



TSPRA Update

a newsletter from the **texas school public relations association**

Carolyn Boyle named TSPRA's 2003 Key Communicator

TSPRA President Kirk Lewis presented the prestigious **Key Communicator Award for 2003** to **Carolyn Boyle**, coordinator for the Texas Coalition for Public Schools at the TASA/TASB Annual Convention in Dallas in September during the first general session.

For the last seven years Boyle has coordinated the fight against private school vouchers for the Coalition, an organization of 38 diverse groups. As a local PTA president, she saw the need to ensure that public schools excelled for future children, and she rose to the challenge.

Praising Boyle before an audience of several thousand school administrators and trustees, Lewis said, "As we have raised our voices against vouchers, a champion has stood in the middle of this critical public arena defending our successes and ensuring that Texans hear the truth about vouchers. As an awe-inspiring advocate of public schools, Mrs. Boyle has been relentless in challenging some of the most powerful and well-funded state and national lobbyists in the pro-voucher movement, defeating voucher bills in 1997, 1999, 2001 and 2003.

Boyle told the audience, "The Coalition continues to be engaged in a war at the Texas Capitol, and



2003 Key Communicator Carolyn Boyle received congratulations from TSPRA Awards Chairperson Mary Ann Simpson.

the next skirmish will be this spring. You can expect voucher lobbyists to push a school finance plan that gives every child a tuition voucher. You also can expect continued efforts to turn the Accountability System into a system that is used to justify private school vouchers."

Saying that the primary battle tactic of the Coalition is communication and its primary weapon is words, Boyle urged administrators and trustees to have "in-person heart-to-heart talks with your legis-

Continued on page 5

Inside ➔	
President's Column	2
Conference contracts signed	3
TSPRA at TASA/TASB	3
Thank you, TSPRA	3
Schools FIR\$T is a hit	4
Texas Public Schools Week	4
Audit & Teller Committees meet	4
Workshop update	5
APR - Why and How	5

President's Perspective

By Kirk Lewis

Each table in the second grade held a collection of presentation boards and experiments, some obviously crafted by the hands of a child, others delicately built with parental assistance.

Around the room were several jars of brightly-colored liquid, which when swirled, demonstrated the formation of tornadoes. Bean plants, irrigated with Coca-Cola, water and milk, sprouted from the tops of papers cups in different stages of development, the largest plant indicating that we should water our lawns with soft drinks.



Kirk Lewis,
Pasadena ISD,
TSPRA President

As the bell rang, one small boy carried in his project with obvious pride, followed by his father and mother. His project featured a series of boxes filled with dirt, each laced with miniature gullies and ditches clearly showing the effects of water and wind erosion.

He lugged the cumbersome project in the same arms in which he carried his coat. In the process of hurrying down the hall to turn in his project, the boy tripped, spilling its contents across the carpet. His work was now little more than a custodial mess. The boy wept as if the world had ended.

The father told him to stop crying, reminding him that he had told him the project was too heavy for the boy to carry. Thank goodness mothers have a way of seeing into the

heart of a weeping child. She wiped the little boy's tears and said, "Let's pick up the pieces, scoop up the dirt and take it all home. We'll see what we can make of what is left."

Played out in that family drama, was every human response to failure. We cry in hopeless despair, but that makes us believe that failure is lasting. We deny the importance of that which has happened, but denial takes away the meaning behind the moment. We share the hurt and pick up the pieces to "see what we can make of what is left."

In his book, "100 Voices," John Claypool called the latter approach the "gift of next time." Next time things will be different. Next time I will walk with measured steps. Next time I will ask for help. Next time I will not fail.

The implication of "No Child Left Behind" is that every child can learn given time, patience, support—and, a next time. As keepers of the heart, provide encouragement to your principals and teachers as they wrap comforting arms around a child, making something from the nothingness of failure. Theirs is the gift of next time. Your gift is the ability to share it.

Bits and pieces

Your TSPRA Board of Directors met in June and approved a conservative budget reflective of the tight financial times. As has been the trend, the bulk of the revenue for our organization's programs and services comes from your dues, your attendance at the annual conference, your participation in the Star Awards and your support of the Texas Public School Week resources.

While the Board is exploring

other revenue-generating options, your involvement in TSPRA is critical. Membership fees, dues and travel are among the early victims during times of budget crisis. Do not let your district's budget woes keep you from joining the organization or attending our conference. Professional growth and development depends on our ability to meet with and learn from our colleagues. TSPRA is the "sole source" of training for school pr professionals. Even if you must supplement your participation with your own funds, it will be money well spent.

The room rate for **2004 conference** at the **Hyatt Regency in Austin** (Feb. 18-20) is only \$110 per night. We have received some encouraging words from TASB that the new law that limits hotel expenditures to \$80 a does not apply to conferences already under contract. That bit of news may enable you to get full reimbursement for your stay in Austin, depending on your district's policies. We will keep you posted on developments in this area.

Congratulations to every TSPRA member for the role you played in securing the organization's **Blue Ribbon Chapter Award** from the NSPRA seminar in Denver. Thanks to **Judi Saxton** from Mt. Pleasant ISD for pulling together another outstanding packet of your accomplishments as an organization.

With another important school year underway, stay focused on your mission and your message. As you make them hear the good news of public education in Texas, turn each failure into the gift of next time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kirk Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

TSPRA Conference hotel contracts signed through 2006

TSPRA has signed contracts for annual conferences in 2004, 2005, and 2006. These contracts were all negotiated and signed prior to September 1, 2003 when the new law limiting reimbursement for hotel rooms to \$80 per day went into effect. The **2004 Conference** will be held at the **Hyatt Regency Hotel in Austin February 18-20**, with a rate of \$110 single or double.

The 2005 and 2006 conferences will be at the Marriott at the Capitol in Austin for a rate of \$117, single or double.

Hopefully, by 2007, this law will be changed since it presents associations with a significant challenge. It is virtually impossible to find hotel accommodations with adequate meeting space for professional development training sessions at the \$80 rate.

TSPRA will include proof of contract date on your conference registration form.

Travel and the new State Law: According to the Comptroller's Office, districts can honor hotel reimburse-

ment rates when the association or organization sponsor has contracted with the hotel for a rate that exceeds the state rate, if that contract was completed prior to September 1, 2003. So, if the person submitting their travel reimbursement form has attached documentation from the association/organization proving the existence of a contract with the hotel for a certain room rate that was executed prior to September 1, 2003, then the district can legally reimburse the higher rate.

TSPRA visibility high at TASA/TASB Convention

TSPRA activities held in conjunction with the **TASA/TASB Convention** in Dallas in September included a board meeting, Key Communicator presentation, sessions on communications presented by TSPRA members, and the popular exhibit booth where TSPRAs from across the state send their best and brightest PR ideas and publications to share with other districts.

Congratulations to **Mark Thomas**, Birdville ISD, who chaired the exhibit booth and resource center this year. His committee included **Candace Ahlfinger**, **Sherilyn Conn**, **Kristen Escovedo**, **Richie Escovedo**, **Tiffany Ewing**, **Ian Halperin**, **Judy Kriehn**, **Lauren Layfield**, **M.J.**

McDaniel, **Terry Morawski**, **Brad Press**, **Melissa Starnater**, **Julie Thannum** and **Debi Whitchurch**.

Presenting sessions for TSPRA at the recent TASA/TASB Convention were **Candace Ahlfinger**, **Tim Carroll**, **Kathy Clausen**, **Susan Dacus**, **Elaine Free**, **Pascual Gonzalez**, **Ken Haseley**, **Jana Hathorne**, **Kirk Lewis**, **Cindy Randle** and **Judith Saxton**.

TSPRA's contract with TASB and TASA to participate in their annual convention goes back more than 30 years. Over the decades some activities have been dropped and others added, but the exhibit booth and sessions have remained a traditional part of the convention. The Key Communicator has been presented since 1981.

Thank You to TSPRA

Just when I thought I couldn't shed another tear of gratitude, TSPRAs do something so incredibly overwhelming and kind.

I thank you so much for your loving phone calls, flowers and cards, topped by your generous expression of sympathy. Greatly humbled by your financial gift, I feel so blessed to have you as precious friends and to be a part of such a caring organization.

Even though you did not know my beautiful daughter, you honored her memory in a special way by investing in her three precious children. Your gift certainly helped to get them started in school this year and continues to meet so many needs.

*I love each of you.
Thank you! Thank you!
Thank you!*

Lynda Queen

Lynda Queen's daughter Beth Dill died in July, leaving Lynda to raise her three grandchildren.



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Annell Todd & Janet Crock

Texas School Public Relations Association
1801 N. Lamar Blvd, Suite 222
Austin, TX 78701-1050

Phone: 512-474-9107 • FAX: 512-477-0906

www.tspra.org

Schools FIR\$T kit is a hit

Feedback on the **Schools FIR\$T** kit continues to be extremely positive as a majority of districts across the state garner good press on their financial ratings.

TSPRA teamed up with the **Texas Association of School Business Officials (TASBO)** and the **Texas Education Agency (TEA)** three years ago to develop the **Schools FIR\$T Communications Resources Kit** recently mailed to all school districts, **TSPRA** and **TASBO** members.

Initially, **TASBO** Executive Director **Gwen Santiago** contacted **TSPRA** Executive Director **Annell Todd** to ask for assistance in communicating to districts how best to meet the reporting requirements of a new financial accountability system mandated by the Texas Legislature. A committee of **TSPRA** and **TASBO** members met in July 2000 with **TEA** officials to learn about the new mandate. **TSPRA** members at this first meeting were **Katherine Cernosek**, **Mary Ann Simpson**, **Julie Thannum**, **Andy Welch**, **Jimmy Wynn** and **Todd**.

TSPRA creativity kicked in immediately with the **Mesquite ISD communications staff** coming up with **Schools FIR\$T** (Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas) as the name for the accountability system and **Becky Walker** of **Fort Bend ISD** creating the logo.

Many meetings and focus groups later (and even testimony


before a Senate Committee by **Jimmy Wynn** supporting implementation of the accountability system) a fresh group of committee members came together to finalize the draft. This group included **Bill Britcher**, **Cathy Brandewie**, **Panchita Garrett**, **Theresa Bledsoe**, **Todd** and **TASBO** President **Mike Jolly**. **Jimmy Wynn** and **Amy Williams** then assumed the task of graphic design and printing at **Harris County Department of Education**.

"I believe that the **TSPRA/TASBO** team is a perfect match," said **Todd**. "**TSPRA** supplied the creativity and communications skills while **TASBO** provided financial expertise and paid for printing and mailing costs of the kit."

Both **Santiago** and **TEA** Associate Commissioner **Ed Flathouse** have reported that districts throughout the state continue to praise the resource kit and credit it with the positive media coverage they are receiving.

The initial report from **TEA** shows that 86 percent - that's 892 out of 1,040 - of the districts in Texas received the "Superior Achievement" rating on the School Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas.

This year is the first time **TEA** has evaluated the financial health of districts as part of the new financial accountability system created by the Texas Legislature in 2001 to improve the management of school districts' financial resources.



150 YEARS

Texas Public Schools

Educating With Heart!

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Watch for your Texas Public Schools Week order form in the mail!

This year marks the 150th anniversary of public education in Texas and the 50th anniversary of the annual Texas Public Schools Week celebration. Districts are encouraged to celebrate throughout 2004 the 150 years of public school successes. Order your **TPSW** kits and specialty items early and plan ahead for your week in March. Kudos to this year's **TPSW** committee: **Celia Longoria**, chair; **Patti Perales**; **Sergio Garcia**; and **Becky Walker**.

Audit and Teller Committees meet

Chairman **David Ochoa**, **Harlandale ISD**, and his committee, **Ed Suarez**, **South San Antonio ISD**, and **Sharon Woldhagen**, **Southwest ISD**, came to the state office in September to conduct the annual member financial audit for **TSPRA**. They reviewed receipts, bank statements, check stubs, canceled checks and the CPA end-of-year report. They also reviewed inventory and business operations. Their report states:

The Audit Committee found the financial records to be in order and commends the Association and the Executive Director for establishing and following generally accepted accounting procedures.

Helen Moran, **Del Valle ISD**, came to the office to certify the ballots on the most recent bylaws change regarding general membership meetings. The proposed by-law change passed overwhelmingly with

only two no votes.

TSPRA will now conduct only one general membership meeting in conjunction with the annual conference. Previously a membership meeting was held in conjunction with the **TASA/TASB** Convention in September. In recent years attendance at this meeting has been less than 20 members in addition to the executive committee, so it was proposed to eliminate it.

Ammerman Crisis Training & other Workshops

Three Ammerman Communication workshops were held during the summer. “Dealing with an Angry Public” workshops were conducted for Goose Creek CISD and Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD, while Waco ISD hosted a full-day Crisis Media Workshop.

The TSPRA office is currently working with the following districts to schedule Ammerman training: Corsicana, Waco, Galena Park, San Benito and Tyler. For dates

and prices, please contact the TSPRA state office.

Ken Haseley also presented a modified session of the “Dealing with an Angry Public” workshop for one of the TSPRA sessions at the TASA/TASB Convention to approximately 150 school trustees and administrators. Evaluations on the Ammerman training continue to be outstanding and TSPRA appreciates the collaboration with the Ammerman Experience.

APR - Why and How

by *Monica Faulkenberg, APR Accreditation Chairperson, PRSA/San Antonio*

When the city of Dallas was advertising an opening for a Public Information Officer several months ago, they received hundreds of applications. Naturally this group had to be narrowed down until only the most qualified remained to be interviewed. And three things that members of that “cream of the crop” shared were the letters A, P, and R after their names.

In public relations circles, to be accredited in the equivalent to an accountant being a CPA. APR certification gives credibility to your skills and credibility to our profession as a whole. I hope you will take time to seriously consider taking this next professional step in your career.

Unless your head has been stuck in a pickle jar recently, you know that the accreditation process has gone through a major overhaul.

What's new about the process?

Candidates must first go through a Readiness Review panel (comprised of local accredited members).

Once approved to proceed, the candidate then goes to a local testing center to take the written portion which is computer-delivered and scored, contains 100 percent multiple-choice questions, and takes only three hours. Another change is that the results are announced in weeks, not the months it used to take. The Universal Accreditation Board recommends, but does not require anymore, that candidates have five to seven years experience.

The cost?

The first step is to download the application and pay a one-time application fee of \$25. When ready to take the written portion of the test, you will be asked to pay a \$385 fee to Prometric Testing Center; however, PRSA rebates \$110 to each PRSA member.

Next month, I will discuss the Readiness Review process. In the meantime, check out the accreditation page under professional development at www.prsa.org.

Carolyn Boyle, Key Communicator continued from p.1

lators about the voucher issue this fall or winter.

“Our message is simple: Texas taxpayers cannot afford to subsidize private schools when we are not fully supporting our public schools,” she said.

Since 1981, the Texas School Public Relations Association (TSPRA) has honored a Key Communicator for significant contributions to the field of school communications and public relations.

The recipient may be a legislator, educator, or professional in another field who has improved school communications; or a member of TSPRA who has contributed outstanding service to the profession of school communications.

Recipients have included leaders from business, PTA, media, politics and education. **Annell Todd** was last year's recipient, and other recent recipients are Rep. **Paul Sadler**, **Mike Moses** and **Riney Jordan**.

Boyle earned her Master's and Bachelor's degrees in journalism from The University of Texas at Austin. Until 1997, she operated her own marketing and communications firm in Austin. She has also served as Director of Community Relations and Marketing for Brackenridge Hospital in Austin and has written and edited for the *Texas Outlook* magazine, the *Houston Chronicle* and the Texas Education Agency.

Mary Ann Simpson, Fort Bend ISD, chaired the 2003 Key Communicator selection committee which included: **Tim Carroll**, Allen ISD; **Karen Collier**, Humble ISD; **Mary Gorden**, Plano ISD; **M.J. McDaniel**, Weatherford ISD; **David Ochoa**, South San Antonio ISD; and **Sharon Woldhagen**, Southwest ISD.