

# NSPRA 2018

# Mark of Distinction

# Award Application

---

for

*Coalition-Building*

*Collaborative Communication Efforts*

by the

Michigan School Public Relations Association



Submitted on May 15, 2018

---

**The "Mark of Distinction" Recognition Program  
for NSPRA Chapters**

**Entry Form**

**(Please include this information with each individual entry)**

Chapter Name: Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA)

Chapter President: Kristin Tank

*President's contact information*

District/Organization: Muskegon Area Intermediate School District

Address: 630 Harvey St.

City/State/Zip Code: Muskegon, MI 49442

Telephone: 231-767-7263 office e-Mail: ktank@muskegonisd.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: Kristin M. Tank

**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](mailto:awards@nspra.org), subject line "Mark of Distinction."

## Mark of Distinction Entry Specifics

Chapter: Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA)

**Please complete and include the information below for each individual entry**

       **Section I: Membership Building**

- Current number of chapter members \_\_\_\_\_
- NSPRA-provided membership baseline number as of June 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of chapter members who belong to NSPRA as of April 30 \_\_\_\_\_

---

  X   **Section II: Special Focus Areas**

  X   Category A – chapter has less than 50% NSPRA membership

       Category B – chapter has 50% or more NSPRA membership

       1. Professional Development/PR Skill Building

       2. Special PR/Communication Program, Project or Campaign

       One-time project/program (completed within a single year)

       Continuing annual project/program (repeats each year; demonstrate new/improved/revised components)

       Multi-year project/program (one-time only with defined start and end dates)

       Multi-year phased project/program (components implemented in clearly defined phases each year)

  X   3. Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Effort

# 2018 National School Public Relations Association Mark of Distinction Award Application

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

## Section II: Special Focus Areas Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Efforts

MSPRA initiated an effort and joined with other organizations to provide communication resources on student walkouts.

### Summary of the Initiative

After receiving a PR practitioner's request for help with the March 14<sup>th</sup> student walkouts, MSPRA's Executive Director conferred with MSPRA's President and President-elect, then sent an email on February 20 at 5:31 p.m. to several statewide school associations (superintendents, intermediate school districts, school boards, business officials, principals and department of education) suggesting a group effort to address the issue. On February 20 at 8:48 p.m. the Executive Director of the Michigan Association of School Administrators responded in the affirmative and the collaboration began.

MSPRA led the effort that produced a guidance document entitled "[\*How to Approach Student Walkouts.\*](#)" The document was drafted by MSPRA leaders, vetted by the school board association's legal counsel, edited by the collaborating partners, and finalized in about 63 hours (addressing the urgency expressed by the superintendents' association). It was then jointly released via email to each of the participating associations' members on Friday, February 23 at 8:30 a.m.

After sending the document to MSPRA members, our NSPRA's Mideast Region VP (who is an MSPRA member) sent it to NSPRA. It was subsequently added to NSPRA's online Gold Mine resources. It was also sent, upon request, to the NYSPRA Chapter for its use.

After the initial collaboration, the superintendents' association contacted MSPRA to work on a second round of guidance, in anticipation of potential April 20<sup>th</sup> walkouts.

### Documentation and evidence of collaborative efforts and activities

- **The overall effort had statewide and national reach/impact.**
  - The document was jointly released on February 23, 2018 by seven groups to thousands of their members across the state.
  - It was shared with NSPRA and became part of its Gold Mine resources.

- It was also shared with NYSPRA, at its request.
  - Association members provided feedback via email and reported at the MSPRA conference on March 15 that they used the guidance.
  - There were no major incidents in Michigan reported on March 14<sup>th</sup>.
- **The chapter/collaboration partner goals and objectives for the activity were to:**
    - Pool partners' collective knowledge, resources, time and effort to provide guidance.
    - Meet an expressed need of members across the associations.
    - Use results from the superintendents' association survey to tailor information needs.
  - **Timeline and calendar of related events/activities**  
 All of the events occurred between February 20, 2018 and February 23, 2018. Most of the activity occurred within about 63 hours of the first reply to MSPRA's email about working together. The quick turn-around time was one of the key (and appreciated) factors in this effort. The starting and ending email messages appear below.

---

Email sent:

*February 20, 2018; 5:31 p.m.*

Subject: Working together to communicate about walkouts

*Dear Communication Partners,*

*A local school district communicator sent out this message today and we believe this may be just the beginning:*

*"I was just wondering if you've been receiving messages asking about walk-outs organized in support of gun control. We've received a couple now, and I was wondering how you've been responding. Parents have specifically been asking if it's something the district and schools could promote."*

*With walkouts announced for March 14<sup>th</sup> (students) and April 20<sup>th</sup> (staff), MSPRA leaders believe it would be in the best interest of all, if we could work together (MDE, MASA, MAISA, MASB, MASSP, MSPRA, MSBO) to communicate about this. Perhaps we could start with a conference call.*

*We welcome your thoughts on how we can best collaborate on next steps that might lead to helpful tools for our schools and include sample letters to students, parents, and staff; talking points that address the legal issues; and consequences for students and staff who choose to walk out.*

*We look forward to your reply.*

*Thank you,*

*Gerri Allen*

*Executive Director of MSPRA*

---

---

Email sent:

February 20, 2018; 8:48 p.m.

Subject: Working together to communicate about walkouts

*Thanks so much for the email. Our last few days have been a whirlwind of emails, texts, and calls, about guidance that MASA might be able to offer not only with walkouts, but all things Florida and school safety. ...today we sent a survey out to our 30+ member MASA Council ... We have given them a short response time so that we could look at the results quickly and start to make some decisions about what to do next. ... We were thinking about the possibility of contracting with a pr firm to help us sort through some of this, but in receiving your email tonight, it appears as though the answer is right in our back yard. ... We would be very open to a conference call and to see what we could do together as that would really help us greatly. ... please let us know what the next steps might be and we will be glad to be at the table.*

*Thanks again for making the contact and understanding the urgency.*

*Chris [Wigent, Executive Director, Michigan Association of School Administrators]*

---

Email sent:

February 23, 2018; 8:33 a.m.

*Greetings PR Colleagues,*

*There has been much discussion, many questions and voiced concerns about the student walkouts that are planned for March 14<sup>th</sup> and April 20<sup>th</sup>.*

*The attached document: "How to Approach Student Walkouts" addresses some of these questions and concerns. It has been prepared in cooperation with the Michigan Association of School Administrators, Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, Michigan Association of School Boards, Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, Michigan Department of Education, Michigan School Business Officials **and the Michigan School Public Relations Association**. All of the associations' members are receiving it at the same time this morning.*

***This document has been carefully crafted and reviewed by an attorney, but it is still intended to be informational only. Remember: If your district has any concerns, it should consult its own legal counsel.***

*We trust it will better help you address and communicate about this complex and important issue, while keeping our students safe. ...*

*Gerri Allen*

*MSPRA Executive Director*

---

- **MSPRA’s role as a coalition/collaborative partner**  
 MSPRA initiated the contact and suggested the idea to its “communication partners.” For the past several years, MSPRA has invited its communication partners (the communicators from the state associations for the superintendents, intermediate superintendents, school boards, school business officials, secondary school principals and the Michigan Department of Education) to meet with the MSPRA Board for a complimentary lunch at the Board’s annual retreat (which is held in the building that houses most of them). The exchange includes mutual communication concerns and professional development offerings and any major initiatives each has planned for the year. This once/year face-to-face meeting has helped reinforce our mutual communication emphasis, kept the lines of communication open, and provided a natural core group for our initial communication about the March 14<sup>th</sup> issue.
- **Communication plan related to coalition/collaboration efforts**  
 Our goal was to develop a useful, concise, legally-accurate document that could be shared in a timely fashion with all our members to help them address March 14<sup>th</sup> walkouts. Most of our interaction was handled either by email or conference calls. We used Google Docs as our collaborative platform.
- **Documentation of all related materials and endorsements**

  - The final document is linked [here](#).
  - Gongwer News Service-Michigan, that covers state policy and politics, noted the document in its [February 23 coverage](#).
- **Identification of target audiences and explanation of desired outcomes**  
 Our target audiences were identified as our association members and the Michigan Department of Education. Our desired outcome was a document that would serve as a useful guide to approaching possible student walkouts on March 14<sup>th</sup>.
- **Documentation of measurable outcomes, effectiveness and success of the collaboration**  
 We were able to provide a useful (members used it), official (all listed partners approved it), two-page (concise) document in concert with the school board association’s attorney (legal), in a timely manner (within 63 hours of the first reply to our ask about addressing the issue) to all of our associations’ members and the department of education (joint release at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, February 23, 2018).
- **This collaborative effort specifically relates to these NSPRA Goals**  
 Goal 1. NSPRA will be the professional organization that is indispensable to school public relations professionals and other education leaders.

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

- Goal 2. NSPRA will be the recognized leader and authority on school public relations.
1. NSPRA (staff and members) will be visible throughout the educational community.
  2. NSPRA will be the primary source of expert information and knowledge on school public relations.
  3. School communication professionals, superintendents and other education leaders will understand the positive impact of an effective public relations program on student achievement and on a district's mission.
  5. NSPRA will have beneficial relationships with other organizations.
  6. NSPRA will advocate for effective public relations in education organizations.

- **This collaborative effort specifically relates to these NSPRA Beliefs**

NSPRA believes public relations:

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

- **Reactions to the process and resulting document**

From Chris Wigent, Executive Director, Michigan Association of School Administrators:

*"...I am extremely impressed with the high quality of work and the timely manner in which it was developed. Thanks to everyone (especially Gerri [Allen], Kristin [Tank] and Brad [Banasik])...[MSPRA] thanks so very much for your leadership in bringing this group together.*

*"This is the type of resource that quality associations should be providing to their members and I am pleased to be offering this to the MASA membership.*

*"Thanks again and let's keep the dialogue continuing."*

---

From William Miller, Executive Director, Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators: *"Thanks for being proactive on this critical topic."*

---

From Anne Cron, APR, Community Outreach Facilitator, Birmingham Public Schools: *"Wow! What a great guide you sent out this morning, Gerri! Thank you to everyone that*

*worked on that. I wanted to share a note I received from my boss today, which I think summed it up nicely:*

*‘MSPRA really knocks it out of the park with this one. Kudos to everyone on the board. I also see from the addresses that it’s a great example of true collaboration between organizations united with a common goal. Great job!’*”

---

From Allison Kaufman, Director Communications & Marketing; Managing Editor School News Network, Kent Intermediate School District: *“Thank you MSPRA! This is just excellent and very helpful. And what a fast turnaround. We are grateful!”*

---

From Michelle Ready, Director Communications & Integrated Marketing, Ottawa Area Intermediate School District: *“I echo what Allison said. Thank you so much!”*

---

From Diane Bauman, APR, Director, School/Community Relations, Farmington Public Schools: *“This is fabulous information and I cannot thank MSPRA and our other partners enough for stepping up to provide this to districts. Just the type of info we need when events like this occur. THANK YOU!!!”*

---

- **Further evaluation**

At MSPRA’s 2018 Annual Conference on March 15, 2018—the day after the walkout—we held a special debriefing session entitled “Talking About Walking Out.” During that session, conference attendees reported that they appreciated the document and:

- Used the bullet points to write letters.
- Used the information to see if they were on track.
- Used it to have discussions.
- Used it as a guide.
- Shared it with the administrative team.
- Shared it with two County Sheriff’s departments.

- **Continuing coalition/collaboration effort**

This initial collaboration of associations resulted in a second collaboration in which the superintendents’ association reached out to MSPRA, seeking help with a second round of guidance for potential April 20<sup>th</sup> walkouts. MSPRA leaders helped craft questions for a second superintendents’ survey about walkouts. Then, MSPRA leaders contributed to the resulting guidance for possible April 20<sup>th</sup> walkouts. The second document, “[Student Walkout Guidance April 16](#)” was built upon the first collaborative document, but included more in-depth legal advice crafted by the superintendents’ association legal counsel. It was released to the collaborating state associations on April 16, 2018.

**Thank you for the consideration and  
opportunity to submit this  
NSPRA 2018  
Mark of Distinction Award  
Application**

---

for

*Coalition-Building*

*Collaborative Communication Efforts*

by the

Michigan School Public Relations Association



Submitted on May 15, 2018

---