

December 14, 2016

**DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS PLAN
EDUCATION FUNDING / 2017 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Overall Strategy

During their 2017 session, lawmakers must develop a 2017-19 biennial budget that addresses the remaining key issues that have been raised by the Supreme Court's *McCleary* rulings, including increased K-12 basic education funding, educator compensation, and the balance between state and local property taxes in funding schools. The debate on these issues will be the primary focus of the entire session, and there will be a wide variety of stakeholders weighing from all sides. The razor-thin majorities in both chambers will require bipartisan cooperation and compromise to find a solution that can win passage – and it is highly likely that at least one special session will be required.

Throughout these deliberations, there is a risk that the media, the public and elected officials themselves will become distracted by process stories about the tug-of-war between the judicial and legislative branches or the political posturing within the marble halls of the capitol building. It is critical that the focus be brought back to the local classroom, school and district and how these funding issues directly impacting how schools operate and how students learn.

The Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) and its 35 member districts represent 794 local schools, with more than 22,000 teachers serving more than 400,000 students – roughly 40 percent of all K-12 students in Washington. PSESD member superintendents have great credibility in their respective communities, and this plan is based on leveraging that credibility to keep decision-makers focused on the needs of the districts' students.

Messaging

To ensure that the PSESD “voice” does not get swallowed up in the general “chorus” of stakeholders during the legislative debate, we recommend that PSESD and its member superintendents avoid generalities or speculation on what the right mix of revenue sources should be to increase K-12 funding.

Instead, we would will work with you to develop a messaging platform that focuses on a small set of key issues that reflect the identified 2017 regional legislative positions (such as ample state funding, addressing the levy cliff, educator compensation and teacher shortage) that (a) can be presented as key parts of the over-all solution, and (b) on which local superintendents have unique credibility. The primary objective will be to put a human (student and teacher) face on the legislative deliberations, thereby underscoring the need for lawmakers to take affirmative action now.

These messages will be utilized in all PSESD-related communication on legislative funding issues, including our earned media efforts.

Objectives

- Enhance understanding among legislators, opinion-leaders and the public of the funding challenges facing schools and districts
- Build the sense of urgency from a diverse set of communities and school districts for legislative action on basic education funding

Potential Tactics

- Work with PSESD leadership to develop a basic message platform that focuses on some critical funding challenges and allows local customization
- Develop more detailed talking points / Q&A for use by PSESD member superintendents
- Hold 1-2 messaging “training” sessions via conference call as needed to ensure coordinated communication at local level
- Arrange editorial board sessions / interviews with target publications (Times/TNT):
 - Identify local spokespeople (superintendents)
 - Hold message training sessions
 - Develop supporting materials to take to sessions
- Execute a localized op-ed strategy in community newspapers
 - Develop “template” op-ed and customize locally
 - Work with local superintendents to identify local community/business leaders as co-authors
 - Coordinate with superintendents/districts on placement in local newspapers
- Other earned media, such as reaching out to interested columnists with story ideas and angles
- Identify opportunity for PSESD superintendents to stage a news conference locally or in Olympia to highlight a specific issue in the funding deliberations
 - Identify issue and specific messaging
 - Select location and recruit speakers
 - Develop a media kit including press release, fact sheets and other materials
 - Invite media to the event
- Evaluate whether a coordinated “PSESD Day on the Hill” would be valuable in furthering the legislative agenda and coordinate arrangements as appropriate
- Develop and execute a coordinated strategy to engage lawmakers at town-hall events
 - Identify target list of in-district events
 - Recruit participants to deliver PSESD / district messaging
 - Provide messaging training to participants
 - Provide materials as needed
- Serve as a resource for local district communicators in their engagement with their local community stakeholders (teachers, staff, PTAs, community groups) – recognizing limits on issue advocacy

- Develop a short community presentation and materials that local superintendents can share with local civic groups (chambers, rotary clubs, etc.)
- Create a summary of resulting media coverage and circulate to legislators and through the local education representatives

Note: Some of the tactics above (especially related to Olympia engagement) may be undertaken by other organizations in which the PSESD superintendents participate. Steps will be taken to ensure that there is no duplication of effort.

Media

The following is a representative sample of the outlets we would approach for media opportunities outlined in the plan:

Seattle Times

Tacoma News-Tribune

Puget Sound Business Journal

South Sound Business Examiner

Crosscut

Sound Publishing:

- Auburn Reporter
- Bellevue Reporter
- Bothell-Kenmore Reporter
- Covington-Maple Valley-Black Diamond Reporter
- Federal Way Mirror
- Issaquah-Sammamish Reporter
- Kent Reporter
- Kirkland Reporter
- Mercer Island Reporter
- Redmond Reporter
- Renton Reporter
- Snoqualmie Valley Reporter
- The Courier-Herald (Enumclaw, Bonney Lake, Sumner)
- Tukwila Reporter
- Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber

Bainbridge Islander

KING

KOMO

KIRO

KSTW

KUOW

KNKX

Other community-based digital media outlets as identified