

NSPRA 2020

**Mark of Distinction
Award Application**

*Professional Development
and Skill-Building*

submitted by



due May 15, 2020

**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: Karen Heath, Supervisor of Communications

President's contact information

District/Organization: Berrien Regional Education Service Agency

Address: 711 St. Joseph Avenue, P.O. Box 364

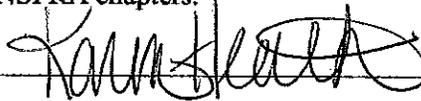
City/State/Zip Code: Berrien Springs, MI 49103

Telephone: (269) 471-7725 ext. 1147 e-Mail: karen.heath@berrienresa.org

Right to Use Materials Statement

On behalf of the Chapter, I agree that NSPRA has the right to use any materials, project/program examples, etc., submitted in this entry in Association print/online publications, on the website, and as "best practice" resources for NSPRA chapters.

Signature of Chapter President: _____



Application Process Checklist

- Each entry includes this cover form and the Entry Specifics form.
- A single PDF that includes links to related supplemental materials and examples is attached.** (If entering in more than one category, a single PDF for each category entry is attached or sent individually).
- Chapter president has signed the "right to use materials" statement on the entry form.
- Entry is delivered no later than May 15** and sent to awards@nspra.org, subject line "Mark of Distinction."

2020 National School Public Relations Association Mark of Distinction Award Application

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

Special Focus—Professional Development/Skill-Building

Overview of MSPRA Professional Development/PR Skill-Building Entry

Each year, the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) plans and provides a variety of programs and activities to support the professional growth and status of its members and improve the communication skills of Michigan educators including administrators, board members, teachers and support staff. This submission includes six examples of professional growth support: A) MSPRA's Annual Conference, B) Two drive-in conferences, C) The Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award, D) The Gerri Allen School Communicator of the Year Award, E) The Gold Medallion Award, and F) Other examples of public relations training provided by MSPRA members on behalf of MSPRA.

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

- 1) Impact of overall year-long effort (page 3)
- 2) Statement of chapter goals and objectives for programs/activities (page 2)
- 3) Documentation of conference/workshop/meeting programs and agendas, marketing materials, tip sheets and/or presentations distributed or made available to participants (See links throughout narrative.)
- 4) Examples of specific programs/activities for awards (pages 11 and 12)
- 5) Identification of target audience and participation/attendance (pages 4, 8 and 9)
- 6) Documentation/demonstration of measurable outcomes, effectiveness and success of the program/activity (See annual conference evaluation link and drive-in conference evaluation links in narrative.)
- 7) Explanation of how program/activity relates to NSPRA's Goals and Objectives (page 3)
- 8) Other relevant examples of chapter's professional development/PR skill-building efforts (pages 13 and 14)



MSPRA conference attendees take their professional development seriously.

Overview of MSPRA Professional Development /Skill-Building Efforts

The Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) devotes much of its human and financial resources to professional development and skill-building. The results are some of the best available communication and public relations training in the state. The consistent, high quality of our effort helps our members be better communicators, aids in member retention, and drives conference attendance and participation.

Our primary professional development activities include:

- Our spring Annual Conference, which offers intensive skill-building sessions, networking and learning.
- Our drive-in conferences that feature timely, topical training with expert speakers to equip members with knowledge and skills.
- Our Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award to recognize the critical communication role of the leaders of our organizations.
- Our Outstanding School Communicator Award to recognize front-line practitioners.
- Our Gold Medallion Award that recognizes member skills and encourages sharing of high-quality projects and programs.

The MSPRA Executive Board appoints a board member to manage each of these Professional Development initiatives: the Annual Conference, the Communication Awards, Membership service activities and APR Certification. Typically, an additional 1-3 board members are either conference co-chairs, assist with the awards, or help coordinate drive-in conferences. Again this year, we recruited several MSPRA members to serve on our Professional Development Committee, giving them statewide experience/exposure while giving our Annual Conference statewide input. It was a positive growth opportunity for all involved.

The Board's goals for its annual and drive-in conferences include:

- Building skills for all levels of members, from those who are new to the profession to those who are veterans.
- Preparing members to address current hot topics in Michigan education.
- Networking to strengthen professional relationships.
- Recognizing the skills and sharing the successful strategies of MSPRA/NSPRA contest winners.
- Sharing some of the topics, trends, and speakers heard at the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) Seminar.

And, MSPRA's Communication Awards are designed to:

- Affirm school districts' communication efforts.
- Elevate exceptional communication programs, products and practitioners.
- Encourage best practices among those providing communication services in Michigan's public schools.



Tom Gould (shown here with orange frog friends) served as co-chair of the Professional Development Committee for the second year in a row.

Together, MSPRA’s Communication Awards, Annual Conference and drive-in conferences provide unparalleled opportunities for members and interested others to learn about and advance their communication skills. All of these activities generate widespread participation from communicators, educators and staff members across the state.

The impact of this year’s effort is reflected in the more than 120 registrants (members and non-members), speakers and sponsors who attended our three conferences.

Evaluations from all these activities are mined for improvement ideas and suggestions. Every few years, these activities are reinvented to ensure their relevance, value to our members and high quality of programming. We are using social media and technology to promote our organization and events, and are finding new ways to use these tools for professional development.

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.

MSPRA’s professional development activities 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 members 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.



Members appreciate the professional development opportunities that MSPRA offers. We work hard to make it some of the best school PR training available.

Our seminars, sessions and speakers are chosen to build the abilities of our members and members of the school family.

Through purposeful planning and expert implementation, our chapter works to elevate the role of the school communicator, the skill of our members (and their colleagues), and the value we each bring to our schools and communities.

Our Unprecedented 2020 Annual MSPRA Conference

The Annual Conference—Became a one-day event

As is our practice, we promoted our annual two-day conference with a series of electronic messages to members and others. There were [website posts](#), conference teasers and registration reminders in our weekly MSPRA Minute that included a registration link. We also mailed a [postcard](#) to members.

Our 2020 Annual Conference: “**20/20 Vision for the Future of School Public Relations**” was set for March 12 and 13, 2020 in Midland, Michigan at the H Hotel. But, our “vision” became blurred and we had to refocus on COVID-19.

A total of 74 people including presenters, members, vendors and interested others pre-registered for the conference. But by start time on March 12, we had dropped to [43 participants](#), 3 outside presenters and 1 vendor. Some 27 registrants, presenters and vendors said they were unable to attend due to quickly changing COVID-19 developments.

Prior to the conference, there were no known COVID-19 cases in Michigan. We had heard rumors that Michigan’s Governor was going to close schools that week, but we were not sure when. After much discussion and after writing a [crisis communication plan](#) for canceling the conference itself, we held our first day—with a revised agenda so that part of our focus was COVID-19. And, while about 2/3 of our registrants saw the benefit of being together with other PR professionals during this time of crisis, about 1/3 felt it was necessary to stay back in their districts.

In the end, no registrant was penalized for the decision they felt they had to make. But, we believed it was important to continue with the promised professional development for those who chose to attend. That decision would cause us to be fluid (our favorite new word at the conference) as the situation changed hourly.

Unique Features

These unique features were part of MSPRA’s 2020 Annual Conference:

- 1) *The Happiness Advantage* speakers opened our conference on Thursday morning, presenting a much-needed positive message. A copy of *The Happiness Advantage* book by Shawn Achor was given to each participant.
- 2) Our PD Committee constantly monitored and adjusted the schedule as we went through the day, losing presenters who felt compelled or were called to return to their districts.
- 3) As Thursday continued to unravel, the PD Committee moved some presentations to fill the gaps and decided to cancel what remained of Friday’s events.
- 4) We had five investment partners this year: Blackboard, Intrado/School Messenger, Finalsite, Foxbright, and Peachjar. Only Peachjar’s representative was present and had a display in the same meeting room as our large-group sessions, affording convenient access to our members.

Time	Session	
8:30 - 9:00 AM	Registration & Light Breakfast	B
9:00 - 9:15 AM	Welcome	B
9:15 - 10:45 AM	Keynote - The Happiness Advantage	B
10:45 - 11:00 AM	Break	
11:00 - 11:45 AM	COVID-19 Discussion	B
11:45 AM - 1:30 PM	Lunch Annual Report & Sponsor Recognition	B
1:15 - 2:00 PM	Break-Out Sessions	
	Take the Next Step in Your Career: Earn Your APR	C
	I Took a Job in School PR... Now What?	B
	Community Engagement - Alumni & Senior Citizens	F
2:00 - 2:15 PM	Break	
2:15 - 3:00 PM	Break-Out Sessions Repeat	
	I Took a Job in School PR... Now What?	B
	Community Engagement - Alumni & Senior Citizens	F
3:00 - 3:15 PM	Break	
3:15 - 4:00 PM	Think Like a Sportswriter	B

- 5) This year, given the eroding set of circumstances, we were fortunate to have only in-state presenters.
- 6) Instead of an app, we designed a special page on our website to post our agenda information.
- 7) We heard from our NSPRA Mideast Regional Vice President Patrick Gallaway via [pre-recorded message](#).

The annual conference [agenda](#) began as planned with the Happiness Advantage session. But, we had to make some quick adjustments once we learned that our Superintendent Communicator of the Year Award recipient and his Communication Director had decided to remain in their district—foreshadowing things to come.

Since most of our presenters were MSPRA members, as Thursday progressed, several were called back to their respective districts in anticipation of the rumored statewide school closure. Conference planners huddled several times during the day to revise and reconfigure the conference schedule as those presenters apologetically came to us—wanting to stay but knowing they had to leave. To fill the gaps, we made some small-group sessions large group ones and even called upon a presenter who was not scheduled until Friday to be the last presenter on Thursday afternoon. He got great reviews, even without the final preparation and dry run he had planned to do Thursday night.



The Happiness Advantage presenters were happy to be with us.

We ended up offering two Thursday morning general sessions on *The Happiness Advantage* (based on the Orange Frog book) and a facilitated COVID-19 Group Discussion.

At lunch, we held the Annual MSPRA Business Meeting. President Karen Heath presented the association's [Annual Report](#), noted the chapter's health and its professional development offerings, along with its overall successes and challenges.

After lunch, we held one round of break-out sessions that included: [APR: The Accreditation Advantage](#) (for those looking to advance in their careers), [I took a job in school PR—Now What?](#) (this session was offered at NSPRA), and [Community Engagement: Alumni and Senior Citizens](#) (targeted community engagement) with one of the two presenters covering for both of them.

Following our break-out sessions, we held two more large group sessions: [Think Like a Sportswriter](#) (tips for covering school sports from former sports reporters with a [sports terminology handout](#)—that was originally scheduled as an afternoon break-out session), and [Running an Effective One-Person Communication Shop](#) (that was originally scheduled as a skill session for Friday). That rounded out the day.

We learned late on Thursday afternoon March 12 that the Governor's school closure announcement would be made that evening. Schools would be closed effective on Monday, March 16. That meant Friday, March 13 would be the only day students and staff would have to

gather their personal effects. Knowing this, the professional development committee made the difficult decision to cancel the rest of the conference. We wanted our participants to be in their districts to provide critical communication leadership on Friday, March 13.

So, we activated our conference crisis communication plan and announced at about 5 p.m. on Thursday that Friday's activities were canceled. But, we encouraged everyone to stay for dinner, if possible. At dinner, the Awards and Recognition Committee honored the recipient of *The Gerri Allen Outstanding School Communicator Award*—Keely Baribeau from Port Huron Schools.

At the end of dinner, we adjourned our formal agenda and transitioned to our highly-valued informal networking. We watched the Governor's news conference at 11 p.m. on Thursday, as she announced the closure of schools on Monday. Then, on Friday morning March 13 (after giving them a hot breakfast that we had already purchased), we sent participants home armed with resources that they helped build during a group discussion about COVID-19. Instead of attending a second day of professional development, conference participants drove back to support their districts at the start of the emerging crisis, putting into practice some of what they had learned the previous day.

The Annual Conference—Attendee Reactions

About a week after our one-day, abbreviated conference, we sent an evaluation to those who participated. In spite of the unusual circumstances surrounding it, a majority of those who attended our annual conference and responded to our [evaluation survey](#) gave the shortened, one-day conference high marks. More than half of the 43 participants (24) evaluated their conference experience. Based on their survey responses and comments, it was a success. The overall ranking for the conference was either very (79.2%) or somewhat (20.8%) useful.

When asked to note the best part of the conference, they said:

- *Being around peers in a time of crisis.*
- *The "flexible and fluid" nature.*
- *Being with my colleagues during a time I needed them most.*
- *Being with people... for pretty much the last time for the next month!!*
- *The opportunity to be together with other MI School PR professionals. I also pick up new tips and tricks from the presenters, but really enjoy the networking.*
- *Getting to hear from others about how they were handling COVID-19.*
- *The community of everyone being together to discuss the similar challenges.*
- *I love it all, but I really LOVE connecting with friends I've made over the years. The conversations we have on a personal level are great, but I gain valuable information by also discussing their work, platforms they're using, and their processes.*
- *I'm excited about the people I met and knowing I can contact them if I need assistance.*
- *Networking and leadership. It was GREAT.*
- *Learning from peers.*
- *The APR session was very helpful.*
- *Seeing friends. Making new friends. Bottom line: Personal connections.*
- *Anything COVID-19 related, and the camaraderie during a unique time for everyone.*

- *Connecting with other PR professionals in person.*
- *The insight into how to better manage yourself as a school PR professional.*
- *Opportunity to network and listen to experienced professionals in the field.*

We were even given a good review for how we handled the many schedule changes, as one attendee noted: *“The Committee was awesome to make adjustments as needed on Thursday and to recognize the need to cancel Friday's session, even prior to the Governor's late-night news conference. Kudos to everyone on the planning team!”*

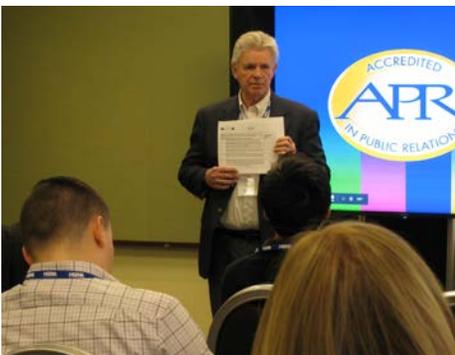
When asked to note the one thing they would change about the conference, two respondents captured the sentiment for most:

- *I think we all would change what was happening in the world so we could have relaxed and enjoyed the conference.*
- *No COVID-19.*

After the conference, our MSPRA Board decided to refund the total registration fees of those registrants who didn't attend. Plus, we reduced everyone else's registration fee to the one-day rate and refunded the difference between it and what they had originally paid. And, even though we still had to pay the hotel for food and arrangements for 74 people, it was the right thing to do.

We also connected with our five investment sponsors, only one of whom was physically present with us on Thursday, March 12, and offered them additional opportunities to “be in front” of our members through alternate virtual offerings including a new MSPRA “Idea Hour” set to debut on May 7.

At the conclusion of the 2020 Annual Conference, we could definitely say it was a learning experience for all concerned: the conference attendees, as well as the Professional Development Committee and Board.



Throughout the day participants experienced excellent professional development, took advantage of networking opportunities, and even had a little fun.

MSPRA's 2019 Drive-in Conferences

June Drive-in Conference

During our June 18, 2019 Drive-in Conference at the Michigan Educational Leadership Group Building in Lansing, Michigan, [26 attendees](#) learned about [“Diversity, Equity & Cultural Sensitivity for School Communicators”](#) from Dr. Jay Marks, Oakland Schools (MI) Diversity and Equity Consultant.

Recognizing that even the most skilled communicator can use help navigating such sensitive topics, our Professional Development Committee sought out Dr. Marks (an internationally-known expert in our own backyard) and asked him to share his expertise with our members. The day-long opportunity was divided into two segments.



Attendees discussed how they could apply what was shared in the morning session.

Morning Session—The Buzz About Diversity & Equity

Dr. Marks gave us [tips and strategies](#) on:

- How to approach these topics within our school communities.
- How to communicate a district's work within this area and how school communicators can help support this important work.
- How to include social justice and cultural relevance in our daily practices and in our communication.

Afternoon Session—Putting These Concepts to Work for You!

Dr. Marks facilitated a group discussion on how to apply what was covered in the morning to our everyday work and how we can facilitate such topical conversations with our school community.

[Evaluations](#) were positive. Of the 14 participants who responded to the evaluation, 92.9% rated the overall workshop as very useful and 7.1% rated it as somewhat useful.

Some of the written comments to the question “What was the best thing about the Drive-in Conference?” included:

- *Dr. Marks - he was informative and entertaining.*
- *Dr. Marks made learning about a tough topic fun and engaging.*
- *Great content presented in an accessible and understandable way.*
- *Dr. Marks' style! Fashion and presentation.*
- *He explained things in a very different manner than anyone else I have heard before. I enjoyed his point of view.*
- *The open dialogue was refreshing. Dr. Marks should be invited to engage in diversity discussions with every school staff member! I learned so much!*

We also garnered some suggestions to improve our next professional development offering, based on the answers to this question: “If you could change one thing about the Drive-in

Conference, what would you change?”

- *More time! I would love to learn more from Dr. Marks.*
- *I wish more people could have attended.*
- *Maybe a set, optional networking time at the end of the day (30 minutes maybe?). Those who are interested can stay.*

October Drive-in Conference

On October 25, 2019, [MSPRA hosted its Fall Drive-in Conference](#) at the Michigan Educational Leadership Group Building in Lansing, Michigan.

The event featured the dynamic and engaging Cathy Kedjidjian, APR, Director of Communications and Strategic Planning for Glenview School District 34 in suburban Chicago, and NSPRA’s Vice President At-Large for Communication Technology & Innovation. The event entitled: “[Get Them Hired!](#) Team Up With Your Human Resources Department to Bring the BEST to Your District” drew both school public relations (PR) professionals and human resource (HR) leaders. [Fifty-one registrants](#) filled the room to capacity.



Cathy Kedjidjian, APR, listens as a participant makes a point during her presentation.

Cathy’s morning topic was “Get Them Hired! Team Up With Your Human Resources Department to Bring the BEST to Your District.” Attendees learned about communication for recruiting and retention and how the human resource office can be the school communicator’s top ally in brand and culture building – for recruiting and retaining high-quality staff. Her presentation offered ways to make concrete HR-PR connections (like inviting HR staff to the drive-in conference), and provided support, tools, and systems to help HR leaders cement a school district’s image and culture. Participants also learned how to partner with HR staff to be brand ambassadors by:

- Using video and social media for recruiting and retaining top employees
- Creating newsletters that connect leaders to staff and each other
- Planning new teacher events (with swag!) that enhance culture from the start

In the afternoon, Cathy brought the BEST ideas home through #K12PRChat and Twitter by hosting a #K12PRChat live from the event. The experience helped Twitter users (novice to veteran) expand their knowledge by building and leveraging participants’ Twitter networks to gather valuable resources, peek inside districts to get ideas for their schools, and – most importantly – make real and lasting connections with colleagues who are also accessible in the Twitterverse.

[Evaluations](#) were very positive. Of the 28 who completed the evaluation survey, 26 or 93% rated the overall day as very or somewhat useful.

Participants said some of the best things about the Drive-in Conference were:

- *Cathy’s enthusiasm and knowledge was inspiring!*
- *Bringing back the employee newsletter, but in a fun, creative and efficient way.*

- *Cathy provided some great ideas to increase communications to staff and to help boost our district's online presence which will help with recruiting.*
- *Immediately useful information.*
- *There were ideas that I could collaboratively discuss at the event because our HR leadership also attended.*
- *Specific, strategic ways were given to make our district more appealing to potential teachers and staff.*
- *It was good to see a full house. It means that the membership is seeing value in the professional development being offered.*

We also gleaned some suggestions to improve our next professional development offering.

When asked, “If you could change one thing about the Drive-in Conference what would you change?” one participant suggested:

- *An opportunity to idea share visually. Many of us had our laptops open. For example - there were 5 or 6 things she spoke on that we already do (in a different way) that would have been great to share with the whole group by shooting them to her digitally and have her put them on the screen. I bet there was a lot of content out there that could have been share-worthy.*

MSPRA Awards and Recognitions

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award recognizes a superintendent for leadership in school district communication. Our recipient for 2019 was Dr. Robert Shaner, Superintendent of Rochester Public Schools in Rochester, Michigan.



Judy Evola, APR, MSPRA Awards Chair, presented the award to Dr. Shaner.

“I am truly honored,” Dr. Shaner said. “We take great pride in building relationships and engaging with our community through open, transparent and respectful communication.”

Judy Evola, APR, Director of Community Relations and Marketing for Walled Lake Schools and the MSPRA Awards Chairperson, presented the award at a Rochester Board of Education meeting. Judy noted that Dr. Shaner exceeded the five criteria for the award.

The selection criteria includes demonstrating the value of a year-round, ongoing communication program, investing in communication tools, strategically working with district communication professionals, practicing communication management techniques, and demonstrating excellent personal communication skills such as ethics, honesty, openness and good listening skills.

Dr. Shaner was also to be recognized at MSPRA's 2020 Annual Conference but that presentation was canceled due to the emerging COVID-19 issue.

MSPRA's Gerri Allen Outstanding School Communicator Award

Keely Baribeau, Communications Director for Port Huron Schools, is MSPRA's “2019 Gerri Allen Outstanding School Communicator.”

Keely was recognized as this year's recipient in a surprise presentation at a Port Huron Schools meeting. In addition, she was recognized at MSPRA's 2020 Annual Conference in March. Garth Kriewall, an MSPRA board member and former Port Huron Schools Trustee, presented the award at both occasions.

She was nominated for the honor by her superintendent, Jamie Cain. Superintendent Cain said, “If you are truly looking for someone who embodies ‘outstanding leadership in advancing education through responsible strategic communication,’ I can think of no one more qualified.” He noted that her job includes such tasks as:

- Creating an atmosphere of honesty and transparency with district stakeholders.



Keely Baribeau received her award at the conference from MSPRA Board member Garth Kriewall.

- Establishing ongoing, consistent communication with staff, parents, and the community.
- Building the image of Port Huron Schools as a “destination district.”
- Cementing community partnerships.

He added, “Ms. Baribeau has demonstrated her ability to excel in this position and to continually strive for improvement in her role with building the district’s visibility, reputation and prestige.”

Named for long-time school public relations professional and current MSPRA Executive Director, the Gerri Allen Outstanding School Communicator Award honors a practicing school public relations professional for his or her daily work and contributions to the field.

MSPRA’s Gold Medallion Awards

MSPRA’s Gold Medallion Award recognizes outstanding programs or projects that advance education through responsible communication. MSPRA’s panel of experts judged entries on the clarity of concept, good writing, and evidence of using the four-step Public Relations process known as RPIE: Research, Planning, Implementation and Evaluation. Based on that judging, MSPRA presented two Gold Medallion Awards in 2019.

The **Rochester Community Schools** “RCS Stakeholders Are Safe, Valued and Respected” initiative received a 2019 Michigan School Public Relations Association’s (MSPRA) Gold Medallion Award. Congratulations to Lori Grein, Rochester Community Schools (RCS) Executive Director of Strategic Communications and the RCS communication team.

The program's overall objective is to: Develop a comprehensive, year-round communications program to promote the ways the Rochester school environment allows all members of the RCS community to feel safe, valued and respected, as outlined in the RCS Respect Code. Related communication seeks to assure RCS families that the schools value and care about students’ well-being—and that the schools are advancing a culture of care, inclusion and understanding.



Shira Good, APR, (center) received her award from MSPRA Awards Chair, Judy Evola, APR, (left) with district Superintendent Patrick Watson (right).

The **Bloomfield Hills Schools** “Maintaining the Community Trust After Students Hacked into the District’s Major Database” entry received a 2019 Michigan School Public Relations Association’s (MSPRA) Gold Medallion Award. Congratulations to Shira Good, APR, Bloomfield Hills Schools (BHS) Director of Communications & Service Standards and the BHS communication team.

The Bloomfield Hills communications team worked with key individuals including the district administration, the district’s insurance company, legal counsel, and law enforcement officials to successfully communicate about the hacking incident. Their ultimate goal was to transparently inform all stakeholders of the event and provide information for staying digitally safe moving forward.

Other Examples of Increasing PR Visibility and Providing PR Training

Between May 1, 2019 and April 30, 2020, MSPRA members presented at other conferences and worked with school districts and school leaders on the importance of good public relations and planned communication. Examples include:

- MSPRA members Beth Piehl Eckerle and Heather Jewell hosted the first-ever [MSPRA North event](#) on June 4, 2019 at Char Em ISD. Northern Michigan school PR and communication staff and administrative professionals came for lunch, to see the (recorded) NSPRA PR Power Hour "Making the Most of Your One-Person PR Department" (that MSPRA purchased), and discuss the important role they play in their districts when it comes to communicating with students, parents and the community.
- MSPRA leaders presented a roundtable on "[Building Partnerships with Statewide Associations](#)" at the NSPRA Leadership Meeting on July 14, 2019 in Washington, D.C.
- On September 19, 2019, five MSPRA members served as school communication consultants during the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators' Fall Conference in Traverse City, Michigan. Prior to the event, [school administrators were invited to register](#) to meet one-on-one with MSPRA members to discuss a specific issue or to learn more about a communication process or strategy. MASA event organizers recapped the opportunity in a [short conference video](#) (comments start about 1:20). In follow-up conversations with event planners, it appears that MSPRA will continue to be invited to serve in this capacity, allowing school communicators to further validate their critical role in the school community with a very specific audience—school district leaders!
- Tom Gould, Director of Public Relations, and Erin MacGregor, Superintendent, both of Howell Public Schools, presented "*What Superintendents Need to Know about School Communication and Public Relations*" to aspiring superintendents at the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD) and Michigan Leadership Institute's Superintendent Preparation Academy on November 18 from 3:30-4:30 p.m. at GISD's Career Institute.
- The Intermediate School District PR professionals, an MSPRA subgroup, were invited to serve on a special Michigan Department of Education committee to support the rollout of the Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process (MICIP) program. The group provided communication guidance to state leaders on how to best help school districts learn about the program, its benefits and the resources available to support their transition from an old assessment system to the new MICIP program.
- In December, Board President Karen Heath was invited by the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators (MASA) to provide cabinet-level school communication training to a cohort of emerging leaders. Her presentation, "Making Sense of School Communication," gave participants a variety of tools aimed at building system-wide communication processes, a primer on the RPIE process, instruction on how to write a communication plan, and resources to help identify and match media platforms with target audiences. Additionally, she shared strategies and best practices related to crisis communication and emphasized the importance of practicing crisis communication techniques so that all school staff know their roles, should such situations occur. (After her

presentation, Karen learned that one of the session participants had to immediately employ what was learned during the session when he was informed that a staff member was placed on administrative leave. The participant was grateful for knowing what to communicate, how to communicate the message and who should receive the information.)

- During the first half of the 2019-20 school year, MSPRA members assisted/supported the work of superintendents/school leaders in [numerous ways](#)—often at the request of our Michigan Educational Leadership Group (MELG) Building colleagues.
- MSPRA President Karen Heath and MSPRA Executive Director Gerri Allen presented on the April 30, 2020 [Chapter Challenges Solved](#) broadcast, discussing “Strategic Collaborations Before and During a Crisis to Elevate Your Chapter Profile.”
- This year, we continued our email listserv, the [MSPRA Minute](#) (our weekly electronic member communication), and [closed Facebook group](#).

These are some of the excellent examples of MSPRA’s professional development efforts that occur throughout the year, in addition to our conference offerings.

-end-

[Note: If any of the links in this document are broken, or if you have difficulty accessing them, please contact Gerri Allen at gallen48@juno.com. MSPRA-maintained links will remain live until at least 07/31/2020. Thank you.]

*Thank you for the consideration and
opportunity to submit this*

NSPRA 2020

Mark of Distinction

Award Application

*Professional Development
and Skill-Building*

submitted by



due May 15, 2020
