

ActionMedia Communications Framing Memo

This memo offers a story about the public interest in education and learning. It is intended to encourage advocates to strengthen their communications, by basing them in a perspective that cuts across ages and programs, and *explicitly* defines the issues in terms of the broadest common public interest.

The Public Interest

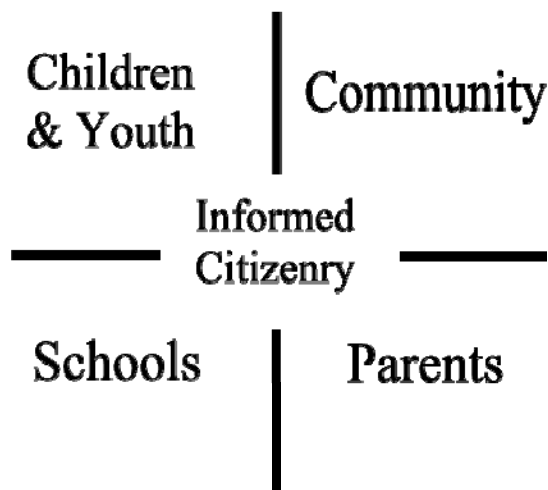
At present, advocates talk about their goals as providing education to all children and youth – a transaction between knowledge providers and students, with youth as the primary beneficiary. But there is a broader, more inclusive story about education. Minnesota’s State Constitution is very specific about the public purpose: “*The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish... (and) secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state.*”

When the work is defined as *providing society with an educated and equipped citizenry* it instantly becomes a story about everyone, not just about students, parents, educators and youth workers. This more inclusive perspective will strengthen the advocates’ position with its target audiences, and be mutually reinforcing among the currently separate spheres of early childhood, K-12, Out of School Time, and secondary education. It also supports telling stories about life long learning, both in the sense of the successive stages of life, and in the sense of community and civic life, where social interactions and sense of community are just as important as specific knowledge and skills.

America, having given the world the model of a free and democratic society, invented universal public education. Today, our economic and social future as a self-governing people depends on every member of society being capable, informed, responsible participants in an increasingly complex economy.

Defining “education”

We know much more today about learning and development than was known when the State constitution called for “the intelligence of the people”. We now understand how learning – and the crucial architecture of the brain that will determine future ability to learn – begins at birth. We understand that parents are teachers. We recognize that success at school increases when students feel connected to their school and community, and when they have the personal skills and goals to take responsibility for their own learning. We now understand that learning doesn’t end when the bell rings, but continues and is supported by the experiences young people have outside of school. And, we know that a high school is no longer enough for the current generation to succeed economically – every Minnesotan must be prepared to pursue post-secondary learning, and be able to continue learning throughout their careers and life.



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It will be challenging for advocates to change their communications in this way. It's always hard to change habits. Advocates and the groups they represent currently frame their communications in terms of the needs and capabilities of young people, because young people are the immediate beneficiaries of that work. However, a new perspective could be strategically put forward. There is nothing in the recommended change that contradicts either the objectives or the pertinence of current communications.

Shared Values

When telling the reframed story it is critical to explicitly evoke the key values of the story - a free, democratic society – one which provides opportunity to all, and expects participation by all, equality of opportunity, and of civic participation.

A related value is responsibility. Everyone has a responsibility to engage in or otherwise support this shared social mission. Achieving it requires that young people become responsible adults, able to take care of themselves, their family and community.

The State constitution refers to “the intelligence” of the people. That century old phrase is better communicated today in terms of the values of knowledge, skills, and relationships that create the capacity to be informed members of a self-governing society, in an increasingly complex economy: productive, contributing, self-reliant adults engaged with others.

Schools, parents early childhood programs, after-school activities, or any combination of these, cannot do it alone. This is a societal task, and requires the full participation of all.

We must do more to support and involve parents, and to ensure early learning. We need to do much better at providing Minnesota's children with an enriching environment of college-oriented peers and supportive adults. We need to better connect our schools to our communities, and to enhance our communities with meaningful participation of young people. We need action to give all Minnesotans learning experiences that begin in earliest childhood and continues through a career.

Our policies and our institutions must apply what we know about development and learning to fully equip our young citizens. Anything less is untenable for our economy, unsustainable for our democracy, and unacceptable for our children.

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