

TSPRA UPDATE



Texas School Public Relations Association  Promoting Texas Public Education Through Effective Communication

TSPRA UPDATE FOR SEPTEMBER 2008

Judy Farmer – TSPRA Executive Director

More than 50 TSPRA members attended the 55th annual National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) seminar in Washington, DC from July 6-9, 2008.

TSPRA President Brad Domitrovich accepted the 2008 NSPRA Blue Ribbon Chapter Award on Sunday afternoon during the Celebration of Achievement and Annual Meeting. The Blue Ribbon Chapter Award earns TSPRA a one-year 2008-2009 NSPRA professional membership and a coupon for \$100 off the expense of the 2009 NSPRA Seminar registration. Staci Stanfield produced this year's TSPRA's Blue Ribbon chapter entry portfolio. This will be the final year that the NSPRA Blue Ribbon Chapter award will be rewarded. Currently, NSPRA is investigating an alternate chapter recognition program which they hope to have it in place by next year.



TSPRA also had great representation at the podium during NSPRA. Skill Sessions were presented by Tim Carroll, Julie Thannum and Julie Zwahr. Cindy Randle, Amy Johnson, Angela Shelley, Emily Olson and LaDonna Conner provided a Special Session entitled "Pumping Up Your Podcasts" which was very well attended. Riney Jordan was the Wednesday morning General Session speaker, and Brad Domitrovich and myself facilitated a Chapter Best Practice Roundtable on Leadership Development. Several TSPRAns met for an informal dinner on Monday evening.

The 2009 NSPRA Seminar will be held in San Francisco from June 28 to July 1, and in Charlotte from July 11-14 in 2010. The NSPRA web site has all the details. In 2011, the NSPRA Seminar will be back on the Riverwalk in San Antonio from July 10-13! If you are interested in serving on the Regional Planning Committee, please contact me at the TSPRA Office or by e-mail to judy@tspra.org.

I hope to see many of you later this month in Dallas at the TASA-TASB Convention - and please don't forget to mark your planners to attend the TSPRA 2009 Conference in San Antonio!



Dr. Cathy Bryce - TSPRA's 2008 Key Communicator

The TSPRA Professional Awards Committee has chosen Dr. Cathy Bryce, Highland Park ISD Superintendent, as our 2008 Key Communicator. The Key Communicator recognizes Dr. Bryce's outstanding contributions to public education through effective communication. The selection committee noted that Dr. Bryce's educational career is solidly grounded in her con-

"If one morning, I walked on top of the water across the Potomac River, the headline would read PRESIDENT CAN'T SWIM".
- Lyndon B. Johnson -

September 2008

viction that all children deserve an outstanding education. While serving as the superintendent of one of the highest-performing public school districts for the past seven years, Dr. Bryce stays focused on the big picture and never loses sight of what is best for Texas: preparing all of its school children to become productive, responsible citizens who have the education and training to compete in the 21st century workplace.

Former Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Moses, who was the recipient of the Key Communicator award in 1998, remarked, "Dr. Bryce is an outstanding advocate for public schools and has the ability to dialogue with any audience about the successes as well as the needs of public education, a strong indicator of a key communicator."

Dr. Bryce will receive the Key Communicator Award at the Second General Session of the TASA/TASB Annual Convention at 10:30 AM on September 27, 2008. Sharon Schwartz of Burnet ISD, chairs the 2008 Professional Awards selection committee. Members of her committee included: Candace Ahlfinger, Pasadena ISD; C. Coleman, North Lamar CISD; Celia Longoria, San Benito CISD; Lynda Queen, Region 16 ESC-Amarillo, and Melissa Starnater, Desoto ISD.

Free Customer Service Workshop

Looking for ways to improve your school district's relations with your community? Are you aware of the level of customer service that your district employees are providing? Research shows that school district customer service can be improved by 40%.

By attending this two-hour session you will learn about simple, dynamic ways to establish measurable customer service policies and ensure that they are implemented. Participants will have the opportunity to share the struggles and victories of working with the public and discover steps enabling all employees to improve their daily routine and dramatically change their customer service environment. The public will notice - and common, repeated complaints will soon become welcome praise!

Jan Jordan of Turning Point Solutions (a TSPRA "Partner") will conduct the workshop at the Performing Arts Center of Hays CISD in Kyle on October 15th from 9:30 - 11:30 AM. Coffee and light refreshments will be provided. Register today for this complimentary and valuable session.



A Million Success Stories

Brad Domitrovich - TSPRA President, Bandera ISD

I began working on this article a couple of weeks ago. There I was, sitting at my desk on a Saturday - feeling sorry for myself that I was the only "schlep" working at the office that day. I was putting together a presentation for an upcoming Administrative Leadership Academy session at my district. Twelve aspiring administrators are going through a 14 month program, learning the various aspects of Bandera ISD's daily operations. I was given the opportunity to lead the first session of the year with them - focusing on school communications and public relations.



As I started making my list of what goes on in the life of this average school PR guy, the sorrow I was feeling for myself by putting in another Saturday at the office, turned into a blinding glimpse of the obvious! The reason all of us put in those odd hours, work those late nights, and drink lots of caffeine is simple - **the only thing that is predictable about life is its unpredictability.** I was working that Saturday because I didn't know (as much as I tried to plan) what was going to really happen!

I didn't know that we would have a bus wreck on the second day of school. I didn't know that an elementary school would lose its water supply for an extended period of time. I didn't know I would need to be away from the office and tele-commute at times because I was needing to look after a sick loved one. I didn't know, I didn't know, I just didn't know.

Isn't this what all of us deal with? No matter what size district you are in, a TSPRA member earns their pay each and every day. We deal with the big stuff pretty easily, but it seems most of our time is consumed by the trivial. Those little mosquitoes that keep buzzing around your head annoying you to no end. You know that one good swat will end your problem, but all your training tells you: diplomacy - diplomacy!

Fast forward one week. Hurricane Ike. Several

districts around the San Antonio area are having to set up shelters. We're wondering if Bandera ISD will get the call also? I try contacting some of my TSPRA friends in the Houston area. Are they OK? Are their families OK?

Fast forward another week. Many schools in Ike's path are still not open; TSPRAs living there are still waiting for insurance adjusters to put a dollar amount on their personal loss; I'm still needing to telecommute from time to time.

Fast forward one more week. I finally have the opportunity to sit down and finish this article. Guess what? It's another Saturday. As I look back at what I started writing a few weeks ago, I realize that I have come full circle. Remember that presentation I talked about. Guess what I focused on? Positive school PR. I focused on why it was important to keep student success in the eyes of our public. I focused on why everyone needs to know that teachers do make a difference. I focused on the human aspect of education. After all, isn't that what's really important?

Even though life is unpredictable, even though life doesn't always go as planned ... isn't it great to experience all the joy that life has to offer us? **Life is truly a precious gift.** I'm proud to say that "There's A Million Success Stories Every Day!" and I am even more proud to be one of those people that can share the stories with others.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as TSPRA President. I look forward to a great year and a great conference thanks to the assistance of some really talented people.

Brad Domitrovich

We Are "Growing Graduates"

Lisa Winters – CTPS Chair, Kerrville ISD

The theme for this year's Celebrate Texas Public Schools Campaign is "Growing Graduates: Texas Public Schools Plant Seeds For Success" and this Texas public school graduate is growing up to be a talented graphic designer!



Ashley Brondo is a 2008 graduate of Tivy High School in Kerrville. Growing up in Kerrville ISD, Brondo finished as a valued member of the Tivy High School band and accomplished school artist. Ashley was discovered by TSPRA in spring 2008 after Brondo won a highly competitive Career and Technology Scholarship in Graphic Arts.

Inspired by her Digital Graphics teacher Belinda Medellin, Ashley easily transferred her naturally artistic talents to the industry of graphic design. Medellin stopped by the Kerrville ISD Central Office one day to finalize the scholarship award and I asked her about the student that had captured so much attention. Could this be a student that could assist in a TSPRA campaign?

Several months later, when I began working on the CTPS campaign and met Ashley through her



teacher, I spotted some remarkable art pieces in her portfolio. I knew then and there that Brondo was the perfect partner for TSPRA's Celebrate Texas Public Schools campaign. After all, with the "Growing Graduates" theme in mind, Brondo was a graduate that was growing toward success in rapid fashion.

Our campaign will feature local public school students, teachers, staff, and graduates that had grown (or were growing) toward success and, thanks to Ashley, the most important seed in the campaign scheme was planted. Every element of 2009 CTPSW logo is a Brondo original. Every element is a freehand, originally created concept.

All of us in TSPRA need to congratulate this successful public school graduate as we await news of her continued success! Ashley will be recognized at the TSPRA 2009 Conference in San Antonio during one of the scheduled lunches. In a final note, Ashley has entered Schreiner University after receiving a full four-year scholarship. She will pursue a degree in graphic design.

Throughout this year, our TSPRA Area Vice-Presidents and their members will provide content, stories, and tips for us to enjoy in our upcoming newsletters. Working our way across the State and starting with the Gulf Coast Area (Regions 1, 2, 3) – we present our first series of articles and bright ideas.

Don't Overlook The Power Of One On One

Mark May – TSPRA Area Vice-President, McAllen ISD

The other day I was waiting to meet a reporter in the front office area of one of our elementary schools. A parent approached me and asked if I was an administrator for that campus. I replied that I was from Central Office but 'how could I help,' I said.

There was a TV crew in the school parking lot and she wanted to tell someone in case no one knew they were there. I thanked her and said that actually I was the one expecting them. I went on to add that we had a teacher nominated for State Teacher of the Year and the TV crew was here to do a story about her. Imagine that! A TV crew coming out to produce a positive news piece on public schools. That's a story for another column but meanwhile, the parent became very excited to hear that such an illustrious teacher was right here at her child's campus.

Hopefully, that parent went on to tell someone else who told someone else, and you know the rest. While we are all well-versed in getting out messages on mass-media platforms, don't overlook the power of communicating one on one.

You know how currents in the middle of the ocean can appear small and subtle but by the time they hit the shore as a wave, they are quite large? Communication works the same way.

Anytime you are in line at the bank, attending a social gathering or just trying to kill time before a meeting, use the opportunity to strike up a conversation and casually drop in a few tidbits

about your schools. I've used this technique just before board meetings. Parents who attend board meetings are generally there because their child is being recognized or they are upset about something. If they are of the upset variety, a casual conversation that starts off about the big game this weekend and winds its way toward school news can sometimes dim down those ill feelings.

As strong as the web and other resources like newsletters and TV productions are, there is still a bit of a dis-connect. **One On One** lends that personal touch. When you make eye-contact with someone, trust develops. People feel like they are getting the inside dope so to speak because it's something they haven't heard.

This is even effective with school employees who often have tunnel vision trained only on their campus or department. Do your counselors know that the business office got a superior rating from the state? Does staff in Human Resources know that a teacher was recognized by the region? Take the time when waiting in the lobby for a meeting to chat up some of these items with the receptionist. Receptionists speak to a lot of people on a given day.

With parents or community members you can drop in things like "I understand our bus fleet added some new buses with modern safety features" or "I really like how the teachers here mix reading with technology" or even "I just heard we had two National Merit Scholars."

Although **One On One** isn't something you can afford to do all day, a little time invested at opportune moments can make a big splash at the end.

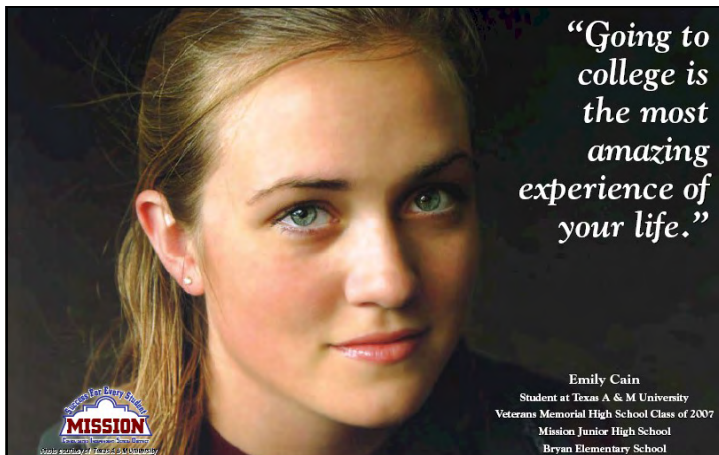
Personalized College Awareness Posters Paying Off

Craig Verley, Mission CISD

How do you contribute toward the superintendent's college readiness initiatives and support campus efforts to create and grow a college-going culture, beginning in the elementary schools? That was a question the Mission CISD public relations department was trying to answer this year. The an-



swer came one day while visiting a high school campus and it was noticed that all the college related recruiting materials seemed so generic. It was agreed that their messages were probably not geared to really reaching the students of Mission CISD, which is 97 percent Hispanic and college is often thought of as unattainable, or not even an economically feasible option.



“Going to college is the most amazing experience of your life.”

Emily Cain
Student at Texas A & M University
Veterans Memorial High School Class of 2007
Mission Junior High School
Bryan Elementary School

The result was creating a series of posters using recent Mission CISD graduates who were academic role models that spoke to more than just the academics of college. The first step was to create a short questionnaire that was designed to elicit thoughtful responses about different aspects of college life and what it meant to the student. Once that was done, staff reached out to many of the top five percent of the previous graduating class, while trying to get a good spread of colleges, both local and out of state. About ten students agreed to partici-

partate in the project and they were sent the questionnaire.

Once the students were on board, the district PR staff reached out to the PR staff at the college student’s campus. The goal was to have the college’s professional photographers arrange to take casual pictures of the students in a setting that screamed college or their particular university. Each college agreed to participate and did not charge for their services. They realized that this would be free publicity for them and would support our efforts.

Once the pictures arrived and the students sent in their questionnaires, posters were created using a quote from the students. There were so many great pictures and quotes about different aspects of college life, that a series of posters was created. Throughout the school year another batch of posters will be released with a different pose of each student and a different quote. In addition to the quote, the following information is included: the student’s name, their college, the high school attended, the junior high attended (if within the district) and the elementary school attended (if within the district).

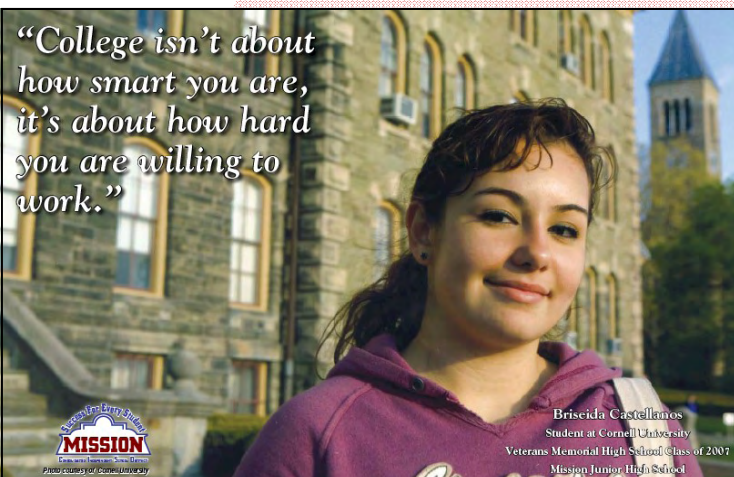


“You do so many new things (in college) and meet a lot of new people.”

Rogers Brown
Student at Texas Lutheran University
Mission High School Class of 2007



The response has been very positive from the campuses to the first batch of posters. In fact, we have also created bookmarks with the student picture and information on one side with a longer quote about college life on the back.



“College isn’t about how smart you are, it’s about how hard you are willing to work.”

Briseida Castellanos
Student at Cornell University
Veterans Memorial High School Class of 2007
Mission Junior High School

The district’s cable TV channel has asked for the poster images so they can be included in on air graphics. Several principals have indicated the posters have prompted questions about college from students and parents. Administrators are also using the posters to tie in with other initiatives they have to build a college-going culture.

TSPRA Document Vault

Julie Jerome – TSPRA President-Elect, Hays CISD

The first day of school, a knife is found in a student's backpack and one of your middle school principals needs a letter to send home to parents in English and Spanish. Fast! One of your elementary students is involved in a fatal vehicle accident over the weekend. Who can find the words to express the grief or deliver the comfort needed for fellow students and parents? You must!

A band booster president urgently needs some answers - preferably policy - about gift management. Drug testing is being discussed in your district and you have been asked to produce some sample policies. Your brand, shiny new Education Foundation wants you to initiate an annual fundraising drive, yet you don't know where to begin. What do you do?

Nearly 200 letters to parents, in both English and Spanish, on topics ranging from death of a teacher to bomb threat, reside in TSPRA's Document Vault. The Education Foundation link has more than 30 annual reports, annual drive sponsorship letters, and fundraising collateral. The policies/procedures link contains nearly 30 documents, from media guidelines to board agenda templates. Examples of more than 30 invitations to the events we annually pull off live in the Vault.

TSPRA's Document Vault allows subscribers to view/use a bank of current documents dealing with important school public relations issues, resolutions, speeches and communiqués. The documents represent efforts by school districts throughout the state. TSPRA members, as well as superintendents from smaller districts that don't have PR staffs, download the documents for their use.

These documents can serve as inspiration for new

communication pieces when dealing with similar situations or can be used as templates. The documents are made available as either pre-formatted Microsoft Word documents or Adobe Acrobat documents.

TSPRA's 2008-2010 Strategic Plan lays out initiatives to improve the Document Vault, including: a periodic review of the documents, a baseline survey and then annual survey about the types of documents in the Vault and how much TSPRA members use it, and an internal and external campaign to increase usage rates. TSPRA members routinely present on the Document Vault at TASA/TASB Annual Conference, Summer Leadership Institute, and TASA Midwinter.

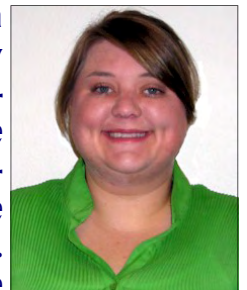
So, feel free to upload some of your documents. Take a perusal through the Vault to see if there is something you need, or like I did just an hour ago, look for a letter in English and Spanish to modify and send home to parents ... it's as easy as a summer afternoon!

A New Face At TSPRA

Judy Farmer – TSPRA Executive Director

TSPRA has a new administrative assistant in the Austin office. Her name is Lesly Peveto. She is a UT-Austin graduate and has previously worked for the Texas Department of Transportation, the Texas Classroom Teachers Association, and the Austin Police Department as a 911 Call Taker. It's pretty certain that she will be able to handle any emergency call that comes in to the TSPRA office!

Lesly also worked for a year as a high school Spanish teacher and Drill/Dance Team Director in Silsbee ISD. She has some familiarity with Texas public education, which is a big help to this office! She is catching on quickly, and we expect her to be a strong asset to our team. Welcome her on board the next time you call your state office.





TSPRA 2009 Conference February 15-18 in San Antonio

Plans are well underway for the upcoming TSPRA Conference - "There's A Million Success Stories Everyday!". We have received many ideas and suggestions for our conferences, and hopefully the Conference Committee will be able to meet the needs of everyone's request.

Here are a few of the things that have been planned. Two out of three Key-note Speakers have been confirmed. TSPRA legend and nationally recognized humorist and motivational speaker **Riney Jordan** will wrap up our first General Session. **Trish DeBerry**, Partner and President of Guerra-DeBerry-Coody Marketing and Communications will highlight our second General Session.



Since the theme of our conference is on those "Million Success Stories" in Texas public education - you will see a magnificent presence of high achieving students in San Antonio. Performances have been confirmed by two award winning music groups: the Harlandale High School Mariachi Band and the Bandera High School Jazz Ensemble.

Two Pre-Conference sessions will be held: "Boot Camp" and "APR Insights". Sign-Up dinners will be arranged on both Sunday and Monday nights, with a special excursion to the San Antonio Riverwalk planned for Monday night.

A few other additions to the conference line-up include: a special time for mentoring and learning about leadership opportunities in TSPRA; the TSPRA BiStro (yes the S is supposed to be capitalized); a series of IOI sessions on school finance, personnel issues, legal issues, testing/assessment, and others; the addition of Education Foundation sessions into the Tuesday line-up; the inclusion of

PR sessions into the Wednesday line-up; and more.

We hope that you will make your plans now to be with us in San Antonio. Check the TSPRA web site for hotel information and planned additions to our conference speakers and sessions.

Rumor Has It

Brad Domitrovich – TSPRA President, Bandera ISD

Since I was sworn in as President last February in Houston, many people have been swearing at me ... only kidding! But I have received a lot of questions and comments and I thank everyone for their input. Here are a few of the questions that I feel have the most interest among our membership regarding TSPRA and our operations.

I heard that a new strategic plan was developed this summer, how come I haven't seen it? *The TSPRA Strategic Planning Committee met in June to evaluate and suggest improvement to the previous plan. The 2008–2010 Strategic Plan will be presented to the Executive Committee for approval on September 26th. If approved, it will be released through the Area VP's and the TSPRA State Office.*

Why does the conference keep moving? Why did we leave Austin? *Several years ago the Executive Committee decided to hold the conference in Austin during non-legislative years due to the better contracts we can make with the hotels. That is why there has been a two year hiatus from the Capital City. We went to Houston in 2008, going to San Antonio in 2009, and will be back in Austin for 2010.*

I heard that because of budget cuts in the school industry, TSPRA membership has been dropping. Is this true? *TSPRA's membership level for the past year was very strong. We had 856 members at the conclusion of 2007–2008: 485 Professional members, 76 Associate members, 55 Institutional Professional members, 86 Institutional Associate members; 55 Education Foundation Professional members, 8 Education Foundation Associate members, 41 Education Foundation Institutional Group members, 12 Affiliate members, 36 Retired members, and 2 Honorary members.*

Are TSPRA's finances in good shape? *Yes. For the fourth consecutive year, TSPRA has ended the year with a positive financial surplus. The Audit Committee just reviewed the 2007–2008 numbers which showed a net income for the organization of \$15,994. Your Area VP's will receive a copy of the Audit Committees report on September 26th. Ask them to share this info with you at your next area meeting.*

I really want to serve TSPRA, but nobody has called me to volunteer. How can I help? *If you look on the TSPRA web site you will see a listing of this year's Committee Chairs. I don't know of one of them who wouldn't say "YES" to you wanting to serve. If you are uncertain on what a committee does or how much time will be involved, contact me at (830) 796-6204 and I will be glad to help.*

Who do I contact if I know of someone who wants to be a sponsor or a vendor for our conference? *Contact Judy Farmer and she will get a sponsorship package out to them. Referrals from TSPRA members are the best ways to secure sponsorship.*

TSPRA 2008-2009 Executive Committee Members

President

Brad Domitrovich, Bandera ISD

President Elect

Julie Jerome, Hays CISD

Immediate Past President

Christy Willman, Lamar CISD

Executive Director

Judy Farmer, TSPRA

VP - Gulf Coast Area

Mark May, McAllen ISD

VP - Houston/Beaumont Area

Mike Keeney, Aldine ISD

VP - East Texas Area

Roxan DeRosier, North Lamar ISD

VP - North Central Area

Terry Morawski, Mansfield ISD

VP - West Central Area

Bob Massey, Killeen ISD

VP - Central Area

Donald Williams, Bastrop ISD

VP - Northwest Texas Area

Linsae Snider, Frenship ISD

VP - Far West Area

Laura Cade, Clint ISD

VP - San Antonio

Sean Hoffmann, Judson ISD

VP At-Large, Position 1

Karen Permetti, Lewisville ISD

VP At-Large, Position 2

Lynn Kaylor, Flour Bluff ISD

Chairman Education Foundation Division

Karolyn Gephart, Friendswood ISD

Parliamentarian

Candace Ahlfinger, Pasadena ISD

Help TASB Celebrate 60 Years

TASB will be celebrating its 60th Anniversary in 2009 and is seeking assistance from TSPRA members to provide historical photos with cut lines from their school districts. Old yearbooks from 1949 would be a good starting point because they might have captions. Of course, TASB will take whatever you have to offer and try to use your contribution somewhere. TASB is envisioning pictures that capture kids in dungarees, cheerleaders in long skirts, teachers in fancy dresses, school buses, and the like. Buildings will be of interest if they are sixty years old and are no longer being used by the school district. If you can help with this project, please send your captioned photos to TASB in care of Barbara Williams at barbara.williams@tasb.org.



Important TSPRA Dates

September 26

- TSPRA Executive Committee Meeting, Hyatt Hotel in Dallas

September 26,27,28

- TASA/TASB Convention, Dallas Convention Center

October 15

- Customer Service Awareness Session, Hays CISD

October 31

- Deadline – TSPRA Membership Due Renewals
- Deadline – Star Awards Entries



TEXAS SCHOOL PUBLIC
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