

Southeast Region Chapter Reports – March 2018

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General Overview

Southeast chapters report changes in leadership, member outreach efforts, and professional development opportunities. The Southeast represents hundreds of memberships for NSPRA and the standing goal is to sustain year-to-year increases in chapter membership.

Environmental Scan

Southeast chapters all look ahead to January/February when many state legislatures convene and begin taking a look at education. Diversion of funds from public schools to charter schools and other “schools of choice” continues as a hot topic in many states.

Outreach and Travel

As NSPRA Southeast VP, I have attended – and/or served as presenter – for various chapters including the Alabama School Public Relations Association (ALSPRA) and the Tennessee Association of School Communicators (TASC). Additionally, I moderated an NSPRA PR Power Hour in early 2018 on ADA Web Compliance. I also have been in communication (email/phone) with chapter leaders from MSPRA (Sandi Beason) and SUNSPRA (Kevin Christian) regarding chapter health and other issues which have surfaced over the past few months in their organizations.

Suggestions for Improving Regional Relationships/Increasing NSPRA’s Influence

NSPRA should continue its culture of chapter outreach, digital innovation and exploration of relevant, nationally-renowned speakers. Our chapter affiliates appreciate the responsiveness of NSPRA staff.

Alabama School Public Relations Association (ALSPRA)

Cindy Warner, APR, chapter president

Chapter Well-Being: The Alabama School Public Relations Association conducted its membership drive from August-October 2017. As a result of the drive, the chapter currently has 52 active members. The new payment format of including our meetings as part of membership costs has been very well received. The chapter currently has over \$11,000 in the bank and is expecting about \$2,000 more to be coming in from vendors who are sponsoring our upcoming conference, including Blackboard, Remind, and Foxbright.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts: The organization’s Professional Learning Unit is still being offered, but with fewer participants than the two previous years. ALSPRA will be sending out a survey to our members and other educators in the state to determine whether to move forward with renewing our PLU offering with the Alabama Council for Leadership Development. It is likely that depending on the response from survey participants that the PLU will be updated so that past participants can benefit from it again. If response to the PLU offering is low, then we may not renew for it to be offered for another three years.

ALSPRA has several chapter members who have been collaborating with colleagues at NSPRA to help provide leadership and professional development offerings. Jason Gaston, APR, is currently serving as the NSPRA Southeast VP. Lesley Bruinton, APR, was a co-panelist for the September 15 PR Power Hour which focused on equity and inclusion and will be a featured Pre-Seminar Workshop presenter at the 2018 Seminar in Anaheim, Calif. Cindy Warner, APR, assisted with an NSPRA Twitter Takeover, helped to moderate #k12prchat, and will also be a 2018 NSPRA Seminar presenter.

Whitlee Lusk from Jefferson County Schools is currently working with vendors in regards to sponsoring/hosting the chapter's website. ASLPRA has had offers from two national vendors to possibly host and revamp the ALSPRA website. If those options don't work out, Whitlee will redesign the site herself, giving ALSPRA an updated web presence with additional options and resources for members. We are also looking at starting an ALSPRA Facebook page in the near future.

Professional Development Programs/Activities: We are continuing our effort to provide high-quality programming by partnering with local experts in the cities in which we host our meetings, workshops and conferences. We are also calling on our colleagues from other NSPRA chapters to help provide professional development to members. ALSPRA held a workshop on December 7 which featured Kim Doddridge, from Maury Council Public Schools and our neighboring Tennessee chapter. Doddridge provided great insight as to how her district handled the crisis when teacher Tad Cummins kidnapped his student, Elisabeth Thomas. ALSPRA member Jason Gaston also provided a session on Keeping Websites ADA Compliant in order to avoid OCR complaints and audits.

ALSPRA will hold its annual conference March 1 in Alabaster, Ala., with NSPRA President Tom DeLapp, APR, as the Keynote speaker. DeLapp will share two sessions with participants, "What to Do When the Whole World Is Watching," and "Being Your Own Wire Service in the Era of Fake News." Blackboard and Remind, our conference sponsors, will also be holding sessions. We currently have 50 registered to attend the conference, but are hoping for last minute additions leading up to the date.

We will also give our annual Excellence in Communications Professional and Publication Awards at the annual meeting. Amber Hinton, a senior at Hillcrest High School will be awarded our annual scholarship, given to a student who plans to pursue a major in a communications related field.

Issues or areas that could use NSPRA regional or national support: Continue to provide resources on major hot-button issues like school safety (due to recent school shooting in Florida).

State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On: State Representative Will Ainsworth (R) plans to propose a bill that will allow trained, certified teachers to carry weapons on school campuses. Teachers and administrators who carry guns would have to receive 40 hours of training through the Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission and a mental health evaluation. The state would pay the cost of training but not the cost of the guns. Governor Kay Ivey (R) and U.S. Senator Doug Jones (D) have both spoken out in support

of installing metal detectors at all public school entrances.

Selection of a new state superintendent and how that selection will impact the future of education in Alabama, including recommendations for new state assessments and a revised Strategic Plan for the State Department of Education.

Georgia School Public Relations Association (GSPRA)

Barbara Jacoby, chapter president

Chapter Well-Being: The GSPRA chapter is in great shape having held our Annual Conference in October with outstanding participation including several dozen new members in attendance.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts: GSPRA continues its partnership with the [Georgia Vision Project](#) (GVP) to support the SPARK! campaign, an advocacy campaign to celebrate public education in Georgia and to change the perception of our schools by changing the conversation about our schools.

Professional Development Programs/Activities: We successfully presented our Annual Conference from Oct. 22-24 at St. Simons Island. We welcomed 85 PR professionals to the conference, which is our highest attendance in recent years. We featured several National speakers including NSPRA member Daniel Thigpen of Folsom Cordova Unified School District in Calif.

In response to the results of our membership survey conducted in May, we are bringing back the One-Day Conference (drive-in conference) on March 9, with National speakers including NSPRA member Lesley Brinton of Tuscaloosa (Ala.) City Schools.

Our Accreditation Chair also this spring is beginning an informational campaign for our members about the benefits of APR using testimonials from those who have achieved this designation.

Major Chapter Issues or Concerns: Our members are very eager for more professional development opportunities based on the results of the membership survey conducted in May. As a result, we're bringing back the One-Day Conference this March, with plans to consider additional programs based on a post-event evaluation.

Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support: We are interested in learning from NSPRA who our like SPRAs are across the country, so we can forge relationships with them for planning, contest judging and other purposes.

State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On: As many SPRAs likely are, we are very concerned in Georgia about continuing attacks on public education with a goal of discrediting, defunding and dismantling our systems and schools in order to benefit profiteers and politicians at the expense of the children we serve.

Mississippi School Public Relations Association (MSPRA)

Sandi Beason, APR, chapter president

Chapter Well-Being: We held elections in December and now we have a strong board in place. We are in good financial standing.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts:

- Feb. 28-March 2, MSPRA/MASA conference at the Golden Nugget in Biloxi, MS (partnership with our state association of school administrators). NSPRA President Tom DeLapp, APR, will be a keynote speaker at this conference. Other PIO sessions include building and maintaining strong partnerships (led by longtime MSPRA member Debbie Anglin in the Pascagoula-Gautier School District), and the importance of earning Accreditation in PR (led by solo PR guru Kristie Aylett, APR).
- July 10-13, MSPRA/MASS conference at the Beau Rivage in Biloxi, MS (partnership with our state association of school superintendents). Vice President Geri Hill in the DeSoto County School District is currently updating our awards packet, and using the South Carolina chapter's model for online award submissions. We will hold our chapter awards at the MASS conference this summer – we feel like this will be a bigger draw for our members since our superintendents will already be at this conference and can be there for awards presentations.

We will have our chapter elections at this event and choose the 2018-19 MSPRA board. I'm working now with the MASS director to include communication-related concurrent sessions at the MASS conference and possibly a keynote speaker on the topic of school PR. This is the biggest public education conference in Mississippi and regularly draws 1,500 people including superintendents, principals, department heads, vendors and national-caliber speakers.

Professional Development Programs/Activities: My goal as president is to encourage our members to pursue APR. I'm the only school district in MS right now who is accredited. Two members have told me they're interested and I've provided resources to help them get started with this process. I continue to promote APR in messaging to the chapter and we are focusing a session on it at the spring conference.

Major Chapter Issues or Concerns: We are addressing the issues we had from 2017, and our chapter is back on track.

Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support: Thank you for allowing Tom DeLapp to come speak at our spring conference. He's a fantastic public speaker and will be well received by all attendees (not just PIOs)

State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On: Privatization is a growing issue, funding for basic needs, safe and secure facilities, safety training for employees and students

North Carolina School Public Relations Association (NCSPRA)

Todd Hagans, chapter president

Chapter Well-Being: The North Carolina School Public Relations Association (NCSPRA) rang in the 2018 calendar year with our annual Blue Ribbon Awards ceremony and brunch. Held on January 26 at the O. Henry Hotel in Greensboro, the ceremony honored members from 38 school districts for their efforts in creating effective school communications and public relations in 2017. A total of 306 gold, silver, and bronze awards were presented in eight competition categories: digital media engagement, electronic media, excellence in writing, image/graphic design, marketing, photography, publications (print and electronic), and special events/programs.

Additionally, a “Best of the Best” award was given in each of the competition categories to identify the best entry. Three years ago, we revamped the Blue Ribbon Awards program to include updated and new categories; the gold, silver, and bronze award levels; and the “Best of the Best” awards. This year, submissions exceeded 300, which is up significantly from 171 three years ago. These changes have increased interest in the awards program, created some friendly competition among school districts, and generated additional revenue for NCSPRA. Again this year, members of the Georgia School Public Relations Association judged the contest. Needless to say, this year was one of our most successful Blue Ribbon programs.

During the Blue Ribbon Awards ceremony, NCSPRA presented its most prestigious award – the Barry Gaskins Service Award for outstanding contributions to school public relations – to Dr. Nora Carr, APR, chief of staff for Guilford County Schools in Greensboro and a past NSPRA president. Click the link for more information: <https://www.ncspra.org/domain/11>. Additionally, Dr. James Merrill, the retiring superintendent for the Wake County Public School System, served as our keynote speaker. Dr. Merrill was presented one of our signature NCSPRA clocks in recognition of his dedicated service to public education.

Our current membership is 137, which is 13 more people than last year. Membership includes 65 school districts, two education-related organizations, a charter school, and a retiree. The Board of Directors is planning to explore ways to further increase membership for 2018-2019.

Each year, the Board of Directors conducts in-person meetings (at least one each quarter) and has an annual summer planning retreat. Our last Board meeting was held on January 26 and our next Board meetings are March 22 and April 26 with our summer planning retreat scheduled for June 25-26.

The Association remains financially sound with an annual \$10,000 commitment from Blackboard, an increase in membership, an overwhelmingly successful fall conference and Blue Ribbon Awards program, and various business/corporate sponsorships.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts: Our upcoming, ongoing, and completed projects are listed below.

- **‘Final Four’ Professional Development Series:** This year’s Final Four is scheduled for Friday, March 23 at the U.S. National Whitewater Center in Charlotte. The theme is “Staying Afloat in School Communications.” The one-day program features four

sessions; the topics are state legislative update, branding/marketing, website accessibility, and crisis communication. Click the link for more information:

<https://www.ncspra.org/domain/39>

- **Professional Development with NCCAT:** We are partnering with NCCAT (North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching) to sponsor a two-day professional development retreat on the NCCAT campus in Cullowhee (adjacent to Western Carolina University), April 26-27. The theme is “Yesterday. Today. Tomorrow. Your journey in school PR,” and the retreat is intended for school PR professionals with 1-3 years of experience. This is a new program for NCSPPRA to support “newbies” in our profession.
- **Website/Social Media:** We continue our efforts to update the NCSPPRA website (www.ncspra.org) on a regular basis. Our most recent updates provide information about the ‘Final Four’ professional development workshop and a recap of the Blue Ribbon Awards ceremony. Our goal for 2018-2019 is to provide a “members only” resources area on the website. This year on Facebook, we have given “shout-outs” to the school districts that joined NCSPPRA.
- **Scholarships for the NSPPRA National Seminar:** We are seeking applicants for the Bonnie Reidy Mentor Legacy Scholarship, which is given to a member with less than three years of experience in school PR, and the Nora Carr Presidential Scholarship, which is given to a member who has not attended the NSPPRA National Seminar in the past three years. The scholarships cover registration to attend this year’s National Seminar in California. The recipients will be announced during our ‘Final Four’ program on March 23.
- **Election for Officers/Board Members:** In April, we will conduct our annual election. This year, we have two Board of Directors positions open in addition to the four officer positions, which are one-year terms. We expect our nominating committee to recommend our current officers for another one-year term, thus providing stability in our leadership.
- **Fall Conference:** We had a successful fall conference in Asheville, October 25-27, 2017. The conference was a joint venture with the South Carolina Chapter of the National School Public Relations Association. NCSPPRA hosted this year’s conference, and NSPPRA president Tom DeLapp, APR, was the keynote speaker. We had 110 people from North Carolina and South Carolina to attend, surpassing our attendance goal of 80. South Carolina will host the 2018 conference in Myrtle Beach, October 10-12.

Professional Development Programs/Activities: Overall, our goal is to provide as many professional development and engagement opportunities as possible for our members. Additionally, our Board would like to hold a professional development webinar/conference call this spring to provide additional support and engagement for members. Another idea is to conduct a survey (possibly this summer) to engage members and gather feedback about how well we are doing and what they would like to see in 2018-2019.

Major Chapter Issues or Concerns: We do not have major issues or concerns facing the Association. Our leadership is strong, and we are providing quality professional development for members. Our plan is to continue working on membership to retain our current members and attract new ones for 2018-2019.

Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support: The school shooting in Florida has created issues for schools across the nation, everything from the media and others questioning school safety procedures to elected officials suggesting that teachers should be armed. NSPRA is already compiling materials and information to help with student walkouts/protests and other activities that stem from the tragedy.

Another issue facing our state is what can be done to make the teaching profession attractive to college students. It has become increasingly difficult in recent years to find and retain qualified teachers. Is there a national marketing effort in place to promote the teaching profession?

State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On: In North Carolina, the state legislature enacted a new law that reduces class size for grades K-3. While the law (in its original form) had good intentions, it did not provide funding to support the need for more teachers, more classroom space, and more resources. Lawmakers recently enacted a change to the law that will have the class size reduction phased in over the next few years rather than entirely in 2018-2019. While lawmakers have designated funds for the class size change, our concerns are the availability of additional teachers and the guarantee of sufficient funding.

Additional Items of Note: A recent look at the NCSPPA history revealed that the Association's 50th anniversary is approaching. The chapter was founded in 1970, which means the 50th anniversary is in 2020. The NCSPPA Board of Directors will be responsible for determining how to celebrate the milestone.

South Carolina School Public Relations Association (SC/NSPRA)

Johnathan Graves, chapter president

Chapter Well-Being: SC/NSPRA is in the midst of a very exciting year! We currently stand at a total membership of 141 who are either active, retired, affiliate, or institutional members which is an increase from last year. Our finances are in excellent shape thanks to a strong membership drive and well attended meetings. We believe the increase in membership can be attributed to our new online payment system which allows individuals to make payments for their membership electronically.

Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts: We recently completed the first part of our Rewards For Excellence program. Over 199 entries were submitted by schools and school districts in our state. For the first time ever, individuals could go online to submit their entries. Entries will be judged and scored later this month as we prepare to recognize our award winners at our Rewards For Excellence program in Columbia on April 27th. The program will feature NSPRA President Tom Delapp, APR, as our keynote speaker.

Our organization was proud to reintroduce the SC/NSPRA Communicator of the Year and Administrator of the Year awards this year. These two awards were created to highlight school communication professionals and superintendents who have shown hard work, dedication, and commitment to school communications. The official announcement of winners for these two prestigious awards will take place in March. Our award winners will also be recognized at the Rewards for Excellence program in April.

Professional Development/Program Activities: *Ladies and gentlemen, Start Your Engines!*

On Friday, February 23rd, we hosted our annual Winter Drive-in meeting at the Darlington Raceway Media Center in Darlington, S.C. Attendees were provided with plenty of great photo opportunities at this historic race track and excellent topics from a variety of speakers. We also hosted a sock & blanket drive during this meeting. Items collected during the meeting were donated back to Carolina’s Kids, a non-profit that serves the students of Darlington County Schools.

SC/NSPRA is in the early stages of planning our joint Fall Conference with NCSPPRA. The Conference is shaping up to be another successful event due to the strong partnership between both organizations. This year, our organization will host the conference on October 12th-14th at the Marriott Resort Grande Dunes in Myrtle Beach, SC. Our keynote speaker for the conference will be none other than John Draper, who is known as a speaker whose engaging presentations motivate public educators across the country.

Our organization’s lone sponsor, Blackboard, hosted a webinar on Web Accessibility in October. This webinar is one of three we will have during the year on hot topics for school communications professionals. The participation and feedback from the first webinar was very positive!

Additional Items of Note: SC/NSPRA appreciates the support NSPRA provides to our organization and we look forward to partnering with NSPRA to begin new initiatives for our organization!

Tennessee Association of School Communicators (TASC)

Anthony Johnson, chapter president

Chapter Well-Being: Since the October update, successful contact was made with additional, non-member districts inviting communications professionals to attend the March 2 conference and join TASC. A 20% discount was offered to those who joined TASC and attended the conference. The president and president-elect have had several conversations regarding recruitment, and this will be an ongoing opportunity for refinement.

Professional Development Programs/Activities: On Friday, March 2, TASC will hold a spring professional learning conference. We are expecting around 45-50 attendees. Below is the agenda.

9:00-9:15	Welcome and Introductions	Anthony & Carly
9:15-9:30	Business	Anthony & Carly
9:30-9:45	Regional Updates & NSPRA 2018	Jason Gaston, APR
9:45-10:15	“Old Media, New Media and Being Your Own Newsroom”	James Evans, APR
10:30-11:00	“Transparency to Engagement”	Kate Crowder
11:00-11:30	Open Discussion: Social Media & Multimedia	Various
11:30-12:30	Lunch	Maggiano’s
12:30-1:00	Open Discussion: Safety, Custody, and Communication	Various
1:00-2:00	Crisis Communication	Mimi Bliss http://www.blisscommunications.net/
2:00-3:00	What Matters to You?	Anthony & Carly

Major Chapter Issues or Concerns: As with the October update, the chapter continues to struggle with engagement, especially in the eastern and western portions of the state. Middle Tennessee has the majority of largest districts in the state (Metro Nashville, Williamson, CMCSS, Rutherford, etc.) and most meetings and networking opportunities occur in Nashville because of its central location. While Nashville is a short drive for most districts in the middle, it can be a 3-5 hour drive for eastern and western districts. The president-elect is from East Tennessee, so we hope her insight will help us to improve in this area.

Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support: We feel like NSPRA is doing an effective job of providing articles, research, training, and support to help communications professionals with today's challenges. We look forward to NSPRA 2018 in Anaheim! Jason Gaston will be at our March 2 conference to encourage TASC members to attend.

State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On: We are still experiencing the same issues as the October update with a heightened concern around school safety. From the October update: Middle Tennessee is seeing growth, so many of the districts in the region are dealing with overcrowding, funding, construction, organizational changes, and the other challenges experienced with growth. Additionally, we are struggling with many of the same challenges observed across the nation: teacher shortages, bus driver shortages, the student mental health crisis, the opioid epidemic, continued concerns over school safety, OCR compliance with websites and other communications, parent and community engagement, the current political climate, and the ever-changing technology landscape.

Additional Items of Note: We are blessed to have Jason Gaston, APR, as our Regional VP. His willingness to drive up and attend our conference and his consistent encouragement is truly appreciated. He is quick to respond to requests for assistance and he keeps consistent communication with chapter leaders. As we continue to identify opportunities to grow, we know he will be an asset for us.

Sunshine State (Florida) School Public Relations Association (SUNSPRA)

Kevin Christian, APR, chapter president

No report submitted.