



SUNSPRA

Sunshine State School
Public Relations Association



“Thursday Thoughts” – 11.17.16

Kevin Christian, APR, CPRC, SUNSPRA President

AWARDS time

We have five contenders for this year’s Outstanding Superintendent and Leading Light awards! Thanks to everyone who entered. Now, the tough job of choosing just ONE winner for each award is underway. I have the privilege of handing out these prestigious awards during the luncheon general session on Thursday, December 1, at FSBA’s Joint Conference in Tampa Bay. Special thanks to Judson Aungst and

Blackboard®

for once again returning as our exclusive awards sponsor. After the awards session, we will support fellow SUNSPRA members Amity Chandler and Greg Turchetta as they present a second breakout session from 2:30pm-3:30pm. Then, SUNSPRA will gather in the 1823 Kitchen & Bar in the hotel lobby for small plates, beverages, and desserts – courtesy of Karen Hanson & Education Funding Partners (EFP). I hope you’ll join us!

IT’S TIME – TO RENEW YOUR SUNSPRA MEMBERSHIP

Once again, folks, I’m asking you to renew your SUNSPRA membership. Last year, we increased membership by 22 percent! I encourage you to complete your renewal process with the fillable pdf form. SUNSPRA is only as strong as its membership – and we are growing significantly, already in this new school year! Marianne sent invoices earlier this week. ***I encourage you to renew today!***

LEGISLATIVE & ISSUES UPDATE

Change would send more money to Florida's aging schools

Florida Department of Education officials are looking for ways to funnel more money to the state's aging schools and their growing backlog of deferred maintenance and repairs.

Memphis Creating Local School Report Card with Community Help

Memphis education leaders are working to create more high-quality learning options for students, along with a better way to assess and report them. Instead of relying on the state’s annual report card, Shelby County Schools wants its own measurement tool based on what constituents say are the most important qualities in a school. A proposed “school performance framework,” introduced during recent community meetings around the district, would act as a report card for the district’s traditional schools. It will be created and driven by feedback on what the community sees as valuable. Officials also note the approach provides a platform to advertise their best schools as the district fights to retain and gain students to offset enrollment declines from a decade of charter school expansion in Memphis.

Teacher Absenteeism Becoming a Concern

Illinois parents were concerned when new state data recently showed that almost 1 in 4 teachers in their state were absent more than 10 days in the school year. But actually the 23.5 percent Illinois absentee rate is better than the national percentage of 27. Indeed, according to the U.S. Education Department, some school systems around the nation saw chronic absenteeism among teachers rise

above 75 percent in the latest available data. Officials say that the trend toward missing the equivalent of more than two weeks of classes each academic year is becoming an educational crisis. While many districts are searching for causes and seeking solutions, the New Mexico Education Department is now requiring attendance to be factored into teachers' performance evaluations.

Guns Continue to Make School News

Guns at school have been a hot item in the news of late, but for varying reasons. In Georgia — where lawmakers had approved conflicting measures on the issue — the state Supreme Court said a law that prohibits guns on school property trumps one passed at the same time that allowed firearms inside school safety zones. Now the only time guns are allowed onto school property is when someone is dropping off or picking up a student. Meanwhile in Ohio, experts estimate that more than 175 districts — 1 in 4 in the state — allow school staff to carry concealed firearms on campus and in classrooms. No one knows the actual extent of the trend since details of such policies are allowed to be confidential in the state and many districts are doing little to advise the public.

More High Schools Eliminating Class Rank

High schools around the country continue to drop out of class-rank systems in an effort to allow more students to get into their colleges of choice. Many are in districts with highly competitive students where the differences in grade-point averages between the No. 1 and 20th or 25th ranked students is minuscule. Yet colleges often look unfavorably on the lower ranked student. Pennsylvania's West Chester District recently made the decision after being told a highly qualified graduate was rejected because she was ranked 15th out of 320. The movement has gained such popularity in some areas that colleges no longer use class rank in their admissions process. The trend started at least two decades ago with private schools and eventually spread to public schools, according to the National Association of College Admissions Officers. A 2015 survey shows that colleges' decisions rely more on grades in college prep classes, quality of curriculum, and school GPA than on class rankings.

Florida Parent Group: A-F Letter Grade System a 'Failure,' Should Be Abolished

Florida's A through F grading system as a means to gauge a school's performance has been fraught with controversy in recent years, and now a statewide parent group is fed up, calling for an end to the system which has been basic in Florida education for 17 years.

PR Power Hour: Website Accessibility for All: Practical Strategies for Meeting Compliance Requirements

[Register Now!](#)

Date & Time: Friday, December 9, 2016 — Noon ET

As an essential communication tool, our publics rely on websites to provide key information about our schools and the business of the district. A new challenge now looms in meeting federal requirements — and for some districts addressing U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights complaints — to ensure that district and school websites are accessible to individuals with disabilities. This program will provide some insight along with practical steps and strategies for sharing online content in ways that meet these requirements.



For NSPRA members, the cost is \$50 per registered attendee; non-NSPRA members pay \$80. Registrants can access an audio file of the webinar for an additional \$10. Those who register for five or more Power Hours receive audio files of each purchased webinar at no additional fee.

[Register online now!](#)



Panelists: **Jessica Scheckton**, assistant director, communications and public relations, Capital Region BOCES, Albany, N.Y.; and **Jean Tower**, director, media and digital learning, Needham (Mass.) Public Schools
Moderator: **Terry Locke**, director, community relations, Chandler (Ariz.) Unified School District



National School Public Relations Association
The leader in school communication™



Power Behind the Podium for Educators — become a more powerful speaker and speechwriter

Join us for a free webinar on Dec 13, 2016 at 12:00 PM EST.

[Register now!](#)

Whether you give speeches or write them for someone else, this FREE one-hour webinar will turn your speechwriting upside down. As a result, you will take less time to write a more powerful speech. Discover the secret sauce to **Power Behind the Podium**, created by David R. Voss specifically for educators and school communicators. This webinar is hosted and presented by Voss & Associates as part of a partnership with the **National School Public Relations Association**.



SEATING IS LIMITED. SIGN UP NOW TO RESERVE YOUR SPOT.

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar. For more information about communication courses, go to vossandassociates.net or www.nspr.org/communicatingeducation.

[View System Requirements](#)

AND FINALLY...

Video of the Week — Help Stop Bullying in Its Tracks

Preventing bullying in our schools remains a priority especially in light of the uncivil discourse and behavior we have seen in our national election and now in its aftermath. South Washington County Schools in Minnesota started an anti-bullying video campaign and recently released this video, [Help Stop Bullying in Its Tracks](#). In this first video of a monthly series, district administrators, students and staff share their message on the importance each of us play in recognizing bullying, being kind, and including others. Thanks to Megan Brown, video/communication specialist, for sharing this video with NSPRA.



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

Kevin

Kevin Christian, [APR](#), [CPRC](#)

SUNSPRA President

Public Relations Officer / Coordinator of Multimedia Productions

Marion County Public Schools

P: 352.671.7555

F: 352.671.7735

www.marionschools.net



[Accredited in Public Relations](#)