



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

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PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

October 7, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: John C. Austin, President

SUBJECT: Discussion on State Board of Education
Communications Policy

The attached "Proposed State Board Communications Policies and Practices" document is being presented to the Board for discussion.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Proposed State Board Communications Policies and Practices

At our retreat we discussed establishing some common expectations/practices regarding individual SBE members communications, and governing use of MDE communications staff, lists, e-lists and assistance in sharing public statements, press releases, op-eds etc. that represent individual SBE member positions.

I talked with 4 states identified by NASBE as having well-functioning communications offices, and elected State Board members: (Colorado, Ohio, Utah and Washington State) to learn about their practices and/or policies on related issues. You are familiar with what was learned (Appendix A. attached).

An informal committee (Ulbrich, Danhof, Weiser, Austin) discussed policies and practices again on September 12th, 2011, joined by Marty Ackley and Marilyn Schneider.

This discussion did not reach consensus, but aired a variety of perspectives and issues.

Following these discussions, I am proposing the policies below, as an effort at compromise, but knowing it does not satisfy all Board Members. I welcome additional comments on this draft, from Board and staff.

I ask for Board Approval of the following policies and practices:

- **State Board Members** will collaborate on and share public statements of the Board to the **media** through MDE communications staff and office, that reflect shared Board positions as determined by vote at public meeting;
- **State Board Member communication to education stakeholders groups**, listservs, and organizations managed by MDE, must reflect shared SBE position and decision;
- **Individual SBE Members**, as state elected officials and as a function of their offices, are encouraged to share their individual viewpoints on education issues with media and constituents in the form of editorials, press releases, blogs, facebook, newsletter articles and Twitter accounts using:
 - **SBE letterhead and logo clearly identifying their individual office**
- The MDE communications staff will facilitate this communication by:
 - electronic distribution of SBE Member communication, clearly labeled, through MDE media listservs, and editorial contacts, when requested by SBE Members;
 - Making available to SBE members MDE editorial and media lists;

- Collaborating on a simple “press packet” regarding SBE, members and activity;
- Aiding in set-up of a SBE Member-maintained Facebook Page and link to SBE home page;
- Investigating the cost/feasibility, and reporting on the process for establishing, a simple integrated website that affords better two-way communication among SBE, MDE, and constituencies, through blog posts and interactivity—as seen in Utah model. <http://utahpubliceducation.org/>

Attachment A. Elected State Board Communications Policy and Practice

After NASBE organized consultation with other states, here's what I learned:

Ohio: has eleven Board Members elected by regional district, and nine others appointed by Governor. They appoint the State Superintendent (as we do) and have a communications office with the Department of Education.

They have no formal policy on these issues, and were prompted by my call to consider "we should have a similar discussion here." Their board members have traditionally not been active, nor interested in communicating their positions publically, and to date largely defer to communications staff on handling the press etc. However, changes in Board appointees due to change in Gov's office is likely to provoke some need for developing their own policies and practices.

Utah: had the best developed communications effort. They have 18+ (elected by regional district) Board members, who appoint the Superintendent, and have an Education Department Communications office. They:

- a) Look to their executive committee, which has calls weekly to develop and review/approve public statements and releases/editorials that reflect the position of the full Board. Department communications staff facilitate their communication.
- b) They also have a State Education Department Blog, and Facebook page, and Twitter functionality that any and all individual Board members use to make statements, share perspective or otherwise communicate as individuals--provided as a service to the Board members. See <http://utahpubliceducation.org/>

Washington: Has 5 elected (by region), 7 Governor-appointed Board members, and an independently-elected Superintendent (with a vote on the Board). They have a State Board Office that also handles Board communications. Superintendent/Department of Education has its own communications function.

They don't have any formal policies on Board communications. Informally, the Board makes statements and issues statements reflecting Board positions, facilitated by their communications staff. Individual Board members sometimes make their own statements, share information with public media on their own letterhead, and from their own offices—but this does not come through the Board office.

Colorado: has 7 elected-by Congressional District Board members and they appoint Superintendent; with both a Board Secretary, and a communications department in the Education Department (like Michigan).

They too have no formal policies or procedures. (and think after talking they might want to develop some). Informally, and in practice Department communications people working for the Superintendent try and control the messages coming from the Board and Board members—Board members haven't initiated much public communication on their own, but are known to speak freely to press, and at public venues, not necessarily reflecting the full Board position.