



WSPRA



Washington School Public
Relations Association
4616 25th Ave NE, PMB 415
Seattle, WA 98105

Dear Public Disclosure Commission Commissioners and Staff,

On behalf of the Washington School Public Relations Association (WSPRA) and our 233 members, we are writing regarding the guidelines, or lack thereof, for communicating school election information with the communities we serve using modern communication tools, strategies and best practices.

We acknowledge and respect the important work done by the PDC in guiding accurate and unbiased information to the electorate. Concurrently, we face the ongoing challenge of effectively communicating with our local constituents. This task is particularly crucial when their active participation is essential in the electoral process, amidst the abundance of distractions in today's dynamic and distracting modern media landscape.

In consideration of the PDC's strategic commitment to identifying and proactively addressing emerging trends and challenges with increased agility and responsiveness, we believe it is essential to convey the unique challenges that school districts encounter while planning and executing informational campaigns. We respectfully urge the commission to carefully consider these elements and seek a collaborative approach with professionals in school communications. This collaboration would be instrumental in understanding and implementing current best practices, especially in the context of updating PDC guidelines that pertain to the regulation and effective use of social media and other modern digital communication tools of the 21st century.

Key Points for Consideration:

1. **Necessity of Repetitive Messaging:** In our efforts to capture the limited attention of stakeholders, school districts find it necessary to frequently reiterate messages. This repetition occurs through various channels such as emails, text messages, and multiple social media postings. Such practices are not only routine but imperative, particularly when communicating about bonds and levies. This aligns with our established communication protocols and is crucial for ensuring that vital information reaches our communities.
2. **Social Media's Role:** In our digital age, our community members actively seek information on a range of social media platforms. This necessitates the maintenance of several social media profiles by most districts to adequately reach and engage different segments of our community. Social media, while favoring brief and recurrent posts, often limits the extent of content that can be shared in a single update. Consequently, districts are compelled to segment complex topics, such as the specifics of levy or bond measures, into multiple posts to ensure comprehensive communication. Imposing limits on the number of social media posts could severely restrict a district's capability to convey critical information, thus hampering informed decision-making by voters.
3. **Algorithmic Challenges and Cost Effectiveness:** The visibility and reach of our posts on social media platforms are largely dictated by algorithms, over which school districts have no control. Restricting the frequency of our social media posts could unintentionally reduce the transparency of our communications and deprive voters of essential information.



4. **Diversity and Equity in Communication:** Our school districts serve a diverse population, encompassing a wide range of generations, home languages, and socioeconomic backgrounds, each with distinct communication preferences. It is imperative that we employ a variety of communication tools and strategies to ensure equitable access to information for all families and community members.
5. **Communications Reflecting Students' Needs:** The PDC acknowledges the importance of informing communities about the needs and challenges faced by districts and students, many of which may be unknown to the broader community. Personalizing these needs through various mediums such as articles, videos, social media posts, quotes, and presentations about individual students, classes, and schools is fundamental. This approach not only builds awareness but is also in line with the best practices in communications. Furthermore, it is the district's responsibility to clearly communicate to voters how anticipated funding will impact student and staff experiences and outcomes.
6. **Transparency and Informed Decision-Making:** Additional limitations on the use of modern communication tools could significantly impede the democratic process. Low voter turnout rates in our state, which often hover around 30-40%, are a testament to this challenge. The frequent reports from local constituents of being unaware of school district measures on the ballot, despite the district's efforts to comply with PDC guidelines, underscore the need for more accessible and transparent communication. Limitations in this area could potentially lead to even lower voter engagement in critical electoral measures.

We request the PDC to work closely with school communication professionals to continuously update and evaluate strategies and technologies vital for effective information dissemination in today's digital landscape. The dynamic nature of communication platforms necessitates ongoing assessment. We stand ready to collaborate in researching best practices, ensuring that guidance remains current with evolving methods of information delivery.

Sincerely,

The WSPRA Executive Board

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