



For Immediate Release

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## National Survey Pinpoints Communication Preferences in School Communication

*Rockville, Maryland, August 26, 2011* – Parents want more information about their child’s progress in school on a regular basis and definitely want to know if their child is struggling before it is too late to do something about it. They prefer to have it all delivered to them in electronic/internet-based sources like email, e-newsletters, district websites, and parent portals.

Those results and more are part of the communication survey reporting on 43,410 responses from 50 school districts in 22 states conducted last spring as part of a communication accountability program of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). The survey asked parents and residents about their preferences when it came to content, delivery systems and frequency of communication from their schools.

Some of the findings are:

- Preferred delivery methods include direct communication from teachers, principals and school district leaders in electronic/Internet based formats. In a surprise finding, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc. were in the bottom tier of preferred communication vehicles. Assumptions by NSPRA leaders are that social media may be seen as “too social,” lacking in credibility for official school information or it is just too soon to make an impact for today’s parents. Traditional media such as newspapers and television also were not as preferred as direct electronic communication from teachers, principals and other school leaders.

As NSPRA President Ron Koehler, APR, notes, “Consumer needs are changing. The backpack folder is no longer the primary source of information for parents. They want and prefer instant electronic information. That doesn’t mean a timely letter from the superintendent or principal isn’t effective, nor does it eliminate the need for multiple sources of information to reinforce the message. Still, the data demonstrates parents and non-parents alike turn to the web when they need information, and they want it now.”

- Content preferences by parents from teachers focused primarily on how well their child was doing in the classroom. Some discrepancy was seen between elementary and secondary parents, but for the most part, parents want updates on how well their children are doing and how they can help them do better. They also requested timely notices when their child’s performance was slipping, as parents do not want to be surprised at the end of a marking period. Information on behavior, social skills and the expectations on what their children will be expected to learn during the year were also a priority by many parents.
- At the school level, parents’ top choices focused on curriculum and educational changes and updates, as well as descriptions of what is being taught. Operational information on schedules, dates, etc., were naturally high on the list, along with information on how the school is performing compared to others within the district, as well as with neighboring school districts. With all the news about charter schools and other options, only about quarter of respondents sought more information about these alternative programs.
- When it comes to content issues from school district leaders, both parents and non-parents listed the rationale/reasons for decisions made by the school district, curriculum/educational options, information on how well the school district is performing compared to other school districts, and budget and finance elections and updates in the top tier of content requests.

- Respondents believed that the district should provide updates as often as major decisions were being considered. Most respondents showed little support for quarterly or less frequent updates. These timely requests for information reinforce the respondents' desire for the school to be the first choice for information, as they do not want to search for information, nor do they want to wait for secondary sources to report the information.
- Respondents tended to feel less well informed about statewide issues impacting education. Only 39% of parents indicated that they are pretty well informed or very well informed. With more state decisions on testing and financing coming down the pike, it may be time to step up communication on state-wide issues.
- More than 64% of parents and nonparents indicated that their districts education services were above average or excellent. The annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll released just last week notes that 51% of respondents gave their local schools an A/B. One assumption is that school districts that invest in communication and are open and transparent, receive higher marks from the communities they serve.

NSPRA President Ron Koehler, APR, noted, "The message is clear. Open, honest and transparent communication is the best antidote to public mistrust. This research finds the institutions that invest in communication, and provide opportunities for dialogue and dissent are the first choice for information about the services they provide."

The entire survey may be obtained by going to [www.nspr.org/2011capsurvey](http://www.nspr.org/2011capsurvey).

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**About the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)** Since 1935, The National School Public Relations Association, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been providing school communication training and services to school leaders throughout the United States, Canada, and the United States Department of Defense Schools worldwide. NSPRA is a professional membership organization dedicated to building trust and support for education. To learn more about NSPRA go to [www.nspr.org](http://www.nspr.org).

#### **About The Survey**

NSPRA created an email survey to be used by all NSPRA- member districts. The project was made possible through a partnership with K12 *Insight*, Inc. ([www.k12insight.com](http://www.k12insight.com)).

The purpose of the study was to assess baseline data in learning the communication preferences of parents and non-parents in NSPRA-member districts. Fifty member districts participated in the survey from February through April 2011. Each district received its confidential results in May, while the compiled results, with no identification of the districts, were released the week of August 22, 2011.

Some demographic information, provided by the 50 participating districts, includes:

- Responding districts were located in 22 states. Some 31 of the 50 participants (62%) labeled themselves as suburban, followed by eight (16%) being urban, while six (12%) were rural, and three (6%) were exurban.
- Enrollment of the participating districts: Less than 2,500 (4); 2,501-5,000 (10); 5,001-10,000 (13); 10,001-15,000 (3); 15,001-20,000 (6); Greater than 20,000 (14).

Within the 50 participating districts, 268,917 residents were invited to participate in the email survey. Each district provided the list of email invitees for completion of the survey. The survey response rate was 16% with a 43,410 responses. Participants were asked to respond concerning communication with their oldest child in school. Parents' responses were segregated into elementary or secondary responses.