



Engaging Colleagues, Parents,
Community Members, & the Media
Straight Talk About the Work

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AGENDA

Context for this Session

Start with Research

- Frameworks Institute Findings
- School Board Focus Group Findings
- The Media

Strategy One: The Message Triangle

Strategy Two: Respond Strategically

Context for this Session

Things to Think About

- Effective communication strategies can make or break a school-improvement process
- Public schools will only change as much as the public allows...and can understand
- Everyone is an expert

What Does the Research Tell Us?

Frameworks Institute Findings

School Board Focus Group Findings

The Media

Frameworks Institute Findings

Little Picture Thinking

Education systems are invisible, which makes many reforms unimaginable.

Frameworks Institute Findings

The Tangible Triad

Unframed conversations about education and education reform tend to default to three highly visible actors who are judged as primarily responsible for education results: **parents, teachers, and students**.

Frameworks Institute Findings

Default Settings

The kinds of reforms that are easiest to think about are the most conventional: **money, "the basics," and computers.**

Frameworks Institute Findings

Avoid the Crisis Frame

Crisis thinking, while common in educational communications and campaigns, leads to caution and conservatism, not innovation and transformation.

Frameworks Institute Findings

A Focus on Self Interest

Since most people feel they do not have an agency, power, or authority when it comes to changing the education system, they adopt a defensive posture that favors a consumerist "me and my kid" approach to education issues.

Frameworks Institute Findings

Avoid the Individualist Frame

Individual, consumerist approaches to education make it more difficult for people to see education as an engine that drives national prosperity or as an investment we all make in the country's future.

Frameworks Institute Findings

A Future Preparation Focus

When the goal of education is explicitly described as the future preparation needed to maintain and support our country's quality of life, people understand that a new set of skills and experiences are necessary.

Frameworks Institute Findings

Make It Understandable

When people begin to understand the education system in concrete, familiar terms, and they recognize the need to coordinate its different parts for the good of the whole, they become more expansive in their thinking about how and where reform might take place.

Frameworks Institute Findings

Reform versus “Transformation”

When people can see reform as a practical act or as a set of methodical steps toward an ultimate goal, they gain agency and become more enthusiastic about education reforms.

Frameworks Institute Findings

Lead with Values + Simplify

Individual education reforms need to be connect to core values and familiar concepts to avoid people's tendency to default to strong, entrenched patterns of thinking.

Frameworks Institute Findings

Universal Values

Freedom ★ Prosperity ★ Opportunity ★ Fairness
Honesty ★ Trust ★ Community ★ Cooperation
Protection ★ Fulfillment ★ Self-Determination ★
Family ★ Responsibility

NESSC School Board Focus Groups

21st century skills—like critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, financial literacy, and technology—are essential for success in today’s world.	4.91
The goal of high school is to prepare every student for success in life.	4.83
High schools need to make sure that graduates leave with the skills they need to be competitive workers in the global knowledge economy.	4.6
It’s every high school’s responsibility to teach students the skills they need to succeed in college, work, and citizenship.	4.5
Today’s high schools need to teach relevant, real-world skills that students can apply in every area of adult life.	4.47
High schools should provide personalized learning opportunities and flexible pathways to graduation that allow students to manage and design their own education.	4.43
Our high schools need to be more student-centered and provide personalized learning opportunities that are based on each student’s interests and aspirations.	4.39
A high school diploma should be based on demonstrated proficiency—it should certify that all students have achieved high learning standards.	4.37
In the 21st century, students need some form of higher education or postsecondary training to get a good job.	4.28
We need strong high schools to make sure our students can compete for jobs against workers from India and China.	4.11
Our high schools haven’t changed much for decades—they need to be more innovative when it comes to how they teach today’s students.	4.09
Improving equity and reducing achievement gaps between poor students and wealthy students, and between minorities and white students, should be a primary goal of our education system.	3.93
Every student should graduate from high school prepared for college.	3.2

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Using the Media as an Ally

How do I get through the media clutter?

- Be concise
- Be clear
- Be emotionally persuasive
- Be relevant
- Colorful metaphors, comparisons, stories, memorable facts or statistics, first person testimony all amplify your message

Using the Media as an Ally

How are messages received?

People—and the media—will:

- Believe what they want to believe
- Respond to emotional connotations
- Yield to repetition
- Respond to the prestige of the messenger
- Conform to fellow listeners

Using the Media as an Ally

Business Interest v. Public Interest

- Corporatization: Bottom line focus = smaller, younger news staff
- Consolidation: Fewer competitors to keep outlets honest
- Commercialization: News is increasingly a vehicle to sell something

Using the Media as an Ally

What this means for you–

- Lack of sophistication and nuance
- Fewer specialty reporters (environment, investigative)
- Less content - thinner newspapers, more wire stories
- Increased rapidity and frequency of reporting

Your job: Keep the message simple. Package it with the reporter's needs in mind.

Finding a Hook

Eight Components of a Newsworthy Story

- Conflict
- Change
- Timeliness
- Impact
- Prominence
- Proximity
- The Unusual
- Currency

Staying on Message in an Interview

Blocking:

Deftly avoiding an unwelcome or unproductive question. Only block a question completely when there is good reason to do so.

Bridging:

Taking the discussion from unfriendly to friendly territory with a smooth transition. There is almost no reason for “no comment”—bridge to what you want the media to hear.

Staying on Message in an Interview

Classic Traps

- Irrelevance: A question that has no bearing on your agenda, perhaps not even on your area of expertise or the stated focus of the interview.
- Speculation: The reporter asks you to predict the future or address a hypothetical situation.
- Loaded Preface: The question begins with a premise that is negative or incorrect

Thoughts on Social Media

- Think small and specific
- Build followers
- Operate one-way

Think, Turn, and Talk

What is a key message about your work that you often share in public? Write this down.

Share with a neighbor.

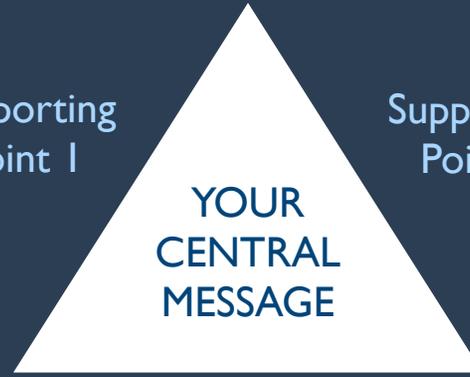
Messaging Triangle

Supporting
Point 1

Supporting
Point 2

YOUR
CENTRAL
MESSAGE

Supporting Point 3



Messaging Triangle

A college degree
is the gateway to
prosperity and
better jobs

It's only fair that
every student graduates
prepared for college and
modern careers

Every
student deserves
to graduate prepared
for college and careers

Our high school's primary mission is
to give every student the best
possible chance to succeed in life

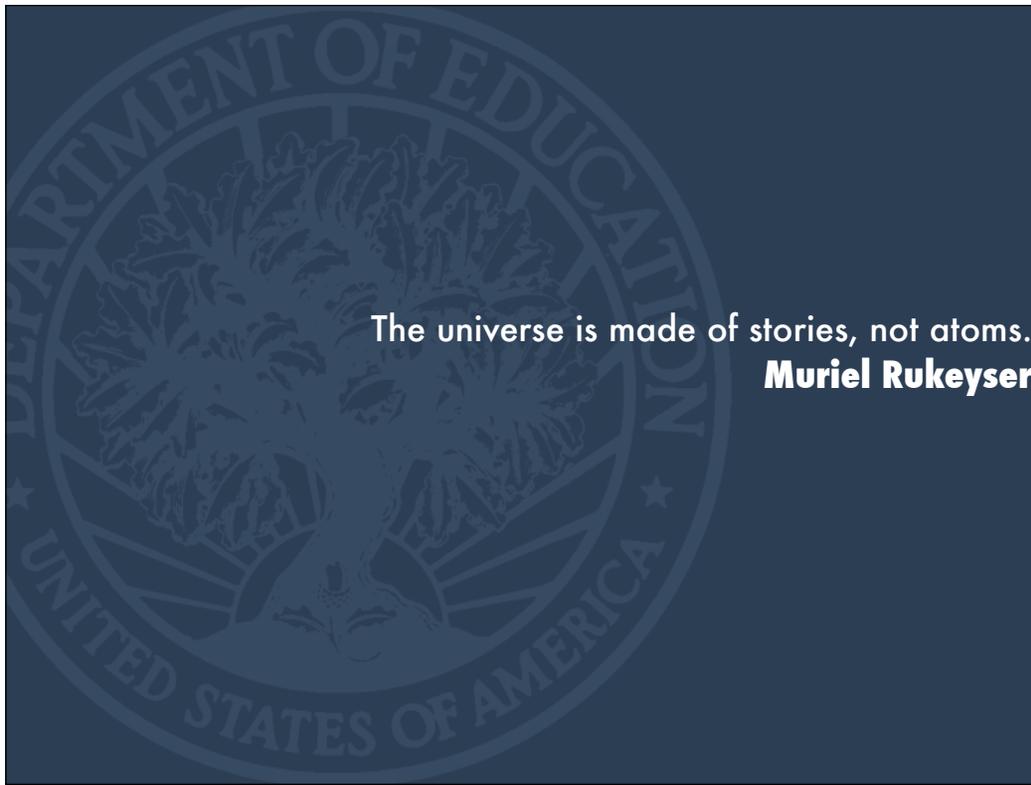
Think, Turn, and Talk

Consider what you've learned today. How might you change your presentation, language, or framing to deliver the message more effectively?

Share with a neighbor.

Responding Strategically

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
TRUE	Affirm + Amplify	Recast + Explain
FALSE	Let Sleeping Dogs Lie	Change the Impression



The universe is made of stories, not atoms.
Muriel Rukeyser