

TSPRA UPDATE



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

TSPRA's 2008-10 Strategic Plan

Julie Jerome, Hays CISD, TSPRA President-Elect

If you hold TSPRA's 2008-10 Strategic Plan next to your ear, listen closely and use your imagination, you can hear a heartbeat. Not really, but with a little attention from all of us, we can keep TSPRA's Strategic Plan a living, breathing, active document that serves the entire membership.

An eight-member team of TSPRA members developed the 2008-10 Strategic Plan over the course of the summer using a different approach than in years past. We began the effort with the results of a membership SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) survey. We changed the format of the Plan to reflect a district's strategic plan. We rewrote the executive director's job description and evaluation instrument so they are direct products of the Plan, much like a superintendent's evaluation is tied to the strategic plan in our districts at home.



Area vice presidents now have a copy of the Plan, plus an accompanying communications plan and fact sheet to assist with rolling it out to membership at the regional meetings. TSPRA's Strategic Plan will be a standing item on every Executive Committee agenda, with agenda items tied to specific goals. The Plan will be presented again to the general membership at TSPRA's annual conference in February.

The Plan itself has been streamlined from five goals to three: improve financial stability and organizational health and establish the organization as a leader at the local, regional, state and national levels. Each initiative/activity of each objective in the Plan lists individual(s) responsible and a date for accomplishing it.

Though it isn't a goal, communication is a theme throughout the entire plan, a response to concerns of weak communication expressed in the SWOT survey. For example, Objective 6 of Goal 1 states, "Communicate finances to general membership," and lists four activities. Six activities are listed under Goal 2, Objective 1: Improve internal communication. Also in the spirit of improved communication, we have developed a communications plan for the Strategic Plan. The goal is to "effectively communicate the job and value of TSPRA to members by keeping the Strategic Plan a living document referenced by all members." Strategies and tactics include: discussion at regional meetings, including it in the Document Vault and on the TSPRA web site, and em-

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*"In your thirst for knowledge,
be sure not to drown in all the information."
- Anthony J. D'Angelo -*

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phasis on the relationships and roles of the State Office and membership, the value of the organization's goals and the ties between the Plan and the organization's budget.

Though well worth the effort, keeping the Strategic Plan alive will take all of us. We're off to an excellent start because it's a solid instrument. It's just the beginning, though. To remain vibrant, it will need review, some modifications, and most of all, our attention.

TSPRA Update for November

Judy Farmer, TSPRA, Executive Director

Are you aware that TSPRA has a professional networking opportunity already available in the Members Only Section of the TSPRA website? Have you ever visited the Discussion Forums? This section is an ideal place to post questions or topics to which you want answers and responses from other TSPRA members. Current topics posted include: Changes in Calculating High School GPA, Roll Back Elections, Parent Notification Systems; Strategic Communications Plans and Paraprofessional Recognition.



Some of the topics have been posted for a while but responses would still be useful. We can list new topics or expand on the current ones already posted. Just let us know if you have a burning topic for which you are seeking input.

I encourage you to not just view the topics and questions but to also post a response. Everyone's time is valuable, and you may be able to only check the Forum once a week or so. But I expect you will find solutions for some of your nagging questions if you network with your colleagues through this easy connection.

Be sure to upload your photo to the on-line membership directory. It's easy to do with simple

instructions under Edit My Membership Profile. Especially for new members, it's a great opportunity to introduce yourself to the current membership and be recognized at TSPRA events, especially the annual conference. For veterans, consider how helpful it will be to new members to be able to put a face with a name when they meet you for the first time. Also check off the topics of interest in your profile. This will give you another opportunity to easily contact TSPRA members who also are interested in the same or similar topics or who share the same job responsibilities.

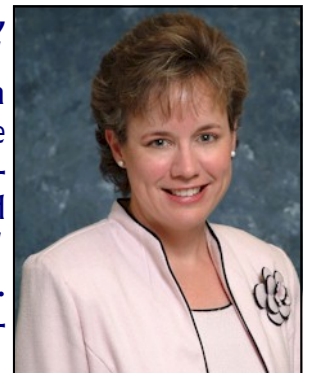
I also hope you have noticed the new events calendar on the home page. If you click on New and Reports and go to the TSPRA Calendar, you can view a three-month period of upcoming TSPRA activities and special holidays. There also is a link in the Welcome text on the home page to the three-month calendar view.

If you have questions about the new features or other parts of the website, please feel free to contact the TSPRA office at info@tspra.org or 512-474-9107.

Executive Committee Recap

Kari Hutchison, Comal ISD, Acting Parliamentarian

Your TSPRA executive committee meets three times a year - during the annual conference, in June, and during the TASA/TASB annual convention in the Fall. The following are highlights from the September 26 board meeting held in Dallas during the TASA/TASB annual convention. They are not written to replace the official minutes.



TSPRA is financially sound. It was reported that for the fourth year in a row, the association has ended the year with a net revenue. For the year ended August 31, 2008, the net revenue was almost \$16,000. More than \$85,000 is currently invested in money markets and COD deposits.

Three past presidents - Cindy Randle, Julie Thannum, and Julie Zwahr - made a short presentation. Their comments and ideas were appreciated and covered many facets of concern from membership services, to increased transparency, to enhanced communication and calling on past presidents for additional help and advice. A few of the suggestions included appointing the Past Presidents' Council chairperson as a voting member of the Executive Committee. This would include an approved bylaws change. They asked that the board review the 2005 strategic plan and report to members on its progress and make sure the 2008 strategic plan has an action plan to ensure accountability. The board voted to refer the report to the Past Presidents' Committee, chaired by Pascual Gonzalez, for further review and suggestions on implementation.

During the executive director's report, Judy Farmer explained how San Antonio's selection as the site of the 2011 NSPRA conference was decided by NSPRA and not in consultation with TSPRA. The committee is excited about the opportunity, however, and a TSPRA committee will be formed soon to begin working with NSPRA.

Judy Farmer and Brad Domitrovich were congratulated on the return of TSPRA's newsletter, "Update." It was recently e-mailed to all members. For an archive of news and newsletters check out TSPRA's website and look under NEWS and REPORTS.

The regional vice presidents provided reports on all of their activities since June. Several of them have been holding regional meetings with members that feature guest speakers. They communicate with their regional members through emails and/or newsletters.

After discussion and suggested changes, the 2008-10 Strategic Plan was approved by the Executive Committee. An activity that was added to the plan that was developed by a separate committee in June, is to create an ad-hoc committee to evaluate online communication tools. Terry Morawski from North Texas has agreed to chair the committee.

Members are in for a terrific professional devel-

opment experience during the 2009 TSPRA conference in San Antonio, Feb. 15-18. The theme is "a Million Success Stories Every Day" and field trips for video/web members, vendor sessions, the return of regional meetings, group sessions based on school district size or specialty, numerous student performances, and an action-packed Education Foundation day make up this exciting conference. Look for more details soon on the website!

This year's "Celebrate Texas Public Schools" theme is "Growing Graduates: Texas Public Schools Plant Seeds for Success" and was developed by a recent graduate of Kerrville Tivy High School. This year the kit will be available for download from the TSPRA website and not in print format.

Enthusiasm is Contagious!

Brad Domitrovich, Bandera ISD, TSPRA President

In addition to being a proud TSPRA member, I am also a card carrying member of AARP. Don't laugh! I get great discounts on my house and car insurance! In that vein, I am certainly considered old by those twenty and thirty something's who have embraced the many forms of social media that is available today.

In order to better understand the strategies that I will need to communicate with that next era of parents and community members, I have been doing a lot of reading and studying on the subject of the new media, synaptic connections, and the stimuli that will influence the ongoing evolution between people and the technology that they use.



A couple of weeks back, I finished a book on the new brain and how the modern age is rewiring your mind. Although this book was full of intriguing concepts such as mod-

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ern imaging techniques, brain plasticity, and genetic mapping - it was the review of emotional contagion that really struck gold with me. As PR people, it is a concept that many of us deal with on a daily basis.

Emotional contagion is when negative emotions exert a more powerful effect in social situations than positive ones. Our brains are powerful tools. They are stimulating machines designed to detect and respond to a wide range of intentions on the part of other people. Make sense? PR folks deal with negative emotions from irate taxpayers, disgruntled employees, and overzealous reporters pretty much every day. Our quest for keeping a positive perspective or putting the right spin on an issue is what makes our job fulfilling and keeps our bosses happy. It is hard to stay positive at times but it is something that all of us do. With negativity flying at us at the speed of light, we all need to work overtime to control and monitor our own behavior or else we will simply respond and react to the behavior of others.

So why did emotional contagion strike gold with me? It reminded me of a fortune cookie I received after eating lunch at my favorite restaurant in Bandera (*Yes Virginia, there is Chinese food in the Cowboy Capital*). The fortune said three simple words: "Enthusiasm is contagious". Doesn't that explain emotional contagion all so simply? The more enthusiastic we are, the better we are at our jobs. The more enthusiastic we are, the easier it is to discount negativity. The more enthusiastic we are, the easier it is to get along with others. It is all so complex, yet it is all so simple.

In the last few months of my term, I look forward to working with you and meeting new friends. A great team of TSPRA veterans and rookies are putting together an annual conference based on many of the wishes of the membership and in doing so - providing a truly spectacular professional development opportunity for all of us. Thank you for allowing me to serve as TSPRA President. I hope that everyone enjoys a terrific Thanksgiving break.

Hurricane Ike, Lessons Learned

Candace Ahlfinger, Pasadena ISD, TSPRA Parliamentarian

Ike was an excellent teacher! In spite of the lessons learned from Katrina, Rita, and Gustav, there was something new to be gained from his arrival. Lamar CISD's Christy Willman kept their staff informed via the email system throughout the storm. Providing daily updates via email and on the web page were very helpful. Unfortunately, many people lost power for weeks, but neighbors were often able to share information with them.



In Pasadena ISD, Pasadena High School Principal Chris Bolyard started a blog for his staff so that they could find out how their staff members were and have a way to share and express themselves. Using an automated phone system was also important for districts affected by Hurricane Ike. It was essential that parents and staff were notified when school was closing and when it would reopen. In addition, many districts kept their answering machines updated daily and routed all phones to a central number so that every caller received the same information in both Spanish and English and other languages as necessary.

One very important point to mention concerning technology is to have a back-up plan and multiple layers of redundancy. Lamar CISD hosted an emergency website (with their same web address) at an off-site location. This step guaranteed that the "ghost" site would remain on line and could be updated throughout the storm even if power was lost.

Districts also need to have multiple ways to get substantiated closing (and opening) information to media sources. Many PIO's were without power and/ or Internet. In addition, many of the media's websites were not working so that "old-fashioned phone calls" were the only reliable way of getting through. Even after media had correct information, PIO's were reminded to check, recheck, and recheck that the information the media was posting was correct. For some reason, the

information sometimes changed without new data from the district or did not reflect changes that were made.

Another piece of useful planning is to take care of your staff before and after the event. Many districts made arrangements to get paychecks to their employees - both direct deposit and actual checks - before closing for the hurricane to ensure that staff members had enough funds to evacuate if necessary. This step was a very positive morale booster wherever it was utilized. Keeping in touch with staff throughout the time off was very important also. E-mail, web pages, and an employee phone answering service were used by various districts to keep staff members informed as details were known.

Staff members and students need time and direction to share their experiences. Every person is affected by and deals with trauma differently. Many staff members needed additional time off



to take care of homes that were severely damaged and knowing that their employers were understanding did much to help their spirits and their district loyalty.

As staff members returned to school, they were encouraged to share their experiences to "debrief" before facing their students and helping them to deal with the same challenges.

TSPRA members were lifelines to many PIO's in the area. From e-mail discussions to communicate updated school information in the area to TSPRAs in the Valley helping reach media sources there to let employees and parents know that school was "re-starting," the network of friends and colleagues proved, as always, to be invaluable.

Perhaps the biggest lessons learned from Ike were the personal ones. As Mark Kramer, Pasadena ISD Communications Specialist shared, "My family and I learned to never, ever take even the littlest things for granted. Just a few miles south of

our home, the storm surge wiped out most of the houses in the small community. After driving through there, we realized things could have been much, much worse. We still had a home intact, those folks lost everything. The little luxuries we enjoy are just that."

Indeed, through Ike and its aftermath, as we watched others struggle with loss of power, water, homes and lives, the reminder for us all is that we are truly the fortunate ones because we have our families, our friends and our lives.

Heading Off Negative PR with Positive Campaign

Roxan DeRosier, North Lamar ISD, TSPRA Vice-President

Sitting at my computer trying to start this article with ... This is an exciting time of year in the school business ... then I thought, who are you trying to fool? When is it not exciting to work with students, teachers, administrators, and the community? Lots of excitement fills the air with the beginning of a school year: homecoming, planning our education foundation fundraiser and our high school fall drama production.

For instance, let's take the high school fall drama production. A group of staff and parents met to discuss a possible choice for the fall production, **URINETOWN** the Musical. There were many reasons to produce the show: the award-winning music and book, students whose talents matched the characters, and the timely themes. But the question on everyone's mind was, "How do you sell tickets to a musical with such a shocking title?" The local newspaper blog had already received some negative comments about such an "appalling" production for the high school. After considering a number of approaches, the group finalized an



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outlined advertising campaign, "Blue & Gold Make Green" that would educate the audience about the environmental theme of the show. The campaign included several "green" projects the URINETOWN cast would create. "Very clever!" we thought. "Students will do service projects that can double as free marketing!"

As important ideas tend to do, the "green" marketing approach began to grow. Why not expand beyond the cast and include all students in the high school? Wait! What about the entire district? And the community! Excitement grew as we realized what began as a self-serving marketing campaign was growing into something bigger and self actualizing for our students and community. Thus, NLISD's "green" project was born. And what a beautiful baby! The project has taken on "a life of its own" as North Lamar ISD students, staff, and administration feed it with their creativity and passion for Mother Earth.

What started as a way to avoid a PR nightmare about a high school drama production has become a PR dream about great things happening in our school district. Numerous green projects are evolving because of this campaign. A teacher



submitted the title "Blue & Gold Make Green" because our school colors are blue and gold and we are going green, and the logo for our campaign was student generated.

Students are learning about the environmental effects of waste and educating the community about carbon footprints. Grade-level team video projects to be viewed prior to the high school production of URINETOWN the Musical are the focus of others on campus. Speech students are giving environmental presentations to community service organizations and our campuses are recycling paper, cardboard, newspaper, and plastic.

While controversial issues frequently attract attention, they can attract the wrong kind of attention. A well

planned PR campaign can increase recognition and exposure. Keep your eyes and ears open and always be ready to put a positive spin to your public relations. URINETOWN the Musical started out as the high school fall production that was getting bad blogs in the local newspaper but placing a positive spin on the production has created some of the best district public relations I have experienced.

Get Ready for Boot Camp!

Helen Williams, Highland Park ISD, Boot Camp Co-Chair

So you're the new communications director? Congratulations! Now what? The first year at any job is a challenge. The first job as a school pr professional is trial by fire - and on camera! So don't go it alone.

Come to TSPRA's boot camp, an afternoon workshop full of great advice about surviving that first year. You'll hear stories from the front line, along with tips on avoiding the mine fields that so many of us have navigated over the years.

Workshop topics will include: Your role as director, customer service, writing like a pr pro; media; web and new media; open records; and elections

Boot camp will be led by Mesquite ISD Communications Director Laura Jobe, Cambridge Communications Strategist Sarah Stephenson, and Highland Park ISD Communications Director Helen Williams.



We won't spoil any war stories here, but among the three of them, these drill sergeants have put in more than a few years in the fields of journalism, corporate public relations and public school communications.

The session will be from 1:00-4:30 PM on Sunday, February 15th. The cost is a bargain at \$75. Sign up now, and the boot camp leaders will contact you to see if there are additional topics you would like to see covered that aren't already on the list. This is your chance to meet other new members and get ahead of the game.

Help TSPRA Get Social!

Terry Morawski, Mansfield ISD, TSPRA Vice-President

If you haven't noticed, there is a communications revolution going on. The implications to school public relations are tremendous. The revolution I speak of is Social Media.

So, what is social media, anyway? Social media is a general term for the many tools out there designed to help individuals connect, collaborate and share. Many businesses are now harnessing



these tools, and with great results. The media often chooses to depict these tools (Facebook and YouTube, for example) as negative.

Think of how many in the media choose to depict your school district negatively on a regular basis. Social media gives you a chance to speak directly to your public. It's hard to argue this ability is invaluable.

So, why is TSPRA interested in social media? Here's just a few reasons. Most of the technologies are free, so there's no big upfront cost for the organization or members. Students (K-College) are heavy users of social media, and they will be the next crop of school public relations professionals.

TSPRA has a goal to be more visible in the state, to other organizations, and as a player in the public relations field. Social media offers this exposure. In addition to possibly increasing membership numbers, this technology will increase internal communication.

So, where do we go from here? I am leading the newly formed ad-hoc Online Communications Committee to explore the many social media opportunities for TSPRA. We've got room for you, if you are interested. The only warning is that you will be required to participate and learn about these technologies personally. Any meetings will be held online, if needed. If you are interested in serving, e-mail terry-morawski@gmail.com.

Customer Service Revival

Shannon Grow, Bandera ISD, TSPRA Member

When you think of customer service, what comes to mind? A trip to a department store counter where you begin pleading your case for the return of your valuable dollar? Waiting on hold for someone to understand your current cell phone predicament?

Schools come to mind for Jan Jordan of Turning Point Solutions. A well received customer service revival was held October 15, 2008 in Hays CISD where discussion centered on customer service in our schools. The customer is no longer just a 'consumer of goods' but a student, a parent, and a taxpayer. Jan took the twenty five participants from all over the state of Texas through the tenets of customer needs and wants, what good customer service looks like, and the value of training your staff in this area.



Turning Point Solutions offers a variety of services that can make your school district better equipped to offer great customer service. A comprehensive audit can provide data about phone calls, visits, email, and web services. Training can be provided to your front office staff, teaching pool, and administrators to ensure a cohesive approach. Lastly, a customized handbook can be produced for standards and a means for evaluation.

Texas schools are ready to take a proactive approach to the needs of its customers. Jan Jordan has inspired today's leaders in education towards the goal of great customer service!

Editor's Note: Jan Jordan will be presenting a session titled "There's No Bronze Medal for Customer Service" at the February 2009 TSPRA State Conference in San Antonio.

TSPRA at the TASA/TASB Convention

TSPRA was represented in full force at the TASA/TASB Convention in late September in Dallas. Several TSPRA members shared their PR expertise in the form of concurrent sessions throughout the three day event. The activity began on Thursday afternoon as Karen Permetti (Lewisville ISD) and her team set up a great networking and publications exchange booth for TSPRA in the Dallas Convention Center exhibit hall. Many volunteers took turns manning the booth and greeting school board members and administrators from all around the state.

On Friday, the TSPRA Executive Committee met for its second of three regular meetings of the year. Several Executive Committee members were unable to attend as they were dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Ike. Past-President Kari Hutchison from Comal ISD graciously stepped in as Parliamentarian for the meeting since Candace Ahlfinger was dealing with clean up at Pasadena ISD. Even though the Executive Committee was not at 100%, the 14 members that were present accomplished a lot of business. At the conclusion of the Executive Committee meeting, the TSPRA Nominating Committee met and selected a slate of candidates for this year's election.



Brad Domitrovich congratulates Highland Park ISD's Dr. Cathy Bryce while Judy Farmer waits to present the 2008 Key Communicator Award to her.




Judy Farmer and Dr. Cathy Bryce take a moment for a picture in front of the TSPRA Publications Exchange Booth.

On Saturday, TSPRA was at center stage during the Second General Session as President Brad Domitrovich and Executive Director Judy Farmer presented the 2008 Key Communicator Award to Highland Park ISD Superintendent Dr. Cathy Bryce. Everyone will be able to meet Dr. Bryce in February as she is planning to attend our Annual Conference in San Antonio.

Important TSPRA Dates

- November 24 - *Deadline for Officer Ballots*
- November 27-28 - *TSPRA Office Closed*
- December 2 - *Ammerman Crisis Workshop in Frenship ISD (open registration)*
- December 4 - *Past Presidents Gathering in Austin*
- December 5 - *Board2Board Workshop in San Marcos CISD*
- December 5 - *Deadline for Conference Scholarship Applications*
- December 5 - *Deadline for Chapter and Professional Awards*
- December 22-January 2 - *TSPRA Office Closed*
- January 8 - *Last Day for Early Registration for TSPRA Conference in San Antonio*





TEXAS SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

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