

North Central Region Chapter Reports – March 2018

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Illinois School Public Relation Association (INSPRA)

Ryan McPherrin, chapter president

Chapter Well-Being: INSPRA is in good shape. We have 170 members, one fewer than at this time in 2017. We are fiscally sound; yet are increasing our efforts to secure sponsorships so that we may continue to bring in national speakers for our Tips & Tactics workshops. We're also looking to increase our membership dues. Our \$90 membership rate has not been increased in 10 years. This spring, we will seek members' approval to increase dues to \$125. This year, the facility where we hold Tips & Tactics started charging us a room usage fee, which is a first in the more than 14 years we've used their facility.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts: INSPRA's Board is reviewing and updating the chapter's strategic plan, the current version of which will be complete at the end of the 2018 calendar year. Sixty-two people attended our annual foundations conference, which was successful. Our annual Distinguished Service Awards are set for May 11. Traditionally, attendees include numerous INSPRA members, superintendents, school board members, licensed & support staff and even some students. Highly valuable opportunity for others to see what we do, recognize PR ambassadors in our districts and network with colleagues.

Professional Development Programs/Activities: Tips & Tactics sessions

- In February, Sandy Cokeley, APR, presented Evaluating Communication Effectiveness
- Upcoming: March 16 topic: Advanced Tools for the Digital Age and April 20 topic: Yes ... And! To Change
- Complete schedule of Tips & Tactics sessions at <http://bit.ly/2FhvQVS>

Major Chapter Issues or Concerns: INSPRA members, like school PR professionals nationwide, are looking for definitive guidance on website ADA compliance. We will share the recent NSPRA PR Power Hour with members in a special Tips & Tactics session. Members are hungry for go-to resources to answer the myriad of questions about complying with ADA requirements.

Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support: Two areas of interest: website ADA compliance and school safety resources in the wake of the Parkland, FL tragedy.

State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On: Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner is advocating for a 2-year local property tax freeze and shifting the employer portion of the teachers' pension to local school districts. These two proposals would result in districts losing

millions of dollars in revenue and incurring millions in additional expenditures, respectively. In Illinois, school districts are heavily dependent on local property taxes.

Iowa School Public Relations Association (ISPRA)

Laura Sprague, chapter president

Chapter Well-Being: The Iowa School Public Relations Association (ISPRA) has a growing roster and is in good financial health. Since the start of the 2017-18 school year we have added 16 new members, due to a growing need in our state for solid school public relations practitioners. To date, our total balance of all accounts is \$15,455.87.

Our state chapter comes together twice a year for a fall conference and spring awards night/conference. We actively use a Google group to ask and share information; this has been beneficial for new and old members alike. Recently, we implemented a monthly Zoom meeting between board members to share updates and information. This has been a helpful way for leadership to stay connected and on-task with chapter work.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts: Continuing to recruit and retain school communicators; once on-boarded with ISPRA, we are making more of an attempt to provide any and all resources we can and help them find (veteran) school PR people in their area to form relationships. We will be offering a specific new member day in August 2018 to bring all new members (2017 to August 2018) together to share resources and help them get better acclimated to their roles. *(Ongoing project)*

Forming better relationships with state associations, such as the School Administrators of Iowa, Iowa Association of School Business and Finance, Iowa Association of School Boards. We want these groups to see us as valuable partners in the whole picture of school/district vitality. *(Ongoing project)*

It is my hope as president to write a strategic plan for the chapter that would provide direction and initiatives for the next three to five years. A membership survey in late spring 2018 will provide the research necessary to write the plan. *(New project)*

Our past president has taken on the idea to create a speaker's bureau of Iowa school PR practitioners that can be used by outside organizations if they are looking for a resource. Examples: A smaller district would like to hear from someone on crisis communications – they can use our speaker's bureau to identify someone who excels in crisis communications and we would speak to their group. *(New project)*

Professional Development Programs/Activities: The Iowa chapter held its Fall conference on Oct. 5, which featured a hands-on workshop around messaging, audiences, handling Q & A, and mastering the news media interview.

Afternoon sessions included a focus on what makes a strong superintendent/communications director team as well as round table discussions and sharing of best practices in video, social media strategy, bond/finance campaigns, branding/imaging campaign and strategic

communication plan. We had 33 members and non-members attend, which is a good turnout for our chapter.

ISPRA members are “attending” five NSPRA PR Power Hours over the course of the coming year; we have three locations around the state where regional groups of practitioners can gather. On the months we do not have a Power Hour, we will have a Zoom meeting to catch up and share information with one another.

Our Spring awards night and conference is coming up April 19 and 20 in Des Moines. April 19 serves as an evening to socialize and celebrate our successes through the annual awards dinner. On April 20, we will hear from the following speakers/topics: Bonds & Levies: Beyond Campaign Time – Lesley Rogers, Strategies 360; Legal Primer for School Communicators – Matt Carver, J.D., School Administrators of Iowa; News Media Relations: The New Rules of Engagement – Jerry Gallagher, Donovan Group; Lessons Learned: Promise of Iowa Campaign – Lisa Bartusek, IASB.

We continue to advocate for our members to obtain their Accreditation in Public Relations (APR). The state PRSA chapter welcomes school practitioners to join their classes and we have had good interest from our membership in taking the course and completing the requirements. Currently, two ISPRA members are taking the PRSA APR short course for eventual completion of the APR.

Major Chapter Issues or Concerns: This is an ongoing issue; I think we are struggling to be seen as an equal “player” amongst other school administrator/business services. As mentioned above, we are putting more effort into letting statewide organizations know we are here, we are professionals, and we play a vital role in the daily operations of our school district. As our group gains credibility and (favorable) reputation, I hope to see that reflected in how our roles are viewed within individual school districts.

Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support: I’d like to see the goals and objectives for NSPRA and then learn how we, as state chapters, can be supporting those or working on them within our own areas. Sometimes I feel like there is a disconnect between the national association and state associations.

State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On: Education legislation and dwindling dollars for “extras” like school communications leaves many of us in one-person shops and/or fighting tooth and nail for our offices. Additionally, we, as school communicators, are often asked about advocacy efforts and that’s a tough call – tips and best practices around what’s ethically OK to do in terms of advocacy would be appreciated.

Additional items of note: We are thriving as a collegial group and chapter. It’s an exciting, changing time in the world of school PR and I am honored to lead this organization!

Minnesota School Public Relations Association (MinnSPRA)

Jake Sturgis, APR, chapter president

Chapter Well-Being: Our chapter is active and we have the highest number of members at this time of the year than we have had in recent memory. We are fiscally stable and our board made an intentional effort to spend down some of our fund balance this year by reinvesting in our membership through professional development opportunities.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts: We are collaborating with a group of superintendents who are developing a plan to address diversity, inclusion and student achievement issues. <http://www.amsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Reimagine-MN-Roadmap-for-Action.pdf> The roadmap has been developed however a communications plan for the project that involves 40+ school districts.

Professional Development Programs/Activities: We introduced two new professional development opportunities to our members this winter. On February 8, a leadership seminar was held for emerging and veteran leaders. The two groups had separate sessions tailored to the place they are at in their career. We see a number of veteran leaders retiring in the coming years and we wanted to be proactive as a group to provide leadership training and opportunities for our next generation of leaders.

Our mentorship experience was launched on February 16. Jaclyn Swords, APR, helped design a new program that matches people based on areas of strengths and areas of growth. Each person in the program will act as a mentor and mentee. The goal is to help close the knowledge gap between professionals and provide a mutually beneficial learning opportunity for professional and personal growth. There will be activities for all mentor groups to attend together, in addition to meeting together throughout the rest of this year.

We also have monthly “Coffee Chats” where members are able to join a conversation with their computers and web cams to discuss timely topics.

Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support: Continued support with the school safety issues and student demonstrations.

State or local issues that NSPRA should keep an eye on: The use of student voice to advance different topics and issues will continue to grow with the events in Parkland, Florida. Knowing how to handle and manage students who know they have a voice on important issues should be something we prepare for as communicators.

Nebraska School Public Relation Association (NebSPRA)

Amanda Oliver, chapter president

Chapter Well-Being: Nebraska continues to be an active chapter. We continue to have regular monthly meetings during the school year. Our members are engaged and active during meetings. A large portion of our school districts remain understaffed for their size of district so our

members continue to be overloaded within their day-to-day jobs. There are many great ideas brought forth and discussed but we continue to have trouble putting the plans into action.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts: We continue efforts to get a seminar/conference scheduled as well as chapter awards up and running, and a luncheon with possible speakers for our chapter and state superintendents. We continue to collaborate with our local state administrator's organization as well as other state organizations on a number of our projects.

Professional Development Programs/Activities: We are working to offer professional development opportunities at our monthly meetings, including guest speakers and business tools/solutions from vendors that different districts are currently working with.

Major Chapter Issues or Concerns: This is a continuation for us. Our members are feeling very overworked. A few larger districts with new or incoming superintendents or new communications professionals who struggle on how to best use their communications person/team. Participation in NSPRA-related activities outside meetings continues to be a struggle – meeting planning, conference planning, member recruitment activities, etc.

Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support: Open to suggestions on how to get non-school PR individuals involved in NSPRA. We have most of the school PR individuals in our state but we are still small in numbers. Would like to involve more principals, superintendents or others who have communication duties in our group.

State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On: Several initiatives for Charter Schools continue with state legislature. So far we do not have any charter schools. Funding concerns remain very real for many of our districts.

Wisconsin School Public Relations Association (WSPRA)

Sarah Heck, chapter president

No report submitted.