

## Southwest Region Chapter Reports – November 2017

*Trent Allen, APR, Southwest Region Vice president*

*Senior Director of Community Relations, San Juan Unified School District, Carmichael, Calif.*

[trent.allen@sanjuan.edu](mailto:trent.allen@sanjuan.edu)

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### **General Overview**

Southwest Region chapters are off to a strong start this year with renewed growing memberships and renewed activity in some chapters.

### **Environmental Scan**

Chapters continue to experience membership growth overall with a marked increase in the number of new members who are advocates or freelance supporters of public education rather than working for school districts or other education institutions. Competition continues to be a hot topic as our members work to position their schools as quality options for students and families.

Professional development is strong within the Southwest Region with growing attendance at events and a renewed push in Colorado.

### **Outreach and Travel**

Arizona member Joseph Ortiz and I participated in NSPRA's October PR Power Hour focusing on engaging immigrant and refugee families. California's unprecedented wildfires that destroyed thousands of acres, hundreds of structures and took multiple lives struck hard. Working with the CalSPRA board, I was able to collect and distribute resources and work to connect members in need of assistance.

### **Arizona School Public Relations Association (ASPRA)**

*Kim Mesquita, chapter president*

**Chapter Well-being:** The Arizona School Public Relations Association (ASPRA) membership is strong. With more than 120 members, our organization continues to welcome new members across the state. With a slight increase in new districts becoming members, most new faces/new members are replacing a communication practitioner that left a school district currently associated with ASPRA. In addition, we seem to be getting more and more membership requests from organizations that are not associated with any school district in particular, but claim their efforts are to advocate for school districts.

The executive board plans to meet monthly – or more, if necessary. We currently have four professional development meetings set for the year. Those who are unable to attend and/or do not wish to travel to Phoenix will be able to livestream the meeting via BlueJean. In addition, we will have a two-day summer conference in June.

**Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts:** ASPRA currently has several committees working on various projects.

- ASPRA's Annual Award Luncheon – two separate committees are working on:
  - a) revising nomination criteria; and
  - b) award luncheon details, including the possibility of changing the luncheon from spring to fall.
- Membership – one committee is looking to revise membership descriptions, membership costs and the possibility of adding a business/outside organization membership. As well, the committee is looking to revise current vendor opportunities within the organization.
- Annual Winter Fundraiser – a committee is working with the Arizona School Boards Association to expand and improve communication efforts during ASBA's fall conference. This is an annual event ASPRA has supported over the past 20+ years.

**Professional Development Programs/activities:** Below is the schedule of meetings and topics:

- September 22 – How to utilize social media metrics & dealing with public records requests
- November 17 – Dealing with percolating school threats & insights on what's happening within your district
- February 9 – Advocating for Communications & Public Relations: success stories demonstrating your value to your executive team/district
- April 6 – Pitching stories in Arizona & the value of media monitoring

Additionally, members continue to use the listserv to pose questions on immediate issues or timely topics. Members report that conversations that occur via the listserv are the best professional development opportunities that we provide.

**Major Chapter Issues or Concerns:**

Memberships: Although we have a committee researching and reviewing our Bylaws relating to membership, we seem to be struggling with “who” actually qualifies to be a member. We seem to be getting more and more requests to become members from individuals that cause the executive board to have long conversations about granting their request. Is our organization inclusive or exclusive? Do we serve/support the actual school district PR practitioner only and/or do we include members who may not necessarily be associated with a particular school district, but claim to advocate for schools? What about the business rep/vendor? Besides monetarily, are they a benefit to our organization or are we a benefit to them? With all these requests, do we need to consider executive board seats and voting privileges are for some members but not for others?

I see this is a topic of discussion for the NSPRA Board and I look forward to hearing more about that conversation. Hopefully it will provide insight on how we can move forward with these types of requests.

Release of AZ school letter grades: The state had planned to release school letter grades in early October, but instead released preliminary letter grades to schools/districts. 108 districts (public & charter schools) had issues with their grades – whether they be associated with technical issues in reporting data or the formula the state used to determine the grades. Almost half the districts in the state are challenging their grades.

This causes complicated communication issues when sharing information with parents/community. Some districts have come out to report the state's formula is flawed, while others (who received glowing results) report how the formula is what's best for students to improve academically. As school communication professionals, we, at times, contradict each other.

**Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support:** Memberships and defining who qualifies (see above).

**State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On:** Passage of Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESAs). ESAs provide taxpayer money from the state's general fund to parents who opt to take their child out of a public school and send them to a private school. In 2011, the AZ Legislature created ESAs for students with special needs. It was the first such program in the nation. Legislators expanded eligibility from 115,000 students in 2011 to more than 250,000 in 2015. Since their inception, ESAs impact on the state budget has been \$99.7 million in funds drawn from the state general fund and provided to parents taking their child(ren) out of public schools.

Since AZ launched its program, Nevada, Florida, Mississippi and Tennessee entered the ESA arena with their own versions, one vastly more inclusive and others more restrictive. The AZ education community believes that Republican legislators and policymakers hope to eventually open ESAs to all students, chipping away at public school funding year after year.

### **California School Public Relations Association (CalSPRA)**

*Manny Rubio, chapter president*

**Chapter Well-Being:** CalSPRA membership finished 2016-17 with a membership of 334 with additional growth anticipated next year. The chapter's finances are strong with a significant balance of \$50,358 in reserve. Attendance at events continues to climb with 2017's annual seminar the largest ever with 166 registrants and sponsors.

**Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts:** CalSPRA's efforts to partner with other public relations and education related organizations continue with work to jointly host and promote events. The chapter has made inroads with local chapters of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), The California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO) and the California School Business Organization (CaSBO).

In addition, chapter President Manny Rubio presented to several graduate students in the School of Education at San Diego State University. This includes student in the Masters of Education program as well as the Administrative Credential Program.

**Professional Development Programs/Activities:** The 2017 annual conference was the largest in chapter history and featured several keynote speakers including California State Superintendent Tom Torlakson and Executive Director of Gender Spectrum, Joel Baum.

The 2018 conference is set for San Diego from March 1 – 3 and will feature a “new professional” session to precede the main event. The pre-session will feature CalSPRA Past-President Trinetta Marquis Hobbs, APR, and NSPRA President Tom DeLapp, APR.

CalSPRA’s Southern California region hosted an event on July 28 featuring NSPRA President Tom DeLapp, APR, with more than 50 participants in Arcadia, Calif., at the Arcadia Unified School District.

**Major Chapter Issues or Concerns:**

Growth: CalSPRA has been growing at a very significant rate. With a large membership and growing conference and regional events, the discussion of staffing the chapter or finding new ways to staff and plan events is a concern.

Charter Schools: With an increase in the charter movement, public schools in California have to find new and unique ways to market themselves and show their strengths when compared to other educational options.

**Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support**

- Chapter governance and staffing
- Diversity engagement

**State or Local Issues That NSPRA Should Keep an Eye On:**

- Immigration issues such as Dreamers and presence of federal agencies such as ICE, Homeland Security, Border Patrol, etc.
- Charter Schools
- School Start Times

**Colorado School Public Relations Association (COSPR)**

*Tammy Schiff, chapter president*

**Chapter Well-Being:** Chapter President Tammy Schiff reports the chapter is busily preparing for their upcoming conference set for Nov. 10 in Denver. The event will feature former Peel School Board communication leader Brian Woodland, APR, as well as a variety of other sessions. The chapter has undertaken a membership drive this fall and hopes to be able to report positive results soon.

CoSPRA's membership is active and stable with solid level of participation on the group's listserv. Chapter leadership has identified growing membership and engaging larger districts to more actively participate in activities as priorities.

The chapter plans to hold two large events this year, the fall conference on Nov. 10 and an awards ceremony in the spring.

Finances are stable and the board has been conducting regular meetings via web conference call which seems to be improving communications, collaboration and engagement of all board members in the work of running the chapter.

**Chapter Projects/Collaboration Efforts:** The chapter is focused on its fall conference and spring award events. We are also undertaking a new website on the Blackboard platform. This is a major project being led by a board member to improve our communications efforts and services for members.

CoSPRA collaborates with other chapters on judging for their annual awards programs and has made a concerted effort to reach out and invite neighboring state chapters (Nebraska, Wyoming, Arizona) and the Colorado Chapter of PRSA to the upcoming fall conference.

#### **Professional Development Programs/Activities:**

*Fall Conference:* CoSPRA will be holding our major event at Sports Authority Field thanks to our sponsor Blackboard who is underwriting the venue costs and holding their own vendor event the day before. The evening before the conference we are hosting a social evening in Denver so that attendees that need to travel in the night before can network and connect with other members in the Denver metro area.

The conference has 3 major parts:

- We've invited Brian Woodland, APR, former communications director for the Peel School District Board (that's Canadian for *school district*) to be our keynote speaker. Brian recently retired to thunderous applause in San Antonio at this summer's NSPRA conference. He's going to do two keynote presentations focused on communications work ("Reality TV" NSPRA presentation) and branding.
- Also including a lunch-n-learn about work/life balance with expert Tamara Moore from Relevel. Through her presentation we'll learn about seeing possibilities and taking an active role in creating our best selves.
- Finally, a panel discussion on Crisis Communications representing both private sector and public services. Panelists are from Webroot, Colorado State University, Boulder Valley School District and Safe-2-Tell.

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

*Member participation:* CoSPRA struggles with member engagement, response rates, sponsorships and volunteers to help on events and do other chapter work. All of the activities are currently being handled by the Board and we are grateful to them for doing so much work for the chapter. We must identify potential new board members to groom for future roles. We struggle with engaging leaders from the largest districts in our state.

**Issues or Areas That Could Use NSPRA Regional or National Support**

More opportunities/support to connect with other chapters on how they are planning activities, building membership, and engaging their membership. Our state is large and we rely on regional leadership to connect to rural areas, which is a constant challenge. Perhaps a quarterly call or meeting to bring people together from like kind chapters to share work and ideas?

**Utah School Public Relations Association (USPRA)**

*Kimberly Bird, chapter president*

No report submitted.