

State Board of Education Communications Plan *DRAFT*

Case Statement

The State Board of Education plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape in Iowa. A Communications Plan for the Board creates a comprehensive plan for communicating its decisions and reasoning to its constituency. The formalization of a communications plan establishes a proactive, consistent mechanism for disseminating information and decisions to the media and constituent groups in a coherent and orderly manner, as well as establishing opportunities for input from the constituent groups.

Principles

- The State Board pledges to maintain open and timely communication with its constituents and the media.
- Communication between these entities will occur in an orderly and respectful manner.

Goals

- Reinforce the State Board of Education's identity
- Advancement of priorities and legislative agenda
- Proactive communication

The plan accommodates the activities of the State Board and outlines appropriate mechanisms with regards to media relations and constituent relations.

Board Meetings

Media Relations (Board Meetings)

News Release: Distribute news releases regarding major key State Board initiatives, priorities, and/or decisions to media across the state. The purpose of these news releases is to highlight the work of the Board and the positive actions being taken. Possible topics include:

June	Priorities
July	Iowa Association of Community Colleges Trustees and Community College issues
November	Breaking Barriers Awards/Condition of Education Report
December	Finalized Legislative Agenda
February	Legislative Reception
April	AEA governing boards

Localized releases: News releases will be prepared and distributed when appropriate to the local media of each Board member possibly containing a quote attributable to the local Board member or information specific to the member's geographic area. Any member may request that his/her name and quote be omitted from the release to their local news outlets.

Constituent Relations (Board Meetings)

Maintaining open communication and credibility with the various constituencies leads to a mutually respectful relationship resulting in forward-thinking educational policies for the benefit of all. Our communication is most powerful when we speak directly to our constituents either face-to-face or through direct print/electronic publications.

Prior to decision-making, to the extent practical and possible, the State Board will provide constituents an opportunity for input into policy decisions. The most appropriate mechanism for such input will be determined in consultation with the Iowa Department of Education.

The State Board of Education will communicate the decision of the Board and appropriate rationale to the constituent groups concerned about the passage of a policy in the most efficient manner possible.

Advancement of State Board Educational Priorities and Legislative Agenda

Outreach

In order to achieve the advancement of the Educational Priorities and Legislative Agenda, Board members will implement an annual, ongoing public awareness campaign. In addition to the localized news releases and possible news conferences referenced in the Board Meeting section, the mainstay of the campaign will feature legislative and public outreach within the Board members' local community. This outreach offers an opportunity to emphasize the Board's priorities. Conversely, should there be a potentially unpopular component, the local outreach provides an opportunity to gather additional information and explain the Board's rationale.

While the primary focus would be on outreach through established local meetings, the Board may sponsor large-group forums when deemed appropriate and necessary. The President of the Board, in consultation with the Board's Vice-President and the Iowa Department of Education's Director, will help determine when a large-group forum is necessary, select the location; asking Board members to serve as the host at each of the sites.

Legislative Outreach: The primary goal of legislative outreach is to educate elected officials regarding the legislative agenda of the State Board and to gain legislative insight as to the political realities facing the achievement of the

Legislative Agenda. The focus on this outreach would be one-on-one meetings with Board member's local legislators, which provides the opportunity to inform and build relationships.

The Board will also hold a formal legislative reception in Des Moines on an annual basis.

Public Outreach: The primary goal of public outreach is to gain input from the general public and provide an opportunity to promote the Priorities and Legislative Agenda of the State Board of Education. Wherever possible, Board members can participate in established community events, such as local business, association, or school board meetings, to communicate directly with constituents.

The Board will also work in conjunction with the Iowa Department of Education outreach efforts when appropriate. For example, Board members may consider joining the Department Director on visits to local editorial boards.

Large public forums may also be used when deemed appropriate. These forums are best used when a specific topic or issue is identified as requiring public input. There would be set parameters for these forums and they may be done when deemed necessary and within each Board member's sphere of influence. The Board, in consultation with DE staff, will provide media relations at these events, which may include offering a Q&A upon conclusion of the forum event, offering an available spokesperson, and providing a follow-up release sent to area media reflective of the regional audience that may be in attendance. Direct and written communication with constituents may also be considered as a follow-up.

Comment:

It is tempting to say "it goes without saying"; however, it probably should be said! These forums are being held to 1) gather input from the public on specific topics/issues identified as requiring public contribution; 2) provide an opportunity to promote the Board's priorities and agenda; thereby contributing to the identity of the Board; 3) and to accurately articulate the Board's priorities to members of the media.

General Communication

Newsletters

In consultation with the Iowa Department of Education, the State Board will explore the option of producing a newsletter for selected constituencies with the purpose of announcing and expanding upon the annual Board Priorities and Legislative Agenda as well as highlighting announcements and upcoming events. Distribution methods of the newsletter will include e-mailing and posting on the Board segment of the Department's website.

E- communication

The Board will endeavor to utilize internet technology whenever possible including but not limited to the continued posting of relevant agendas, priorities, mission, purpose, etc. The Board will explore expanding the use of the internet to such areas as audio links to past news conferences, announcements, and forums.

Recognition Events

There are state-sponsored awards and recognitions that the State Board of Education may want to acknowledge either by individual members participating in established events or by the Board as a whole through a formal recognition event. This may include, but is not limited to, the Breaking Barriers awards and the Teacher of the Year award.

News Conferences

Thoughtful and respectful media relations are critical to advancing the Board's agendas and priorities. In order to facilitate a timely and coherent flow of information, a news conference, reflecting the officially sanctioned decisions of the State Board of Education, may be held when deemed appropriate.

In order to foster a mutually beneficial relationship, it is paramount that a non-confrontational, trustworthy avenue of information be afforded the media. News conferences provide that environment, allowing for actions and positions to be explained in a reasonable and thoughtful manner. Accordingly, Board spokespersons need to have well-defined, factual talking points related to the facts of the situation/event/decision; to remain calm when faced with persistent questions challenging the action; and to acknowledge divergent viewpoints.

Meetings with the Governor of Iowa

To maintain and support open communication with the Governor's Office regarding education issues facing Iowa, the State Board of Education will schedule regular meetings with the Governor of Iowa. These meetings will provide an opportunity to discuss current education issues and discuss the future of education in Iowa.

Conclusion

Through implementation of a communication plan, the State Board of Education strives to remain responsive to the educational challenges and goals of educational institutions throughout Iowa.

Crucial to any successful plan is its ability to create consistent, timely, and ongoing communication throughout its identified constituencies while being able to mold itself to changing circumstances. Equally critical is the review of such plan on a systematic basis. Accordingly, the State Board will review the plan on an as needed basis—no less than annually.