
by **L. Michelle** on **Tue, 12 Mar at 2:04 PM** via **Portal**

Comment on Commission meeting agenda item - L. Michelle

Dear Commissioners,

Attached is a letter the Puget Sound ESD 121 wishes to submit as public comment and ask that we be advised of possible next steps, such as a presentation or a meeting.

Kind regards,

L. Michelle

Director of Communications, Puget Sound ESD 121

lmichelle@psed.org



800 Oakesdale Ave SW
Renton, WA 98057
(425) 917-7600

March 12, 2024

Washington State Public Disclosure Commission

Evergreen Plaza, 711 Capitol Way S #206
Olympia, WA 98504

Regarding: Request for collaboration and modernization of PDC Guidelines for School Elections.

Dear Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) Members,

On behalf of the school districts within Puget Sound ESD 121, serving King and Pierce Counties, we respectfully request your consideration and collaboration to update the existing publication guidelines for school district elections. The current PDC guidelines, in use for over two decades, now need revision to align with today's evolving landscape of information dissemination and consumption.

We acknowledge and commend the PDC's crucial role in regulating campaigns during elections, and in ensuring the dissemination of accurate and unbiased information to the electorate. However, our school districts today face increasing challenges in effectively communicating with local constituents. We therefore seek a balance between the need for regulation and our duty to inform the community about the impact of bond and levy dollars. What has become normal and customary in our daily communications practices—for example, using storytelling, authentic voices, repetition, and visual appeal to break through a cluttered media environment—are not fully reflected in the current guidelines.

A vital component of a successful communication strategy today involves the deliberate repetition of messages across various channels, including emails, text messages, and social media platforms. Repetition is a basic and routine practice that is crucial, especially in the context of communicating essential information such as bonds and levies to the public.

There is no disputing that social media has emerged as a powerful tool for information dissemination. Community members actively seek information on various social media platforms, necessitating the maintenance of several profiles by most districts. However, the algorithms governing visibility and reach on these platforms are beyond our control. To give our communities the opportunity to receive our information in a social media feed, it takes posting with frequency and repetition as well as creating content people will interact with, for example, liking or sharing. Without this, the information may not circulate.

We are competing for attention in a highly cluttered media environment. To break through, it is incumbent upon us to develop messaging that our constituents will engage with rather than scroll by. For this reason, the use of engaging video and content that shares the voices of students and staff to convey information and stories is a regular part of our routine communications efforts. Even with our best efforts, we hear reports from local constituents reporting that the first they have heard of a bond or levy being on the ballot is when the ballot arrived.

Further, bond and levy measures are complex. It is the district's responsibility to articulate clearly to voters how anticipated funding will impact student and staff experiences and outcomes. Informing communities about the



800 Oakesdale Ave SW
Renton, WA 98057
(425) 917-7600

nuanced needs and challenges faced by schools and students, and offering these communications through various mediums, such as articles, videos, social media posts, quotes, and presentations, is fundamental. This approach not only builds awareness but also adheres to best practices in communications.

Serving a diverse population with varying generational, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds necessitates the deployment of a diverse set of communication tools and strategies. Ensuring clear and equitable access to information for all families and community members becomes imperative in meeting the various communication preferences within our community. Social and electronic media provide tools that help us to better address these diverse needs and preferences.

In conclusion, the repetitive messaging and diverse communication strategies employed by our school districts are not merely routine practices but are in fact essential elements for fostering community engagement, transparency, and informed decision-making.

We kindly request the Commission's consideration of these challenges, and, in collaboration with school communications professionals, to modernize guidelines as well as develop training opportunities. These steps will enable us to work in good faith, following the law while effectively communicating with our communities regarding the needs of our districts and students.

Sincerely,

John Welch,
Superintendent Puget Sound ESD 121, on behalf of:

Auburn School District
Bainbridge Island School District
Bellevue School District
Bethel School District
Carbonado School District
Chief Leschi Schools
Clover Park School District
Dieringer School District
Eatonville School District
Enumclaw School District
Federal Way Public Schools
Fife Public Schools
Franklin Pierce School District
Highline Public Schools
Issaquah School District
Kent School District
Lake Washington School District
Mercer Island School District
Muckleshoot Tribal Schools

Northshore School District
Orting School District
Peninsula School District
Puyallup School District
Renton School District
Riverview School District
Seattle Public Schools
Shoreline Public Schools
Skykomish Public Schools
Snoqualmie Valley School District
Steilacoom Historical School District
Sumner-Bonney Lake School District
Tacoma Public Schools
Tahoma School District
Tukwila Public Schools
University Place School District
Vashon Island School District
White River School District