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

I joined Osseo Area Schools as a communications specialist in July of 2020. Spending the first year of my school PR career at home didn't keep me from jumping in full-speed: In that role I helped to launch 25 new school and district websites, created the district's first entirely virtual kindergarten enrollment event, managed social media, monitored a customer service inbox and contributed to messaging about learning model shifts and civil unrest in the community. This past December I made the move to Eden Prairie Schools, where I serve as the district's Marketing & Communications Coordinator. In my new role, I oversee digital, print and event enrollment marketing for all grades; assist with crisis communication; and create and implement integrated marketing and communications plans. One of the most surprising and valuable aspects of my career in school PR has been the chance to make meaningful connections through MinnSPRA. Thanks to a supervisor that strongly believed in the value of professional development, I attended MinnSPRA events within months of entering school PR, and I have continued to be an active participant. Of all these opportunities, Good Trouble PR has been particularly resonant for me, and I'm proud to have helped to craft the statement recently adopted by the MinnSPRA board. I am also helping to plan the 2022 Spring Conference.

2. What attributes would you bring to the MinnSPRA board?

I am a collaborative and enthusiastic teammate that is inspired by and committed to MinnSPRA's work. I bring perspectives from two districts that face distinct challenges, and I work continuously to strengthen my equity lens and integrate it into all of my work. As a relative newcomer to school PR, I hope to be a voice on the board that advocates for continued development opportunities for professionals at all levels of their careers.

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

I'll share the best advice I've received in this regard: School PR professionals should develop enough of an understanding of how things function in each department and school that they can provide counsel that garners respect and fosters trust. Once a communications professional is known to have a strong understanding of district operations, they will have more leverage when asking to be brought into strategic decisions from the outset.

4. What major issues face PR professionals today?

I'll narrow my answer to issues facing school PR professionals. I believe we are challenged by, among other things, a constant pressure to write in an "unbiased, non-polarizing" manner; staff that are often too burdened to help us tell stories about the great things they do; last-minute requests that detract from our ability to be mindful and strategic about our communications; and my personal nemesis – granular permissions on websites! 😊



Donnie Belcher
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1. Please provide a brief description of your school PR experience and MinnSPRA experience.

New to the school PR field, but I've been in Communications & Education for 20 years. Started as a High School English Teacher in Chicago for 14 years, then worked in the nonprofit sector for 6 years as an Executive Director, Program Director & Consultant. I've also published multiple articles and essays over the years. I am also new to MinnSPRA but excited about the work. I attended my first MinnSPRA conference this past Fall.

2. What attributes would you bring to the MinnSPRA board?

First, I would bring an equity lens. It is something that I am passionate about particularly in school PR. I would bring creativity, particularly to the area of professional development. I think we can leverage some peer learning and mentorship opportunities. Finally, I'd bring a sense of commitment to elevating the great work we do in our state to a variety of mediums.

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

I think we have to do more to amplify the work that we do across districts and across the field of education to highlight the role that communications plays in management. From case studies, to multi-sector professional development we have the opportunity to highlight the assets of communication leaders system and sector wide.

4. What major issues face PR professionals today?

I think one of the biggest issues we face is change management. We are in a time that education is rapidly changing and we have to be able to assist our organizations in managing people, environmental, political budgetary, etc. change. I also think that we are facing equity challenges that require us to think creativity and collaboratively about our shared future.



Emily Buss
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1. Please provide a brief description of your school PR experience and MinnSPRA experience.

Following five years as a newspaper reporter, I began my career in school public relations in fall 2015. I was the communications specialist for Hopkins Public Schools and joined MinnSPRA shortly after. I was fortunate to make fast connections with colleagues around the Twin Cities and across our chapter. In March 2018, I joined the team at District 196 (Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools) as a communications specialist in a two-person shop. I have since been promoted to communications supervisor and have the privilege of telling the incredible stories of infinite possibilities here in 196!

2. What attributes would you bring to the MinnSPRA board?

Along with the other board members, I have a passion for public education and highlighting the amazing things happening in our schools each and every day. I enjoy learning new things and challenging myself, and I hope to bring another voice of collaboration and enthusiasm to the table.

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

Communications and public relations professionals are critical to the success of any organization, especially in public education. We are in a “people” business where relationships, credibility, authenticity and accountability must be at the forefront. Individuals with this mindset have the power to influence decision-making and shift the outcome of situations, especially during crises. Our role as school public relations and communications professionals is needed at the table to not only lift up the voices of our districts, but also ensure our organization is actively living out its mission and values.

4. What major issues face PR professionals today?

The last two years have been a test of will for many school public relations and communications practitioners. We have faced unprecedented challenges, and many of us were forced into working in states of prolonged crisis mode. Our commitment to our roles, our districts and our students never wavered, but this work-life balance was unsustainable. There must be a renewed focus on our mental health and well-being if we are to continue the important work in our districts.

While the pandemic upended public education, it also provided an opportunity for us to use our critical thinking and creativity to help imagine new systems to better meet the needs of our communities. Most importantly, we were called upon to help design, implement and promote initiatives around social justice, anti-racism and equity in ways that we have not seen before. This work transcended our schools and became the focus of conferences and professional learning opportunities. Going forward, this must continue. School public relations and communications is an ever-evolving career and we must continue using our voices to bring our districts, and each other, along on this most important journey.



Jenna Mead
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1. 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, participated in the Emerging Leaders cohort in 2019 and most recently served as a board director with a focus in conference planning and the equity committee work including Good Trouble PR. I have thoroughly enjoyed the amazing people who are part of this organization and hope to continue to bring value to the board with an emphasis in growing our membership.

2. 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 welcome and mentor the next generation of school PR professionals. As I work with school districts across the state and country, I bring a unique perspective to the board as I understand the needs of school leaders in all types of communities. I'm creatively minded and have a huge heart for amplifying the diverse voices of our young people.

3. 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 all voices in our community in order to provide informed strategic counsel and guidance to our leadership. We choose what stories are being told through which lens, we shape messages and publish what others read about our schools and people within them. That influence should be used to create a belonging environment for all and continually question what's best for our students.

4. What major issues face school PR professionals today?

The ever-expanding political divide and mistrust within our communities. The need for school communicators to put out fire after fire, leaving no time and energy for long-term strategic communications work. The burnout, turnover and staff shortages across the state and nation. Self-care for school PR professionals and the number of people leaving our profession is also a major issue. There's a need to develop future talent and work to provide tools people can use to help manage and prioritize all of the competing needs professionals are dealing with every day.



Renae Reedy
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1. Please provide a brief description of your school PR work and MinnSPRA experience.

I have several years of in PR experience in government, non-profit and private business. I moved to full time school PR in 2018. I joined MinnSPRA in 2016 and recently became a member of the MinnSPRA board to fill a vacancy.

2. What attributes would you bring to the MinnSPRA Board?

I am a one-person department representing a district with a mix of suburban and rural families. I bring to the board the perspective from a district with limited communication resources and high communications/marketing needs.

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

As PR professionals, we need to be proactive with district leadership in helping them understand the importance of community engagement and transparency with families. In addition, as PR professionals we have the ability to help change the narrative, nudging education, families and students toward better outcomes and a better community.

4. What major issues face school PR professionals today?

The depth and breadth of tasks that fall beneath the umbrella of school PR and communications makes it difficult for professionals to maintain focus and momentum. In addition, our direct working environment includes few or no peers in communications/PR, making it more challenging to learn and grow on the job.



Dirk Tedmon
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1. Please provide a brief description of your school PR work and MinnSPRA experience.

When I was at Minneapolis Public schools, I supported many communication efforts. I focused on finding solutions to the challenges the district faces and offering strategies to allow MPS to rewrite its story and become more open, transparent, and accessible in its communication. In MinnSPRA, my goal has been to be a resource to my school PR colleagues and to increase our equity, diversity and inclusion efforts. I have been on multiple conference planning committees, led sessions at multiple conferences, helped develop and launch Good Trouble PR, and provided counsel on MinnSPRA efforts as a Board Director.

2. 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. Plus, I'm just fun to have around!

3. 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.

4. What major issues face school PR professionals today?

From ever-changing social media platforms to ever-growing expectations for communication, especially in light of the pandemic, PR professionals have to be more flexible and nimble than ever before. More options for school choice create enrollment (and therefore budgetary) issues, and it falls on communicators to solve challenges like those. Inability to engage in constructive discourse is fragmenting communities, and communicators are often called upon to respond to crises created by that reality or to magically solve it. Also, School PR people are continuously 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.—even as their decision-making power and influence are often limited.



Stacy Wells
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1. Please provide a brief description of your school PR experience and MinnSPRA experience.

I joined the district in this role in November 2020. The district has never had an internal communications position, so I have been shaping the role while doing a lot of crisis communication around Covid and CRT. Toya reached out and made me aware of MinnSPRA and I joined shortly after that. I have found the FB page to be a good way to informally get information and find support. I also attended the most recent conference. I recently joined the national organization as well.

2. What attributes would you bring to the MinnSPRA board?

While I am newer to the school PR and communications role, I have been an educator for most of my professional career and bring multiple perspectives and experiences from the various roles I have had from teacher to district administrator. I also have extensive experience as a DEI practitioner and bring a commitment to equity and racial justice. Overall I am always interested in learning more and helping others.

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

As districts deal with the changes brought about from the Covid pandemic, communication efforts are more important than ever, and PR is only a portion of the work that is needed. Declining enrollment, budget challenges, staffing shortages, teacher and staff morale, persistent achievement, and opportunity gaps, student SEL, and so on, nearly everything that happens in a district has an element of communication and a variety of strategies are needed to address these issues. The overarching communication strategy creates and controls the identity, reputation, and accountability of the district with internal and external audiences. Communication leaders should be involved in the day-to-day operations to provide guidance around communication strategy as a consideration during decision making.

4. What major issues face PR professionals today?

- Misinformation and outright attacks on education as a whole and specifically around Covid and CRT/Equity
- Effectively managing social media
- Crisis management
- Appropriately reaching and representing multiple cultures