



SUNSPRA

Sunshine State School
Public Relations Association



“Thursday Thoughts” – 8.4.16 & 8.11.16

Kevin Christian, APR, CPRC, SUNSPRA President

The following is adapted for Marion County Public Schools with NSPRA permission from David Luther, retired Public Relations Officer for Jefferson City Public Schools in Missouri.

WHAT WENT RIGHT!

We humans often have a bad habit. We sometimes focus on the negative things in our lives and fail to recognize the positives. Our media doesn't do much to help us in this regard. Bad news is typically more likely to get published and broadcast, and as much as we might not like to admit it, we read and watch these stories. Reporters will sometimes use the terms “soft” or “fluff” for positive stories. That's a shame, because some of these stories are the most remarkable.

Wednesday was the first day of school for **39,444** Marion County Public Schools students, and a few things did not go perfectly. Some buses ran behind, some students weren't registered, two buses broke down, one had a broken wheelchair lift, 391 seventh graders did not have their required immunizations (29 percent better than last year), and no doubt almost every student, parent and teacher had something not go right. But what about the other side of the story?

What went right?

- **24,000** students had a safe school bus ride to and from school. Our **273** buses cover an average of **33,000** miles each day (our district is a big one – 1,650 sq. miles, larger than the state of Rhode Island). Our bus drivers, aides, and transportation folks do tremendous work!
- **2,921** children and their parents benefitted from Extended Day activities – even more than last year's record-setting first day! As well, **22** schools have waiting lists for Extended Day student openings.
- **10,539** breakfasts and **24,328** lunches were served in our **53** traditional schools. There were healthy choices available (although more than a few cookies were eaten, too). Nearly **67 percent** of our students are eligible for free and reduced meals – two out of every three. For some students, these were the **best meals of their day**. For some students, these were the **only meals of the day**. Our food service workers are amazing!
- Over **3,200** teachers, principals and other instructional staff greeted students, helped them find their classes, began the teaching process and in general did an exceptional job. This includes **260** teachers brand new to Marion County. This did not happen by accident. Most teachers and school personnel spent much of their summer preparing for the next school year so things started right today. And we still have **96** teaching positions open as of today!
- Schools were clean and grounds were taken care of. Our maintenance workers and custodians **spent the summer** renovating buildings and cafeterias, putting down new carpet, making sure windows were fixed, roofs were repaired, air conditioners worked, floors were waxed, and, in general, getting schools ready for kids.
- Our technology team installed over **6,000** new computers in the last 12 weeks (some as late as yesterday) -- all so students would have the latest technology for learning, Internet research, Accelerated Reader points, test taking, and other academic pursuits. As well, teachers now have **93** more engaged classrooms to use – also installed this summer, not to mention our Internet speed being doubled to 4G.

- Secretaries, receptionists, and other office staff greeted students, and we all know as the year goes along, these people handle **thousands of jobs**, and virtually every one of these jobs will in some way impact students.
- District administrators, principals and School Board members spent much of their time making sure the district stays focused on **doing what is right for students**.
- As if first-day challenges weren't enough, one school administrative team had to carefully wrangle a momma and poppa duck and their 13 ducklings as the animals waddled across campus!
- The coordination of over **39,440** students, **6,000+** staff members, **422** portable classrooms, and **53** schools with **7 million square feet of space** does not happen by accident, and it won't happen at all if someone doesn't mind the switch.

Look, I'm a public relations person, so I know people will say, "Well, he's paid to put a positive take on everything." True confessions: my day did not go perfectly either, and I spent time dwelling on those imperfections, but after I threw my little private fit, I decided to look for the positive. This is a wonderful community in which we live, and despite what standardized testing would have us believe, we have great schools, great teachers and great students! Are there problems? Absolutely. Are they insurmountable? Absolutely not! (Though some are tougher to solve than others.) The main thing we must do is keep our eyes on the ball, and for MCPS this means always doing what is in the best interest of students.

Please share your own "what went right" perspective with others from time to time. When teachers and other staff do **a great job** -- tell them (this goes for all of us: parents, colleagues, bosses, etc.). When your kids experience success -- celebrate! When you see something that needs to be improved -- tell those involved and be part of the solution, not the problem.

Here's to a wonderful 2016-17 school year!

IT'S TIME – TO RENEW YOUR SUNSPRA MEMBERSHIP

This year, SUNSPRA met the objective of increasing membership by 10 percent... except we actually increased 22 percent! It's time to renew YOUR membership, so I'm including a renewal form in this issue of *Thursday Thoughts* (see below; also available as a fillable pdf at www.sunspira.org). SUNSPRA is only as strong as its membership – and we are growing significantly, already in this new school year!

Here's a look at SUNSPRA's objectives over the last year:

Objective #1 - Increase membership by 10 percent during the 2015-16 chapter year.

UPDATE: We have 61 members as of this report. Met and exceeded objective by 22 percent by securing original goal of five members PLUS six additional members.

Objective #2 – Convince at least one person from Florida's Department of Education to join SUNSPRA during the 2015-16 chapter year.

UPDATE: Our three newest members are from Florida's DOE. A great "WELCOME" to:

- Meghan Collins, Director of Communications and External Affairs
- Cheryl Ethers, Deputy Director of Communications and External Affairs
- Alix Miller, Press Secretary

Objective #3 – Secure at least three national-level sponsors/supporters this year.

UPDATE: Objective met and exceeded with SchoolMessenger, Blackboard, Peachjar, and Voss & Associates

Objective #4 – Convince at least five percent of our members to pursue the APR credential.

UPDATE: Currently working to meet this objective. I am serving as NSPRA's national accreditation chair for the 2016-17 term while also serving as FPRA Ocala's accreditation chair

for the same term. I will continue promoting credentialing by encouraging you to earn accreditation for a multitude of reasons. Speaking of this...

Get to Know the APR and Become a Leader in the Field



Within today's dynamic public relations and communications environment, hiring an individual with an Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) demonstrates personal drive, professional acumen, a commitment to ethics, and dedication to lifelong learning.

The APR integrates timeless communications principles with contemporary strategies and tactics, meaning candidates with this certification are always in step with the public relations industry and attuned to trends. You can trust that the APR is an accurate representation of an individual's present expertise and a true test of their potential to lead the field.

Preparing for the APR is an exercise in success, as the process provides an assessment of an individual's proficiency and accurately calibrates their craft, contacts, and career goals, so they will bring years of professional experience, industry knowledge, and best practices to your business.

It takes a professional—someone with exceptional experience, broad expertise, and strong dedication and values—to thrive in the public relations industry. The APR certifies that you're working with the best.

If you're considering APR, please let me know. I am happy to share my experience with the process. It IS a process, not something you earn overnight. But once you finish the process, it is an amazing accomplishment and wonderful milestone in your public relations career.

You won't be alone in the process. Each year, hundreds of PR professionals strive for their APR credential. Currently, about 20 percent of PR professionals worldwide hold the APR credential.

LEGISLATIVE / HEADLINE RECAPS

State Resumes Borrowing For Education Projects

Reversing a five-year trend, Gov. Rick Scott and the Florida Cabinet on Tuesday unanimously agreed to borrow \$285 million over the next few years to build and maintain facilities for state universities, colleges and public schools.

Florida Excels in School-System Safety, But Trails Behind in School Quality

Florida ranks in the top 10 states nationwide for school-system safety, but trails behind on school-system quality, according to a new report. The WalletHub report released this week rated Florida No. 8 for school-system safety out of all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Schools React To First Locally-Acquired Cases Of The Zika Virus In South Florida

Schools and school districts are among those reacting to news of 14 locally-acquired cases of the Zika virus confirmed in South Florida. With the first day of school still weeks away, Miami-Dade County Public Schools sent out an automated voicemail to parents last week reinforcing basic anti-mosquito measures.

Schools budget tops \$5 billion, but teachers not paid enough, some say

Miami-Dade school board members on Wednesday gave a first nod to the 2016-2017 budget, paving the way to finalizing the biggest portion of a resident's tax bill. Under the proposed budget, homeowners will pay a slightly lower tax rate of \$7.30 per thousand dollars of taxable property value. Miami-Dade Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said it is the lowest tax rate in four decades.

Zika Virus Update

Having just finished a conference call with the governor, commissioner of education and Florida's attorney general, let me share what Marion County Public Schools is doing regarding the Zika virus. Perhaps this will help you prepare for questions about what your district is doing to protect students, teachers, parents, and others from the virus:

MCPS Zika Plan:

- Eliminate standing water areas and containers on campuses
- Direct partnership with Florida Dept. Of Health in Marion County
- School nurses to be trained in Zika recognition
- Classroom materials & health messages aligned with FL Standards in K-12 education
- Elementary-aged 30-second [educational video](#)
- [Activity sheets](#) for Pre-K - 12 students with [corresponding teacher tools](#)
- Posters, palm cards, door hangers and other education materials to be displayed throughout campuses and sent home with students (forthcoming)
- Zika Virus Information Hotline: 855-622-6735

As well, you might encourage your high school activities directors to have the following information read to after-hours event crowds, since they are especially likely to come into contact with mosquitos:

"We want all of our MCPS family to stay safe and healthy. We have not had any local Zika cases, but we are taking appropriate steps to remain safe. We are reducing standing water areas on our campuses. We are encouraging after-hour event-goers to wear appropriate clothing and insect repellent as necessary. And we're stressing the importance of awareness and common sense steps to avoid the Zika virus."

AND FINALLY...

My district is heading into new school year day #3 tomorrow... as you've read, we got off to a GREAT start! I hope your district is the same and the 2016-17 school year proves to be amazing for all of us!

Until next time, keep shining the light on school PR in Florida!

Kevin

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SUNSPRA President

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SUNSPRA

Sunshine State School
Public Relations Association

www.sunspira.org

Membership Form / Invoice 2016-2017 School Year

Name _____

Title _____

School/Dept. _____

District/Org. _____

Mailing Address _____

City & Zip _____

Daytime Phone _____

Fax _____

E-mail address _____

SUNSPRA membership is open to anyone actively interested in or supporting school public relations.

Members should be employed by a school district, agency, institution or association and perform information or community relations functions supporting public education. Please check appropriate category:

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP: \$ 75 One Member

INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERSHIP: \$175 Three Members

Are you an NSPRA member? Yes No

When did you join NSPRA? Year _____

Are you a FASA Member? Yes No

When did you join FASA? Year _____

*NOTE: Membership fees are due Oct. 1, 2016 and are effective through September 30, 2017.

Please duplicate and complete this form for EACH member and distribute to appropriate departments and school leadership.

For payment via credit card, please email membership form to marianne@consultmarianne.com then call 941.545.8476 (a convenience fee will apply). Otherwise, attach your check or purchase order payable to SUNSPRA and mail to:

SUNSPRA
ATTN: Marianne Lorentzen
4311 100th Ave. E.
Parrish, FL 34219

OUR MISSION: To build widespread support for Florida public education by engaging all key stakeholders in student success and public school improvement.

OUR VISION: To become known as the premier resource for educational information in Florida.

Membership Benefits include:

- ⊙ Easy access to school PR experts
- ⊙ Informational Web site including Member's Only Section
- ⊙ Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) credential opportunities
 - ⊙ Joint conferences with other Florida education leaders
 - ⊙ Timely notice of education's "hot topics" via e-mail
- ⊙ Meetings to network with other professional school communicators
 - ⊙ Professional development opportunities
- ⊙ Participation in statewide public campaigns
 - ⊙ Mentor Program
 - ⊙ Sunshine Medallion Awards
 - ⊙ Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award
 - ⊙ Margie Davidson "Leading Light" Award

Celebrating 43 Years of Service to Florida Public Education!



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Florida Association of School Administrators