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Communications Contest

Our annual communications contest has launched. Although the categories are the same this year, the entry process looks a little different. The contest is being hosted online by a company named Pitchburner. Pitchburner's website is user friendly and will provide all entrants with feedback from the judges. Here is the link to register. The contest is open until February 20th. Demonstrate your Excellence!!

Symposium

PenSPRA's annual symposium is set for Friday, March 20th in Bedford Springs, PA with a networking event kick-off on Thursday evening. We're planning a great agenda that will include information on State College Area School District's successful referendum campaign. In addition, we expect to hear from the Pennsylvania State Police on best practices for communicating in a crisis and a third topic to be announced soon.

Register for your hotel room here by Feb. 20th to receive the discounted rate:

Register for the symposium here:

PenSPRA's Scholarship

Information on the PenSPRA 2015 scholarship program is now available. We offer three \$1,000 scholarships, one in each of our three regions, for public school students planning to major in communications or public relations. The deadline for submission is March 13, 2015. Applications and more information are available on the PenSPRA website at:

<http://www.penspra.org/ScholarshipInfo.aspx>

Instagram How-to

If you have been thinking about diving into Instagram, this slide share is a quick how-to with some useful tips.

<http://www.slideshare.net/rosssimmonds/the-ultimate-guide-to-instagram-marketing>

Book Review – The Smartest Kids in the World

Amy Ripley's book "The Smartest Kids in the World and How They Got That Way" is a very interesting read that will open your eyes to the differences cultures bring to the educational process. Ripley is a reporter who spent over a year traveling and interviewing in three of the countries that are currently scoring big on the PISA exams; Finland, South Korea and Poland. She wanted to find out what they were doing in these educational systems that are resulting in such high scores and what could we possibly bring back to the United States to improve education here.

From my point of view, there are two very important take-aways from Ripley's experience and research. The first is that society's attitude towards education is critical to success. In these highest performing countries, everyone believes deeply in the importance and value of education. The lengths that families go to in order to improve their children's education are shocking. Students in South Korea, for example, attend traditional school all day and then spend all evening until 11 pm at private study schools called hogwans. Families work multiple extra jobs and use all of their disposable income to provide their children with the best possible hogwan. This is not just an action of one segment of society either; everyone does it, working towards THE TEST. The day of the test is sacred with special accommodations everywhere in the country to support the testing students. Airplane flight patterns are even re-routed over testing centers to provide the quietest atmosphere. We do not see such an intense focus here in the United States. It is truly a vastly different state of mind.

Secondly, teachers are treated much differently in countries that have the highest performing students. Teaching is a highly respected and well regarded profession. In Finland, for example, only the highest achieving students are accepted into University to study to become teachers. It is about as difficult to be accepted into M.I.T as it is to be accepted to train for teaching in Finland. After acceptance, the college education is then provided to teaching students at no charge, with teaching students eventually earning the equivalent of a master's degree. Once in the profession, teachers have a great deal of autonomy in what and how they teach. Parents, community members and even administrators rarely question the teacher's decisions, respecting the expertise of the profession. This too is in sharp contrast to the attitude here in the U.S.

If this quick review interests you, check out this article about the education process in China, another top performing country, or take the plunge and pick up a copy of Ripley's book "The Smartest Kids in the World and How They Got That Way." See if it doesn't force you to think about how we as communicators can help to elevate the importance of teaching and learning in our work!

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/magazine/inside-a-chinese-test-prep-factory.html?ref=education&_r=0

NSPRA and NYSPRA conferences

Early bird registration for NSPRA's annual conference, July 12 – 15 in Nashville, is open until January 23rd. You can register here. http://www.nspra.org/national_seminar. If you are interested in applying for a scholarship to the NSPRA conference, you can apply here. http://www.nspra.org/nspra_foundation_scholarships

Another professional development opportunity comes our way with the NYSPRA conference, March 22-23 in Albany, NY; details are here.

News from around the state and nation

NCLB is up for a make-over this year

<http://www.politico.com/story/2015/01/the-plot-to-overhaul-no-child-left-behind-113857.html#ixzz3Nfe90Hh8>

New head of the state open records office has been appointed

<http://www.delcotimes.com/government-and-politics/20150109/longtime-pileggi-spokesman-tapped-to-lead-office-of-open-records>

Obama proposes two free years of community college for everyone

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/obama-to-call-for-two-years-of-free-community-college-for-all-students-1420760026>

Revisions to the GED test result in a drop in test-takers and passing results

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/ed/2015/01/09/375440666/a-sizable-decrease-in-those-passing-the-ged>

Home schooling regulations lessened in PA

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/05/education/home-schooling-more-pupils-less-regulation.html?ref=education&_r=0

Additional information on the changes to the mandated reporter law

http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/local/item/76882-overhauled-pa-child-abuse-law-demands-more-professionals-report-suspected-cases?linktype=hp_topstory