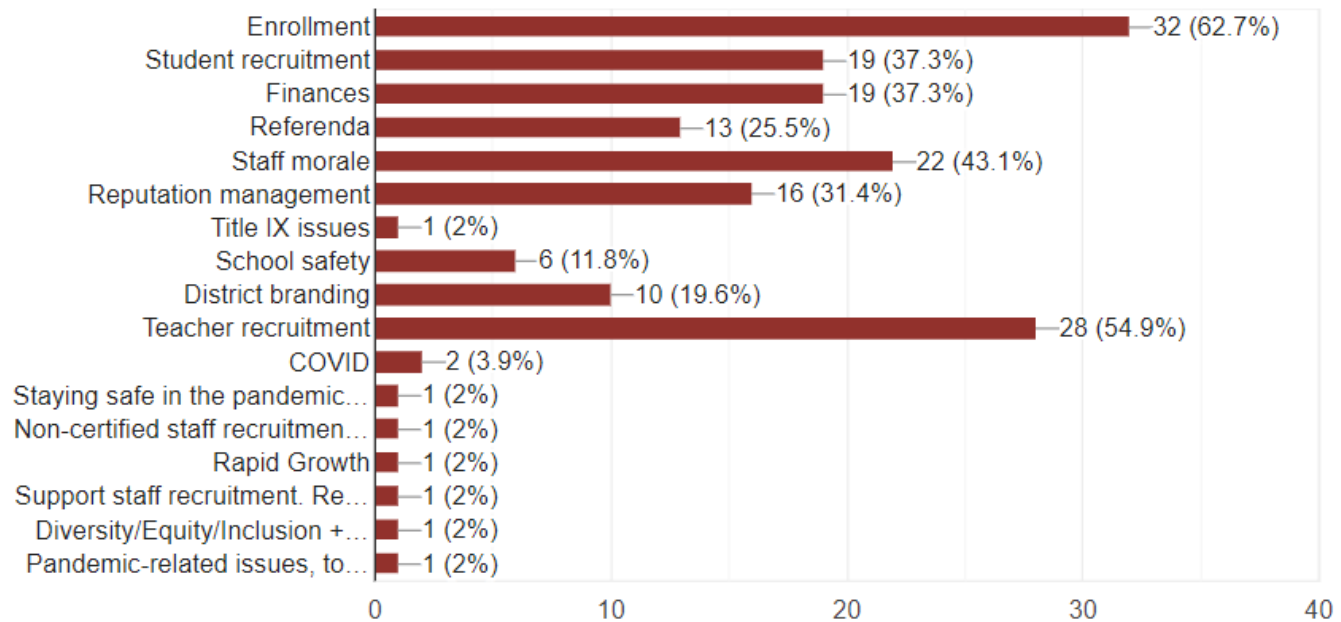
47 responses



This report also gave INDSPRA data on topics of concern for our members. This information provided us a clear understanding of the topics of professional development our members need from INDSPRA.

What are the biggest challenges facing your district? Check all that apply.

51 responses

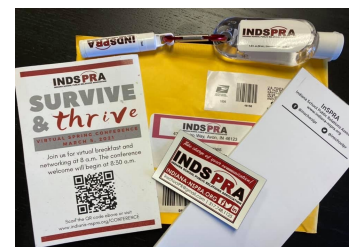


In this survey, our members drilled down and ranked specific professional development opportunities, and also shared their most relevant reasons to maintain their INDSPRA membership. The full data of this survey can be found [HERE](#).

2021 Spring Conference - “Survive & Thrive”

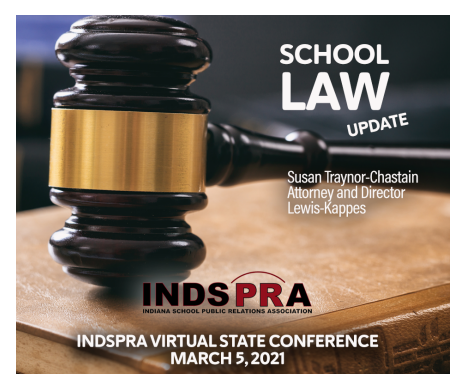
INDSPRA’s primary goals for our Annual Conference are to offer skill-building sessions, networking and sharing best practices and resources to all members in an effort to support their professional growth. We featured timely topics to help our members in their immediate duties and in their leadership throughout their district.

In this unusual pandemic year, INDSPRA focused on wellness and working smarter. The annual conference was titled “Survive & Thrive: INDSPRA’s Virtual Spring Conference” and was held on March 5, 2021. Every participant was mailed a hand sanitizer, lip balm and QR card with the conference Zoom link. We had 53 registrants, which is a high attendee rate for INDSPRA in a non-pandemic, in-person year. The list of registrants can be found [HERE](#).



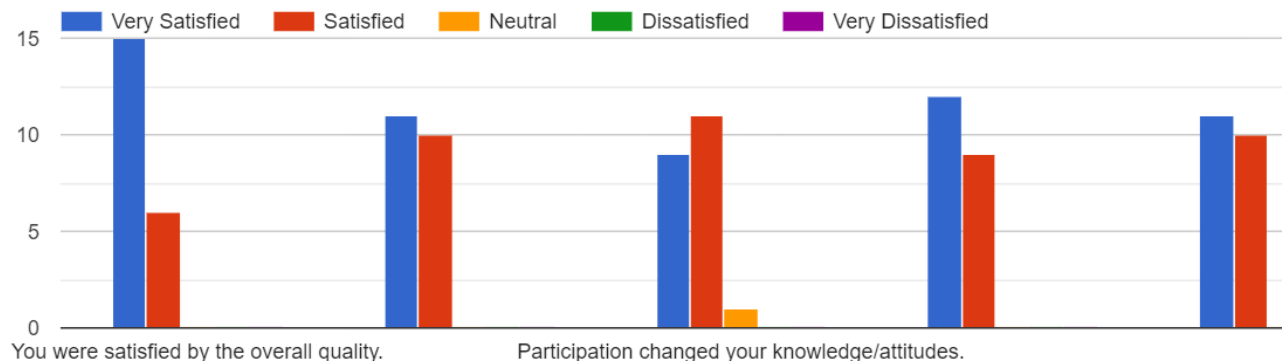
Our “Survive & Thrive” had two keynote speakers: Lesley Bruinton whose topic was the PR Superhero, and Mark Mohammadpour on Designing your Wellness Accountability Plan. Our packed conference also included two legislative sessions, taking care of our brains and bodies, effective ways to recruit staff and teachers, an address from our Indiana Secretary of Education, and more. The conference agenda and program is linked [HERE](#) and the slides for each presentation are linked on our website for our members [HERE](#).

We promoted this conference with these stills shown below, turned many of them into animated gifs, and created a video slideshow of these stills as well. These promotions were distributed through direct member emails, on our Facebook page and closed Facebook member group, as well as on the INDSPRA Twitter account.

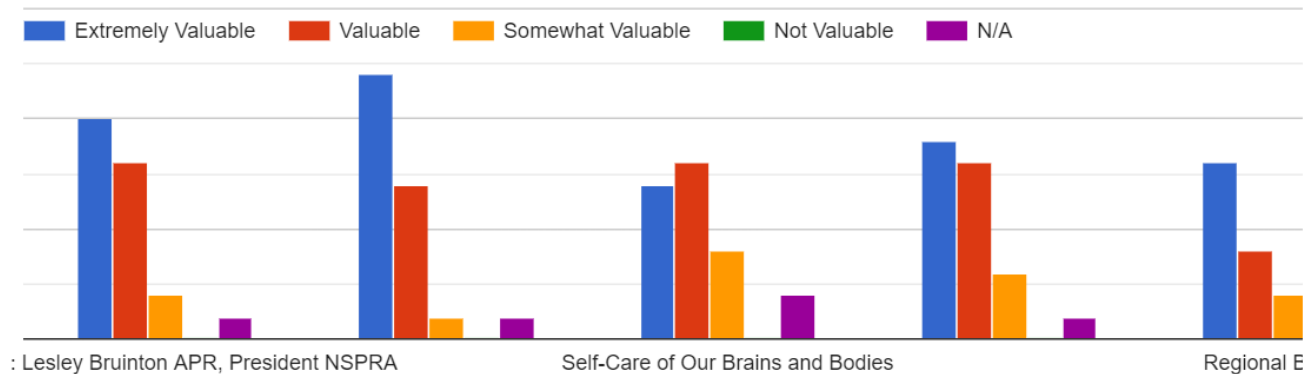


The evaluations were overwhelmingly positive as expressed in the conference evaluations; several key components of the evaluation were highlighted below. The [full data of this survey can be found here](#).

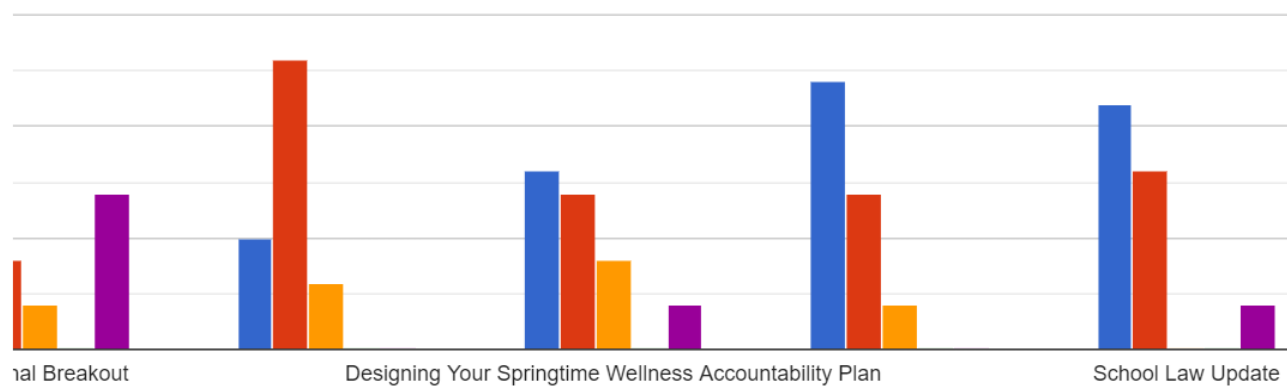
Please evaluate the conference via the scale provided.



Please indicate the value of each session.



Please indicate the value of each session.



Fall Re-Boot Camp

The pandemic and the painful challenges that each professional and their school district were enduring in the fall required us to provide our Indiana members with continuing education/professional development through our annual Bootcamp. We have presented structured Bootcamps for the past five years and they are one of our most popular on-going programs. Our curriculum reviews the public relations basics but also brings new approaches and visions of public school education communication.

With the extra challenges and duties our members faced in the fall due to the pandemic, INDSPPRA opted to not ask anything more of our peers for this professional development. Instead, INDSPPRA utilized portions of NSPRA's virtual conference; we were very grateful for this opportunity from NSPRA. Here's our [curriculum for the day-long virtual program and the number of attendees](#) next to each session title.

All INDSPPRA members, district school superintendents and other key administration leadership were [invited via emails](#) to attend any virtual session that interested them. There was no charge for our members to attend. We promoted the conference via direct emails, all INDSPPRA social media channels mentioned earlier, and utilized a video promotion linked [HERE](#).

Wellness Wednesdays

The weight of new safety and health management issues confronted by every school district often fell on the already overworked shoulders of the public relations professionals. INDSPPRA recognized our members needed a safe place to talk, to relate, maybe to complain a little, and as kids say, "just dump" in a non-judgmental space. We emphasized that our members were charged with taking care of their districts, their communities and their families, and attending our Wellness Wednesdays is one way they can take care of themselves.

INDSPRA
INDIANA SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

**FRIDAY
OCTOBER 9**



FOR INDSPPRA MEMBERS

Branding | Referendum | Profile of a Graduate
Chatter Groups | School Engagement | Equity Communications
Navigating Change | Wellness Campaign

INDSPRA Boot Camp gives us the opportunity to charge or re-charge and freshen our school communications! For rookies and veterans alike, find something new - a tool, a technique, a perspective, a plan - that you can bring to your district.



Wellness Wednesdays have no agenda; the conversation, using Zoom video conferences, was free-form. Our Wellness Wednesdays have been scheduled every two weeks over the lunch hour and are open to all INDSPRA members. The Zoom link is sent to all members the day prior. Members often commiserated, but also found tips, tools and “way to go!” support in these meetings. When we first started hosting these meetings in the early stages of the pandemic, more than 24 participants attended regularly; it held fairly steady at that number for several meetings. The average attendance has been 12 members, but has ranged from 30 members to as few as six. INDSPRA averages two Wellness Wednesday meetings per month and has had 18 meetings from April 29, 2020 through May 15, 2021.

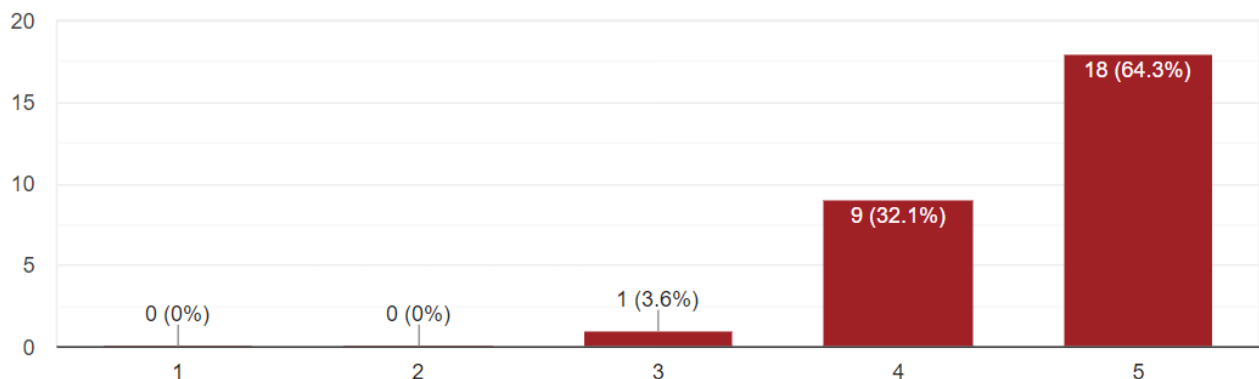
The conversation is driven by the attendees and moderated by INDSPRA’s executive director. The topics usually take us to current issues, but frequently have been centered around school districts’ health and safety plans, and the adjustments and challenges that have been inevitable due to the pandemic. Self-care is a common topic, and best practices are shared among members to help those that struggle in that area. These Wellness Wednesdays have reinforced the connection between colleagues to support one another.

Post research indicates this was a beneficial and popular program for our members. INDSPRA sent out a survey to our members asking those that have attended a Wellness Wednesday to share their thoughts. The following data proves the success of the program as a key support for our members. The full [data on this survey is linked here](#).

KEY: 1 = did not help at all, 5= helped me a lot

Please rate how much Wellness Wednesdays have helped you feel better in your day-to-day roles/responsibilities as the school communications person?

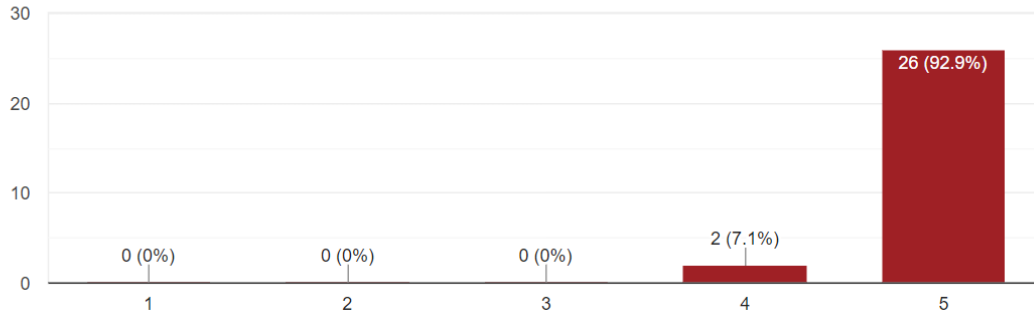
28 responses



KEY: 1= I don't agree 5= I agree

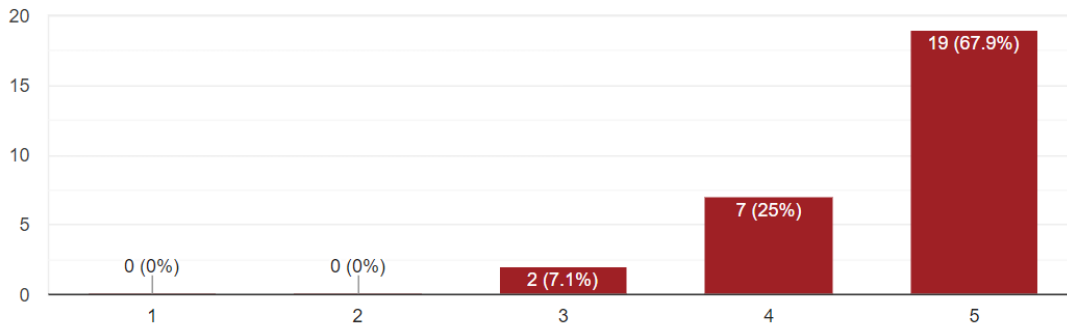
After Wellness Wednesdays I know there are other school public relations professionals who share the same issues and to whom I can turn.

28 responses



Indiana School Public Relations Association's Wellness Wednesday is an important program for my personal and professional development.

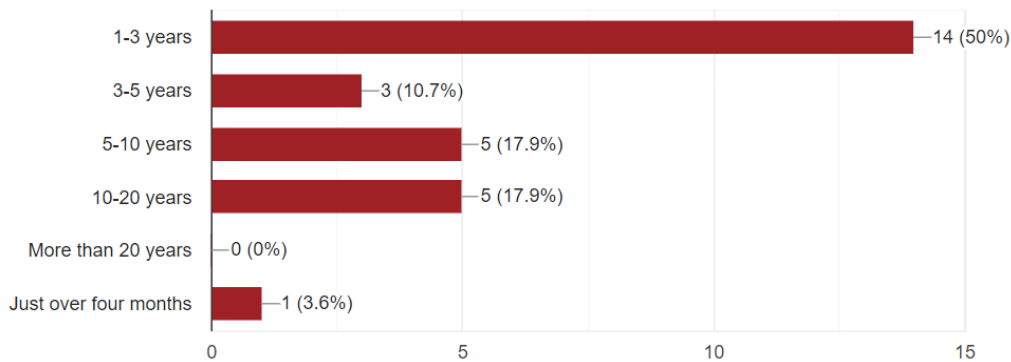
28 responses



An interesting bit of research shows that many Wellness Wednesday attendees have been our members with less experience.

I have worked in school public relations management for:

28 responses



Here are the member responses to the question “What did you enjoy or find beneficial during your most recent Wellness Wednesday? (Or, any other thoughts you'd like to share with INDSPRA?)”

- *Learning about how other schools are navigating through COVID and finding better ways to communicate with our community.*
- *Especially as federal and state rules changed around COVID-19, it was great to hear what other districts were doing and how they were handling the changing protocols. Moving forward, we know school as we know it will change in a post-COVID world. It's wonderful to have peers across the state to share what is working for the betterment of our students and our schools. It's great to see examples of best practices, but it's even better to talk with the people who made them happen and learn from them.*
- *It's easy to feel isolated in this role. Having a chance to meet up with others over Zoom eases that isolation. It is important to learn how others throughout the state are handling situations that I am also facing.*
- *Wellness Wednesday builds relationships between peers across the state.*
- *I really enjoy the chance to check in with people who have experience in the field. SO helpful.*
- *Sometimes the conversation turns to district level decisions rather than communications. I think some of us don't have much say in decisions but are expected to communicate them. While it's interesting to hear what some districts are doing, I want to know more about how people are communicating what they are doing. For example, less "Are you going to offer virtual learning next year?" and more "How are you strategically communicating about what you're offering next year?" This last week focused a lot on communications strategies, and I think I took more away from the discussion than previous weeks (even though I really appreciate any week I'm able to join).*
- *When it first began a year ago, it was probably the most valuable to me. Having the chance to vent, share ideas and learn from others was invaluable, especially at a time when we were all so isolated.*
- *Getting advice for my struggles, sharing resolutions to our common struggles, and just having a good laugh!*
- *Having an hour, you can talk and listen to people with the same duties as you can be very stress-relieving. You will often find an idea to a problem you have been having or develop a way to resolve an issue. It is also helpful to stay on top of events that are coming down the pipeline.*
- *It's great to be able to bounce off ideas off each other in an informal setting like this. While I think there is a place for more structured events, like the conferences, this is a great way to get together, relax a little, and just talk shop. The laid back environment is great for productive conversations.*
- *As a one person department, I do not have anyone to collaborate or share ideas with. Being able to see what works for other professionals in my field has been very beneficial and has helped me grow in my position.*
- *The camaraderie that Wellness Wednesdays' provides gives each of us the support knowing we are all going through similar challenges. Best practices and resources are shared at these meetings and they are a true benefit for the INDSPRA membership.*
- *I appreciate the time to connect with other school PR professionals in the area and share ideas, successes and challenges.*

- *I found it beneficial to have colleagues to get feedback from about challenging issues and a great way to stay up on current events and issues.*
- *planning for graduation with continued pandemic, dealing with mask mandate/advisory*
- *Connecting with others and finding out what issues they are dealing with is very beneficial to me. I've also connected and swapped materials with colleagues outside of the meetings.*
- *How other school districts were handling messaging about school vouchers.*
- *I appreciate the willingness of the participants to roll up their sleeves and help one another.*
- *As a newbie to the education industry, it is incredibly beneficial for me to hear about the projects and issues that other professionals encounter. I am grateful for INDSPRA and the opportunity for connection that Wellness Wednesdays provide.*

New Regional Directors

The INDSPRA Board of Directors did not allow the pandemic to affect our growth and administration. We grew our Regional Director structure and divided our state into 10 regions. The board began to search for veteran INDSPRA leaders in each region to lead organic networking sessions and support each other in their respective areas. Although we are still working on finding leaders in a few of our more rural regions, the addition of the six Regional Directors provides a human touch and connection with our members, especially in parts of the state outside of the urban areas where professionals may feel isolated. The regional directors are encouraged to reach out to their region monthly. Directors are often invited to board meetings to provide regional updates and encourage them in their leadership roles. During this year's annual conference, INDSPRA created virtual breakout sessions for each region to connect individually.

The goal of creating Regional Directors was identified in our [strategic plan](#) as an initiative that would provide additional support and connectivity with our members, while fostering leadership roles for the future of the board. Despite the pandemic and life feeling like it was standing still at times, INDSPRA is pleased that this new networking opportunity among our members is continuing to grow.



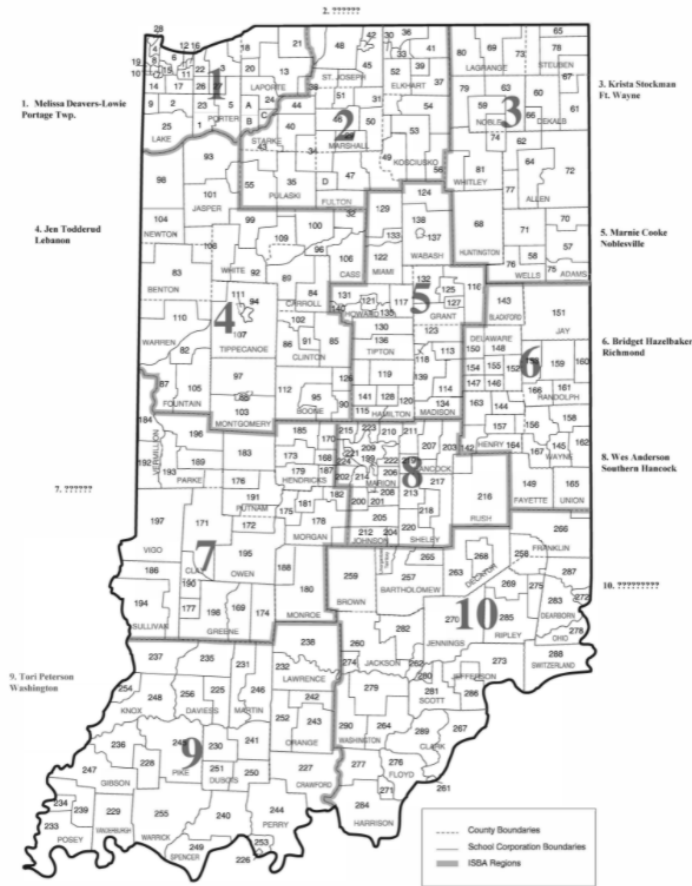
[See a meeting with some of our Regional Directors here](#)

REGIONAL DIRECTORS

- 1. Melissa Deavers-Lowie, Portage Township Schools
- 2. TBD
- 3. Krista Stockman, Fort Wayne Community Schools
- 4. TBD
- 5. Marnie Cooke, Noblesville Schools
- 6. Bridget Hazelbaker, Richmond Community Schools
- 7. TBD
- 8. Wes Anderson, Community School Corporation of Southern Hancock County
- 9. Tori Peterson, Washington Community Schools
- 10. TBD

If you are interested in becoming a Regional Director, please contact [Donna Petrakis](mailto:Donna.Petrakis@indspira.org).

[Click map to view full.](#)



Members Only Facebook Page

To increase connectivity within our membership and provide an opportunity to share best practices and resources, INDSPRA developed a closed members-only Facebook group. This private group has 68 members who provide a new post between them nearly every day, with up to 24 comments per post. Topics range from preparing our peers for what other districts are dealing with, to sharing professional resources, and asking for assistance with a common communication platform. This has proven to be an effective and quick way to ask for help and connect with colleagues.

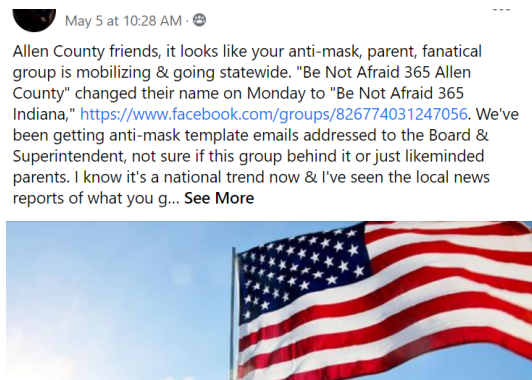
21 TIPS FOR A POSITIVE NEW YEAR
2021

<p>1. STAY POSITIVE Recognize the things that you did well on and believe that success is possible in you can trust that with faith and an optimistic attitude all things are possible.</p>	<p>11. REMEMBER YOUR WHY Low your purpose. Remember why you do what you do. We don't get burned out because of what we do. We get burned out because we forget why we do it.</p>
<p>2. TAKE A DAILY "THANK YOU WALK" You can't be stressed and thankful at the same time. Feel blessed and you won't be stressed.</p>	<p>12. LOVE THE PROCESS Remember there is no such thing as an overnight success. Love the process and you love what the process produces.</p>
<p>3. EAT HEALTHIER FOODS That grow on trees and plants and less foods manufactured in plants.</p>	<p>13. HAVE TRUST Trust that everything happens for a reason and expect good things to come out of challenging experiences.</p>
<p>4. TALK TO YOURSELF Instead of I can't or I won't. Instead of listening to your complaints, fears and doubts, talk to yourself with words of truth and encouragement.</p>	<p>14. NO COMPLAINING RULE Implement the No Complaining Rule. If you're complaining you're not leading.</p>
<p>5. NO ENERGY VAMPIRES ALLOWED Post a sign that says "No Energy Vampires Allowed" Gandhi said, "I will not be anyone's walk through my mind with their dirty feet."</p>	<p>15. READ MORE Read more books than you did in 2020. I happen to know of a few good ones. :)</p>
<p>6. BE A POSITIVE TEAM MEMBER Being positive doesn't just make you better, it makes everyone around you better.</p>	<p>16. DON'T SEEK HAPPINESS Happiness will find you, passion and purpose and happiness will find you.</p>
<p>7. DON'T CHASE SUCCESS Decide to make a difference and success will find you.</p>	<p>17. FOCUS ON "GET TO" Focus on "Get to" or "Be to". Each day focus on what you get to do, not what you have to do. Life is a gift not an obligation.</p>
<p>8. GET MORE SLEEP You can't replace sleep with a double latte.</p>	<p>18. GET BACK UP The next time you "fall" remember that it's not meant to define you. It's meant to define you.</p>
<p>9. DON'T WASTE YOUR ENERGY Don't waste your precious energy on gossip, wrong comments, issues of the past, negative thoughts or things you cannot control.</p>	<p>19. SMILE & LAUGH MORE This isn't a joke or overstatement.</p>
<p>10. LOVE, SERVE AND CARE Everything has to be paid to make for you have to serve to be great. Look for opportunities to Love, Serve and Care.</p>	<p>20. BOOST YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM Your health is your wealth. Eat healthy, exercise, get vitamin C, D and Zinc.</p>
<p>21. ENJOY THE RIDE You only have one ride through life so make the most of it and enjoy it.</p>	

Download these tips at jongord.com/21tips

[Sample self care tip sheet shared out](#)

Here are a few of the many topics shared in our members' posts: Governor's press conference, Pantone color resources, mask mandates, pandemic attendance policies, student enrollment campaigns, substitute appreciation campaigns, press releases, online learning options for next school year, referendum open house, Facebook rules on commenting for district pages, high school graduation billboards, principals of the year, anti-mask sharing/advice, 21 tips to take care of yourself and have a positive new year, and so much more.



On Call PR Counsel and Crisis Support

Our INDSPRA executive director, Donna Petraits, provides up to two hours of free on-call counsel to all INDSPRA members. The majority of the requests are crisis-related. She averages one to three calls per week, based on her timesheet which provides anecdotal evidence of this need and professional support. See a sample of the executive director's [membership consult log here](#).

Partnership with the Central Indiana Educational Service Center

INDSPRA entered into a partnership with the Central Indiana Educational Service Center (CIESC) this year, bringing 11 new INDSPRA members, incredible facility space, and technology support to host our conferences. This partnership proved invaluable by providing the technology support for our first virtual conference in 2021. We will be hosting our Boot Camp 2021 at the CIESC facilities, likely offering a hybrid attendance option. Through this new partnership, INDSPRA has been able to successfully deliver invaluable training for our members.

INDSPRA also led an education video for the state, in collaboration with the Indiana Association of School Business Officials, the Indiana School of Public School Superintendents, many public school districts throughout the state, and was produced by the very talented CIESC staff. This video was launched at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, sharing that public schools adapted to the challenges and will be ready for our students. The video is linked here: <https://vimeo.com/423210985>

INDSPRA is pleased to share the details on these seven initiatives that we have led in the past year for our members and the education industry in Indiana. INDSPRA continues to grow, in memberships, in connections, in talent, and in leadership throughout the state. NSPRA, we appreciate your invaluable leadership, as well as your time and consideration of this application.

**Thank you NSPRA 2021
for your consideration of
INDSPRA's**

**Mark of Distinction
Award Application**

**Professional Development
and PR Skill-Building
Year-Round Program**

The “Mark of Distinction” Recognition Program
for NSPRA Chapters

Entry Form

(Please include this information with each individual entry)

Chapter Name: Indiana School Public Relations Association

Chapter President: Maria Bond

President’s contact information

District/Organization: Mt. Vernon Community School Corporation

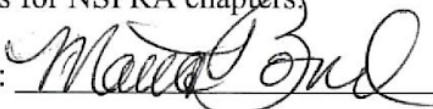
Address: 1806 W. State Road 234

City/State/Zip Code Fortville, IN 46040

Telephone: 317-485-3100 x5115 e-Mail: maria.bond@mvcsc.k12.in.us

Right to Use Materials Statement

On behalf of the Chapter, I agree that NSPRA has the right to use any materials, project/program examples, etc., submitted in this entry in Association print/online publications, on the website, and as “best practice” resources for NSPRA chapters.

Signature of Chapter President: 

Application Process Checklist

- Each entry includes this cover form and the Entry Specifics form.
- **A single PDF that includes links to related supplemental materials and examples is attached.** (If entering in more than one category, a single PDF for each category entry is attached or sent individually).
- Chapter president has signed the “right to use materials” statement on the entry form.
- **Entry is delivered no later than May 15** and sent to awards@nspra.org, subject line “Mark of Distinction.”

Mark of Distinction Entry Specifics

Chapter: Indiana School Public Relations Association

Please complete and include the information below for each individual entry

 Section I: Membership Building

- Current number of chapter members _____
 - NSPRA-provided membership baseline number as of June 1 _____
 - Number of chapter members who belong to NSPRA as of April 30 _____
-

 X **Section II: Special Focus Areas**

 X Category A – chapter has less than 50% NSPRA membership

 Category B – chapter has 50% or more NSPRA membership

 X 1. Professional Development/PR Skill Building

 2. Special PR/Communication Program, Project or Campaign

 One-time project/program (completed within a single year)

 Continuing annual project/program (repeats each year; demonstrate new/improved/revised components)

 Multi-year project/program (one-time only with defined start and end dates)

 Multi-year phased project/program (components implemented in clearly defined phases each year)

 3. Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Effort