



**Name: Mike Schoemer**

**Title: Communications Specialist**

**Organization: ISD 728 – Elk River School District**

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**Please provide a brief description of your school PR work and MinnSPRA experience.**

Mike Schoemer is in his fourth year serving on the MinnSPRA Board, all as director. He joined ISD 728 - better known as Elk River School District - in September of 2014, following a more than 15-year career in community journalism. As a communications specialist at ISD 728, Mike has been responsible for writing, editing, social media, photography and videography. He has led the charge for a new mindfulness campaign in the school district, and has also worked to revamp the district's website, which was launched in 2017. In 2019, he worked with the ISD 728 communications team and fellow MinnSPRA member Barb Nicol to lead a successful bond and levy referendum. At more than \$130 million, it was the largest ballot issue to ever pass in the district's history. Away from his communications work, Mike is still active in community news, owning and publishing North Wright County Today, a website that covers the area of St. Michael, Albertville, Hanover and Otsego. Along with MinnSPRA, Mike is active on several other boards, including the Shop St. Michael-Albertville merchants' association, the Three River Community Foundation and Rotary International. Mike and his wife, Jenn, have three (very busy) kids and reside in St. Michael.

**What attributes would you bring to the MinnSPRA Board?**

As a MinnSPRA board member, Mike's focus has been on expanding the associations' offerings - from our spring and winter conferences to the important single-day seminars that have hit on topics such as school funding and equity. As president, Mike would push to continue that programming, getting more feedback from the membership at large on the issues that face school communicators, including new advances in crisis communications, the push for more equitable school funding, and turning back the growing notion that "government" schools are failing our families and children.

**How can public relations professionals advance our role as communication leaders and build understanding of communication as a core management function?**

Mike believes MinnSPRA, and its board members, should continue to advocate for communicators' input at the leadership level. With more questions than ever facing school district leaders, communicators bring professionalism, messaging and conflict resolution to the table during a time when it is most needed. Building trust with community and leadership teams, school public relations professionals will continue to play a vital role in linking our school achievements to our parents and stakeholders. That work can't be done without a mutual respect between district leadership and communications professionals.

**What major issues face school PR professionals today?**

Without a doubt, the major issue for communicators in today's environment is trust. School communicators represent a system that people are willing to which parents entrust their most precious commodity - their kids. However, they're being told the system is "broken," or that schools are places for "indoctrination." While that messaging might be extreme, our job is to link the community with our school community - building trust with our families and stakeholders as we start a new decade of learning. We build that trust by increasing transparency, working in our communities and fostering relationships - showing people what we do and who we are.



**Name: Coley Fehringer**  
**Title: Communication Strategist**  
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**Please provide a brief description of your school PR work and MinnSPRA experience.**

I began my career in school PR at Spring Lake Park Schools in 2012, where I started as a community education intern and then joined the communication department as a communication specialist. In November I began a new position at CESO Communication as a communication strategist. I have served as the MinnSPRA secretary since 2018, assisted in planning professional development opportunities and helped the MinnSPRA conference planning committees since 2016.

**1. What attributes would you bring to the MinnSPRA Board?**

I will continue to advocate for leadership and development opportunities, especially for young professionals, so we are more prepared to make the step from specialist to whatever is next. I am passionate about learning and am grateful for the opportunities MinnSPRA has offered since becoming a member. I'm enthusiastic about the work of MinnSPRA and look forward to contributing with my creativity and "let's try it" attitude.

**2. How can public relations professionals advance our role as communication leaders and build understanding of communication as a core management function?**

As communication professionals, we are expected to wear many different hats and be experts on a range of topics. While it is important to have excellent technical skills, it is essential to build relationships and trust with administrators, so they look to us for advice and strategic guidance. When we can be strategic in our planning and implementation, we can further strengthen our communications management roles.

**3. What major issues face school PR professionals today?**

School PR professionals face ever-changing communication channels and diverse audiences to communicate with. We must stay on top of communication trends and continue to evolve and think differently about our communication in order to stay relevant and continue building connections in our communities.



**Name: Josh Collins**

**Title: Director of Communications**

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**Please provide a brief description of your school PR work and MinnSPRA experience.**

My communications work has been split between two areas of public policy: education and transportation. My first experience with MinnSPRA was in the mid-2000s when I worked as assistant director of communications for Minneapolis Public Schools. After getting a master's degree in strategic communications from the University of Oregon and a stint working on light rail and historic building restoration projects in Oregon and in St. Paul, I joined the Dayton administration as director of communications for the Minnesota Department of Education from 2013-2019. I currently work for Roseville Area Schools as director of communications.

**1. What attributes would you bring to the MinnSPRA Board?**

My experience working at both the district and state level in education is a unique perspective I will bring to the MinnSPRA board. My work with the Minnesota Department of Education included building strong relationships within other departments that regularly interact with local education authorities, like the state departments of health, human services and human rights. Because of my work in transit responding to numerous bus and train collisions, I have considerable experience conducting communications under crisis. I also have considerable training and experience in incident command and safety and security response.

**2. How can public relations professionals advance our role as communication leaders and build understanding of communication as a core management function?**

Foremost, by being at the table where organizational decisions are being made so that we can offer strategic consultation. Our job is to help an organization prepare for the worst possible outcomes of a decision, and in doing so, create opportunities to make decisions that will avoid negative outcomes. This means we are sometimes bummers to have in a meeting. Nevertheless, it is our job to make sure that all outcomes are considered.

**3. What major issues face school PR professionals today?**

Strained financial resources are a challenge, particularly in districts that don't have more than one communications person. When you are responsible for the website, social media, publications, and employee communication, it is difficult to also have a big-picture strategic focus. Another challenge is in engaging increasingly diverse families in a meaningful way, using systems that have historically served white, English speaking families. There is a common perspective that diverse families are "difficult to communicate with," because they don't respond to tired strategies in the ways we want them to. School PR methods need to evolve to meet changing communications needs.



**Name: Jenna Mead**

**Title: Director of Partnerships**

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**Please provide a brief description of your school PR work and MinnSPRA experience.**

I began working in school communications in 2014. After working as a TV news reporter out of college, I joined the Captivate Media + Consulting team and have the privilege of telling stories for school districts across Minnesota and nationally. I've been a MinnSPRA member since 2015 and have thoroughly enjoyed the amazing people who are part of this organization! I've assisted in planning a fall conference and was part of the MinnSPRA Emerging Leaders cohort in 2019.

**1. What attributes would you bring to the MinnSPRA Board?**

As a young PR professional, I have learned so much from the leadership development opportunities MinnSPRA has afforded me, and I will advocate for continued programming to build up the next generation of school PR professionals. As I work with school districts across the country, I bring a unique perspective to the board. I'm creatively minded and have a huge heart for the students and communities we are serving.

**2. How can public relations professionals advance our role as communication leaders and build understanding of communication as a core management function?**

Public relations professionals can advance our role by listening and engaging with community in order to provide informed strategic counsel and guidance to our leadership. I feel curiosity is vital to an organization's performance and we need to continue to ask questions for those who are not at the table.

**3. What major issues face school PR professionals today?**

As the communities and students we serve become more diverse, we need to challenge our own biases and work to become more racially aware. This goes beyond tactics like translating our communications. Every district is on its own journey with equity work, and it's important for PR professionals to take an active role in navigating this work in our schools in order to truly engage all audiences.



**Name: Dirk Tedmon**

**Title: Media Relations Coordinator**

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**Please provide a brief description of your school PR work and MinnSPRA experience.**

At MPS, I have tried supported many communication efforts. I have focused on finding solutions to the challenges the district faces and offering strategies that allow MPS to rewrite its story and become more open, transparent, and accessible in its communication. In MinnSPRA for the last three years, my goal has been to be a resource to my school PR colleagues and learn from their experiences. At the fall conference, I led a session on the “Love Them First” documentary based on our work on the film.

**1. What attributes would you bring to the MinnSPRA Board?**

Some of my strengths are my foresight, creativity, adaptability, and my focus on making our schools better places. I strive to be someone who sees communications through an equity lens, who values strategy, and who harnesses empathy and critical thinking to create messages and materials that are impactful and relatable. My commitment and my diverse personal and professional experiences make me a leader in communications.

**2. How can public relations professionals advance our role as communication leaders and build understanding of communication as a core management function?**

We need to continue advocating for a seat at the table and demonstrating our value to decision makers. As leaders, we should drive conversations about the ability of communication to shape attitudes, beliefs and opinion, and back up those conversations with data measuring our effectiveness. PR people should also bring the voices of underrepresented communities into dialogue and decisions. All of this will further the understanding of the value we offer and prove our necessity to organizations.

**3. What major issues face school PR professionals today?**

From ever-changing social media platforms to ever-growing expectations for communication, PR professionals have to be more flexible and nimble than ever before. As millennials enter the school system as parents, there will be greater need for digital literacy and authentic engagement from PR pros. Plus, there with growing budget constraints and underfunding of education, school PR people are asked to do more and more with less. And they are expected to be experts in the many facets of a school system—academics, operations, finances, etc.—whereas outside of school PR people often support a singular focus.