

The “Mark of Distinction” Recognition Program for NSPRA Chapters

Entry Form

(Please include this information with each individual entry)

Chapter Name: Alabama School Public Relations Association (ALSPRA)

Chapter President: Lesley Bruinton, APR

President’s contact information

District/Organization: Tuscaloosa City Schools

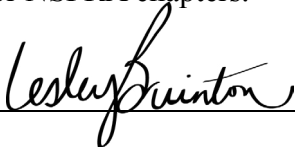
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City/State/Zip Code Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

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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: Alabama School Public Relations Association (ALSPRA)

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 _____

 Section II: Special Focus Areas

- 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)
3. Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Effort



**Mark of Distinction Recognition Program
NSPRA Chapters**

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**Entry: Section II: Special Focus Areas (Category A)
Professional Development/PR Skill Building**

“A Strategic Communication Plan Professional Learning Unit”



The Alabama School Public Relations Association, or ALSPRA, is a statewide coalition of professional school communicators. Members come from various organizations including local school systems, professional state-level education organizations, the Alabama State Department of Education and others. ALSPRA is the chapter affiliate of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) and is currently in good standing. There are currently 62 members of ALSPRA representing 46 schools, school systems, and organizations.

ALSPRA's purposes and objectives include serving the citizenry of Alabama by promoting the understanding of the goals, aims, accomplishments and needs of public schools within the state; and providing professional development for its members.

ALSPRA seeks to accomplish its purposes and objectives by **1) *encouraging the use of sound communications practices by all those at work in the schools within the chapter jurisdiction; 2) by placing before the citizens facts and viewpoints that will lead to better understanding, appreciation and support of their schools; and 3) by developing materials designed to assist schools within the chapter jurisdiction in building an increased public understanding of the role of public education.***

ALSPRA's purposes and objectives align with NSPRA's mission of building support and trust for education through responsible public relations that leads to success for all students; and its goals of being an indispensable professional organization to its members and the recognized leader on school public relations.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – PR SKILL BUILDING

ALSPRA is committed to providing members both resources and outstanding professional development via its website and through quarterly meetings and workshops offered throughout the year. This is done in order to help both rookie and veteran school PR practitioners enhance their skill level, while also providing valuable

training and resources to school districts without a designated school PR practitioner or Public Information Officer.

RESOURCES - Resources available through the ALSPRA Website (www.alspra.org) include links to various state/national education agencies and partner organizations including NSPRA, the Alabama Association of School Boards, Alabama G.R.I.T., and A+ Education Partnership. The website also includes a link to the ***PROS – Public Relations in Our Schools*** newsletter, which is published monthly in partnership with the Alabama State Department of Education to provide school leaders with engaging and relevant resources in the field of school public relations: (<http://www.alsde.edu/sec/comm/PROS/PROS-3-2016.pdf>).

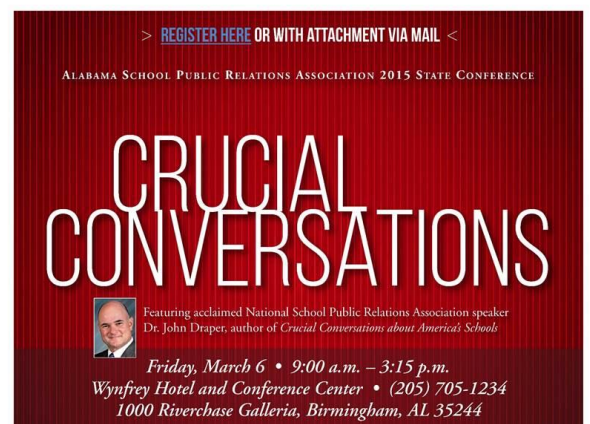
The ALSPRA website also features an events calendar with upcoming workshop dates; and the ALSPRA blog, which provides additional information regarding news, resources, and event dates: <http://www.alspra.org/?DivisionID=21162>.

A section entitled **“Resources for PIOs”** includes samples to assist school PR professionals or school leaders such as: school communication plans - <http://tinyurl.com/h7zsoal>; an Ethics Code for journalists - <http://tinyurl.com/z94fj4o>; and a tips sheet for dealing with the media. A **“Members Only”** section, which requires a login and password, also connects members to additional resources such as conference presentations and sample crisis, branding, marketing, and social media plans.

The home page of the website is used to highlight chapter activities and award winners and to promote best practices by both state and national school PR practitioners. There is also a news feed from the ALSPRA Twitter account: @alabamaschoolpr. (<https://twitter.com/alabamaschoolpr>) The Twitter account gives colleagues a resource to collaborate with school PR leaders using #schoolpr, #USedchat and #ALedchat.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

ALSPRA hosts meetings and workshops throughout the year. On March 6, 2015, ALSPRA hosted a spring workshop entitled “Crucial Conversations” which featured NSPRA consultant Dr. John Draper as the keynote speaker. That workshop was



followed by quarterly meetings held June 4, 2015 in Auburn, and September 18, 2015 in Montgomery.

A new slate of officers was elected at the June 4, 2015 meeting. The officers, who assumed their leadership positions effective July 1, 2015 were: President – Lesley Bruinton, APR; VP Membership – Rena Anderson; VP Professional Development – Whit McGhee; and Secretary/Treasurer – Malissa Valdes-Hubert, APR. ALSPRA members also discussed the creation of Professional Learning Unit (PLU) to attract new members and enhance professional development to all members and approved the creation of the Mitch Edwards, APR, Memorial Award. The September 18, 2015 meeting featured a social media presentation by Jennifer Hogan, founder of #USedchat and #ALedchat. Attendees also heard presentations on reaching key stakeholders by Lesley Bruinton, APR and an NSPRA conference notes highlights by Malissa Valdes-Hubert, APR and Cindy Warner, APR.

ALSPRA will host three major workshops (by June 2016) - a winter workshop, hosted by Tuscaloosa City Schools, on December 15, 2015; a spring workshop, hosted by Vestavia Hills City Schools School on March 4, 2016, and a two-day summer workshop, which will be held at Troy University June 16-17, 2016.



The December 2015 winter workshop featured a crisis communication presentation on “Hacktivism” by the Tuscaloosa County Emergency Management Agency. Featured speakers also included Dr. Suzanne Horsley who presented a session entitled “Media Training Like a Boss” and Dr. Kenon Brown who presented a session

on Building a Communications Plan as part of the ALSPRA Professional Learning Unit (PLU) which will be covered in more detail in the later section of this proposal.

The March 4, 2016 spring workshop, entitled “Elevate”, featured a crisis communication presentation on “Rebranding the Rebels” by Vestavia Hills Superintendent Dr. Shelia Phillips and Communication and Public Relations Specialist Whit McGhee. The keynote address “Pocket PR for Principals” was led by Tuscaloosa City Schools leaders Terry Roller and Andrew Maxey and focused on ways that school leaders can be more effective using social media by implementing the Give Me Five strategy (at least five social media posts from every school event attended.) The workshop also featured workshops on social media management and engagement, an update on proposed

legislative initiatives that would impact K-12 public education in Alabama; and tips for communicating assessment data.

Administrators from nearly a dozen school districts received feedback from accredited members on the strategic communication plans they have created as part of the ALSPRA PLU.

The June 16-17, 2016 two-day workshop will feature presentations on “Crisis Communication Planning” by Dr. Jeff Spurlock, Troy University; “Safe Schools Initiative – A Model Plan to Move from Crisis Communication to Community Engagement” by Dr. Lewis Brooks and Cindy Warner, APR, Shelby County Schools; and “PR Without PR” by Amy Bryan, Butler County Schools.



AWARDS



ALSPRA Scholarship - Each year, ALSPRA awards a \$500 scholarship to a student planning to pursue a public relations major, communication major or emphasis track at a university or college within the state of Alabama. The candidate must be a high school junior or senior at an Alabama public school with a minimum grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. The scholarship is selected by an ALSPRA committee, which grades the candidate on a list of criteria, including the submission of a written essay on either of the following topics: “Important Trends and Issues in PR today with Real World Examples”; and “How has the PR profession changed over the past 10 years/How will it continue to change over the next 10 years?” This year, the scholarship was awarded to Emily Brown of Arab High who plans to attend the University of Montevallo.



Mitch Edwards, APR Memorial Award – This year, the membership of ALSPRA voted to create the Mitch Edwards, APR Memorial Award in honor and memory of former Alabama Department of Education Communication Director Mitch Edwards, APR, who passed away suddenly in December 2014. The monetary

award of \$250 will reimburse any eligible and active member who passes the APR computer-based examination. This award is given in addition to the reimbursement given by NSPRA and the Universal Accreditation Board to further encourage accreditation of ALSPRA members. The inaugural award was presented at the winter workshop to Cindy Warner, APR, Shelby County Schools, who earned the designation in November 2015. <http://www.shelbycountyreporter.com/2015/12/18/warner-receives-award-for-accreditation-in-public-relations/>

Excellence in Communication Awards are given annually at the ALSPRA spring workshop. Three professional awards are given in addition to 14 publication awards for work that demonstrates exceptional communication skills for publications, photography, or electronic media. The three professional awards included:

- **The Nez Calhoun Distinguished Service Award** honors an ALSPRA member for his or her commitment and dedication to the organization and to the profession. Typically, this member has gone above and beyond the call to support ALSPRA and its members. Any ALSPRA member in good standing may nominate a fellow member for this award. The award is named in honor of long-time ALSPRA and NSPRA member Nez Calhoun, APR, from Jefferson County Schools.



This year, it was awarded to ALSPRA President Lesley Bruinton, APR, for her leadership in creating a state-sanctioned Professional Learning Unit (PLU) for educators seeking to create school communication plans and improve community relations. This was the second year of the award's existence and the second consecutive recipient who is accredited in public relations.

- **The Communicator of the Year Award** recognizes an ALSPRA member for outstanding work in the field of public relations prior to and during the previous school year. This award was presented to Suzanne Sullins, Public Relations Manager for Buckhorn High School for her leadership in



improving communication efforts at her school. Sullins, who serves as the school's library media specialist, took the initiative to create an improved website, an online newsletter, and an enhanced social media presence.

- **The Outstanding Leadership in School/Community Relations Award** recognizes an individual who has proven himself or herself to be a leader in using effective school/community relations to build support for public education in his or her community. The award was given to Dr.



Shelia Phillips, Superintendent of Vestavia Hills City Schools for her leadership in the research, planning, implementation and evaluation of a rebranding effort for the Vestavia Hills Hill School “Rebels” mascot following the Charleston church shooting in the summer of 2015.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING UNIT – “*Building the Case for Public Education Among Community & Stakeholders*”

Perhaps the greatest professional development opportunity that ALSPRA undertook this year was the creation of a Professional Learning Unit (PLU) which was approved by the Alabama Council for Leadership Development (ACLD) - <http://tinyurl.com/zfu8kke>.

Background - In recent years, ALSPRA’s membership had remained stagnant and meeting attendance was minimal. The ALSPRA executive board of officers questioned whether the organization was serving its purpose and sought to do more to meet the needs of its members and the K-12 community-at-large.

This year, the executive board began to look for ways to strengthen professional development offerings, to make the organization into a more viable and recognized entity among education leaders statewide, and to increase meeting attendance and membership.

After conducting research, ALSPRA created a PLU designed to help school and system leaders create their own strategic communication plans using the Four-Step Process. The process to plan, develop, and communicate the PLU models the work that school administrators are doing as learning requirements of the PLU itself.

Recognizing that many school systems in the state of Alabama do not have a formal communications program headed by a professional school communicator, this project sought to demystify the process for schools and systems without a professional school communicator to create their own. Research, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation

form the basis of sound communications strategies—regardless of the issue to be communicated. The aim was to teach school administrators how to incorporate this process into their practice. Whether formulating a plan to increase parental engagement in support of student achievement or to motivate more students to take higher level courses in specialty programs, the process is the same.

The materials developed as part of this PLU are designed to be reusable and customizable, based on a school or system’s needs. Quite simply, it is to build capacity in others to use the resources available to communicate their strengths, challenges and opportunities.

The development of this PLU allowed the organization to meet many of its objectives while ensuring ALSPRA met its mission.

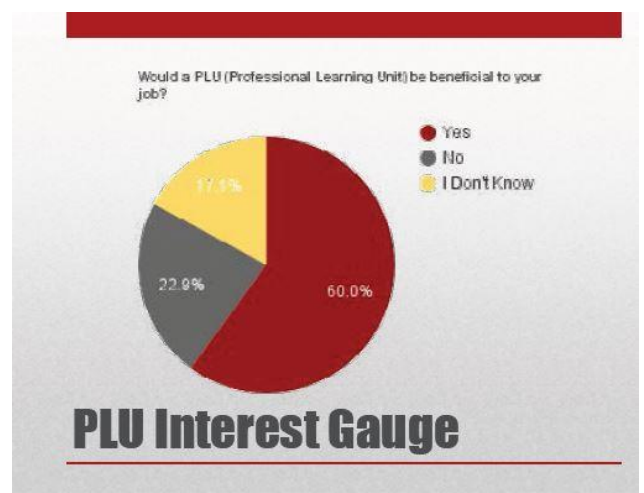
RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT OF PLU

Since 2009, there have only been five ACLD-approved PLUs for Standard 5, Community and Stakeholder Relations. In an age of increased public scrutiny of public schools, educational professionals must do more to build the case for public education by communicating the strengths, challenges and decision-making rationale to their respective communities.

Of the 137 school systems in Alabama, roughly 10 percent have a dedicated public relations practitioner on staff to assist in this role. Many of these individuals belong to ALSPRA however, a greater number of school systems could benefit from an enhanced understanding of strategies and tactics to communicate with community and stakeholder groups.

During the summer of 2015, ALSPRA conducted a survey of its members, in addition to all superintendents and individuals who fill the role of the public information officer for their respective districts, as determined by the Alabama State Department of Education’s Directory. The purpose of this survey was to ascertain the need for targeted professional development to address Standard 5.

<http://tinyurl.com/hwef4qr>



The findings from the ALSPRA 2015 Professional Development Survey supported the idea for the creation of a PLU. More than 70 percent of the respondents said they wanted additional professional development opportunities on community relations. Additionally, more than 50 percent were interested in learning how to build campaigns in support of district-wide initiatives and how to measure them. More than half of the respondents said they wanted to know how to incorporate social media in their school communications practice.

Annually, ALSPRA holds seasonal meetings and/or conferences to provide professional development to its members. Based on feedback from interested participants who do not attend the conferences, a PLU was what they are seeking. Further, ALSPRA was well-positioned to offer this training to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs.) Not only would this training be beneficial to LEAs with a dedicated public relations practitioner on staff, but also to those without a trained professional in this role who, regardless, must fill this capacity. The 2015 survey also found that 60 percent of respondents replied that a PLU would be “beneficial” to their jobs.

Of the PLUs in existence in summer 2015, one required participants to create a media list of reporters as part of the requirement to receive the credit. As an organization, we believed we could offer a more robust experience to improve communication skills for school administrators. A review of the PLU offerings further indicated a growth opportunity for educational leaders as meaningful and relevant professional development did not exist to fill the void in this area. Since Standard 5 dealt squarely with the communication function connected to schools and school systems, it was fitting that ALSPRA provide leadership in this arena among educational leaders in the state. To not do so would continue to cede the organization’s position as being the leader in school public relations in the state of Alabama.

PLANNING OF THE PLU

- **Goal: To pursue Alabama Council for Leadership Development (ACLD) approval of a PLU during the current school year.**

Approval from ACLD would potentially draw additional educators to ALSPRA who were in need of PLUs to maintain their teaching certifications with the state of Alabama. By being strategic about offering meaningful and relevant professional development,

ALSPRA hoped to be more attractive to current and prospective members during the 2015-2016 school year.

- **Objectives:** To achieve the stated goal, the executive board set one primary and three secondary objectives to accomplish by June 30, 2016 (the end of the term for the ALSPRA executive board):
 - To enroll at least 10 individuals in a PLU to develop a strategic communication plan by November 28, 2015. (Primary)
 - To increase meeting attendance by 50 percent. (Secondary)
 - To maintain 95 percent of the ALSPRA membership roster as determined by the July 1, 2015 count. (Secondary)
 - To increase membership by five new members and two new institutional members. (Secondary)
- **Audience Identification:** Using the metric of serving school public relations practitioners as the part of the organization’s mission, the opportunity to serve others needing communication support and PLU credits to maintain teaching certifications, the following audiences were selected:
 - Current ALSPRA members
 - School public relations practitioners
 - Superintendents
 - Principals
 - School administrators
 - Teachers with administrative certification

According to the research, an opportunity clearly presented itself for the Alabama School Public Relations Association to provide leadership on Standard 5 (Community and Stakeholder Relationships). The expertise ALSPRA offers could equip school administrators with the appropriate messages for use at the right time. Titled “**Building the Case for Public Education Among Community and Stakeholders,**” the PLU proposal called for participants to develop their own strategic communication plan through a series of collaborations, activities and events during the course of the 2015-2016 school year, beginning with the December 4, 2015 winter workshop. In partnership

with an associate public relations professor from the University of Alabama, resources were developed for participants as part of the learning experience.

<http://www.alspra.org/PLUdocs>. The fill-in-the-blank materials were designed to create a self-guided experience with explanations of what information would be needed and why. This was intentional in order to provide some foundational public relations knowledge to school educators who may not be familiar with the terminology and/or concepts of sound public relations practice.

During the course of this six-month professional learning opportunity, participants would gather qualitative and quantitative data. This information would guide school administrators in effectively selecting and implementing the appropriate strategies to communicate the strengths, challenges and decision-making rationale for their respective school or systems. To guard against school administrators using the experience to implement a tactic, it would be required that a student data source be used as part of the process to help sustain continuous improvement in their school or system.

The proposal was authored by ALSPRA president Lesley Bruinton and submitted on October 3, 2015. In anticipation of ACLD approval, ALSPRA also developed a communication plan using branding, media relations, emails, and social media to inform others of the potential PLU's availability. On October 22, 2015, the Alabama Council of Leadership Development awarded approval of ALSPRA's PLU to offer it for three years. It was assigned the number PLUACLD421 to be found by interested parties. This was a crucial step in helping ALSPRA to meet its primary and secondary objectives.



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLU

An accelerated timeline was needed in order to meet all target dates. For Year 1 of implementation, a decision was made not to charge for participation in the PLU itself; however, those participants were to pay to attend the annual conference. The communication plan to educate those seeking PLUs

began the next day on social media following the receipt of the confirmation letter. Other social media posts were scheduled via www.buffer.com. Evidence of these posts can be found via ALSPRA's Twitter page at: (<https://twitter.com/alabamaschoolpr>).



Emails were sent using the state department of education’s listserv, and the distributed press release was picked up and run in the state’s PRO’s e-newsletter on school public relations.

Participants registered for PLUACLD421 for free and received the developed resources, available online at

www.alspra.org/PLUdocs. Because ALSPRA is led by a volunteer board, these channels of communication were viewed as the most time efficient and effective channels in reaching busy school administrators. A strong and visually interesting brand identity was developed to communicate the learning opportunity to others. Once a potential participant’s interest was piqued and they registered for this opportunity, they would be provided access to the materials.

First, they were to conduct a communication audit and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis using the provided resources. This work would be continued at the ALSPRA winter workshop (December 2015) in which the agenda provided context for the homework. In early 2016, participants began formulating a communication outline using the provided resources. Participants then selected an issue using a student data source (as a requirement of the PLU), in which a strategic communication plan could assist in their efforts.

At the ALSPRA spring conference (March 2016), participants consulted with accredited ALSPRA members using the communication outline as they developed their strategic communication plan.



The final communication plans will be submitted in May 2016 and adjudicated according to a provided rubric. Strategic communication plans receiving at least 40 of 60 points would be deemed ready for implementation in the 2016-2017 school year.

No budget was allocated for this initiative, and all the collaterals were developed by the ALSPRA executive board gratis.

EVALUATION

There were four main objectives (one primary and three secondary) that would be used to determine the effectiveness of ALSPRA's concerted efforts to support the stated goal by the end of the term for the ALSPRA executive board at the end of June 2016:

- To enroll at least 10 individuals in a PLU to develop a strategic communication plan by November 28, 2015.
- To increase meeting attendance by 50 percent.
- To maintain 95 percent of the ALSPRA membership roster as determined by the July 1, 2015 count.
- To increase membership by five new members and two new institutional members.

The results of the primary research provided the organization with a pathway to meet the goal and the majority of the stated objectives. Seventeen individuals registered for PLUACLD421 by the November 28 deadline, which was 70 percent higher than what was stated in the primary objective. This group includes five teachers, one school-level administrator, six principals, three district-level administrators, and two superintendents. Of the 17 who registered, 12 participants completed the PLU and submitted their final strategic communication plans for review. The plans will be graded by Accredited in Public Relations ALSPRA members using a scoring rubric. A completed plan that receives at least 40 out of 60 possible points will receive PLU approval and be deemed ready for implementation for the 2016-2017 school year.

The strategic communication plans submitted by the PLU participants are excellent, well-written plans, which also validate this entire process. The participants included teachers, principals, and superintendents who had no previous experience in writing communication plans – much less following the RPIE process. By completing this PLU, the participants are now armed with the same knowledge as some seasoned PR practitioners and they will be valued asset to their local schools and school districts in developing communication plans for future initiatives and programs. (*An example plan submitted by a PLU participant has been provided as the final supporting document of this submission.)

During the process, ALSPRA recognized the need to provide additional support to individuals who do not primarily hold the responsibility for school public relations efforts. That is why each of the six Accredited in Public Relations ALSPRA members were paired with two or three participants to mentor. This process was helpful to provide a course correction to those participants whose proposals were not suitable for a strategic communications plan based on the Four-Step Process. Additionally, the executive board decided to offer PLU participants a complimentary membership into the organization as a further way to support the participants as they developed their own strategic communication plans. An added benefit of matching participants with accredited members was to provide those APRs with community service points which can be used toward the renewal of their accreditation status.

The primary research further confirmed the decision to offer a stronger speaker line-up to meet the professional development needs stated in the survey responses. This led to a continued increase in meeting attendees from 15 in June 2015 (the meeting before the current executive board took office), to 34 in September, to 46 in December and the same number March 2016.

ALSPRA also sought to increase membership by five new members and two new institutional members. For the 2015-2016 program year, there are 11 institutional members, including the addition of three new school systems which yielded seven individuals. This addition exceeds the objective.

Moreover, the objective was met by welcoming six new members into the organization. Recall that the ALSPRA board decided to extend complimentary memberships to each of the 17 PLU participants. Simply put: this means 30 new people are part of the Alabama School Public Relations Association! To date, ALSPRA has 62 paid and active members on the roster.

The challenge was maintaining the 95 percent of members on the July 1, 2015 roster. The organization received pledges to renew from the majority of our long-time members; however, financial challenges in the state have resulted in some public relations departments being eliminated and have held up dues for some who rely on their districts to cover the costs. To date, 44 out of 57 the members as of July 1, 2015 have paid their dues for 2016. Efforts to collect on the remaining 12 previous members will continue.

These have provided great lessons for the organization: ALSPRA is challenged to investigate charging for the PLU and change the structure and deadlines associated with membership. With ACLD-approval for the PLU for a total of three years, ALSPRA will refine its practices for the 2016-2017 school year to promote continued success with this learning opportunity. Additionally, the organization is considering reorganization of our business practices to incentivize people to renew memberships rather than struggle to secure the funding. With regards to this particular project, the development and the implementation of the PLU allowed the organization to better serve ALSPRA's purpose by not only providing professional development for its members, but also encouraging the use of sound communications practices and by developing materials designed to assist schools.

NATIONAL RECOGNITION/INVOLVEMENT OF ALSPRA MEMBERS



Dr. Sheila Phillips
Vestavia Hills City Schools



Amy Bryan
Butler County School System

2016 SUPERINTENDENTS TO WATCH



The two superintendents who are members of ALSPRA were recently recognized as **National School Public Relations Association 2015-2016 Superintendents to Watch.**

This program is designed to recognize superintendents, with fewer than five years' experience as a superintendent, using communication technology in innovative and effective ways. **Dr. Sheila Phillips**, Vestavia Hills City Schools, and **Amy Bryan**, Butler County School System were both honored.

Dr. Phillips was the recipient of the ALSPRA 2016 Outstanding Leadership in School/Community Relations award, as well as the 2016 Excellence in Writing award for Vestavia City Schools' Op Ed: A Rebel Strives for Excellence.

http://www.al.com/opinion/index.ssf/2015/07/a_rebel_strives_for_excellence.html

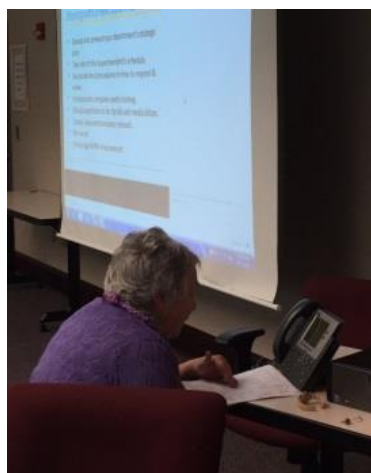
Mrs. Bryan was the recipient of the 2015 Outstanding Leadership in School/Community Relations award. The Butler County School System was awarded best Annual Report, best Marketing campaign and the best Student Handbook and Code of Conduct at the 2016 ALSPRA awards ceremony.

These superintendents were recognized for using dynamic, fast-paced leadership with strong communication at its core. They engage and inform their school communities with new communication technology tools combined with tried-and-true techniques.



Former ALSPRA President **Jason Gaston**, Coordinator of Public/Community Relations for Hoover City Schools, was appointed to the NSPRA National Board of Directors in 2015 as the **Southeast Regional Vice President**. In this capacity, he represents a number of Southern states at the national level – bringing their voices to the table at national school public relations meetings. Though just months into his tenure, Gaston has already made some chapter visits and has other trips on his radar for the summer of 2016. He

communicates regularly with Southeastern chapter presidents regarding best standards and practices, with a goal of encouraging chapters to submit examples of their best communication pieces to NSPRA to add to its ever-growing arsenal of resources. Gaston was also named one of NSPRA’s Frontrunners for 2014-2015. Current President **Lesley Bruinton** has also named one of NSPRA’s Frontrunners for 2015-2016.



Nez Calhoun, APR, was one of two featured panelists for the April 15 NSPRA PR Power Hour. Calhoun, who over the past 40 years in her role with Jefferson County Schools has worked with 17 different superintendents, shared her insight on the topic “So You Have a New Superintendent – Now What?” with Power Hour Attendees.

Cindy Warner, APR and Dr. Lewis Brooks from the Shelby County School District have been selected to be NSPRA presenters at the upcoming 2016 Seminar in Chicago. They will present a session entitled “Safe Schools

Initiative: A Model Plan to Move from Crisis Communication to Community Engagement.” The skill session will highlight strategic communication planning and management with an emphasis on the Four-Step Process. Warner and Brooks will show participants how their district moved past a crisis situation involving a gunman holding five students hostage in one of their schools to the development of a five-point strategic plan called the Safe Schools Initiative using consensus/relationship building and community engagement to secure support and funding.

***Example PLU Plan**

Strategic Communication Plan Outline

Amy Bryan

Superintendent

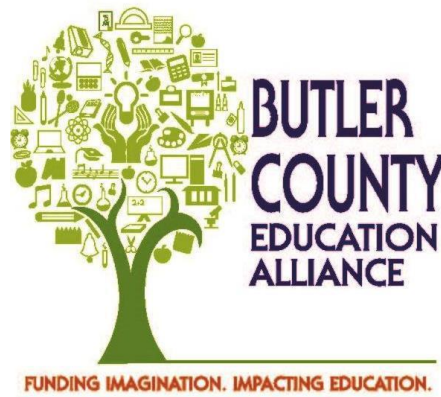
Butler County School System

May 1, 2016


ALSPRA Challenge/PLU Project

1. Problem Statement

The Butler County Education Alliance, a non-profit foundation, is a new entity that will need to broadly communicate its existence, purpose, and benefits to the local communities in Butler County. A purposeful and comprehensive communication plan is necessary to generate the funds necessary to make a difference in Butler County classrooms. Butler County's funding available per student is just over \$8,800 which ranks the system at 130 of 135 systems in Alabama. (Sept. 2015, alabamaschoolconnection.org) The Butler County Education Alliance will work to provide funding to bridge the gap in resources available to Butler County's students.



2. SWOT Analysis

	<p>Strengths These are the positive characteristics within your school/system that give you an advantage when communicating.</p>	<p>Weaknesses These are the negative characteristics within your school/system that put you at a disadvantage when communicating.</p>
<p>Opportunities These are the positive characteristics that exist outside your school/system that you can take advantage of when communicating.</p>	<p>Strengths/Opportunities Intersection People like to give and like to support projects that help students succeed. We have a dynamic superintendent. We have an active support system. We have high academic standards.</p>	<p>Weaknesses/Opportunities Intersection We have to be creative to find time for promoting ourselves. It may be tough to get employees to donate. There is no awareness of the foundation/alliance as it is brand new.</p>
<p>Threats These are the negative characteristics that exist outside your school/system that will hinder your success when communicating.</p>	<p>Strengths/Threats Intersection All of our community is not pro-public education so we'll need to tell the story of how better student success affects our whole economy. We have potential business support from Chamber and BCCED members. We have positive media support.</p>	<p>Weaknesses/Threats Intersection We will need the long-term commitment of foundation members in order for this not to be a short-lived organization. We may have opposition from private school supporters and competition with other foundations (college, child advocacy, food pantry, etc.) The system has suffered a sub par reputation in previous years.</p>

3. Goals

Our goals include 1) raising funds from employees, businesses, organizations, and individuals in order to 2) award classroom grants to teachers which will be used 3) to enhance and improve student learning opportunities beyond what could have otherwise been offered.

4. Audiences

1. Butler County School System employees will likely be the most involved group. They are potential donors and potential mini-grant recipients.
2. Local small businesses, local industries, and civic organizations will be an important audience for our messages about what is needed, how they can help, and then the benefits given to students because of their efforts.
3. Community members/individuals are a broader audience that could contribute to the cause.

5-7. Objectives, Key Messages, and Strategies

Our foundation objectives are 1) to complete a branding project to include a logo, informational brochures, and social media accounts within 2 months of incorporation, 2) to have 50% of the school system employees donate in the first year, to raise more than \$10,000 in year one, and 3) to award at least ½ of the funds raised in year one to classroom teacher grant projects.

1. School System Employees

Objective 1: To get at least 1/2 of each school's staff to contribute to the alliance at least initially if not commit to regular payroll deduction contributions.

Key Message: Your donation goes directly back into Butler County classrooms to provide for exceptional student learning opportunities. Provide examples of what mini-grants could fund for classrooms. No donation is too small.

Strategies: At system institute, kick off the beginning of the new foundation while all employees are together and enthusiastic. Alliance members conduct face-to-face follow up to "seal the deal." There will be some healthy competition promoted between schools to help increase the donations.

Objective 2: To receive at least two grant proposals from each school that score high enough to be awarded funding.

Key Message: Anyone can write successful grants.

Strategies: Publicize the grant applications through faculty meeting presentations, emails, and social media postings. Provide grant writing seminars for teachers.

2. Business/Industry/Civic Org's:

Objective: To raise at least \$10,000 in year one.

Key Messages: Your donations are tax-deductible and directly provide items for enhancing student learning in Butler County Schools.

Strategies: Development committee members will personally contact businesses and civic organizations to share about the new foundation, what it can do for schools, and how easy it is to give – perhaps annually for businesses and/or perhaps through payroll deduction for employees. We will also use ads, social media, and all communications sources available in order to generate donations that can be used for mini-grants. Donors names will be publicized (social media plus more to be determined). Granted projects will also be publicized to our community.

3. Community/Individuals:

Objective: To gain at least a dozen individual donors in year one (outside of employee or business/industry donations)

Key Messages: Funds donated can truly increase student classroom learning opportunities. YOU can afford to donate as no amount is too small. Your gift will be tax deductible.

Strategies: We will use ads, social media, and personal contacts to promote our message and raise funds for our cause.

8. Evaluation

1. Was branding completed within the 2 months planned? Compare date of official notice of 501(c)3 status to invoice for printed items and dates posted. (Disclaimer: we are ahead of the timeline with a logo already approved. (See logo on cover of this plan.)
2. Did 50% of employees donate this year? Provide records of the % that donated from each school and central office.
3. Was at least \$10,000 in new donations received in year one? Provide total of donations.
4. Were at least two competitive grants awarded in classroom mini-grants at each school in year one? Provide donation totals and totals of grants awarded.
5. Overall, has the Butler County Education Alliance provided funding that allowed students opportunities they wouldn't have had before in part thanks to these communication strategies?

9. Logistics (Timetable and Budget)

March 2016 – file for 501(c)3 designation

April – July – Communications committee works on branding (logo, brochures, social media, draft letters, plans for visits, etc.

July 2016 – official notice of 501(c)3 designation due by this month

Development committee seeks \$24K from now defunct foundation of the school board

August 2016 – Foundation kick off month

Employees learn of foundation at system's Institute Day Aug. 5, employee donation competition begins

Grants committee develops grant criteria, application, & scoring rubric

Sept. 2016 – Development committee kicks off business campaign

Grants committee publicizes grant applications with Nov 1 deadline

Oct. 2016 – Development committee kicks off civic organization campaign

Nov. 2016 – Grants collected by Nov 1 and scored by Nov. 30

Dec. 2016 – Announce first grantees (for second semester implementation of project)

Budget: The foundation members' time and work will all be in kind. The only cost anticipated will be in the printing necessary for a brochure for potential donors. Our anticipated first printing cost is \$1000 as a discount will apply and we will print a limited number just to saturate our audiences only once in hopes that our document becomes more sophisticated and detailed with student grants highlighted once awarded.

10. Personnel

The primary communications leader will be Andy Brown, editor of the local newspaper. He has the expertise and resources available (access to others with expertise, printing resources, etc.). He will have the help of a committee to share the "brand" as well as keep the communications current, creative, and comprehensive. There will also be officers of the foundation, the school system's superintendent, as well as an attorney which will all be in the communication loop for the foundation.