

## 2013 National School Public Relations Association Mark of Distinction Award

The Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) currently has 158 members, of which 45 are NSPRA members. That means MSPRA falls in Category A: Chapter has less than 50% NSPRA membership. This year, we are submitting an entry under Section II: Special Focus Areas: Professional Development/PR Skill-Building.

### Section II: Special Focus Areas

#### 1. Professional Development/PR Skill-Building –

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

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

- 1) Explanation and overview of overall year-long effort (follows in this section);
- 2) Statement of chapter goals and objectives for programs/activities (follows in this section);
- 3) Documentation and copies of conference/workshop/meeting programs and agendas, marketing materials, tip sheets and/or PowerPoint presentations distributed to participants (See Section A and B.);
- 4) Examples of specific programs/activities for contests and awards (See Section C and D.);
- 5) Identification of target audience and participation/attendance lists (See participant list in Section A and B.);
- 6) Documentation/demonstration of measurable outcomes, effectiveness and success of the program/activity (See annual conference evaluation in Section A and drive-in conference evaluation in Section B.);
- 7) Explanation of how program/activity relates to NSPRA's Goals and Objectives (follows in this section);
- 8) Other relevant examples of chapter's professional development/PR skill-building efforts (follows in this section).

Note: One flash drive is included with this submission.

# Michigan School Public Relations Association

## Overview of MSPRA Professional Development & Skill-Building Activities

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

Our professional development activities are primarily in:

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

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

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

- Skill-building for all levels of members, those who are new to the profession and those with many years of experience
- Preparing members to address current hot topics in Michigan education
- Networking to strengthen professional relationships
- Recognition of the skills and sharing of the successful strategies of our contest winners (annual conference)
- Exposure to some of the topics, trends, and speakers identified at the National School Public Relations Association conference. This year, we introduced our members to Dr. John Draper who spoke at the 2011 NSPRA Conference in San Antonio, Texas.

The goals for the Communications Contest are to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The 2013 Annual MSPRA Conference

MSPRA held its annual two-day conference on March 7 and 8, 2013 at the Marriot – East Lansing at University Place in East Lansing, Michigan. A total of 55 people including presenters, members and others attended the conference. Evaluations of the conference were positive, with frequent references to the outstanding structure of the conference in terms of providing compelling keynote speakers, holding useful round-table discussions, building in time for networking and “group therapy” among members.

This year we promoted the conference with mailed printed materials. Conference teaser and reminder e-mails were also sent to target audiences with a link to MSPRA’s website for the details. We offered electronic registration in addition to the traditional paper system.

### Unique Features

Four unique features were part of MSPRA’s 2013 Annual Conference:

- 1) Joe Krumm, APR, from Oregon’s North Clackamas School District 12 and current NSPRA President, was our first keynote speaker. Joe brought a poignant and much-needed message to conference participants. And, for the MSPRA board members who ate dinner with Joe the night before the conference, it was a wonderful opportunity to connect with a kindred spirit and NSPRA leader in a relaxed setting.
- 2) We were pleased to have five sponsors for this year’s conference: alternative revenue development; Business + Schools UNITE; PARENTLINK®; Dean Transportation; and McAlvey, Merchant and Associates. (See Section E for sponsor materials.)
- 3) This year, we skipped breakout sessions. Instead, we stayed together in the same room for both days to facilitate networking, enhance the group experience, make it simpler for our planning committee and save money. We accomplished all of these goals. Plus, both anecdotal and formal feedback confirmed that participants found it beneficial.
- 4) We also had our sponsor displays in the same, large meeting room which gave them ultimate access to our members and helped educate them about schools and school PR as they were able to hear all the presenters (if they chose to listen).

### The Conference—Day One

The conference convened with our day-one keynote speaker, Joe Krumm, APR. Joe spoke to us about “When the Job Gets to be too Much.” He immediately hooked us with his title slide: School PR: Are you insane? Our answer, of course, was “Yes!” And with that, Joe had our permission to bring a bit of sanity back into our frenetic lives. He helped us reflect on: when the job gets to be too much, self-care that works for us, work as a cause, managing our time, loving our work, balance and the bottom line: The kids we serve are our legacy. And, through the words of Maya Angelou he reminded us to: “Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.” He observed that we love our work when we: view it as a cause, are affiliated, work with a mentor, and acquire valued skills. He closed by saying that America needs a marketing plan for education and assured us that “NSPRA is working on it.”

After lunch, conference attendees heard from our second speaker, Anthony Huey, President of Reputation Management Associates in Columbus, Ohio. A 20-year communication veteran, Anthony presented “Media Relations 101, Rebooted: Secrets to a Re-energized PR Program.” He reviewed basic media relations, reminded us to think in sound bites, gave us tips for how to be a good interview, and showed us how to use the four response techniques for answering any

question: nuggets, bridging, bump and run and turn the tables. (*Note: The presentation materials from Reputation Management Associates are only able to be reprinted with permission. Therefore, we have not included the handout in this submission. However, we have included a printed, one-page promotion of the presentation from the website.*)

We then focused on communicating with another of our important audiences: legislators. Brad Biladeau, Governmental Liaison for the Michigan Association of School Administrators (the superintendents' association in Michigan) talked about the policy, politics and process involved in law making. He briefed us on the latest activities and actions of the Michigan legislature. He said term limits are causing bills to be introduced year after year. He encouraged us to go back to our districts and help build better communication with our legislators by talking about what's working in education. Brad suggested we make this our goal over the next six months.

Following Brad's presentation, we adjourned to the evening's activities.

### **MSPRA Conference Evening Networking Event**

Our annual MSPRA Conference is a feast of new ideas and skill-building sessions for school communicators from across the state. We start early and learn late, but take a break in the evening for building our relationships.

Goals for the evening are for fun, but also connection. The more our members connect with each other the broader their professional networks grow. And, professional networks are key to successful careers. In addition, we want to showcase our conference location, so activities have ranged from a museum after-hours visit to a live theatre performance to a special dinner venue.

For the 2013 conference, we maximized our meeting location adjacent to the Michigan State University campus by touring the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum. Devoted to post-1945 art, it had opened just a few months earlier, with the aid of a \$28 million gift from the Broads. Conference participants who chose to tour this contemporary art museum in the late afternoon were treated to a unique, statewide treasure. And, it provided a great venue in which to interact.

In the evening, participants enjoyed a meal at one of two sign-up dinner options, one billed as fine dining and the other as crazy, fun gourmet pizza. In these smaller groups we were able to get to know each other that much better.

We returned from dinner to a sponsored After-Glow Event at the hotel where we enjoyed beverages, snacks and continued our conversations.

### **The Conference—Day Two**

We began our second morning by congratulating the MSPRA Contest Award Winners and hearing from our Outstanding Superintendent Communicator—Susan H. Zurvalec, Superintendent of Farmington Public Schools, Farmington, Michigan. (For more details, see Section D.) Susan also hosted a round-table presentation later in the morning entitled: “Top 10 Strategies to Work more Effectively with your Superintendent, so You, your Superintendent and your District Succeed.”

Then we heard from our third keynote speaker, Dr. John Draper, who informed us of the “*Crucial Conversations about America’s Public Schools.*” Much like he did at NSPRA, Dr. Draper helped us step back from the prevailing myths about “failing public schools” and examine what’s really happening in education today. He gave us tools to reframe the conversation about the drop-out rate, turn-around schools and the achievement gap. And, he demonstrated that we possess the “*Curse of Knowledge*” and how the “curse” impacts our communication. [You don’t know what it’s like **NOT** to know what you know.] And, his closing story about how he unknowingly impacted a middle-school student all those years ago, reminded all of us why we do what we do.

After Dr. Draper’s presentation, we offered these nine round-table sessions:

- Understanding and Communicating Right-to-Work Legislation
- So It’s Marketing – What’s the Difference?
- Oh no! Now what? The Basics of Crisis Communication Planning
- APR 101
- Marking Your District’s Milestones: Putting the Punch in your Celebration
- Top 10 Strategies to Work more Effectively with your Superintendent, so You, your Superintendent and your District Succeed
- Better than Bagels in the Morning! Getting Staff Excited for the Start of a New School Year
- How to Produce an Award-Winning E-newsletter; and
- Gold Medallion Winner: A Smile as Big as the Moon.

All totaled, we offered participants three keynote speakers, one legislative update, nine roundtable sessions, one tour of an art museum, two sign-up dinners, and one after-glow gathering for relaxation and networking.

We left the conference feeling rejuvenated and prepared to take on the remainder of the year. Evaluations of the conference were very positive, as evidenced by the survey results.

## The 2012 MSPRA Drive-In Conference

MSPRA held its drive-in conference on December 10, 2012 at the Clarkston Community Schools in Clarkston, Michigan. A total of 26 participants plus presenters attended the half-day training.

The workshop was a joint presentation of the Michigan School Public Relations Association and Lambert, Edwards & Associates (LE&A). Advertised as one of the Midwest's largest and most respected public relations and investor relations firms, LE&A provides its clients with strategic PR counsel and tactical implementation. A former MSPRA board member, TJ Bucholz, is now a director at LE&A and helped facilitate this half-day session.

Participants were eager to hear from public relations experts outside of public education.

The program began at 8:30 a.m. with networking and continental breakfast followed by these five skill-building sessions:

Traditional Public Relations—Kathy Barker Hoffman, LE&A Director

*Tip: Be proactive. Quickly ask to have mistakes in reported stories corrected to keep the misinformation from being cited by other news sources.*

Traditional Media/Changes in Media Landscape—Joe DiBenedetto, LE&A Senior Director

*Tip: Think of media as multi-media. If you include a photo in a news release it gets twice the attention, a video with your news release get four times the attention.*

Electoral Campaigns and Bond Issues—TJ Bucholz, LE&A Director

*Tip: Pull together public officials and tap into their supporters.*

Issues Management—Tara Powers, LE&A Managing Partner/Managing Director

*Tip: Back-pack letters may not reach parents soon enough. Students text. If it's going to be on the noon news, use the alert system.*

Social/Digital Media—Chris Tromp, LE&A Senior Director

*Tip: Use social media as your news channel to promote activities and events.*

A question-and-answer session followed the last presenter.

Evaluations of the half-day session were positive. Majority of the participants who responded to the follow-up survey were pleased with the content and presenters.

## MSPRA's Annual Communications Contest

MSPRA provides a framework in which people who direct communications and public relations programs can:

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

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

Product categories range from writing to print and multi-media publications (i.e., electronic, interactive, video, and podcast). This year, as an added recognition, a member of the MSPRA Board attended a regular meeting of each contest winner's school board and presented the award certificate as part of the agenda. This called additional attention to the award recipient, to the accomplishment and to MSPRA.

MSPRA's Gold Medallion Award recognizes outstanding programs or projects that advance responsible school communications. Entries may come from public and private schools, education agencies, regional MSPRA groups, and any public relations agency or private business serving education entities. (This year's winner, Kent Intermediate School District, presented its entry, *A Smile as Big as the Moon*, at a round-table session on Friday morning.)

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award recognizes a Superintendent for leadership in school district communications. (See Section D.)

## 2012 Entry Recap

(See Section C for a complete list of the winning entries.)

Total # of 2012 Entries - 52

Total # of Judges - 17 (We had a group of judges from the east and west side of the state.)

Total # of Awards - 40 (21-Distinguished, 18-Commendable, 1-Gold Medallion, 1-Outstanding Superintendent)

77% of entries received recognition

## Entry Breakdown (number of entries in each category)

3- Electronic Newsletter

4- Electronic & Interactive Media

1- Individual PA 25 Annual Report

3- Non-PA25 Annual Report

3 -Writing

2- Web Site

10 - Video or Audio

9- Publication

7- Project or Program

1- Gold Medallion

1- Outstanding Superintendent

7- Photography

2- Email/Web/Podcasts/Blogs

## MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award recognizes a Superintendent for leadership in school district communications.

The Superintendent of Farmington Public Schools in Farmington, Michigan, Susan H. Zurvalec, was chosen as MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award recipient.

Susan accepted her award at MSPRA's 2013 Annual Conference on Friday morning, March 8, 2013. She also hosted a round-table session that same day entitled "Top 10 Strategies to Work more Effectively with your Superintendent, so You, your Superintendent and your District Succeed."

## Other examples of increasing PR visibility and providing PR training

MSPRA members presented at other conferences and school districts on the importance of good public relations.

1. At the Fruitport Schools' Opening Day on August 20, 2012, MSPRA Co-President Anita Banach provided *Customer Service/PR* training for:
  - Bus Drivers
  - Custodial and Maintenance Department
2. In April 2013 at the Michigan School Business Officials Annual Conference, MSPRA Board Member John Helmholdt and MSPRA Co-President Anita Banach presented a 3-hour *School Communications and Public Relations* class as part of the certification program for School Business Officials.