South Central Region Chapter Reports – July 2017
Prepared by: Chris Tennill, APR, NSPRA South Central Region Vice President
Chief Communications Officer, School District of Clayton (Mo.)
christennill@claytonschools.net

General Overview
South Central chapters continue to thrive as they support their membership and provide cutting-edge professional learning to the school PR pros they serve.

Environmental Scan
South Central chapters noted the following issues/challenges in their states:

- Things are finally looking up in Kansas, which means a lot to anyone who has been following things in that state for the past few years.
- Legislative and political climates that continue to be anti-public school.
- Inadequate school funding and subsequent job-security concerns for “non-essential” (i.e., public relations) staff.
- Charters and/or for-profit charters and their impact on schools (as well as chapter membership).
- Addressing transgender student issues (at a district level or legislatively).

Outreach and Travel
I attended and present at the MOSPRA Spring Conference (March 29-31) and had to cancel my trip to the OKSPRA Conference (April 5-7) in order to be deposed for a lawsuit.

Suggestions for Improving Regional Relationships/Increasing NSPRA’s Influence
- Continuing to work to increase the percentage of state chapter members who also choose to join NSPRA.

Kansas School Public Relations Association (KanSPRA)

Chapter Well-Being: The Kansas School Public Relations Association is active. Our membership is stable or growing slightly. Our board meets quarterly. Financially, we are very sound with a substantial amount in the bank that grows each year.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts: We continue to work with a professional organization in Kansas that serves school administrators. Our work involves providing communications-related professional development and we encouraged participation in their recent annual June conference. KanSPRA is also moving forward on plans to launch a mobile app for our members in time for our Fall Conference.

Professional Development Programs/Activities: Most of our four regional groups meet on a regular basis for development activities. Our annual statewide fall conference was held in October.
**Issues Or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional Or National Support:** No new issues but I will reiterate that our chapter sometimes struggles with keeping our website current. Maybe NSPRA could look at offering a template for chapters to use for websites, apps, social media, etc. NSPRA could also consider hosting websites for chapters to help with the ongoing struggle to secure services, coordinate contracts, transfer administration, etc.

**State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep An Eye On:** Things seem to be looking up with the Kansas school funding situation. A more sustainable tax plan was recently voted into law and an education plan was approved and sent to the state Supreme Court. The Court will determine later this summer if the new plan meets a mandate to provide adequate funding. In the short term, schools in Kansas have been given the green light to proceed toward opening in August. Hopefully the failed tax cut experiment in Kansas will serve as a warning to leaders in other states and at the national level.

**Missouri School Public Relations Association (MOSPRA)**

**Chapter Well-Being:** MOSPRA membership continued to grow even during the final months of the school year. We are currently at 181 members. We are fiscally strong because of our membership dues and sponsor underwriters.

**Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts:** Since our last report the chapter has completed another successful joint Spring Conference with the Missouri Association of School Administrators. The chapter also hosted a second “One Person Office Communication Planning Workshop.” Finally, members of MOSPRA have joined with MASA to provide regional workshops to help smaller districts with their communication efforts. These half-day workshops have been very successful and have led to increased membership in MOSPRA from smaller schools.

**Professional Development Programs/Activities:** See above.

**State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep An Eye On:** The current leadership at the Missouri Capital has the potential to affect public education in a manner that many see in a negative light; however, this past legislative session ended without public education suffering any major blows. Two particular areas of concern, which will almost certainly come up again next year, are the expansion of charter schools and the push for vouchers. Both were “defeated” this past session.
Texas School Public Relations Association (TSPRA)

Chapter Well-Being:
- We remain at approximately 850 members.
- A two-day Executive Committee meeting took place in Austin on June 14-15, 2017.
- TSPRA will end FY 2016-2017 with $282,000 in savings, $52,000 in long-term investment funds, an operational budget of $510,000 and net profit for the year looks to be approximately $68,000.
- The TSPRA Executive Committee approved a $600,000 operating budget for FY 2017-2018, moved an additional $25,000 into the long-term investment funds, and designated funds from savings for two projects.
- NSPRA approved on March 10, 2017, an amendment to the TSPRA Bylaws/Standing Rules for the addition of a sixth professional award, Partner in Public Education Award, to be awarded for the first time in 2018.
- 2017-2018 Opportunities for Participation will be developed by the first week in July.
- Members expressed satisfaction with the new member management system, Member 365, and the awards system, Open Water, for entering and judging of Star Awards. Both systems were purchased and implemented during FY 2016-2017.
- We received about 15 new memberships as a result of newly created positions in some of Texas’ mid-to-small sized school districts. We continue to see this trend develop, especially among first-time superintendents who realize the value of a communications staffer on staff!

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts:
- Since March, the state office has published 31 EduLege’s, 14 eNewsletters, seven eBlasts and posted 41 communications related positions on our website, in addition to weekly Facebook postings and twitter messages.
- The Strategic Planning Committee conducted a desktop review of progress made on 2016-2018 Organizational Goals using the 2016-2017 Scorecard as data. The budget committee met on May 24, 2017. The Executive Director’s Evaluation Committee conducted the annual ED performance with a conference on June 14, 2017, the scholarship committee has convened twice, and the Professional Awards Committee is accepting nominations for the Key Communicator Award through June 27, 2017 and will select the 2017 Key Communicator by July 14, 2017. The CTPS Committee is working on the 2018 theme, logo and social media calendar and will share the 2017 CTPS program during one of the concurrent sessions during NSPRA 2017. The TSPRA Host Committee for NSPRA in San Antonio has met three times.
- Melissa Tortorici, TSPRA President, has made all committee appointments for the 2017-2018 school year.
- A RFP was awarded to Blue Jarvis to support TSPRA in the redesign of a new logo that will be unveiled during the 2018 annual conference.
- TSPRA will be involved in its first external audit in over 25 years during the months of July/August.
Professional Development Programs/Activities

- Two new APRs were pinned during the first general session of the 2017 TSPRA Conference – Angela Duitch, APR, Tyler ISD and Rebecca Villarreal, APR, New Braunfels ISD. A third member participated in a peer review during the conference resulting in two more TSPRANs on track to receive the coveted credentials.
- The 2017 annual TSPRA Conference was held February 19-23, 2017, on Galveston Island with 601 in attendance, 1082 Star Awards entries, 114 attending preconference sessions and 444 attendees at the Star Awards Banquet, emceed by Tim Carroll, APR, and 37 exhibitors.
- During its inaugural year, a total of 12 Spoken Word Media sessions were scheduled providing media and crisis communications training to 361 individuals.
- Two legal workshops were held in San Antonio and Plano with 75 TSPRA members in attendance.
- Currently 14 TSPRA members are completing the program and/or enrolled in the TCU Certified Public Communicator (CPC) program.
- The executive director, president and 150+ TSPRA members will be attending the NSPRA conference in San Antonio.
- Planning is on schedule for the 2018 annual conference. The conference schedule has been determined to include 45 concurrent sessions, 40+ roundtables, a “job alike” strand, “timely topic” strand and three off site tours will be scheduled. The theme is, “Team TSPRA.” The conference logo appears at the bottom of this report. #teamTSPRA #tspra18
- TSPRA has been invited to provide communications related presentations to TASA new superintendents, Texas PTA officers and TASA second year superintendents.

Major Chapter Issues or Concerns:

- Voucher legislation has not died in Texas this session.
- Charter schools. Should we say more?
- School finance is of major concern, especially for smaller districts.
- TRS insurance is beyond saturation with little help from state funding.
- The 85th Texas Legislature has been unique to say the least. A special session begins on July 18 to address 20 issues that could not be resolved during the 140-day regular session. On top of the agenda is bathroom legislation and school finance that is clouded with vouchers.
- The majority of the 1028 public school districts in Texas have fewer than 1000 students. While our larger districts continue to get larger, our small districts continue to get smaller. TSPRA membership has typically been appealing to larger school districts employing PR professionals. We will continue to explore ways to involve our smaller districts that do not have resources to employ full-time communications experts.
- Not a concern – we are seeing a trend that as more 5A and 6A associate superintendents are being hired as first time superintendents in 4A and 3A districts, they are creating communications departments. We recognize this as aspiring school leaders realizing the benefits of such departments and professionals and finding resources to employ them.
Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional Or National Support:
- Will Trump and DeVos be giving a speech to the schoolchildren of the nation and if so, when? Just joking! Ha!
- Charter schools continue to be a threat to our larger, more urban school districts. While still considered public schools, it becomes increasingly difficult to help the public understand that charter schools are allowed to operate with a different set of governance policies.
- The unfortunate issue so many districts in our state have had to address this past school year is inappropriate teacher/student behavior.

State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep An Eye On:
- See number 2 above. Our biggest issue is a Senate who does not support public education, the risk of vouchers, school finance issues and continued student growth in the state. Safety in our schools continues to be a topic of discussion.

Texas has implemented a process for “Districts of Innovation,” allowing districts to follow a specific process for staff and community support of 12 so-called innovative practices. Many districts are beginning the school earlier, using some flexibility in teacher hiring/contract practices, classroom sizes, etc. as a result of this opportunity.

Arkansas School Public Relations Association (ArkaNSPRA)
No report submitted.

Oklahoma School Public Relations Association (OKSPRA)
No report submitted.