

## North Central Region Chapter Reports – November 2017

*Peg Mannion, APR, NSPRA North Central Region Vice President*

*Community Relations Coordinator, Glenbard Township High School District 87*

[peg\\_mannion@glenbard.org](mailto:peg_mannion@glenbard.org)

---

### **Illinois School Public Relation Association (INSPRA)**

*Ryan McPherrin, chapter president*

**Chapter Well-Being:** The numbers point to a thriving chapter:

- Membership: 142
- Facebook followers: 128 (up from 117 in April)
- Twitter followers: 1,149 (up from 1,054 in July)

The chapter is doing well financially. [The chapter has updated its sponsorship package for 2018](#), continuing to offer the expanded opportunities for sponsors to provide valuable programming and networking for INSPRA members that began in 2017. The Board has started soliciting 2018 sponsors, and we have locked up Blackboard as the Diamond Sponsor once again.

The INSPRA Board will meet a total of eight times during the 2017-2018 school year, including our June summer planning session and an August phone conference.

### **Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts:**

- INSPRA's annual Communications Contest and awards luncheon was held on September 15, 2017. INSPRA saw high engagement, consistent with levels of previous years, in all areas: contest entries, award recipients, and event attendees. We were excited to be welcoming Greg Turchetta, director of communications and community engagement at Collier County School District in Naples Florida to present on "Creating an Army of #Tweetchers," but Mr. Turchetta was unable to make it due to Hurricane Irma. INSPRA's very own Jennifer Delgado, communications supervisor for High School District 214, was able to step in and share a presentation on "The One-Day Campaign: Building Successful Twitter Engagement." It was followed by a panel hosted by 2017 Communications Contest Award of Excellence winners in the area of social media, who discussed best practices in an open forum with attendees. Both components were very well received amongst attendees.
  - As a new perk this year, the INSPRA Communication Contest Committee worked hard to link winning entries from the 2017 Communications Contest to INSPRA's website here: <http://www.inspra.org/CommunicationsContest.aspx>. INSPRA members are invited to peruse the winning entries linked there to get ideas to improve their school communications.
- INSPRA prides itself on its relationships with fellow NSPRA organizations. Many of our members have served as judges for the WSPRA and NYSPRA communications contests, and we consistently collaborate with other NSPRA organizations when asked.
- This year's lineup of programs and membership learning/networking opportunities include:

- [Seven “Tips & Tactics” professional development workshops](#) with an outstanding lineup of topics/speakers. The first session of the programming year was held on October 20, and we are excited for the remainder of the sessions, with highlights being NSPRA President Tom Delapp, APR, speaking on Connecting Schools & Communities in January, and Evaluating Communication Effectiveness with Sandy Cokeley, APR, of SCoPE in February.
  - Foundations Conference in February, which provides tips and expert speakers in the field of education foundations.
  - Distinguished Service Awards in May, a final program that honors those in education that support school communications and community engagement.
- INSPRA will once again be playing a higher-profile role in the Joint Annual Conference this November. The conference is co-hosted by the Illinois Association of School Boards, the Illinois Association of School Administrators and the Illinois Association of School Business Officials is also called “Triple I.” In addition to INSPRA members presenting at the conference, INSPRA will host a “help desk” to provide drop-in PR counseling sessions during the 3-day conference. At “PR Challenges – InsPRaSolutions,” three INSPRA members will be present each shift to serve as a resource for those districts that do not have PR professionals on staff, as well as for board members and administrative staff to learn from and bounce ideas off of seasoned school PR professionals. This began in 2016 and will continue this year, with more INSPRA members participating in the help desk and the help desk in a higher profile space at the conference.
- This year, INSPRA will seek to begin updating its strategic plan, as the current plan ends in 2018.
- This year, INSPRA will review its dues as they have remained unchanged for more than a decade, and changes to the pricing structure of our main meeting space will necessitate more revenue.

**Professional Development Programs/Activities:** In addition to what is listed above, INSPRA has several professional development programs and activities. Here are some examples.

- INSPRA has a very active “Member Needs Help” online professional development tool, whereby members can log on, post an issue, call for help, or question, and an email will be sent to all members seeking feedback. Members then give responses/feedback, and all members can see both the original question and the feedback to help them as they address similar issues.
- As a new perk to INSPRA members, we now offer the INSPRA Document Library in the Member Area of INSPRA’s website. In it, similar to the Communications Contest winning entries mentioned above, members can find communications examples and resources from INSPRA colleagues on a variety of topics that they can feel free to download and use as a starting point to help tackle the latest school PR problem or project. It is accessible in the Member Area of the INSPRA website, and INSPRA members are invited to email their best work to [INSPRA.socialmedia@gmail.com](mailto:INSPRA.socialmedia@gmail.com) to share with INSPRA colleagues!
- Regular [#INSPRAChat](#) Twitter Chat sessions on topics of interest to members. Typically held for an hour during lunch, these sessions allow participants to share ideas and

resources. INSPRA connects with other chapters on Twitter and encourages them to participate in the Twitter chats.

- INSPRA has a Mentor Program in place to connect those new to school PR with experienced members. This is a valuable professional development opportunity for both our new and established members.

### **Major Chapter Issues or Concerns:**

- The INSPRA Board struggles with balancing the volunteer time and effort required to allow the chapter to be so successful and valuable to members, particularly in ensuring that our messaging reaches members in a timely manner – and where they want to be reached.
- INSPRA employs an association management company to oversee chapter administration. A new administrator was assigned to INSPRA in 2016-17, and we are still working to ensure a smooth transition.

**Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support:** INSPRA would love to have more formal regional connections, either through a regional #NSPRAChat, or some other opportunity to connect beyond the NSPRA Seminar.

**State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On:** The State of Illinois continues to struggle financially, so school funding remains a black cloud that hangs over Illinois school districts.

### **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. We have introduced some new board members to the group (president, vice president, secretary, and membership chair) and each appear to be hitting the ground running with their position.

Our group doesn't meet all that often (usually just twice a year as an entire chapter), but our comradery and collegial relationships seem stronger than ever. We actively use a Google group to ask and share information; this has been beneficial for new and old members alike.

**Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts:** We have a few new board members this year and have outlined some areas for focus:

- 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.
- 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.

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.

**Professional Development Programs/Activities:** The Iowa chapter recently held their Fall conference (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 will “attend” 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 PR Power Hour, we will have a Zoom meeting to catch up and share information with one another.

Planning is now underway for our Spring awards night and conference, tentatively scheduled for April 19-20 in Des Moines. We hope to host Mr. DeLapp as part of our professional learning.

Finally, 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.

**Major Chapter Issues or Concerns:** 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:** The PR Power Hours for this year hold a lot of appeal for our group and I hope we can all get some takeaways from those learning sessions.

Personally, 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.

## **Minnesota School Public Relations Association (MinnSPRA)**

*Jake Sturgis, APR, chapter president*

**Chapter Well-Being:** Our membership is on target to remain steady with between 150 – 160 members. We held a referendum workshop in June that was incredibly successful. We are working to build relationships with other educational organizations within our state and offer more of our programming opportunities to them.

### **Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts:**

- June 2017 – More than 90 attendees at a referendum workshop which provided information to teams of people going to referendum or considering a referendum in the near future.
- October 2017 – More than 60 attendees at a workshop focusing on creating Gender Inclusive Schools. Joel Baum was the keynote for the day. We also had researchers from the University of Minnesota present information on local data.
- November 2017 – Our annual fall conference will take place on November 16 and 17. Our keynote speaker is Kim Lear who was the Tuesday keynote at the 2017 NSPRA Conference. We'll continue the discussion on generations.

**Professional Development Programs/Activities:** In addition to the items listed above, we offer opportunities for members to engage monthly in a “Coffee Chat” which is a 45 minute conversation about different school PR issues through web cams. This engages our members across the state who may have a problem commuting to a PD offering.

We just hosted a “Think and Drink” happy hour discussion focused on website accessibility. Representatives from SiteImprove were there to answer questions.

**Major Chapter Issues or Concerns:** Changing our sponsorship offerings to change with the needs of our vendors and members.

**Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support:** Continued support for emerging issues...national anthem, race relations, gender inclusivity, changing federal priorities.

More responsive phone calls/emails from NSPRA office. We've had members' voice concerns about the service they are receiving from the national office with a lack of record keeping, miscommunication and no communication issues.

## **Nebraska School Public Relation Association (NebSPRA)**

*Amanda Oliver, chapter president*

**Chapter Well-Being:** We continue to be an active chapter, but are slow-growing. We continue to have regular monthly meetings during the school year. Our members are engaged and active during meetings. We have great ideas but continue to have trouble putting the plans into action. A large portion of our school districts remain understaffed for their size of district so our members are on overload within their day-to-day jobs.

**Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts:** We continue efforts to get an annual conference and chapter awards up and running. We continue to collaborate with our local state administrators' organization as well as other state organizations on a number of our projects.

**Professional Development Programs/Activities:** We are trying to offer more 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:** Our members continue feeling very overworked. We also have several 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:** 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 be great to involve more principals, superintendents or others who have communication duties in our group. *How To*'s on creating a successful chapter conference.

**State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On:** Several initiatives for Charter Schools have made their way into the state legislature. So far we do not have any charter schools.

Funding concerns remain very real for many of our districts. The state has a shortfall they are trying to overcome, which will have a direct impact on education.

External sites like greatschools.org remain a HUGE concern. Their data is often wrong, outdated and doesn't give a whole picture of a particular school. What can we do to ensure information is accurate?

## **Wisconsin School Public Relations Association (WSPRA)**

*Sarah Heck, chapter president*

No report submitted.