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H1N1 Awareness Campaign Earns Award

The National School Public Relations Association has awarded a Golden Achievement Award to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) in recognition of the success of the H1N1 Influenza communications campaign last year in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). The Golden Achievement Award honors exemplary public relations activities, programs and projects.

The awareness campaign was designed to ensure that the decisions of division-level and building-level educators, administrators and health professionals were informed by timely, accurate and school-specific information about the control and prevention of H1N1 A influenza and to raise H1N1 awareness in school communities.

“This communications campaign was critical to the success of Virginia schools in managing H1N1 influenza,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright. “I am pleased that we had the opportunity to work closely with the Virginia Department of Health to make certain that everyone – teachers, school nurses, parents and students – had ready access to timely and accurate health information.”

Although H1N1 information was available from a variety of state and federal sources, VDOE provided school-specific information targeted to public and private school communities that complemented the efforts of VDH.

“The Virginia Department of Health partnered with the Virginia Department of Education, with local school leadership and school nurses to provide timely and accurate public health guidance and expertise using creative methods such as electronic media, public service announcements to parents and school districts and community meetings,” said State Health Commissioner Dr. Karen Remley. “School nurses contributed to the success of the H1N1 influenza vaccination campaign on the front lines working earnestly to educate students, parents, and school staff, while assisting in the H1N1 vaccination efforts.”

VDOE used traditional and non-traditional communications channels to drive local decision makers to updated school-specific H1N1 information, guidance and customizable communications tools and messages on the VDOE website. The resources available on the website included downloadable videos for the start of the 2009-2010 school year. The two videos, also produced by VDOE with the assistance of VDH, contained specific information for parents and for educators.

The H1N1 campaign was cited for exemplary public relations activities, programs and projects and outstanding achievement in demonstrating the following criteria: analysis of a need, planning to meet the need, execution and communication of the program and formal evaluation.

In addition, the Library of Congress requested permission to include the VDOE H1N1 Web content for inclusion in its “Presidential Transition during a Time of Crisis” collection of Internet materials, stating that “... records of historic events could be considered incomplete without materials that were ‘born digital’ and never printed on paper.”

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