

NSPRA 2020

**Mark of Distinction
Award Application**

*Coalition-Building/
Collaborative Communication Efforts*

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

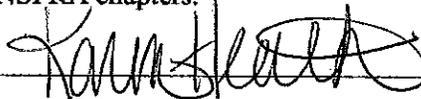
City/State/Zip Code: Berrien Springs, MI 49103

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 for Professional Development/PR Skill-Building and one for **Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Efforts**.

Special Focus—Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication

Overview of MSPRA Coalition-Building/Collaborative Communication Entry

MSPRA either initiated efforts or joined with other organizations to provide communication resources in four areas. This application details the following initiatives (on pages 1-9): **Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) Toolkit**, **Read by Grade 3 (RBG3) Communication Guide**, **Toolkit for Communicating about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)**, and **Emergency Child Care Communication Collaboration**. It also addresses the required documentation and evidence of collaboration (on pages 10-12).

Communicating About Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE)

In September 2019, MSPRA was asked to initiate the production of a tool to help school leaders communicate about [Eastern Equine Encephalitis](#), a deadly, mosquito-borne disease.

On September 19, 2019 at 4:08 p.m., this email was sent to MSPRA's Executive Director:

Mosquito Situation

From: Wendy Z <wendyz@michiganprincipals.org>

Sent: Thu, Sep 19, 2019 04:08 PM

Hi Gerri,

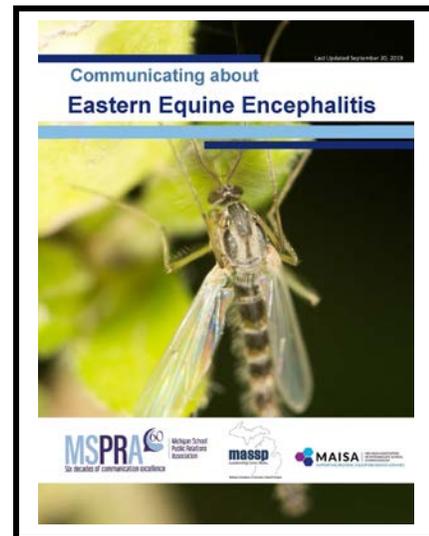
We are hearing a lot of concerns about EEE virus spread by mosquitoes...rescheduling football games & events and communications to parents and the community.

Would you consider pulling the group together to give us a response toolkit for EEE to share with districts?

Thank you for your consideration,

Wendy Zdeb

Executive Director, Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP)



As a result of that contact, MSPRA members worked in collaboration with the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) to collect sample letters, news releases, talking points and infographics outlining how school leaders could communicate about the topic with their constituents.

In less than 6 days, the samples and communication guidance were approved, packaged and shared with communication professionals, principals and superintendents throughout Michigan. Here is the email message that was sent to MSPRA members upon its release.

Tue, Sep 24, 2019, 2:01 PM

To MSPRA Members

Dear School PR Colleagues,

Many of you are (or soon will be) communicating about issues related to Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE).

As you may know, this mosquito-borne disease has now resulted in several confirmed human cases in Michigan--including two that were fatal. As a result, Michigan residents are being strongly advised by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to protect themselves from mosquito bites.

To aid in your communication efforts, MSPRA has developed the attached EEE Communication Toolkit in partnership with the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA).

We are grateful to those who offered their expertise and/or gave us permission to share their communiqués.

Remember this toolkit is intended to be a support to your communication efforts. If there are questions related to EEE, please seek information from your health department or division.

Be safe out there.

*Gerri Allen
MSPRA Executive Director*

It was also shared with NSPRA's Mellissa Braham and featured in the October 1, 2019 issue of NSPRA's *This Week* e-newsletter.

The image is a screenshot of an e-newsletter titled "This Week" from NSPRA, dated October 1, 2019. The newsletter's subtitle is "Relevant News, Resources, and Trends for the Leaders in School Communication". The featured article is titled "Resource — Communicating about Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) Toolkit". The article text states: "Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), a mosquito-borne disease, has affected the states of Michigan, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, North Carolina and New Jersey. It has been in the news recently due to six reported deaths." It then describes the toolkit developed by MSPRA in partnership with MASSP and MAISA, highlighting communication strategies for school districts. A small thumbnail image of a mosquito is visible on the right side of the article. At the bottom, a thank-you note is directed to NSPRA member Karen Heath, supervisor of communications for Berrien RESA and MSPRA President, for sharing the resource.

Read by Grade Three (RBG3) Communication Guide for School Leaders

In December 2019, at the invitation of Dr. William Miller, Executive Director of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) and with the support of Dr. Michael Rice, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, MSPRA members worked with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) Public Relations Network, and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to develop a communication guide around Michigan’s Read By Grade Three Law which the state legislature passed in 2016.

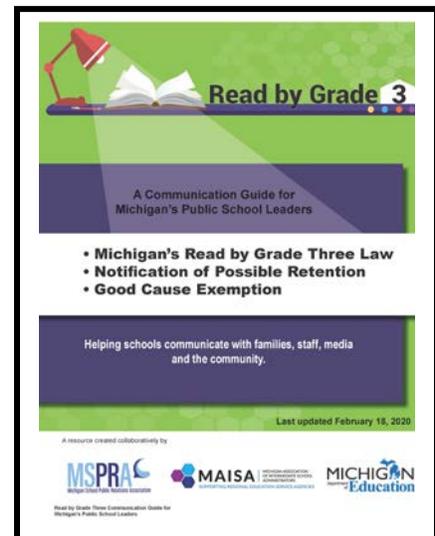
The law requires schools to identify learners who are struggling with reading and writing and to provide additional help. The law also states that, beginning with the 2019-2020 school year, third-grade students may repeat third grade if they are more than one grade level behind.

To determine their progress, learners will take the M-STEP (Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress) in the spring of their third-grade year. The M-STEP measures what children should know and be able to do. If a child scores one or more grade levels behind the third-grade reading level, a notice that the child may be retained will be sent (by June 1 of that school year) to the parent and the child’s school.

The law says if parents/guardians do not agree with the decision, they should request a meeting with the child’s school and file a Good Cause Exemption within 30 days of receiving a notice regarding potential retention.

With both internal and external communication implications on the horizon, school leaders believed Michigan’s public schools could benefit from communication assistance. The degree of communication help was confirmed through an RBG3 [survey](#) specifically designed by MSPRA and MDE that netted 259 responses, representing about half of Michigan’s school districts.

The assistance took the form of a communication guide developed for school leaders between December 04, 2019 and February 18, 2020.



As part of the work, we connected with Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s communication team, made them aware of the guide, and added their suggested link to the guide’s additional resources page.

The [Read by Grade Three Communication Guide for Michigan’s School Leaders](#) was released statewide on February 19, 2020. The text from the distribution email appears below. It was also featured in the Michigan Department of Education’s [weekly memo](#).

February 19, 2020

Dear Colleague,

The Read by Grade Three Law has both internal and external communication implications for all of Michigan’s public schools.

This newly-released **Read by Grade Three Communication Guide for School Leaders** can help communicate about those implications. It's designed to be used, along with Michigan Department of Education (MDE) materials, to communicate with staff, parents, media and the community about the Read by Grade Three Law, the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) letter of possible retention, and the Good Cause Exemption process.

Jointly prepared by the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) Public Relations Network, the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA), and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), this guide contains proven communication strategies and actual communication samples that will help:

- **Provide accurate, consistent information and messages based on the Read by Grade Three Law and MDE resources.**
- **Preview the spring CEPI retention letter with parents to minimize surprises.**
- **Emphasize that schools are working for their child's life-long success.**
- **Tell about Good Cause Exemptions and the deadline by which to contact the school, if interested.**
- **Reinforce that schools are working every day, using a variety of strategies and resources, to support literacy for all children.**

Note: Please feel free to share this resource with others. All communication samples included in this document have been used with permission. Schools are strongly encouraged to follow MDE guidance when interpreting and implementing the Read by Grade Three Law. Please direct specific questions or inquiries about the law to mde-earlyliteracy@michigan.gov.

Reaction:

Dr. Michael Rice, Michigan's State Superintendent of Public Instruction, said:

"...I have reviewed the entirety of the RBG3 communication guide, which I found to be very strong. The guide will contribute substantially to our districts already significant communication efforts around the law. ...Thanks for your leadership on this publication!"

Sent to NSPRA:

From: Karen Heath [mailto:karen.heath@berrienresa.org]

Sent: Thursday, February 27, 2020 2:54 PM

To: Rich Bagin; Mellissa Braham

Cc: Gerri Allen

Subject: MSPRA's Latest Toolkit-Read by Grade Three Communication Guide for School Leaders

Hi Rich and Mellissa-

In December, MSPRA was engaged by the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Districts (MAISA) and State Superintendent Dr. Rice (Michigan Department of Education - MDE) to develop a guide to support schools in their effort to communicate about Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law. The

result of our collective effort is the Read by Grade Three Communication Guide for School Leaders (attached). The document was released on February 19 by MSPRA, MAISA and MDE and is also being disseminated by numerous education groups throughout the state.

As part of the work, we connected with Governor Gretchen Whitmer's communication team, made them aware of the guide, and added their suggested link to the guide's additional resources page.

The guide contains proven communication strategies and actual communication samples that will help schools:

- *Provide accurate, consistent information and messages based on the Read by Grade Three Law and MDE resources.*
- *Preview the spring Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) retention letter with parents to minimize surprises.*
- *Emphasize that schools are working for their child's life-long success.*
- *Tell about Good Cause Exemptions and the deadline by which to contact the school, if interested.*
- *Reinforce that schools are working every day, using a variety of strategies and resources, to support literacy for all children.*

MSPRA took great pride in being asked to undertake this project. The confidence bestowed upon us to jointly provide such an important publication is a shining example of the positive relationships we have built among our state education department and with our fellow education associations. The Guide is one of five statewide publications MSPRA has collaboratively developed over the past two years.

Please feel free to share the document. It is ADA compliant.

*Karen Heath
Supervisor of Communications for Berrien RESA and MSPRA President
(269) 471-7725 ext. 1147*

*(269) 487-8563 - cell
karen.heath@berrienresa.org*

*From: Rich Bagin <rbagin@nspra.org>
To: Karen Heath <karen.heath@berrienresa.org>, Mellissa Braham <mbraham@nspra.org>
Cc: Gerri Allen <gallen48@juno.com>
Subject: RE: MSPRA's Latest Toolkit-Read by Grade Three Communication Guide for School Leaders
Date: Thu, 27 Feb 2020 15:07:45 -0500*

Thanks so much. We will review and let you know about our next steps.

*You guys are impressive on how you built credible relationships with other state groups to invite you into topics where most others do not even think about the need and power of communication.
Looking forward to our review.*

Rich

Update: The rules and procedures around Michigan’s Read by Grade Three Law were suspended this year due to COVID-19.

[mspramembers] FW: COVID-19 Guidance
From: Marty Ackley (MDE) <AckleyM@michigan.gov>
To: Gerri Allen <gallen48@juno.com>
Cc: Schafer, Maureen (MDE) <SchaferM@michigan.gov>
Sent: Wed, Apr 29, 2020 03:53 PM

MEMO #COVID-19-045

Read by Grade Three Law Update

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Governor Whitmer’s Executive Order 2020-35 (COVID-19), specifically Section IX(C), strict compliance with rules and procedures around MCL 380.1280f(5) is temporarily suspended. This compiled law is best known as the Read by Grade Three Law. Section IX(C) of Executive Order 2020-35 relieves a district of the obligations imposed for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year to retain a pupil in grade three. The Read by Grade Three Law has as its foundation state testing, which is not taking place this spring.

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/RBG3_Law_Update_688895_7.pdf

Toolkit for Communicating about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

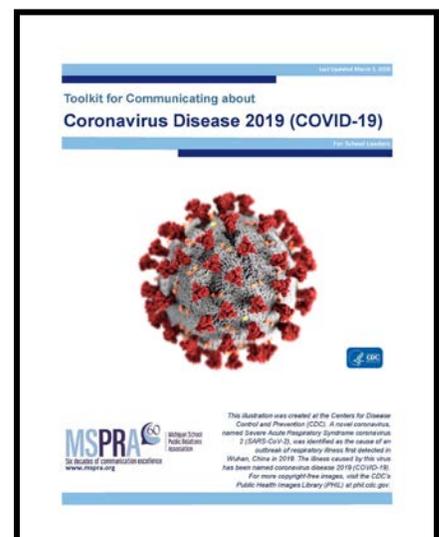
Our COVID-19 Toolkit development spanned 6 days: February 27-March 3, 2020. Here’s how it unfolded.

The virus was headed our way and on Thursday, February 27th we were told that other state education and health agencies were working on guidance for schools.

We informed our members via email and included a few general talking points in that [message](#). We were happy to have others take the lead. We were weary, having just released a toolkit 9 days earlier for Michigan’s Read by Grade 3 Law.

The next day, on Friday, February 28th, we received the promised COVID-19 Guidance—a joint memo from Michigan’s Department of Education (MDE) and Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). But also on Friday, we were learning that superintendents were asking our members to generate COVID-19 communication materials and one superintendent even wrote to us asking, “Does MSPRA have anything on this?”

By Saturday morning, February 29th, it was clear our schools didn’t have the resources they needed to communicate about the issue. So, the MSPRA Board decided to produce a [Toolkit for Communicating about Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#). We had a conference call Saturday afternoon, divided up tasks, wrote the toolkit over that weekend (February 29-March 1), had



it reviewed by representatives from the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators (MASA) and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA), and got it approved by our state education and health departments on Sunday night (March 1).

We finished final edits and made it ADA compliant on Monday, March 2 and sent it on Tuesday, March 3 to our partners for [distribution to their members](#) and colleagues. Little did we know that the product of our cram session would become a key resource for Michigan's schools during that time in the pandemic.

We also shared it nationally via NSPRA's COVID-19 Resource Repository.

It was also featured in a [Blackboard/NSPRA document](#): The Coronavirus Communications Crisis for Public Schools.

Reaction:

Re: Final Toolkit for Communicating About Coronavirus-COVID-19
From: Marty Ackley AckleyM@michigan.gov
To: Gerri Allen <gallen48@juno.com>
Sent: Tue, Mar 03, 2020 01:41 PM

Gerri,
This looks great!!

Let me know when this goes out to all districts and I will forward it to the Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA), too.

-marty
Martin Ackley, Director
Office of Public and Governmental Affairs
Michigan Department of Education

Re: Toolkit for Communicating About Coronavirus-COVID-19 now available
From: Kelly Lyvere kellylyvere@gmail.com
To: Gerri Allen <gallen48@juno.com>
Sent: Tue, Mar 03, 2020 02:15 PM

This is incredible. Thank you so much for always supplying us with the information that we need.

Kelly Lyvere
Saginaw Intermediate School District

Subject: Fabulous Toolkit
From: Allison Kaufman AllisonKaufman@kentisd.org
To: Gerri Allen gallen48@juno.com
Sent: Tue, Mar 10, 2020 11:46 AM

Love this and am using it – many, many thanks! What a great effort in just a few days.

Allison Kaufman
616.365.2227
Director | Communications & Marketing
Managing Editor | School News Network
Kent ISD

An epidemiologist from Minnesota, doing work for the World Health Organization, contacted MSPRA and asked permission to use our COVID-19 materials and shared them internationally.

MSPRA’s COVID-19 Toolkit was also noted in various Michigan news outlets.



Emergency Child Care Communication Collaboration

MSPRA’s COVID-19 Toolkit work lead to our involvement in statewide Emergency COVID-19 Child Care communication. This is how it transpired.

In March, MSPRA held its annual conference. We had heard rumors that the Governor was going to close schools that week, but we were not sure when. After much discussion and after writing a crisis plan for cancelling the conference itself, we held our first day of the conference—with a revised agenda so that our focus was COVID-19. We learned late in day one that the Governor's announcement would be happening that night (which was Thursday, March 12), and made the hard decision to cancel the rest of the conference so that our members could be in their districts to provide critical communication leadership. MSPRA board members also rushed to their districts and assumed crisis mode. By the time most of us got home that Friday night, we were beat. Saturday was a fog, and then we received the Sunday, March 15 morning phone call.

The Executive Director of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) knew that ISDs (intermediate school districts aka education service agencies) were going to be asked to oversee disaster relief child care services for the state of Michigan—and the Governor needed help communicating the announcement, the process for enrollment and that child care was available to essential workers. MSPRA was identified as the group that could help. From that call on Sunday morning, a core group of ISD MSPRA members worked with MAISA and the Governor’s policy team helping to write the child care communication and shape the process through our lens. During that week, we worked with our partners throughout the state to put it together, while waiting for the Governor’s [Executive Order 2020-16](#) to make it official, and dealing with COVID-19 response plans in our own districts.

The Executive Order was signed on Wednesday evening, March 18, 2020 and the [communication](#) to ISDs was sent on Thursday morning, March 19, 2020. We also developed a [news release](#) to help answer media questions. While it was a challenging balance, we very much appreciated being at the table and working with our MAISA partner and the Governor’s team, to not only help formulate the communication but to help think through the child care implementation process, as well.

Message sent from MAISA leadership to MAISA members:

MAISA: COVID-19 Childcare Assistance (Executive Order #2020-16)

From: Bill Miller (MAISA) <wmillers@gomaisa.org>

Sent: Thu, Mar 19, 2020 03:17 PM

[MAISA COVID-19 Ch...](#) (323KB)

Dear MAISA Members,

As you know, last night, Governor Gretchen Whitmer reached out to Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) across the state to help expand the capacity for child care services for members of the essential workforce during the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis.

Through [Executive Order 2020-16](#), she has asked ISDs to help mobilize and coordinate these efforts in partnership with the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, Michigan 2-1-1, local education agencies, employers, early childhood educators, private or community-based child care centers, and licensed in-home providers.

See the attached memo for more details about what ISDs can do next.

Thank you for helping in this time of need.

If you have questions, please contact me.

William C. Miller, Ph.D.

Executive Director, MAISA

wmillers@gomaisa.org

Documentation and evidence of collaborative efforts and activities

- **The overall efforts had statewide and, in some cases, national and international reach/impact.**
 - The EEE Toolkit was released on September 24, 2019 by the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA), the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) to their members. It was also shared with NSPRA members on October 1, 2019 via NSPRA This Week.
 - The RBG3 Communication Guide was released by MSPRA and the Michigan Department of Education and MAISA on February 19, 2020.
 - The COVID-19 Communication Toolkit was released on March 3, 2020 by MSPRA. It was also shared with our association partners and with NSPRA members via NSPRA’s COVID-19 Resource Repository. And, MSPRA gave permission for a Minnesota epidemiologist, doing work for the World Health Organization, to share parts of it internationally. It was also mentioned in several Michigan news outlets.
 - The Emergency Child Care Communication had statewide reach through Michigan’s network of intermediate school districts that serve school districts, students and communities throughout the state.
- **The chapter/collaboration partner goals and objectives for the activities were to:**
 - Leverage partners’ collective knowledge, resources, time and effort to provide guidance.
 - Meet an existing and anticipated need of members across associations.
- **Timeline and calendar of related events/activities**
 - September 19-September 24, 2019, EEE Communication Toolkit
 - December 04, 2019-February 19, 2020, RBG3 Communication Guide
 - February 27-March 03, 2020, COVID-19 Communication Toolkit
 - March 15-March 20, 2020, Emergency Child Care Communication
- **MSPRA’s role as a coalition/collaborative partner**

MSPRA either initiated contact with its “communication partners” about the emerging issue or one of the partners contacted MSPRA. In all instances, MSPRA members were actively engaged in developing the communication materials.

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, keep the lines of communication open, and provide a natural connection for our communication about hot/emerging topics/issues.

- **Communication plan related to coalition/collaboration efforts**

Our goal was to develop useful, accurate documents (by consulting with health department officials and/or content experts) that could be shared in a timely fashion with all our members to help them address current or anticipated issues. Most of our interaction was handled either by email or conference calls. We used Google as our collaborative platform.

- **Documentation of all related materials and endorsements**
 - The toolkits are posted on [MSPRA's website](#). [Links to other documents are contained in this application.]
 - All were shared statewide and several were shared nationally (via NSPRA) and one (COVID-19) was shared internationally.

- **Identification of target audiences and explanation of desired outcomes**

Our target audiences were identified as our association members. Our desired outcomes were documents that would serve as useful guides to communicating about the issues.

- **Documentation of measurable outcomes, effectiveness and success of the collaboration**

We were able to provide useful (members used it), official (listed partners approved it), documents in a timely manner to our associations' members. This has resulted in partners continuing to seek MSPRA out for subsequent collaboration.

- **These collaborative efforts specifically relate 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.

- **These collaborative efforts specifically relate 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.

Final reflections:

- **EEE Communication Toolkit:** Even though it was released last fall, the EEE toolkit remains relevant, as unfortunately, we are hearing that it is going to be another bountiful season for mosquitoes in Michigan.
- **RBG3 Communication Guide:** The RBG3 Communication Guide can be used, once the rules and policies are again in place.
- **COVID-19 Communication Toolkit:** Although the number of Michigan COVID-19 cases has dramatically increased from when it was written, the basic communication information and strategies remain useful and useable.
- **Emergency Child Care Communication:** The Emergency Child Care Communication effort paved the way for MSPRA to be included in regular MAISA member briefings around COVID-19.

-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

Coalition-Building/

Collaborative Communication Efforts

submitted by



due May 15, 2020
