

The Texas School Public Relations Association (TSPRA) is a nonprofit organization that provides professional development, resources and networking for public school communicators and education foundations.



TEXAS SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

Issue 78 - November 30, 2011

>> From TSPRA President Director Tim Carroll



It's The Most Wonderful Time of Year

It's the most wonderful time of the year...but not for mistletoe. Instead, it's a wonderful time to torment the public information office with questions about Christmas in our schools.

For all of the questions and challenges from patrons that I receive each year, few cause me more trouble than the ones during the Christmas season.

Just this past week a patron demanded to know why the term winter vacation had replaced Christmas vacation on the school calendar. "I changed it myself," I admitted, "in 1995."

I proceeded to explain that Christmas may be part of our school vacation but the school district calendar committee did not allocate two weeks for that one day. She wasn't buying it.

Apparently a local radio host had alerted her and other concerned listeners to the devious plot by school administrators to strip Christmas from our schools and she was just following orders.

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EVENTS

[Dec. 2](#)

SPRINT TSPRA Regional Meeting
Highland Park ISD

[Dec. 2](#)

TSPRA Professional Awards Nominations Deadline

[Dec. 2](#)

NSPRA PR Power Hour
Doing It Right Introducing Your New Superintendent to Your School Community

[Dec. 2](#)

TSPRA 2012 Executive Committee-last day to vote

[Dec. 9](#)

Ammerman Media & Crisis Communications workshop
Austin-TASB

[Dec. 9](#)

HASPRRA TSPRA Regional Meeting
Dickinson ISD

[Dec. 19-Jan. 1](#)

TSPRA State Office Closed

[Jan. 6, 2012](#)

The celebration or tolerance of celebrating Christmas in Texas public schools is as perplexing as our school finance formula. I have heard colleagues tell me that it has never been an issue in their community and the school board certainly isn't going to take on the local churches. Other PR folks, mostly in suburban and urban areas, go out of their way to minimize offending their diverse communities.

For the record, the Supreme Court has ruled that public schools may not sponsor religious practices (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962; *Abington v. Schempp*, 1963) but may teach about religion. While it has made no definitive ruling on religious holidays in the schools, the Supreme Court has let stand a lower federal court decision stating that recognition of holidays may be constitutional if the purpose is to provide secular instruction about religious traditions rather than to promote the particular religion involved (*Florey v. Sioux Falls School District*, 8th Cir., 1980).

As is the case for most public relations challenges, the facts about Christmas in schools are often outweighed by the perception. If parents perceive your schools to be intolerant of other religions and cultures then you are likely to hear from them. Unfortunately if parents perceive your schools to be intolerant of Christianity, you are likely to hear from them too.

The key to avoiding trouble is to review the law and guidelines on religious education vs. celebration. A good resource for negotiating this grey area is called [*Religious Holidays In Public Schools*](#), a free pamphlet supported by a coalition of 17 religious and education leaders.

My advice to members is to take a leadership role on this complicated issue and educate themselves on the law. Consider preparing a brief Q&A and review it with your school district attorney if possible. Then ask to be included on an upcoming principal's meeting agenda.



HEB Excellence Award
Deadline

[Jan. 13, 2012](#)

Last Day to Register for 2012
TSPRA Conference at
Regular Rate

[Jan. 14, 2012](#)

Late Registration for 2012
TSPRA Conference

[Jan. 19, 2012](#)

Last Day to Make Hotel
Reservations at Conference
Rate

[Feb. 1, 2012](#)

Last Day to Cancel TSPRA
Conference Registration With
Refund

NEWS

[TASB report: Statewide
superintendent salary survey
released](#)

[2010-2011 AEIS Reports
posted](#)

[Business tax changes may
not bring more money](#)

[A look ahead to SBOE races](#)

[Texas schools face new rules
on financial hardship](#)

[Texas Education Today-Nov.
2011](#)

[More kids in many states
skipping vaccinations](#)

[Drug war sends emotionally
troubled kids to Texas](#)

[Updated: LPE-DPE Template](#)

You Can Quote Me On That

"TSPRA is a professional organization that tracks new trends, provides great resources and professional development. I am proud to be a part of an organization filled with intelligent professionals with fabulous personalities." -- Marianne Kosik, Waller ISD



TSPRA NOTES

The TSPRA Newsletter will not be published on Wednesday December 7th, 2011.



Lee Ann Bandy
Lewisville ISD
Region 11



Lawsuits Filed Against the State

Jennifer Bailey of Leander ISD has prepared an overview of the three school finance law suits filed against the state.

To download the document [click here](#).



TSPRA Checklist

DECEMBER 2, 2011

Submit [nominations for TSPRA Professional Awards](#)

DECEMBER 2, 2011

Deadline to [register for the Austin Ammerman Training](#)

December 9

DECEMBER 2, 2011

Deadline for professional members to vote by electronic ballot for new executive committee members

JANUARY 19, 2012

Deadline to [book your hotel room at the Sheraton](#) at the conference room rate for the annual conference

Don't wait till the the last minute. The room block often is full before the deadline.

JANUARY 13, 2012

[Register for the TSPRA Annual Conference](#).

Late registration begins January 14.

Feds provide flexibility on [child nutrition](#)

[How online learning companies bought America's schools](#)

[Texas slashes public school budget: Cutting through the rethoric and confusion](#)



The Texas School Public Relations Association needs your help in gathering information regarding our TSPRA retirees, especially for our 50th anniversary celebration to be held during the annual conference in Austin, February 13-15, 2012.

If you know of a retired member, please send us their name and contact information (email, phone, address, etc.) so we may contact them about attending the Star Awards Celebration on February 14.

[When you send us this info, your name will be entered to earn a special reward!](#)



Help define

Greg Davis
Lewisville ISD
Region 11

Courtney Hargis
Ingram ISD
Region 20

Laura Madison
Lewisville ISD
Region 11

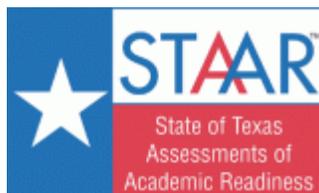
Laurie Vondersaar
Prosper ISD
Region 10



Member Spotlight

Angela Shelley has been promoted to the director of strategic communication services at Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD.

Lauren Bingham has taken a position as coordinator of community relations at Leander ISD.



STARR Media Tool Kit



2012 TSPRA pre-conference sessions

The pre-conference sessions for the 2012 TSPRA Conference will be held on Sunday, February 12, 2012.

The sessions will include:

- The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Education Foundations
- Shoot, Produce, Edit, Publish: All in a Days Work
- Adobe Camp
- Rookie Boot-camp
- APR Certification Training

Additionally, there will be a Sunday social event sponsored by SchoolReach.

"public relations"

Richie Escovedo
Mansfield ISD

In 1982, a first-class stamp was 20 cents, Michael Jackson's Thriller was released, the world's population was 4.6 billion, and [Johnson & Johnson had a PR nightmare](#) on their hands that led to what is now [a model crisis response case study](#). Ironically, 1982 was also the last time the Public Relations Society of America defined public relations.

Last week, [PRSA](#) launched a campaign to create a modern definition for PR with a [dedicated site](#) and a [strategic Media & Advertising column placement in the New York Times](#). I was thrilled to see this collaborative effort to get an updated (and hopefully better) answer to the question, "What is public relations?"

We've needed something new. Public relations takes a beating outside the industry from those who relegate it to only media relations or worse, spin. And honestly, we seldom do an adequate job within the ranks of PR pros of fighting these and other misconceptions. So it's time for a change. (Disclosure: I've been a member of PRSA since 2001.)

Out with the old, in with the new

In 1982, PRSA adopted [a definition for PR](#) as: "Public relations helps an organization and its publics

A new STAAR [media toolkit](#) brings together resources that educators and reporters can use to help explain the new State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness program to the public. The toolkit includes answers to frequently asked questions, testing calendars, sample questions that illustrate the increasing rigor of state tests over the past 30 years and more. Additionally, new information is posted virtually every school day on the main [STAAR website](#).

adapt mutually to each other.” Today, we have an opportunity to adapt this definition to better fit what it is that we do. Take a few minutes to review the [notes from the one-day summit of the Definition of Public Relations Task Force](#). That group concluded that a modern definition of public relations should be limited to a single sentence:

Public relations [DOES WHAT] with/for [WHOM] to [DO WHAT] for [WHAT PURPOSE].

I am encouraging TSPRA members (and any other school PR pros) to take some time and review this campaign and also participate in this definition collaboration. The deadline to [submit your definition is Friday, December 2](#).

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