

Northwest Region Chapter Reports – March 2014

*Prepared by: Carol Fenstermacher, APR, NSPRA Northwest Region Vice President
Community Engagement Coordinator, Centennial School District, Portland, Ore.
carol_fenstermacher@centennial.k12.or.us*

As I prepare this report, I am at the beginning of a weeklong intensive workshop on “Coaching for Educational Equity.” I look forward to sharing what I learn with my NSPRA colleagues.

In Oregon, the Medford School District teachers returned to work this week after a two-week strike. Portland Public Schools barely avoided a strike.

Once again, reached out to the Idaho chapter, but did not get any response.

Oregon School Public Relations Association (OSPRA)

Chapter Well-Being – OSPRA is holding steady at approximately 30 members, and our Board is making an active effort this year to increase membership by targeting some non-traditional school communicators. While our membership numbers may appear small, keep in mind the majority of Oregon’s 197 school district are small and rural, meaning most cannot afford to keep a communications specialist on staff. Keeping that in mind, over the past year OSPRA has encouraged non-traditional communicators to attend our workshops to learn more about how to effectively communicate in schools, such as small district superintendents, human resources directors and principals. Our 6-member board is spread out across the state, but we conduct monthly conference calls (these are more frequent when we’re planning a workshop) and also have an annual board retreat to plan out the year and set goals.

Chapter Projects/Collaborative Efforts – Our chapter has not typically taken on any projects, but this year we have enhanced our relationships between OSPRA and its members with the Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Education Investment Board. The Oregon Education Investment Board’s communications director has been working to create ways to collaborate with members.

Professional Development Programs/Activities – Our Fall 2013 workshop took place on Nov. 7-8 in Troutdale, and provided around 30 participants with a “PR Warrior Kit: Strategies, tools and tips for the school PR pro making a difference in the trenches.” Our featured speaker was Steve Knagg, who thoroughly entertained everyone and provided some valuable tools. We also had progressive discussions on social media tools and tricks.

Our OSPRA Board is currently in the planning stages of our spring 2014 workshop, which will be held April 17-18 in Portland. Our featured speakers will be Ken DeSieghardt – who’s been a speaker at the NSPRA seminar – who will speak about how to think like a patron and build trust with parents and community, and Jim Endicott, who will speak about communication leadership. We’ll also be holding roundtable discussions about emerging education trends and initiatives in Oregon, including early learning, district transfer opt-out, full-day kindergarten, P-20 and

Common Core to share best practices and ideas for communicating these issues with staff, parents and community. Since these topics can be effective for anyone in education, we're hoping our impending marketing efforts for our spring workshop will bring in some non-OSPRA members to participate and hopefully become members. ☺

Major Chapter Issues/Concerns

- Increasing membership in tough financial times
- Internal Communications
- Bridging the gap between what's actually happening in schools and what's perceived to be happening.
- How to turn staff into ambassadors
- Boundary changes
- Common Core
- Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

Issues or Areas that Could Use NSPRA Support – All of the above.

State/Local Issues NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On – The Oregon Education Investment Board has numerous initiatives for education reform, including the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, a P-20 (pre-natal through college) education system, and regional early learning hubs. Education finally got a boost from the state in terms of funding for the next biennium, but school districts continue to struggle financially (meaning communicators have to continue to find ways to be relevant).

Washington School Public Relations Association (WSPRA)

Chapter Well-Being

- Membership has increased by 8 members this year. At our yearly retreat we made a goal of increasing membership by 10%. There were 99 in July 2013 so we are just about there.
- WSPRA is an active chapter with a strong officer team. The board conducts a yearly retreat and conducts monthly board meetings via conference calls.
- We host two to three regional workshops and one state conference each year. (Please see answers to question #3 for more information.) We implemented a new sponsorship program which has resulted in significant additional revenue which is being used to bring in high quality speakers.
- We generate revenue through membership fees and our annual communication awards. We are in excellent shape financially. We review our budget and financials monthly, are fiscally responsible, and have funds set aside in a certificate of deposit, should we need them.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts

- This year we partnered with SchoolWires to launch a new website to enable more collaboration between members. The website was built with responsive design for mobile phones and tablets to create a more user friendly interface. <http://www.wspra.com/>

- Implemented the use of E-Vite as our tool for conference marketing and registration. This has truly streamlined our conference registration process and accounting processes. It also offers a better experience for our members.
- We collaborated with Seattle Northwest Securities, now Piper Jaffray for a School Election Conference in September. This conference is held every two years in the Seattle-area and is free for attendees. WSPRA helps Piper Jaffray with developing the agenda, registration and securing guest speakers.
- Our sponsorships are in high gear this year. We developed sponsorship packages for our workshops and events and the slots are filling up quickly. This is a nice source of additional revenue that we are driving back into our workshops to ensure they are high quality.
- A portion of our eastside workshop in Spokane was held in conjunction with the PRSA chapter.

Professional Development Programs/Activities

So far this year, we have had two programs:

- Nov. 14, in Spokane – *The Art of Leadership Communication: Better align, challenge and motivate those you lead*, presented by Jim Endicott from Distinctive Communications in Newberg, Oregon. Intended for communication professionals and organization leaders, the workshop will address a Leader’s Communication Toolkit for getting through to busy and distracted people, plus how to stand out in a sea of voices.
- Feb. 28 in Burien – We are bringing the Leadership Communication speaker from the Spokane conference to the west side workshop. With this keynote, we extended our marketing and invitations to school district administrators. A panel will address Common Core State Standards from several perspectives, and we have time for updates from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

In May we will offer:

- May 1-2 in Leavenworth – We’ve set a general theme for our annual two-day conference “This is our Story.” We are thrilled that NSPRA President Nora Carr will be giving the keynote presentation. Sessions focus on storytelling through video and writing. We will also provide an APR informational session for attendees.

Major chapter issues or concerns

We’ve been doing a great job with the workshops and conferences, but have struggled with creating a sense of community outside of those gatherings. We are hopeful that our new website will become a valuable resource for our members with lots of new content being provided by members.

Issues or areas that could use NSPRA regional or national support

It would be great to have a speakers’ bureau resource we could tap into for our conferences. We appreciate that you’ve been out in front of the Common Core Standards implementation in providing communications materials and resources.

State or Local Issues that NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On

- **Social Media – Uses and Abuses**
- **School Day/Core 24:** Bills have been introduced in the legislature calling for increasing the hours of the school day grades 7-12 to 1080 hours. Another bill requires 24 credits as a requirement for graduation. Another bill attempts to combine these with 1080 hours grades 9-12 and CORE 24. We aren't sure how it will all shake out, but it does have the potential for enormous impact operationally in Washington State.
- **Common Core Standards:** From a communications standpoint, we have to be knowledgeable about the Common Core State Standards on an internal and external basis in order to communicate to staff, students and families. Districts around our state are experiencing different levels of concern – or apathy about Common Core. With the new Smarter Balanced Assessments being field tested, we'll start to see the rubber hit the road. This will be part of our February workshop and will be an ongoing topic.
www.k12.wa.us/corestandards/

Additional Items of Note

2013-14 Goals: Work to enhance the value of WSPRA membership.

- *Workshop attendee satisfaction – 90% rated conference as satisfied or very satisfied.*
- *Increase membership by 10%.*
- *To meet or exceed number of participants in workshops.*
- *Identify new tool for managing event registration & payment.*
- *Implement a new website.*
- *Define and promote a sponsorship program*