

NSPRA 2021

**Mark of Distinction
Award Application**

*Coalition-Building/
Collaborative Communication Efforts*

submitted by



due May 15, 2021

The "Mark of Distinction" Recognition Program for NSPRA Chapters

Entry Form

(Please include this information with each individual entry)

Chapter Name: Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA)

Chapter President: Anne Cron, APR

President's contact information

District/Organization: Birmingham Public Schools

Address: 31301 Evergreen Rd.

City/State/Zip Code: Beverly Hills MI 48025

Telephone: 248.203.3026 e-Mail: acron@birmingham.k12.mi.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: Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA)

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

 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)

 X 3. Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Effort

2021 National School Public Relations Association Mark of Distinction Award Application

This year, the [Michigan School Public Relations Association](#) (MSPRA) is submitting two entries under Section II: Special Focus Areas: one for Professional Development/PR Skill-Building and one for **Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Efforts**.

Special Focus—Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication

Overview of MSPRA Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Entry

MSPRA initiated efforts and/or joined with other organizations to provide communication resources in four areas. This application details the following initiatives (on pages 1-8): A) releasing the **Return to School Communication Toolkit**, B) resharing **Communicating About Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE)**, C) revising **How to Approach Student Activism**, and D) resharing the **Read by Grade 3 (RBG3) Communication Guide**. The application also addresses the required documentation, evidence of collaboration, and final reflections (on pages 9-11).

Initiative Details

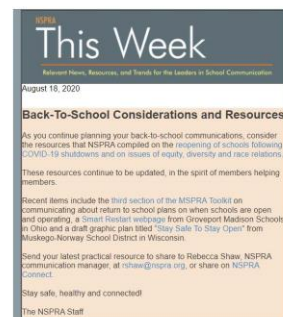
A) Releasing Return to School Communication Toolkit

In 2019-20, MSPRA was active in developing toolkits and collaborative statewide communication. The majority of the work occurred on:

- September 19-September 24, 2019, EEE Communication Toolkit
- December 04, 2019-February 19, 2020, RBG3 Communication Guide
- February 27-March 03, 2020, COVID-19 Communication Toolkit
- March 15-March 20, 2020, Emergency Child Care Communication (COVID-19 related)

All of this activity generated an increased awareness of MSPRA's communication leadership and expectations (both internal and external) for additional products, leading to the development of the Return to School Communication Toolkit.

Over the summer of 2020, MSPRA teamed with two statewide associations along with the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to produce a three-part toolkit for school administrators and communicators on Communicating about Returning to School During COVID-19. All three sections were shared across Michigan and also featured in NSPRA's *This Week* (NTW) e-newsletter. The third section was shared in NTW's August 18, 2020 edition.



Here's how its development unfolded. Last spring, as end-of-school activities concluded, our focus turned toward returning to school in the fall and how we could help our districts communicate about it. Our Governor's office had developed a MI Safe Schools Return to School Roadmap and other organizations were preparing Back to School Learning Guidance. So, MSPRA leadership determined that it was time to develop related communication guidance. The work spanned six weeks, beginning with our initial meeting on Friday, June 26, continuing through the release of Section I on July 15, the release of Section II on July 23, and culminating with the release of Section III on August 6.

***The toolkit was noted
in NSPRA This Week.***

In each phase of the process, we involved MSPRA members and our organization partners. All three sections were reviewed by representatives from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators (MASA), and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA). All sample materials were used with permission, serving as examples of what could be tailored to individual district situations and needs.

Each section's release was announced via email to our members and organization partners: Part I on July 15, Part II on July 23 and Part III on August 6. Below is the August 6 email announcing the Part III installment and summarizing all three parts for our members followed by a nearly identical email to our partners. **(Differences between the MSPRA and partner emails are highlighted in green.)**

Email to MSPRA Members

Subject: Toolkit for Communicating about Return to School Plans



August 6, 2020

Greetings MSPRA Members,

MSPRA is pleased to release [Section III of its Toolkit for Communicating about Return to School Plans](#) to support schools in their communication to students, parents, union leaders, staff and board representatives, community members, the media and others about their individual return to school roadmaps (which includes their official COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plans as outlined in Executive Order 2020-142). Thanks to those members who contributed to this section.

This third of three parts coincides with the [Opportunity Labs Roadmap](#) and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Association's General Education Leadership Network's [Continuity of Learning - Back to School Guidance](#) timeframes:

1. [Do First](#) - Section I of the toolkit was released July 15, 2020. It is designed to help schools communicate with target audiences to highlight work being done over the summer to prepare for various return to school scenarios.
2. [Do Before Schools Open](#) - Section II of the toolkit released July 23, 2020, is designed to help schools communicate with target audiences to help them understand what school will look like in the fall, describe health and safety procedures, outline educational options and explain closure processes, should they be needed.
3. [When Schools are Open and Operating](#) - Section III of the toolkit released today, August 6, 2020, provides communication resources to support schools as they share important information and updates relative to school operations as Michigan moves through the phases of the MI Safe Start Plan.



All three parts of the toolkit are linked above, attached to this email, and can also be found at www.mspra.org. (Please feel free to share them with others.)

All three documents have been reviewed by representatives from the Michigan Department of Education, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators, and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators. All sample materials have been used with permission and are intended to serve as examples of what could be tailored to individual district situations and needs.

Remember:

1. As your district communicates, always consider your school's policies, codes of conduct, local community needs and local climate as you address the information needs of your stakeholders.
2. This toolkit and its parts are designed to help guide your communication, highlighting some of the ways school districts may choose to communicate about this important issue. When in doubt, consult legal counsel.
3. It is essential to recognize that COVID-19 is a public health issue. Please direct questions or inquiries about health guidelines to your local health department.

Your MSPRA Board

Email to Organization Partners

Subject: Toolkit for Communicating about Return to School Plans



August 6, 2020

Greetings Communication Partners,

MSPRA is pleased to release [Section III of its Toolkit for Communicating about Return to School Plans](#) to support schools in their communication to students, parents, union leaders, staff and board representatives, community members, the media and others about their individual return to school roadmaps (which includes their official COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plans as outlined in Executive Order 2020-142). Thanks to those members who contributed to this section.

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information and updates relative to school operations as Michigan moves through the phases of the MI Safe Start Plan.

All three parts of the toolkit are linked above, attached to this email, and can also be found at www.mspra.org. (Please feel free to share them with your members and colleagues.)

All three documents have been reviewed by representatives from the Michigan Department of Education, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators, and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators. All sample materials have been used with permission and are intended to serve as examples of what could be tailored to individual district situations and needs.

Remember:

1. As your district communicates, always consider your school's policies, codes of conduct, local community needs and local climate as you address the information needs of your stakeholders.
2. This toolkit and its parts are designed to help guide your communication, highlighting some of the ways school districts may choose to communicate about this important issue. When in doubt, consult legal counsel.
3. It is essential to recognize that COVID-19 is a public health issue. Please direct questions or inquiries about health guidelines to your local health department.

Be well.

The MSPRA Board
www.mspra.org

This work was shared electronically throughout the state via MSPRA's listserv network and that of our Michigan organization partners, and throughout the nation via the NSPRA network. One of our partners, the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators (MASA), even posted it under latest news on its website.

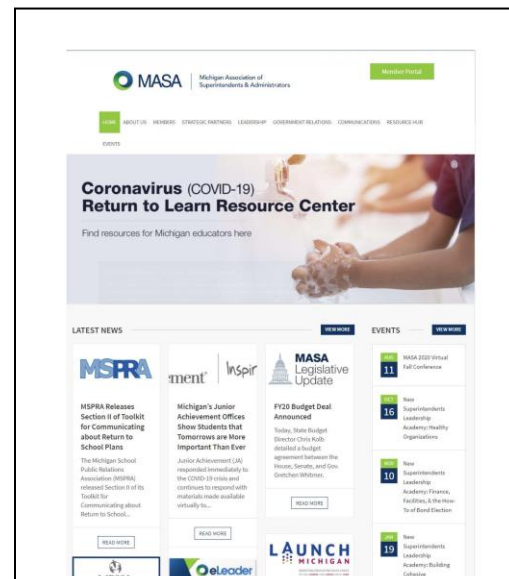
Here's a sample of the feedback we received after its distribution:

From: Holly McCaw <hmccaw@otsegops.org>
To: Gerri Allen <gallen48@juno.com>
Sent: Thu, Jul 16, 2020 08:01 AM

MSPRA Board,
... I compiled this [district plan] with the help of ... *"the Communication Toolkit and will continue to follow this great document as we move through the next phase with our families."*

Have a great day!

Holly McCaw



The Toolkit for Communicating about Return to School Plans was featured on MASA's website.

Director of Communications
Otsego Public Schools
400 Sherwood St.
Otsego, MI 49078
O: 269-694-7910
C: 269-267-7822

From: **Gillian Conrad** <gconrad@bchdmi.org>
Date: Thu, Jul 23, 2020 at 8:46 PM
Subject: RE: MSPRA's Communication Toolkit Return to School Part 2
To: Karen Heath <karen.heath@berrienresa.org>

Thank you for sharing Karen! This is fantastic and super thorough!

Gillian Conrad, MPH
Communications Manager
Berrien County Health Department
2149 E. Napier Ave.
Benton Harbor, MI 49022
Office: 269.927.5624
Cell: 269.369.6995
gconrad@bchdmi.org

RE: MSPRA releases Return to School Toolkit Sections I & II

From: Rich Bagin (NSPRA) <rbagin@nspra.org>
To: Mellissa Braham <mbraham@nspra.org>, Gerri Allen <gallen48@juno.com>
Cc: Karen Heath <karen.heath@berrienresa.org>
Sent: Fri, Jul 24, 2020 04:29 PM

So, what have you “guys” been doing this summer?

We admire how hard you work to deliver TIMELY and PRACITCAL insight to help all in school leadership positions. And thanks so much for sharing with us to distribute to others with a hearty attribution to you. I will review more of it this weekend.

Thanks again and take a break when you can.

Rich Bagin, APR
Executive Director
National School Public Relations Association
15948 Derwood Road, Rockville, MD 20855
Phone: 301-519-0496 / Fax: 301-519-0494
e-mail: rbagin@nspra.org
Web site: www.nspra.org
blog: schoolpr.wordpress.com

B) Resharing Communicating About Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE)

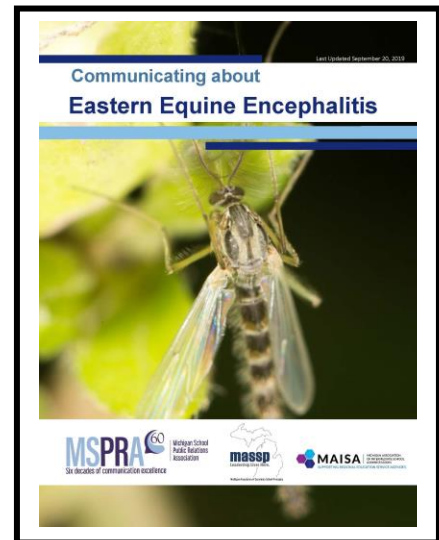
In September 2019, MSPRA initiated the production of a tool to help school leaders communicate about [Eastern Equine Encephalitis](#), a deadly, mosquito-borne disease. It was circulated at that time among our members and organization partners. **We reshared it with our members and partners in the Fall of 2020 as cases were again confirmed in Michigan.** See the message that follows:



Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020

MSPRA Toolkit helps schools communicate about EEE; avoiding mosquito bites

As of September 10, 2020, Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) has been confirmed in 19 horses in nine counties in Michigan – Barry, Clare, Isabella, Jackson, Kent, Mecosta, Montcalm, Newaygo and Oakland. Additional animal cases are under investigation. This is twice as many animal cases as the same time last year, and one possible human case is being investigated. EEE is a potentially deadly mosquito-borne illness that poses a threat not only to horses but to humans. There is an EEE vaccine available for horses, but not for people.



The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) in a September 11 [news release](#) is now strongly advising Michigan residents to protect themselves from mosquito bites. To aid in your Eastern Equine Encephalitis communication efforts, we have reposted the [Eastern Equine Encephalitis \(EEE\) Communication Toolkit](#) developed in 2019 by MSPRA in partnership with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) and Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP). Feel free to use it or share it as you deem appropriate.

We also notified our organization partners of the reposting via the email message below.



On Thu, Sep 17, 2020 at 2:33 PM Gerri Allen <gallen48@juno.com> wrote:

Hi Bill, Wendy, Tina, Paul and Marty,

In light of the recent MDHHS mosquito advisory, last Tuesday MSPRA reposted the 2019 EEE Communication Toolkit. You are welcome to share it with your members/colleagues.

Gerri Allen
MSPRA Executive Director

C) Revising How to Approach Student Activism

In February 2018, MSPRA worked with other organization partners in Michigan on a document about [Student Walkouts](#). In light of more recent events and at the suggestion of one of our partners (See Wendy's email below), MSPRA revised/refreshed that piece (with reference to it) and gave it a new title: [How to Approach Student Activism](#).

From: Wendy Z <wendyz@michiganprincipals.org>
To: Gerri Allen <gallen48@juno.com>
Subject: Chauvin Verdict
Sent: Mon, Apr 19, 2021 12:54 PM

Hi Gerri,

I had a member send me a blog post he wrote outlining how teachers can help students process the Chauvin trial verdict when it comes out. I think he has a good point that it is a teachable moment regardless of the outcome and that schools should be prepared to have open discussions about it. I am wondering if you think it would be appropriate to pull your group together to send something out. ... Best,

Wendy Zdeb
Executive Director, MASSP
1001 Centennial Way, Suite 100
Lansing, MI 48917-9279
(517) 327-5315 Office
(517) 899-4322 Cell
@massp | www.massp.com

We sent the revised and renamed Student Activism document to our members and our organization partners on April 21, 2021—who then shared it with their members. (See the Facebook post.) We also sent an email to NSPRA. It was subsequently posted to NSPRA's race-equity resources page.



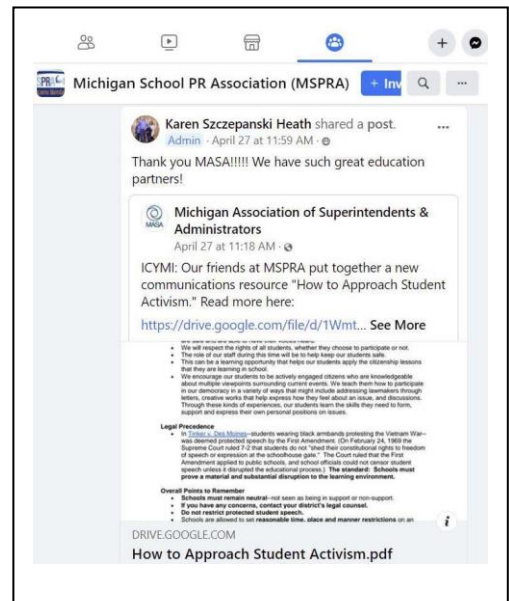
Wed, Apr 21, 9:54 AM

Dear NSPRA Colleagues,

In February 2018, MSPRA worked with other organization partners in Michigan on a document about [Student Walkouts](#). MSPRA has revised/refreshed that piece (with reference to it) and sent it to our membership today with a new title: [How to Approach Student Activism](#).

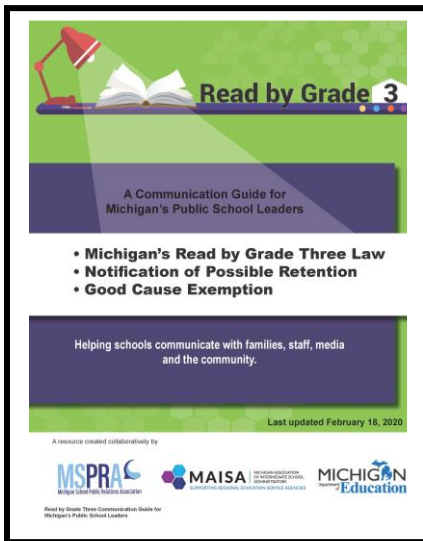
We submit it for your consideration in the larger context of communicating about current events. Thanks for all you do for school communicators....

The MSPRA Board



MASA gave the Student Activism document a shout out on Facebook.

D) Resharing Read by Grade 3 (RBG3) Communication Guide



In early 2020, MSPRA, in cooperation with two of its organization partners, developed and released a guide to help districts communicate about Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law. However, shortly after its release, the rules and procedures around Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law were suspended for 2020 due to COVID-19. That suspension relieved districts of their obligation under the law to retain students in grade 3 based on state testing that did not take place last spring. So, the communication guide was not needed.

But, in mid-April, 2021, the U.S. Department of Education denied Michigan's second request to waive the federal requirement to administer state summative assessments for this school year, which includes the M-STEP (Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress) third grade reading assessment.

Now, as districts prepare to communicate around this topic, MSPRA reminded members that in early 2020, in partnership with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), it produced the Read by Grade 3 Communication Guide. In both the MSPRA [Minute](#) and MAISA's InSiDe Update, schools were encouraged to revisit the [Read by Grade 3 Communication Guide](#).

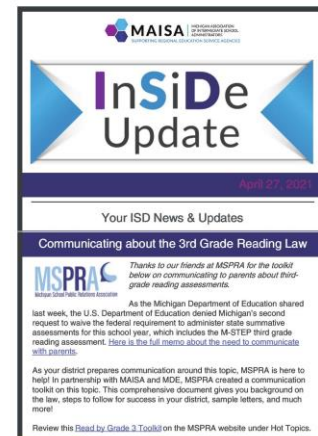
Development History

In December 2019, at the invitation of Dr. William Miller, Executive Director of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) and with the support of Dr. Michael Rice, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, MSPRA members worked with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) Public Relations Network, and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to develop a communication guide around Michigan's Read By Grade Three Law, passed by the state legislature in 2016.

The law requires schools to identify learners who are struggling with reading and writing and to provide additional help. The law also states that, beginning with the 2019-2020 school year, third-grade students may repeat third grade if they are more than one grade level behind.

To determine their progress, learners take the M-STEP in the spring of their third-grade year. If a child scores one or more grade levels behind the third-grade reading level, a notice that the child may be retained will be sent (by June 1 of that school year) to the parent and the child's school. If parents/guardians do not agree with the decision, they should request a meeting with the child's school and file a Good Cause Exemption within 30 days of receiving a notice regarding potential retention.

With both internal and external communication implications, school leaders believed Michigan's public schools could benefit from communication assistance. The resulting [Read by Grade Three Communication Guide for Michigan's School Leaders](#) was released statewide on February 19, 2020, shared with our partners, and with NSPRA. It was reshared on April 22, 2021.



MAISA noted the toolkit in its member newsletter.

Documentation and evidence of collaborative efforts and activities

- **The overall efforts had statewide and, in some cases, national and international reach/impact.**
 - The **Return to School Communication Toolkit** sections were released statewide on July 15, July 23, and August 6, 2020 to MSPRA members. They were also shared with our organization partners and with NSPRA and its members.
 - The **EEE Toolkit**, originally released on September 24, 2019, was reshared statewide with MSPRA members on September 15, 2020.
 - The **How to Approach Student Activism** document was refreshed and shared with MSPRA members, our organization partners, and NSPRA on April 21, 2021.
 - The **RBG3 Communication Guide**, originally released by MSPRA, MAISA and MDE on February 19, 2020 and shared with NSPRA, was reshared on April 22, 2021.
- **The chapter/collaboration partner goals and objectives for the activities were to:**
 - Leverage partners' collective knowledge, resources, time and effort to provide guidance, awareness and distribution.
 - Meet an existing and anticipated need of members across associations.
- **Timeline and calendar of related events/activities**
 - **June 26-August 6, 2020**, produced/released the three-part **Return to School Communication Toolkit**
 - **September 15, 2021**, reshared **EEE Communication Toolkit** (original work done September 19-September 24, 2019)
 - **April 19-21, 2021**, refreshed, renamed and shared **How to Approach Student Activism** document (original work done as part of Student Walkouts in February 2018)
 - **April 22, 2021**, reshared **RBG3 Communication Guide** (original work done December 04, 2019-February 19, 2020)
- **MSPRA's role as a coalition/collaborative partner**

MSPRA either initiated contact with its organization partners about the emerging issue or one of the partners contacted MSPRA. In all instances, MSPRA members were actively engaged in developing the communication materials.

For the past several years, MSPRA has invited its organization partners (the communicators from the state associations for the superintendents, intermediate superintendents, school boards, school business officials, secondary school principals, and the Michigan Department of Education) to meet with the MSPRA Board over a complimentary lunch at the Board's annual retreat (which has been held in the building that houses most of them). This year, because of COVID-19, we met virtually in December. Even though the meeting was virtual and there was no complimentary lunch, the exchange still included mutual communication concerns and professional development offerings and any major initiatives each had planned for the year. This electronic gathering continued to reinforce our mutual communication emphasis, keep the lines of communication open, and provide a natural connection for our communication about hot/emerging topics/issues.

- **Communication plan related to coalition/collaboration efforts**

Our goal was to develop useful, accurate documents (by consulting with health department officials and/or content experts) that could be shared in a timely fashion with all our members to help address current or anticipated issues. Most of our interaction was handled either by email or conference calls. We used Google as our collaborative platform.

- **Documentation of all related materials and endorsements**
 - Toolkits are posted on [MSPRA's website](#). Links to other documents are in this application.
 - All were shared statewide and several were shared nationally/internationally (via NSPRA).
- **Identification of target audiences and explanation of desired outcomes**

Our target audiences were identified as our association members. Our desired outcomes were documents that would serve as useful guides to communicating about the issues.
- **Documentation of measurable outcomes, effectiveness and success of the collaboration**

We were able to provide useful (members used it), official (listed partners approved it), documents in a timely manner to our associations' members. This has resulted in partners continuing to seek out MSPRA for subsequent collaboration.
- **These collaborative efforts specifically relate to these NSPRA Goals**

Goal 1. NSPRA will be the professional organization that is indispensable to school public relations professionals and other education leaders.

 1. NSPRA members will have the skills they need to plan and implement an effective public relations program valuing inclusion and diversity.
 2. NSPRA members will be recognized and valued as trusted advisors and members of school/district leadership teams.

Goal 2. NSPRA will be the recognized leader and authority on school public relations.

 1. NSPRA (staff and members) will be visible throughout the educational community.
 2. NSPRA will be the primary source of expert information and knowledge on school public relations.
 3. School communication professionals, superintendents and other education leaders will understand the positive impact of effective public relations in creating educational environments that are accessible and welcoming to the diversity of students and families they serve.
 5. NSPRA will have beneficial relationships with other organizations.
 6. NSPRA will advocate for effective public relations in education organizations and factual and accurate reporting on public education.
- **These collaborative efforts specifically relate to these NSPRA Beliefs**

NSPRA believes public relations:

 - Is a crucial leadership function essential to the success of education.
 - Is rooted in integrity, transparency, accuracy and ethical behavior, and always serves the public's interest.
 - Serves as the conscience of the organization.
 - Strives to build consensus and reach common ground.
 - Provides counsel and services to all segments of the staff and community.
 - Is the shared responsibility of everyone in education.
 - Develops trust through two-way communication and meaningful relationships with all audiences.
 - Requires continuous professional growth to meet the accelerated pace of societal and technological change.
 - Brings diverse schools and communities together to support success for all students.
 - Serves the public accountability function for the school district.
 - Builds understanding and consensus around diversity and equity conditions facing public school communities.
 - Creates a culture of transparency and trust that positively impacts student achievement.

Final Reflections

- **Return to School Communication Toolkit:** Even as the COVID-19 situation continues to be fluid, the basic communication planning, information and strategies remain useful.
- **Communicating About Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE):** Although it was originally released in the fall of 2019, the EEE toolkit remained relevant, as unfortunately, the summer of 2020 was another bountiful season for mosquitoes in Michigan.
- **How to Approach Student Activism:** Given recent events, this document serves as a reminder of how schools can protect and honor student free speech.
- **Read by Grade 3 (RBG3) Communication Guide:** The RBG3 Communication Guide can now be used, since the suspended rules and policies are again in place.

-end-

[Note: If any of the links in this document are broken, or if you have difficulty accessing them, please contact Gerri Allen at gallen48@juno.com. MSPRA-maintained links will remain live until at least 07/31/2021. Thank you.]

Thank you for the opportunity

to submit this

NSPRA 2021

Mark of Distinction

Award Application

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*Coalition-Building/*

*Collaborative Communication Efforts*



due May 15, 2021

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