



June 2006

National School Public Relations Association

Research Shows Link Between Strong School Communication and Student Success

“The research leaves no doubt that well-planned and effective ongoing communication from schools makes a significant impact on student achievement and parent and community involvement,” said NSPRA Executive Director Rich Bagin, APR. “Parents and family can make a huge difference in student achievement when schools and homes are working together through collaborative and competent communication.”

This is the key finding in NSPRA’s newly released white paper, *How Strong Communication Contributes to Student and School Success: Parent and Family Involvement*. We all know that school communication is a dynamic part of education, but documenting it can be a tough task. That’s why NSPRA’s Communication Accountability Project (CAP) committees have undertaken the task of compiling this important research.

The white paper compiles and reviews research investigating the links between school communication and the resulting parental and community involvement crucial to student achievement. Its purpose is to help school leaders and their

communities better understand the results and impact of effective communication on students and their schools.

In schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, test scores grew at a rate 40 percent higher than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach.

Key Findings

In today’s educational world, school communication can no longer be even a bit behind the times. We live and work in a world run by e-mail and the Internet. Instantaneous information is the norm and parents and communities are expecting that from their schools as well.

In this age of instant access and 24/7 demand, schools need to quickly figure out ways to reach their key audiences effectively. Educators now need to be able to see what types of communication work best to build, maintain and strengthen a school community of parents and students.

As the white paper reveals, the research is clear on this — communication plays an important role in the type and quality of parent/community involvement. A number of performance issues, the white paper reports, are linked to school communication and involvement, including higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests, more classes passed, higher enrollment in more challenging academic classes, better attendance and improved behavior at home and at school.

The white paper also says that “key characteristics associated with academic improvement include high standards and expectations for all students and curriculum, effective leadership, focused professional development, frequent monitoring of teaching and learning and parent and community involvement.

The importance of establishing and maintaining meaningful, direct, two-way communication between schools, parents and the community is one of the defining features of effective parent and community involvement.



The 2006 National Seminar in Chicago, Ill. is less than a month away!

Visit www.NSPRA.org and click the “Events & Seminars” link for more information and to register.

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President's Corner

In his book *Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy*, Dr. David Mathews talks about the growing disconnect between education professionals and the public. Mathews, president and CEO of the Kettering Foundation, explores the failure of schools and their communities to come together.

This growing chasm between schools and communities is not surprising. We know many schools do not know how to communicate with their communities and 75 percent of all homes in most communities have no school-age children.

Data cited in *The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work* shows today's working couple working 717 hours more each year than a working couple in 1969, an average of 26 percent longer than 30 years ago. Many of these parents are the "working poor" and have no choice about the hours they work and little time for extensive dialogue with schools. They are struggling to provide the most basic needs for their children.


The difficulty in reaching families and our efforts to do it makes our work more important to schools than ever before. And the NSPRA white paper released last month, a compilation of many studies that show the importance of parent involvement to student achievement, shows how research has documented this important point again and again.

Take time to read this new white paper (you can download a copy from www.NSPRA.org/whitepaper.pdf) and celebrate your role in raising achievement in your schools and, ultimately, in changing the world. Your work with parents and to keep kids in school does make a difference — now and in the future!

Eighteen percent of American children live in poverty. Fifty seven percent of the children whose parents did not complete high school are living in poverty while only four percent of children who have one college-educated parent are living in poverty. We do indeed change the future when our work keeps a child in school or reaches a parent in a meaningful way.

David Mathews will be at our NSPRA conference in Chicago in July to receive the NSPRA Learning and Liberty Award and tell us more about his research. This is one more opportunity for us to come together to learn, re-energize and go home to tackle the tough issues that will ultimately make the difference in our world.

I look forward to seeing you in Chicago.


Gay Campbell, APR
NSPRA President

School Communication and Student Success

(Continued from front page)

Other Key Findings

While many are appreciating the importance of building these partnerships between schools, parents and communities, most schools have not been able to make that evident in their practices. Schools are still struggling to engage these audiences.

The white paper states that parents and principals cite lack of time as the most common barrier to increased involvement, but research identifies lack of planning for partnerships and lack of mutual understanding as the two greatest barriers to effective family involvement.

In schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, test scores grew at a rate 40 percent higher than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach. While 98 percent of teachers believe that effective teachers need to work with students' families and 90 percent see it as one of their school's priorities, they also find that it is the area for which they feel least prepared.

The white paper also reports that there is clear evidence that expanding the school's outreach

beyond families into the community also has measurable positive impact in at least four important areas: student learning, family engagement, school effectiveness and community vitality.

“All of us need to do more in making sure our teachers and principals have the tools and confidence they need in getting better at student, school and home communication.”

— *Rich Bagin, APR*
NSPRA Executive Director

Community support contributes to changes in schools that include upgraded school facilities, improved school leadership and staffing, higher quality learning programs for students, new resources and programs for students, new resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum, and new funding for after-school programs and family supports.

“The evidence is clear that effective two-way communication plays a major role in school

and student success,” Bagin said. “All of us need to do more in making sure our teachers and principals have the tools and confidence they need in getting better at student, school and home communication.”

CAP Research

CAP is a five-year initiative to document the specific ways in which good communication is an essential element to achieving real school success in schools and their districts.

In addition to this newly released white paper, CAP research teams are gathering data about successful superintendents, what search firms look for in superintendent candidates and how year-round programs contribute to the bottom line — both financially and in student success.

NSPRA members and others can download a copy of the white paper, *How Strong Communication Contributes to Student and School Success: Parent and Family Involvement*, at www.NSPRA.org/whitepaper.pdf.

— *Jennifer Kim*
Editorial and Marketing Specialist



Download your free copy of the white paper at www.NSPRA.org/whitepaper.pdf

Getting Your PR Program Off the Ground

A school district should develop public relations strategies to inform families, businesses and the community about involvement programs and policies. An effective public relations program promotes planned, ongoing, two-way communication between the school district and its community. Here are some ideas on how to get started on this task:

- **Start with policy.** Review or create a policy on family and community engagement. It is critical that you collaborate with the families, foundations, business and community groups you intend to engage.
- **Identify barriers to increased community involvement.** This could include time constraints, child care, language, transportation, cultural

beliefs, lack of understanding, discrimination or exclusion. Identify community foundations and governmental sources of funding to address the barriers.

- **Define where you want to be.** Specify what it is you hope to achieve, over what time period and how you plan to achieve it.
- **You can't do much without money.** Check for federal or state grants your school district has received to see if budget allowances are given for communication/dissemination.
- **Don't forget about assessment.** Determine how you will assess your progress.

An effective public relations program promotes planned, ongoing, two-way communication between the school district and its community.

Member watch



**Nola
Lionberger**

- Congratulations to **Nola Lionberger**, public information officer for the Solano County (Calif.) Office of Education. Nola was named the 2006 Classified Manager of the Year by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). ACSA's Classified Manager of the Year Award is one of 19 awards presented annually in recognition of outstanding performance and achievement by individuals in the public school system.
- **Marykay Feeley** has replaced David Archibald as the superintendent at Lower Moreland School District, Red Lion, Pa.
- **Jim Szczepaniak** has been named community relations director for Niles Township HSD 219, Skokie, Ill. He replaces Karen Geddeis.
- **David Kuschel** is the new director of communications for the Maplewood-Richmond Heights (Mo.) SD. He replaces Natasha Webster.
- **We want to hear from you!** Send news of your promotion, new job, major award or other noteworthy achievement to *Network* editorial@nspira.org.

Brief Case

To culminate a finance election campaign, Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Community School District staged a "Parade of Schools," showcasing facilities improvements that were making a positive impact for students and teachers.

Assessment

Following a successful three-year, \$52 million facilities renovation project, financed by voter-approved bond elections, Cedar Rapids Community School District wanted community members to see their "new" schools.

School leaders decided that a high-profile, culminating event was needed to generate media coverage and make an impression on people even if they did not attend.

Planning

A planning committee was led by the director of communications and comprised of principals. Their idea, a "Parade of Schools," was a spinoff from Realtors' "Parade of Homes," a popular event in Cedar Rapids.

Although the focus of the renovation project had been additions to three high schools, the committee decided to include all schools. All staff and students would be involved in the celebration, and more parents and community members could be engaged. Special bus tours were arranged to visit the schools with extensive renovations.

Communication

To publicize the Parade of Schools, the committee used flyers, customized for specific audiences; posters distributed to schools, libraries, grocery stores; media kits; a video shown frequently on the district's cable TV channel; prominent listing on the district web site; staff e-mails; a special newspaper insert; and personal letters to key audiences. During the prior week and the week of the event, announcements were made at service club meetings.

Evaluation

An estimated 1,300 people attended the Parade of Schools. Most were not parents, a fact that pleased district leaders. The goal was to engage taxpayers who had no direct connection with schools, and parents had earlier opportunities to see the upgrades at their children's schools. A quick telephone survey revealed that awareness and opinion were positive as a result of the event.

The district also received positive media coverage, with special praise given on the editorial page of the regional newspaper.

This was a winner of an NSPRA Golden Achievement Award. For more information, contact Linda Kuster, director of communications, Cedar Rapids Community School District, 346 Second Avenue SW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52404; 319/558-2331; lkuster@cr.k12.ia.us

Perspectives

Network asked NSPRA members: **What do you think will be some of the biggest communication challenges you'll face in the coming year?** Here's what your peers said:

Ann Stephens-Cherry

Hampton City (Va.) School



In this coming year, I believe we will see a larger cry from the community to be engaged in the priorities of our public school systems. This is a valid position as community perception is often key to whether or not a division [district] is viewed as “worthy” of taxpayers’ dollars. With the increasing presence of baby boomers, many communities are becoming heavily populated with empty-nesters. Therefore, a community that some 20 years ago was brimming with school-aged children may now be a community where a small percentage of its citizenry is in that category — yet expected to pay taxes to support the local school division. Our communication challenge will be that of not only demonstrating the need for public support and engagement, but also that of convincing communities through a variety of activities designed to engage their active support, that the public school system is in fact their most valuable asset — one that is indeed “worthy” of support.



Terri McHugh

Schaumburg Community (Ill.) Consolidated School District 54

My biggest challenge is communicating with all members of our increasingly diverse community.

Translating publications is not enough. In some cultures, parents don't visit schools for fear of insulting educators, whom they respect. We must break through cultural barriers so that parents of all ethnicities feel part of our school community.

Sloan Roach

Gwinnett County (Ga.) Public Schools



Challenges will include outreach to our growing, increasingly diverse community; garnering voter support for a critically needed building program; and communicating clear, concise messages during an election year that is focusing on education issues. We also are working to capitalize on our district's assets — its reputation/brand — so that it remains “the choice” in a time of more options.

PR professionally Speaking

A good reputation will help your school develop community support to improve learning opportunities for students.

The Wirthlin Group has identified six leading categories that drive truly outstanding corporate reputations. They have strong implications for education, and schools with good reputations will have — or reflect — these drivers.

Best products and services:

Do your schools have a reputation for producing outstanding levels of student achievement?

Customer focus: Do your schools have a reputation for having a board and management dedicated to achieving results?

Social responsibility: Do your schools have a reputation for being socially responsible, caring about and meeting the educational needs of its constituents?

Well-run and managed: Do your schools have a reputation for providing value, and for being well run, with smart, highly capable and well-regarded people in management?

Financially stable and profitable: Do your schools have a reputation for sound fiscal management and accountability?

Employee relations: Do your schools have a reputation for being an excellent employer?

Six leading categories drive truly outstanding corporate reputations; schools with good reputations will have — or reflect — these drivers.

Adapted from *School Public Relations – Building Confidence in Education*, an NSPRA publication.

NSPRA Matters



**Marsha
Chappelow**

Executive Board Candidates Announced

The NSPRA Executive Board Search Committee (EBSC) has announced the 2006 slate of candidates for the NSPRA Executive Board. They are:

■ President-Elect

Marsha Chappelow, Ph.D., assistant superintendent, HR and communications, Ladue School District, St. Louis, Mo.

■ Southeast Vice President

Debbie Elmore, communications coordinator, South Carolina School Boards Association, Columbia, S.C.

■ Northwest Vice President

Brenda Gustafson, senior communications officer, Portland (Ore.) Public Schools

J.Marie Merrifield Riche, communications specialist, Snohomish (Wash.) School District

The candidates for Southeast and Northwest Vice Presidents will give campaign speeches at the Regional Colleague Connections on Sunday, July 9 at the National Seminar in Chicago. President-elect candidates will speak on the same day at the NSPRA Annual Meeting. Elections will be held in August and successful candidates will take office October 1, 2006.

The NSPRA Executive Board would like to thank the members of the EBSC for their efforts in recruiting and presenting highly qualified candidates for office.

Its members are:

- *Chair* — Berney Kirkland, APR (Ga. — Southeast)
- Joe Krumm, APR (Ore. — Northwest)
- Gerri Allen (Mich. — Mideast)
- Marci Davis, APR (Pa. — Northeast)
- Tanya Caughey (Colo. — Southwest)
- Susan Brott (Minn. — North Central)
- David Joplin, APR (Okla. — South Central)
- Ellen Morgan (Calif. — Minority)

Running from the Floor for the NSPRA Executive Board

NSPRA Policy 205.13 allows nominations from the floor at the Annual Seminar of members in good standing for Executive Board offices.

In order to run from the floor, interested members must submit their intention to run in writing to the chair of the Executive Board Search Committee by noon prior to the Regional and Annual Meetings of the Association. These meetings will be held Sunday, July 9, 2006, beginning at 1:00 p.m. Those wishing to run for office from the floor will be allowed to speak at their respective meeting and must abide by NSPRA's policies on campaigning for office.

For more information on running for an NSPRA office, contact EBSC Chair Berney Kirkland, APR at berney_kirkland@gwinnett.k12.ga.us or 770-822-6127; or Karen Kleinz, APR, NSPRA associate director at kkleinz@nspra.org or 301-519-1227.

Share Your Great Work

Share your best and learn from some of the finest school communicating materials available today at the NSPRA Seminar Exchange Center. The Exchange Center will be open from Sunday July 9 through Wednesday July 12.

All NSPRA members are invited to send 150 copies of their best publications to share in the Exchange Center at the NSPRA National Seminar. Send your best materials to **arrive no earlier than July 5 and no later than July 8** to:

**Attention: Scott Trump
FOR NSPRA
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2006 NSPRA
NATIONAL SEMINAR
Chicago Marriott Downtown
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Chicago, IL 60611**

Mark your package(s) clearly with the contents, i.e., "Internal Newsletters," "Annual Reports," "Financial Publications," etc. Please do not use Styrofoam peanuts or shredded paper as packing materials. We recommend materials be shipped via UPS, Federal Express, or a service that allows you to trace your shipment. Please check with your delivery service to confirm time to allow for ground service from your area.

Share Ideas with Your NSPRA Colleagues

Does your chapter, school, district or association have an idea or an activity that other NSPRA members would be interested in? Let us know. E-mail your suggestions to editorial@nspra.org.

Leadership from the Top: Superintendent Sets the Example for Communication

When Harold Brathwaite was a Peel District School Board Superintendent, he felt that a vital part of his job was to set the example for effective communication in his district. Brathwaite, now retired, is a former recipient of NSPRA's Bob Grossman Leadership in Communication Award.

In a recent interview, he said he believes that a superintendent should work hard to model consistent communication that is timely, multi-modal, targeted, clear about intent and consistent with organizational values. By using these principles and employing a professional communications staff, Brathwaite feels a superintendent will be successful.

The communications staff must also model the values of the organization, most notably those of honesty and trust. "In today's world, only a fool can believe that he can hide or camouflage bad news," Brathwaite explained. "Being the first to admit your students' test scores were disappointing, outlining corrective measures, building teacher capacity, and creating an appropriate sense of urgency will go a long way in allaying the concerns of parents and students."

Clear Communications Needed

Early in his term at Peel, Superintendent Brathwaite recognized the need for clear and transparent communications. As a new provincial/state government was taking school funding from local municipalities, his district was entering teacher negotiations. The change in the funding formula created confusion on the parts of both the school board and the union.

"I immediately insisted that the board staff work with the union staff to agree on the total funding the school board was receiving before proceeding to negotiations," said Brathwaite. This move led to an early agreement that was sent to the media with a joint statement of understanding crafted by district communications personnel.

Giving communications professionals access to cabinet and leadership team meetings is beneficial for both the communications professionals and the teams they are assisting. Brathwaite feels that communications professionals are only as good

and as useful as the degree to which they are given access to information.

"Being aware of the total picture, the professional is able to provide an immediate assessment of many angles from which a given decision may be viewed and suggest appropriate missing links that should be communicated," Brathwaite said.

Throughout his career, Brathwaite observed that transparent communications is the mirror of the district, "reflecting back the successes of the system, never distorting but repositioning when necessary, getting the story out first and accurately, reinforcing the district's vision and values and building community confidence."

A Well-Deserved Reputation

Brathwaite's school district earned a reputation for its open, ready communications. This status made it easier to meet potential concerns head on.

Due to the incredible annual growth of the district — 3,000 students added to the existing 120,000 — it was a constant challenge to provide adequate classroom space. Students had to be enrolled before the district could seek government grants to build new schools. Consequently, many of the district's mobile classrooms were being used longer than originally anticipated.

Eventually, the issue of mold in the mobile classrooms began to emerge on a grand scale. Protecting the health and safety of students and staff members was an urgent matter that had to be dealt with quickly and properly. Brathwaite and his staff knew the media would continue to have a field day with this issue if they did not handle it in an open and honest manner.

Constant Assurances

Brathwaite summed up the need for open, honest and timely communication by saying, "Schools are havens where people send their most treasured possessions, their children. Parents want constant assurances that schools are living up to their expectations. Schools, like all human institutions, are not perfect. People can accept that as long as the imperfections are minor, being addressed and not hidden."



Schools, like all human institutions, are not perfect. People can accept that as long as the imperfections are minor, being addressed and not hidden.

— Harold Brathwaite

This article was written by Carol L. Votsmier, director of communications, Springfield (Ill.) Public Schools. She is also a member of the CAP Support/Research Committee.

Good Stuff



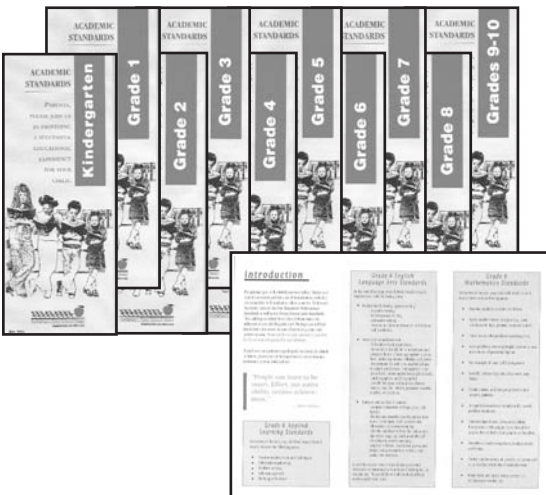
Customer Service Standards

Alhambra School District, Phoenix, Ariz., had office staff create new districtwide customer service standards. Professionally designed customer service standards posters were created and are displayed in all school and district offices, cafeterias, maintenance and transportation departments, and even on school buses. The posters were printed in two different sizes — 8.5 x 11 and 24 x 36. For more information, contact Linda Jeffries, community relations coordinator, at 602-336-2926 or ljeffries@alhambra.k12.az.us.

Share your
“Good Stuff”

Network is always seeking innovative techniques and ideas from your communication and marketing programs.

E-mail NSPRA at editorial@nspra.org with your Good Stuff.



The Standard for Academics

Bethlehem (Pa.) School District produced a series of 10 brochures aimed at parents, staff and students that provide a grade by grade description of the curriculum as it aligns with state standards. Each brochure contains the Applied Learning, English Language and Mathematics requirement for each level as well as tips for parents and method of assessing each student’s progress. For more information, contact Deborah Campanella, administrative coordinator to the superintendent, at 610-861-0500 ext. 3250 or dcampanella@bethsd.org.

Playing It Safe

To provide guidance to playground supervisors on safety and bullying issues, Denver (Colo.) Public Schools produced an 18-page booklet for its playground supervisors. Topics include playground usage for a variety of equipment, common hazards, accident procedures, wind chill information and how to make a suggestion for changes or additions to playgrounds, among others. For more information, contact Stephen Finley, director, risk management, at 720-423-3515 or stephen_finley@dpsk12.org.

