

The “Mark of Distinction” Recognition Program for NSPRA Chapters

Entry Form

(Please include this information with each individual entry)

Chapter Name: North Carolina School Public Relations Association

Chapter President: Ken Derksen

President’s contact information

District/Organization: Wayne County Public Schools

Address: P.O. Drawer 1797

City/State/Zip Code Goldsboro NC 27534

Telephone: 919-705-6125 e-Mail: kenderksen@wcps.org

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: North Carolina 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



NCSPPRA
Mark of Distinction Program - Exemplary Chapter
2021 Chapter Nomination

“A Year of Professional Development & Support”

Prelude

Like school PR practitioners across the nation, the personal and professional lives of North Carolina School Public Relations Association (NCSPPRA) members were significantly impacted in March of 2020. In what can only be described as a herculean communications effort, NCSPPRA members worked tirelessly to support their district leadership/response by developing and managing critical communications that could effectively inform and engage students, staff and other stakeholders in the wake of the State governor’s immediate shutdown of NC public school buildings and transitioning of students to remote instruction.

With all NCSPPRA Board of Directors/Officers immediately stretched and locally pulled into long hours of planning and response within their own districts, NCSPPRA quickly found itself on the precipice of a historical and pivotal milestone in how it would define its role in this global crisis. Standing on its core values and the mission of NSPPRA, NCSPPRA leadership recognized that in order to continue the advancement of NC public education - and to continue responsible public relations and communication rooted in building student success - immediate actions would need to be taken to prevent its members from operating in silos or in a communications vacuum. It was through the early actions of the NCSPPRA leadership that NCSPPRA was positioned to provide a year of professional development and skill building support that would ultimately benefit the practice of school public relations across North Carolina and beyond.

In the first week of the March 2020 public schools closure, NCSPPRA leadership took two key actions that would lay the groundwork for a powerful year of professional development support:

1. On March 20, NCSPPRA affirmed its resolve and commitment to membership in the following email.

PLEASE READ - NCSPPRA Exchange & Current School Communication Challenges



NCSPPRA President <nccsprapresident@gmail.com>

Fri, Mar 20, 2020, 1:34 PM



to bcc: Aarika, bcc: Allison, bcc: Allison, bcc: Amanda, bcc: Amber, bcc: Andrew, bcc: Angel, bcc: Ashley, bcc: Ashley-Michelle, bcc: Becky, bcc: Ben, bcc: Beverly, bcc: Brent, t

NCSPPRA Members,

The North Carolina School Public Relations Association recognizes that this is a very difficult time for school districts. However, despite the odds before them, we have seen North Carolina public schools and employees mobilize in herculean ways never before imagined as part of the state-wide effort to provide essential services and academic supports to our students during this unprecedented school closure.

All of our members have a valuable role in helping develop clear messaging, informational resources, and relevant tools which are vital for keeping your families, staff and communities informed during this time. As such, we would like to start an important conversation specific to the area of school communications and public relations.

We are asking all members to take part in the following [Exchange](#). After you take part in the [Exchange](#), please check back periodically over the next two days to read and rate the thoughts of others. Your input will be vital in helping NCSPPRA better understand what types of supports may be needed in the coming days and weeks. Your input will also be shared with the newly created NCDPI Communications team assisting with NCDPI's COVID-19 response in order for them to hear directly from you.

Please be on the lookout for further NCSPPRA communications and exchanges as we work to help look past the immediacy of current school communication challenges to helping provide meaningful input that can be used by the State in their efforts to develop long range transition plans and make-sense solutions that will best support North Carolina schools and communities during this time.

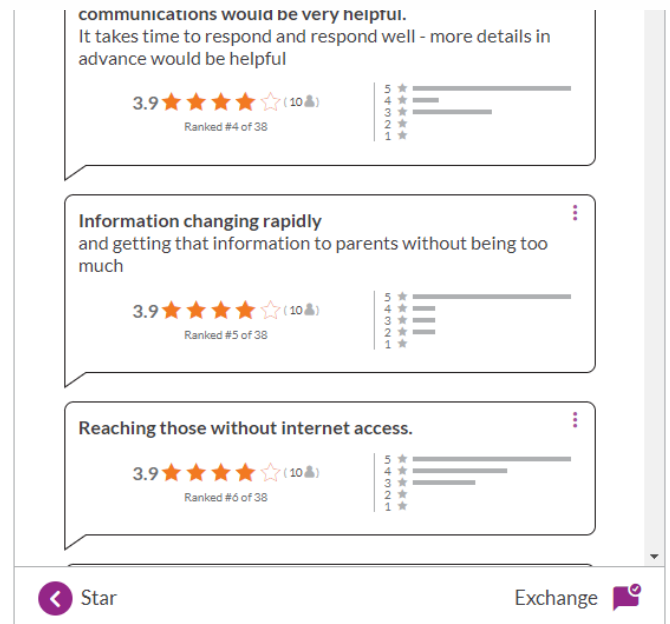
With our greatest respect,

The NCSPPRA Executive Officers & Board



It was also in that communication that NCSPPRA leadership introduced members to the ThoughtExchange platform, which would be used periodically throughout the Spring and the 2020-2021 school year to engage membership on key topics and issues.

- NCSPPRA partnered with Jessica Swencki, NCDPI's newly appointed COVID-19 Communication Response Leader (and former NCSPPRA Board Member) and established a virtual seat at the table of the agency's newly formed COVID-19 Communication Team. The following purpose of the team was established:



The screenshot shows three topics on the ThoughtExchange platform, each with a 3.9 star rating and a bar chart showing the distribution of responses. The topics are:

- communications would be very helpful.** It takes time to respond and respond well - more details in advance would be helpful. Ranked #4 of 38.
- Information changing rapidly and getting that information to parents without being too much.** Ranked #5 of 38.
- Reaching those without internet access.** Ranked #6 of 38.

At the bottom of the screenshot, there are navigation buttons for "Star" and "Exchange".

The NCDPI COVID-19 Communication Team will support NC Public Schools as trusted advisors and creators of accurate, reliable, and timely communication for internal and external audiences. Our work will be process driven and reflect the unique perspectives of those we represent.

Meeting daily via Zoom, NCSPPRA officers Patricia Hollingsworth and Ken Derksen joined other NCDPI and State Board of Education representatives, adding a PR lens, an accurate understanding of the issues being experienced by NC public school districts, and regular advocacy for key supports that could help address short-term and long-term issues school PR practitioners were faced with. Weekly Zoom calls were established with school communications leaders in the field which also welcomed superintendents and other district leaders. The weekly calls provided an opportunity to share relevant information, answer questions from the field, and establish public relations initiatives that could help highlight the amazing work being accomplished across the State to support students and which could bring out the best in public education.

North Carolina
School Communications Leaders
Update
May 29, 2020



Open Mic Questions & Idea Exchange

Moderators:



Dr. Patricia Hollingsworth
NCSPPRA Executive Officer
Durham Public Schools



Ken Derksen
NCSPPRA Executive Officer
Wayne County Schools



It is important to note that the School Communications Leaders calls were also accessed by non-NCSPPRA members, which allowed NCSPPRA to showcase all that it has to offer to school PR practitioners who for whatever reason had not previously joined. This did create a membership building opportunity in 2020-2021. More importantly, it allowed NCSPPRA to solidify itself as the “go to” in North Carolina for school PR support, regardless of membership status.

In June of 2020, the NCDPI COVID-19 Communication Team transitioned to a single weekly Zoom meeting with a bi-weekly Zoom call schedule which has remained in place throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

Overview:

Since May of 2020, NCSPPRA has led numerous critical conversations, facilitated powerful professional development and support opportunities, and sought to strengthen public schools and student success via multiple channels and membership activities.



Goal

The single overarching goal for all efforts demonstrated was grounded in the NCSPPRA/NSPPRA mission, which is to advance and build support for public education through well-planned and responsible public relations/communication that leads to success for all students.

Key Objectives & Target Audiences

The following objectives served as the impetus and driving force for all professional development and support activities that targeted NCSPPRA Members, Prospective NCSPPRA Members, and Non-Members (e.g. school & district administrators, school nurse, etc.):

- NCSPPRA will help lead consistent/collective statewide messaging & response for both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 school related matters;
- NCSPPRA will help strengthen roles of school PR practitioners & improved daily communications programs and activities within school districts;
- NCSPPRA will help increase connectivity amongst members & strengthen network of support in times of crisis;
- NCSPPRA will help build bridges between schools and communities & help drive the narrative for public education; and
- NCSPPRA will help build up future NCSPPRA leaders.

Timeline: Specific Programs & Activities

May 2020 - Present

NCDPI COVID-19 Communications Response Team

NCSPPRA has provided its membership and education leaders from school districts and charter schools outside of our organization with strong PR support in order to help bring out the best in the public schools of North Carolina during the global COVID-19 pandemic. As the “go to” school PR organization in North Carolina, NCSPPRA has been a partner with NCDPI and represented the school PR lens on its COVID-19 Communication Team which has been in place since March 2020. NCSPPRA has been an active voice for school PIOs and a constant advocate for greater supports to ensure effective and strategic communications could occur through the roller coaster of challenges and PR issues that arose from the State’s COVID-19 response.

NCSPPRA leaders have supported NCDPI with more than 30 weekly, and later bi-weekly, virtual professional development, skill building, and support opportunities over the past year with calls ranging from a few hundred to well over a thousand attendees. In addition to planning, facilitating questions, and/or leading conversations, various members of the NCSPPRA Board and rising NCSPPRA leaders assisted with facilitating key sessions.

Brief Sampling of Facilitated Discussions & Trainings

North Carolina
School Communications Leaders
Update
May 8, 2020



Open Mic Questions & Idea Exchange

Moderators:



Dr. Patricia Hollingsworth
NCSPPRA Executive Officer
Durham Public Schools



Ken Derksen
NCSPPRA Executive Officer
Wayne County Schools



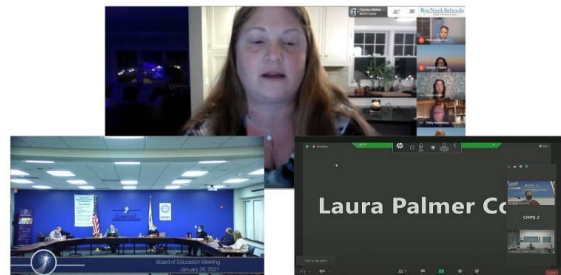
[NCSPPRA Graduation Planning Discussion](#) [Time Code: 47:12]

With public school buildings still closed and the 2019-2020 school year coming to a close, on May 8, 2020, NCSPPRA leaders led a critical discussion regarding graduation planning and end-of-year celebrations and recognitions.

Zoom BOE meetings

Best Practices (e.g. Do's & Don'ts!)

Why is this a relevant conversation?



[Zoom BOE meetings: Best Practices \(e.g. Do's & Don'ts\)](#) [Time Code: 29:17]

This professional development session occurred on March 16, 2021, exactly one year to the first school day NC public school buildings were shuttered. Zoom/Video Conferencing platforms and/or streaming systems remain vital communication tools for Boards of Education to meet the continued demand by news media and the public to access the public's business. NCSPPRA president Ken Derksen in collaboration with NCDPI Web Marketing Specialist, Elaine Darby, identified issues, provided easy strategies to address issues, and showed how already good Zooms/Video Conferencing meetings and streams can be taken to the next level.

June 2020

Newly appointed NCSPPRA President's Message to Membership

This [letter](#) written by the newly appointed NCSPPRA president, Ken Derksen, provided important updates to membership. It also reaffirmed NCSPPRA's commitment to inclusion and its efforts to continue providing members a high level of professional development support.

July 2020

Start of NCSPPRA Executive Director

After 6 months without an Executive Director, NCSPPRA welcomed Ellen Boyd, APR to the role. Boyd quickly bought into the Board's vision and initiated a new online registration and payment system to better support membership and their districts. Since her start, she has supported membership through regular communications and the launching of [NCSPPRA's Connections](#) e-newsletter, as well as has been instrumental in helping support all NCSPPRA-led professional development and support building activities.

NCSPPRA Thought Exchange ➤



NCSPPRA Executive Director <ncspr.a.executivedirector@gmail.com>
to bcc: me ▾

Wed, Jul 29, 2020, 11:23 AM ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear NCSPPRA members,

We want to make sure we're giving you the support you need to get ready for the start of school in just a few weeks. We have developed a brief **Thought Exchange** to find out your needs and give you a voice in what types of training or professional supports would be most beneficial to you at this crucial time.

Please take a few minutes to give us your input. [You may participate by using this link.](#) We also will share your responses with the NCDPI COVID-19 Communications Team. Thank you for your time and feedback!

Best regards,

Ellen

—
Ellen Boyd, M.S., APR
NCSPPRA Executive Director

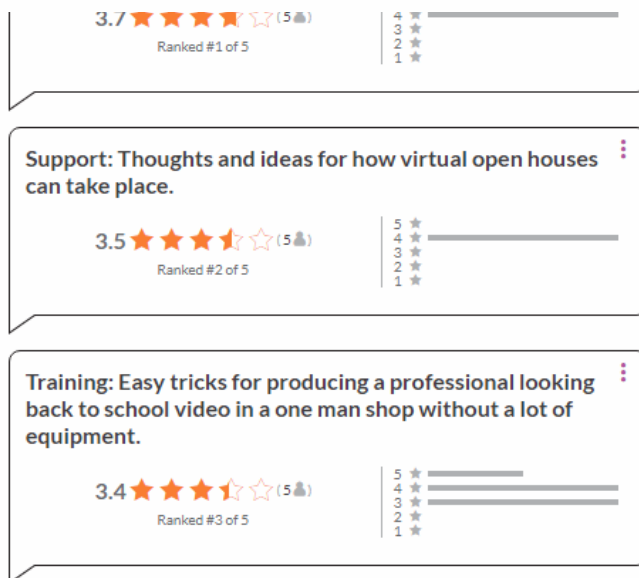
NCSPPRA ThoughtExchange

A targeted ThoughtExchange was released prior to the start of the 2021-22 school year to help drive professional development planning for the coming year.

August 2020

NCSPPRA 2020-21 Board Planning Retreat

The NCSPPRA Board held its annual [Planning Retreat](#) via Zoom and laid out its blueprint for organizational and membership success in the 2020-2021 school year. Noticeably missing from





the agenda was a bi-monthly meeting calendar, as Board Members had grown accustomed to meeting regularly and on-demand via Zoom to address Board business and other NCSPPRA planning efforts.

August 2020-present

NCSPPRA School PR Drive Time Podcast

As a historical milestone, the NCSPPRA Social Media Team launched the [NCSPPRA School PR Drive Time podcast](#). The podcast shares timely and critical conversations on topics such as crisis communications, social & racial equity, and more (also recognized by Education NC [\[ednc.org\]](#) as one of “12 Education Podcasts You Should Know About”) The podcast, which began receiving sponsorships in March of 2021, is now reaching listeners from across NC and the nation.

#NCSPPRAGold

NCSPPRA launched the #NCSPPRAGold to promote content on social media that includes relevant articles related to public relations, school PR, marketing, education, schools, communications, social media, etc. More importantly, NCSPPRA began using the hashtag to curate and promote members/schools demonstrating best practices on Twitter.

September - December 2020

PR Check-Ins

What started in September as an offline opportunity to connect with membership, NCSPPRA's PR Check-Ins were so well received by members that NCSPPRA leadership provided regular PR Check-Ins throughout the fall as a professional development and skill building resource to membership and a marketing opportunity to prospective members. The virtual PD opportunities addressed a myriad of topics, including COVID-19 Social & Racial Equity, Elections Issues/Concerns, Public Records, Marketing, COVID-19 Communications, and more. In addition to the professional development sessions, attendees were broken up into small groups to allow for networking and off-line conversations/support to occur. Click on the links below to see some of the related materials. Attendance ranged from 50 to 80 people on a given call.

COVID-19 Resources - October 2, 2020

- [Materials from Gaston Co. Schools](#)
- (returning to in-person or expanded in-person learning)
- [SAMPLE Principal Notification Call Script for Positive COVID-19 Notifications](#) (as shared by Henderson County Public Schools)
- [Feedback from Breakout Rooms](#) (attendees contributed [1] successes, [2] challenges, [3] needs for the future)

COVID-19 Resources - October 9, 2020

- [Padlet with COVID-19 related resources](#)

Crisis Communications - October 23, 2020

- [Resources from Renee Murphy](#)

- (Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, KY)
- [Information from Guilford County Schools Regarding Racial Equity](#)
- [WATCH the full video recording of PR Check-In](#)

Public Records Requests - November 20, 2020

- [Video of PR Check-In](#)
- (Video of the PR Check-in session on Public Records Requests)
- [Slide Presentation from Kathy Boyd](#) (Senior Staff Attorney, North Carolina School Boards Association)
- [Public Records Law Overview](#) (from UNC School of Government)

COVID-19 and the Flu - December 4, 2020

- [Video of PR Check-in](#)
- [PPT presentation from Traci Hewes](#)

October 2020-present

NCSPPRA PR

Counselling Support

NCSPPRA in partnership with NCDPI began providing targeted PR counselling support to districts that lost staff members to COVID-19 and other school related crises.

NCSPPRA President

Ken Derksen in

partnership with

NCSPPRA member

Tahira Stalberte and

NCDPI COVID-19

Communications

Leader, Jessica

Swencki provided multiple instances of support to PIOs and superintendents via phone calls and follow-ups containing prepared messaging and talking points.

██████████

We had a staff member pass away in August (though WCPS could not confirm if it was COVID-19 or some other medical issue). Below is the messaging that was shared. I also have some thoughts below for your current situation.

InstantConnect Parent Message

"This message is for all ██████████. It is with a very heavy heart that I share the sad news that longtime staff member and instructional assistant, ██████████, passed away yesterday evening. Today, a team of school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers were available for anyone in our school who needed someone to talk with concerning her passing. As you know, ██████████ is very much like a family. If you have any particular concerns for your child that we need to be aware of, please don't hesitate to contact the school."

Follow-up media statement:

WCPS can confirm that ██████████ families and staff were notified this morning that longtime staff member and instructional assistant, ██████████, passed away yesterday evening. Today, a team of school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers were available for anyone at the school who needed someone to talk with concerning her passing.

WCPS has no further information to share at this time.

██████████ I liked Tahira's statement used during their situation, "I cannot confirm her cause of death, nor any information related to her medical condition. This information should be confirmed by her family." I basically said that in follow-up to a media inquiry, but should have included it in my original statement.

As for messaging, you are really limited in what you can say to parents, staff or with the media as schools are not a reporting agency for official causes of death (Even local health departments are not confirming specific situations and only releasing stats when reporting county-wide deaths caused by COVID-19). Your focus should be on how you are meeting student/staff needs during this time. Ultimately, it is on the family as to what they want to share publicly regarding the staff member's cause of death.

Please let me know if I can be of further support.

Ken

December 2020

NCSPPRA Annual Meeting

On December 18, 2020 NCSPPRA President Ken Derksen and NCSPPRA Executive Director Ellen Boyd led the chapter's [2020 Annual Meeting](#) via Zoom. In addition to providing members important updates, Derksen read the following [message](#) which was later emailed to the

membership. NCSPPRA also unveiled its new logo which was designed using ThoughtExchange input [as exemplified to the right] from its members.

January - February 2021

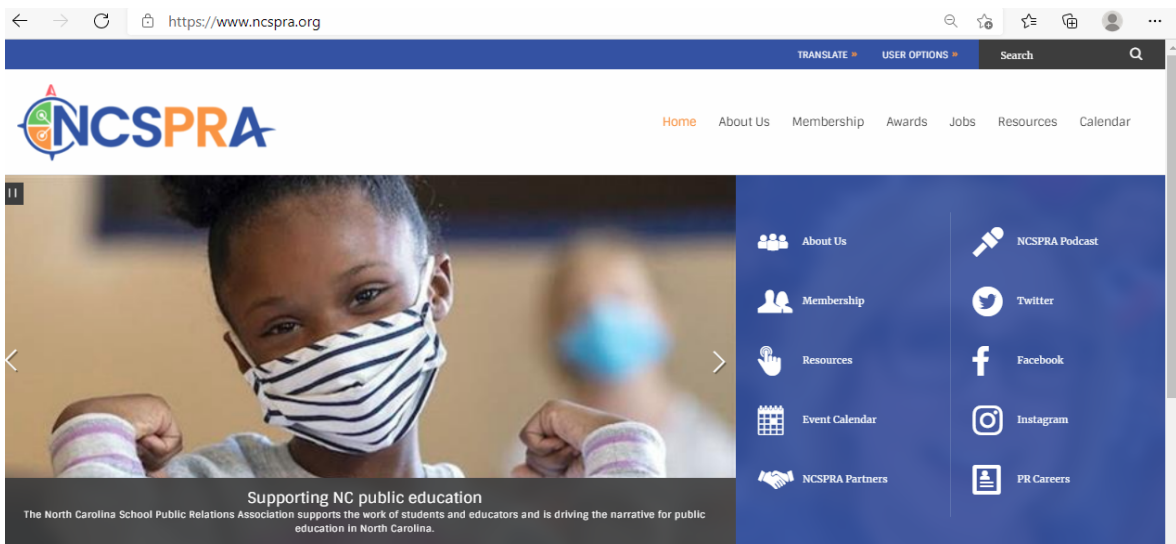
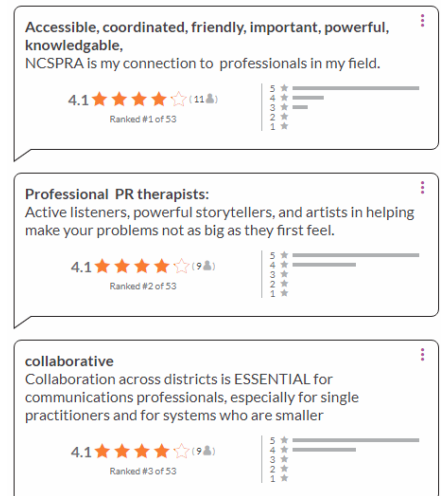
NCSPPRA Blue Ribbons Awards

The NCSPPRA Blue Ribbon Planning Team which had been meeting since Fall 2020 and the NCSPPRA Social Media Team were married in January 2020 to ensure a successful virtual Blue Ribbons Awards celebration. On February 5, NCSPPRA held its annual [awards program](#) to recognize and celebrate excellence in North Carolina school communications.

February 2021

NCSPPRA Website & Rebrand

To better support its members, NCSPPRA launched a rebranded website with a new “Members Only” area. In addition to promoting important announcements and links to the latest NCSPPRA School PR Drive Time podcast, membership now has access to valuable professional resources that can effectively support them and their districts in their daily communications programs. Between its launch and April 30, the new site had visits by more than 660 users.



School PR Drive Time Podcast

- About our Podcast
- Choose Your Player

NCSPPRA is proud to host a podcast for school communicators: **#SCHOOLPR DRIVE TIME**. The podcast focuses on driving the narrative forward for public education through the work of school PR professionals. It is available anywhere podcasts are found. Simply select the “Choose Your Player” tab to enjoy any of our episodes. Special thanks to our sponsors for supporting **#SCHOOLPR DRIVE TIME**: Blackboard, ThoughtExchange, Finalsite, Parentsquare.

Announcements



NSPPRA 2021 National Seminar
Have you registered for the NSPPRA seminar? Attend high-power sessions virtually or in-person! Check out the pre-Seminar workshops and learn more about registration and early bird discounts!



New Board Members Elected
NCSPPRA elects board members and officers to begin terms on June 1, 2021.

March 2021

Spring Professional Development Series

NCSPRA in partnership with sister chapters from Georgia and South Carolina offered high quality professional development and skill building support through a 4-part Spring Professional Development Series targeting school communications leaders from the NSPRA Southeast Region and across the nation. This 4-part professional development series, which had approximately 375 registrants was spread over four Fridays in March. To see the full scope of this program, click on [NSPRA Gold Medallion Award Submission](#) and click on links below to view related materials.

March 26, 2021 Sessions:

Recording of March 26th sessions

Sponsored by **VolunteerNow**

Featuring **NC Virtual Public School & NCSPRA's #SCHOOLPR DRIVE TIME** podcast

PPT Presentation: **OneDistrict: Communications for Urban, Suburban, and Rural Districts**

PPT Presentation: **The Human Grid**

Worksheets for building communities and growing support for your school/district/organization

Website for **We Must Be Bold**

March 19, 2021 Sessions

Recording of March 19th sessions

Sponsored by **ThoughtExchange & Gabbart Communications**

PPT PRESENTATION: **Building staff trust, buy-in, and morale through effective internal communications**

March 12, 2021 Sessions

Recording of March 12th sessions

Sponsored by **Finalsite & ParentSquare**

PPT PRESENTATION: [How to \(Re\)+Build Your District's Enrollment Numbers](#)

[Student Enrollment Workbook](#)

[Reaching Families Without Internet Access Guide](#)

[Forthright Advising Resources Page](#)

[Forthright Advising on Twitter / Forthright Advising Website](#)

[Forthright Presenter Bios](#)

PPT PRESENTATION: [Supercharging Your Social Media](#)

[Lisa Perry Bio / Perry Productions Website](#)

March 5, 2021 Session

[Recording of March 5th session](#)

Sponsored by [Blackboard](#)

[Top Education Issues Documents](#)

[Public School Forum of North Carolina](#)

[Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education](#)

Finale

2020-2021 was truly “A Year of Professional Development & Support” for NCSPRA. It is worth noting, as a result of its efforts, NCSPRA’s membership increased 12%. Following its 2021-2022 elections, North Carolina Superintendent of the Year, Dr. Brent Williams was appointed to the NCSPRA Board as its 2021-2022 Superintendent Liaison. The NCSPRA Officers and Executive Director are currently finalizing plans for an in-person 2021-2022 Planning Retreat in June.

Tentative agenda items include:

- Increasing NCSPRA membership to include all PSUs
- Increasing NSPRA Membership
- Increasing Podcast listenership
- Continued NCDPI partnership as COVID-19 issues and bi-weekly calls end
- Increasing mentor/mentees



- Implementation of Past-President's Council
- 2021-2022 Calendar: PR Check-Ins, Fall Conference, Winter Workshop, Leadership Academy, Spring Professional Development Series & 50th Anniversary Celebration
- Development & implementation of 2021-2022 Sponsorship Program
- Development & Implementation of 3-Year Strategic Plan