

Memorandum

From: Mark Eckhardt, MAISA president
To: MAISA members
Re: Short-term communication strategy to address ISD reform legislation
Date: September 5, 2003

As you know, several pieces of legislation aimed at reforming Intermediate School Districts have been introduced in recent months. While several of these bills are punitive in nature, some are reasonable reforms that are supported by MAISA.

On your behalf, I brought together the ISD Public Relations group to develop a communications strategy to help us with these issues. Their work is attached. It includes several documents to help MAISA members work within their school family to seek support for legislation that is fair and opposition to bills that would drastically affect our ability to operate. They are:

- A one-page strategy sheet outlining our recommendations to deal with this legislation and your local legislators;
- A summary of ISD reform legislation now pending in the Legislature categorized by bills MAISA does not support, bills MAISA could support, and other legislative concepts that MAISA may support if necessary;
- A handout containing talking points on the role and function of ISDs, the governance structure and controls on ISD expenditures, activities, etc.
- Handouts on why, and how, you can go about assembling a group of outside spokespersons to speak on behalf of your ISD;
- Sample success stories, the “little miracles” you should keep in your back pocket about the work you do in your ISD; and
- A list of key legislators to contact.

We must work together to preserve and expand the responsibilities of Intermediate School Districts. Intermediate districts are essential to the Governor’s preschool education initiative to give children a Great Start, and local districts need ISDs more than ever to manage the accountability and school improvement mandates under No Child Left Behind.

Please study the attached communications materials carefully and use them as you work with your local district superintendents, the families you serve, and your local legislators. Together we can demonstrate how important, responsive and responsible our Intermediate School Districts are to the children and families of the communities we serve.

Getting to your legislator

The Strategy:

Sing from the same song sheet

- Use the attached materials to shape your comments with legislators, the media and others who may ask about ISDs, their role and function, and legislation to reform ISDS. Help them understand what your ISD does, how you serve students and schools, and why some of the legislation that has been proposed would be a big step backward for your area and the state.

Recruit others to tell your story

- Reach out to selected supporters among your local superintendents, share the attached outline of proposed legislation and talking points, and ask them to share their perspective with your local legislators. Their comments on your behalf will carry a great deal of credibility and will not seem so self-serving and your own efforts to detail the services you provide.

Others in your community are important too. Seek out parents and influential people in your community who have benefited from your ISD to speak out on your behalf. Share appropriate information with them and ask for their support.

Focus on key legislators

- Certain legislators – because of their committee assignments, their influence, or the votes they have cast on similar legislation – play a key role in the success of our legislative strategy.

Two lists of legislators are attached to this memo. One is a list of key legislators who should be contacted because of their committee assignments and influence. The other is a list of legislators who voted for the popular election of ISD board members as an amendment to the election consolidation bill.

If your local legislator is on the attached list, you must seek out a local superintendent and others in your community to contact your legislator(s) and talk with them about how damaging some of the proposed legislation could be for schools and schoolchildren.

Pending ISD Reform Legislation

MAISA opposes:

1. HB 4338 – R. Johnson (R) – Holly
 - Sets the number of ISD board members at seven.
 - Requires all of ISD board members to be popularly elected beginning July 1, 2004.
 - Prohibits a local school board member from serving on the ISD board.
 - Prohibits an ISD board member from holding any other elective office.
 - Modifies current law for dissolving districts and now provides for the “disorganization” of district.

2. HB 4935 – R. Johnson (R) – Holly
 - Allows, by petition or resolution, the placement of an issue on a ballot that puts the governance of the ISD under a reform board.
 - Establishes the structure of the reform board.
 - Establishes the process for removing the governance of the ISD from the reform board.

MAISA supports, or *could* support:

1. HB 4947 – Gleason (D) – Flushing (Has public MAISA support)
 - Requires each local district board to publicly disclose their vote for the ISD board candidate through a resolution.

2. HB 4979 – Minor (D) – Flint (Will likely be supported by MAISA)
 - Requires each local district board to publicly disclose their vote for the ISD board candidate through a resolution adopted by the majority of members on the local board.
 - Requires the election of the ISD board members to be held at an open meeting.

3. HB 5043 – R. Johnson (R) – Holly (Could possibly be supported if modified)
 - Establishes a procedure for the recall of ISD Board members.

4. SB 643 – Cherry (D) – Burton (Will likely be supported by MAISA)
 - Requires the election of the ISD board members to be held at an open meeting as defined by the Open Meetings Act.

MAISA will discuss at a future meeting, but no direction has been determined:

1. HB 4934 – R. Johnson (R) – Holly
 - Allows voters to reconsider their millage vote if the millage is used for a purpose other than the one stated on the ballot.
2. HB 5044 – R. Johnson (R) – Holly
 - Requires the ISD to maintain a list of parents on the special education parent advisory committee (PAC).

Other bill concepts that have been discussed and *could* be supported by MAISA:

1. The requirement that *all* contracts for superintendents contain language allowing for the superintendent's dismissal for misfeasance, malfeasance or nonfeasance. Alternatively, a requirement in law allowing for a superintendent to be dismissed for misfeasance, malfeasance or nonfeasance.

Intermediate School Districts: Role, Power, and Mission

- ISDs were created by the Legislature in 1962 to bring about quality and equitable educational opportunities to students and schools throughout the state. ISDs accomplish this mission in a number of ways, namely by:
 1. Creating and promoting economies of scale (*give local examples*)
 2. Sharing current and credible research, best practices, and innovation (*give local examples*)
 3. Providing oversight and liaison roles (*give local examples*)
- Over the course of the past decade, the unique roles of intermediate school districts have adapted to include the realities of increased calls for educational accountability and choice. For example, ISDs are assuming an active role in helping member districts understand, comply, and implement the standards required of the complex federal No Child Left Behind law and the state accreditation system. Currently, ISDs are being called upon to provide technical assistance to schools, much as they have done in the area of school improvement.
- By building and sustaining local partnerships and sharing credible research into the importance of early childhood care and education, ISDs have been leaders throughout the state in this area.
- By working with work development boards and business and industry, ISDs help promote growing economies and stable communities.

These are just a few examples; be prepared to cite other local examples. For a broader guide, refer to the Essential Services document, which gives public act citations and service information.

Intermediate School Districts: Board Elections, Board Accountability and Service

- ISDs always welcome concerned community citizens to serve on their boards.
- Statute specifies two ways to elect ISD board members: 1) allow locally elected boards of education to choose or 2) allow for popular election of ISD boards. This has been a local decision.
- ISD board members, who are chosen by local districts, must comply with all state election and campaign laws, including garnering voter signatures to qualify. Notices are published in local newspapers.
- By having local districts choose ISD board members, ISDs are able to have a geographic representation on their boards, balancing large and small school districts, as well as urban, suburban and rural.
- Local districts are well qualified and well positioned to choose and oversee the election of ISD board members. ISDs exist to serve educational needs of their constituents, with local districts being the major constituency.
- All ISD board meetings fall under the Open Meetings Act and are posted and open to the public. Time for public comment is available at every ISD board meeting.

- All ISD board actions become public records and are available to the public through a variety of ways: the superintendent's office, on the district website, and often through the local media.
- According to state law, board members may serve on local and ISD boards simultaneously.
- According to state law, ISD board members must abstain from property transfer decisions involving a local district in which they also serve as a board member.

Intermediate School Districts: Oversight

- As community-based and taxpayer-funded organizations, ISDs expect and welcome the high degree of scrutiny they typically receive of their programs, services, budget, personnel, facilities, etc.
- ISDs receive ongoing scrutiny from: local boards of education, superintendents, curriculum and special education directors, local district business administrators, local district human resource directors, classroom teachers and support staff, parents of special needs students, parents of students in our career and technical education centers or programs, students who attend ISD specialized programs, workforce development boards, human service agencies and collaboratives, chamber of commerce, business and industry partners, legislators and other policymakers, state board of education and the media, among others.
- ISD budgets are reviewed annually by their constituent districts. Their finances are open to the public at any time.
- If you need information from your ISD, just ask. All ISD records are covered by the Freedom of Information Act.

Intermediate School Districts: Revenue Options and Accounting Practices

- After the passage of Proposal A, local districts are extremely limited in how they can raise funds for educational needs.
- By acting on a regional basis, through Intermediate School Districts, local districts can ask the public for increased funding for special education, vocational education, or enhancement millage. These tax dollars go directly to local school districts or are utilized to provide services used by local school districts, their students and families.
- ISD tax levies are subject to the same public scrutiny of every governmental unit (i.e., township, city, state) and formal structures to challenge exist.
- Through ISDs and the corresponding economies of scale available, public monies are used to optimum advantage. This allows local schools to better leverage their own resources. *(Give local examples.)*
- ISDs follow standard accounting practices and, like all other school districts, will adopt Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) Statement 34 requirements according to law.

- All ISDs have an independent board auditor and their books are audited each year. These audits are open and readily available to the public.

Intermediate School Districts: Superintendent Compensation

- Superintendents of our intermediate school districts are the educational and administrative leaders of organizations that serve large and diverse populations and constituencies.
- Considering the size and scope of operational and educational services offered, ISD superintendents often lead organizations that are among the largest employers in their community.
- Salaries reflect the standards of the communities they serve. This is a local decision.
- There is a system of checks and balances in terms of compensating ISD superintendents comparably with local district superintendents. The market largely determines appropriate compensation.
- It is becoming increasingly difficult to attract quality public school administrators and we need to be competitive to get the best candidates.

Intermediate School Districts: Contracts with Outside Vendors and Conflicts of Interest

- ISD contracts fall under the same guidelines as other entities that receive governmental monies.
- Bid policies are set according to School Code guidelines.
- ISDs have bylaws, policies, and/or guidelines prohibiting conflict of interest on the part of board members, administrators, and staff.
- (Make sure board policies are available.)

Intermediate School District: Professional Development

- As educational leaders, it is essential superintendents remain current in their field. This is done largely through active participation in education associations, both state and national, which may require travel and reimbursement for expenses.
- This participation in state and national education associations is necessary as intermediate school districts are most often the preferred provider of professional development for the schools they serve. For Michigan's students and their schools to remain on the cutting edge, ISDs and their administrators must be on the cutting edge as well.
- ISD board members require similar professional development through participation in state and national education associations to provide leadership in setting policies that help districts implement and achieve the goals of increased student achievement required in legislation such as No Child Left Behind.

- All ISDs have board policies and guidelines covering participation in state and national education associations and their continuing education conferences and workshops. Actual and necessary expenses incurred through the discharge of official duties and in performing functions authorized by the board are typically reimbursed by the intermediate district within approved budget guidelines. (Refer to your district's policies and guidelines for further detail.)

Intermediate School Districts: Open Communication

- ISDs have a long history of open communication with our legislators (give examples like: we hold regular meetings with our legislators as part of our school boards' association activities.)
- We also have direct dialogue with our local superintendents and school boards, regularly reviewing our efforts, programs and funding.
- And, we have a track record of candid communication with our local media to ensure that our communities know and understand our efforts on behalf of children and families.
- In addition, ISDs – collectively as part of our state association – have provided legislators with a document called ISDs' Mission, Role and Essential Services. Originally developed in 1990, revised in 1993, and updated in 2000, it is a tool that we've used to help legislators and others understand what ISDs do and are capable of doing.

When telling the ISD story

Enlist others to talk about your successes

ISDs have many success stories. But, it's better when someone else tells them. That's because the information is perceived as more credible when someone without a vested interest sings your praises. The list below suggests people who may be willing to tell about the positive experiences they've had with your ISD, its staff, programs or services. Scenarios will be as varied as Michigan's intermediate school districts and their communities. Seek out these or any other examples that are specific to your area. The key is to have someone else speak positively on your behalf.

Direct Student Services

- The parents of a successfully included child commenting on the difference it has made in their lives.
- The parents of a child who received or is receiving early childhood services—and the improvement they've seen in school readiness.
- A student who graduated from your career/technical center and is happily employed in a related field.
- The parents of a child who received early intervention services and is no longer in need of special education services.

Professional Development

- Teachers who have attended content-specific training that's made a difference in their classroom practice.
- A building secretary who attended a seminar at your ISD and applied what s/he learned back in his/her office.
- A local board member who has benefited from a new board member orientation session.

School Improvement

- A principal who has worked with your School Improvement consultant to use data to improve instruction.
- A teacher who is better equipped to work with a special needs student because of the support received from an ISD teacher consultant.

Regional Educational Media Center

- Local district business manager commenting on the amount of dollars saved via the ISD cooperative purchasing program.
- A teacher commenting about how s/he used REMC materials, ERIC search, teacher workroom, videos, software, kits or models to enhance learning in his/her classroom.
- A parent of a special needs child who has benefited from REMC materials or connections s/he has acquired through your ISD.

Technology Services

- A local school district technology director praising your technology consultants for help with distance learning, fiber connection or WAN/LAN systems.
- A special education teacher telling about how a piece of assistive technology equipment from the ISD has made the difference for a special needs child in his/her classroom.

Community Collaboration

- A county government administrator who can speak to the role your ISD plays in countywide efforts.
- A leader from the local community college or university who can talk about the role your ISD plays in teacher education.
- The chairperson of your Chamber of Commerce's Education Committee who can speak about your ISD's role in quality of life/economic development efforts.
- An employer who has worked with your work-study coordinator to hire one or more of your students with special needs.
- A police or fire chief who can speak to the ISD's role in school safety, post 9-11.

Administrative Services

- A superintendent who can comment on the help her/his district has received with legislative relations.
- A principal who can talk about the school nursing services his school receives under a contract with the ISD.
- A human resources administrator noting the invaluable substitute teacher recruitment program coordinated by the ISD.

Michigan School Public Relations Association

###

Compiling an ISD spokesperson list

Why compile an ISD/RESA spokesperson list?

The most effective spokespersons for your ISD or RESA are your constituents, customers, and partners. Make it a practice to suggest these sources to reporters whenever they contact you for information about your organization. The best time to compile such a list is NOW, not when a reporter contacts you and is pursuing a story, facing a deadline, and looking for sources. Use the following suggestions to pull together your spokesperson list.

Who to include on your spokesperson list?

- ISD/RESA staff members
- Parents of ISD/RESA students
- ISD/RESA board of education members
- Local district superintendents
- Local district board members
- Representatives from public school academies if applicable
- Curriculum directors
- Special education directors
- Vocational education directors
- Business officials in local districts
- Human resource directors in local districts
- Technology directors in local districts
- Legislators
- Local policymakers
- Workforce development partners
- Business partners
- Human service agency partners
- Higher education partners
- Michigan Department of Education spokesperson
- Educational associations
- Community leaders

What factors to consider when compiling a spokesperson list?

- Be sure you have a strong, positive relationship with each of your designated spokespersons
- Get permission to use these individuals as spokespersons for your ISD/RESA
- Consider diversity, geography, and credibility as you compile your list
- Include names, titles, relationship to ISD/RESA, locations, and phone numbers on your list
- Keep your list to one easily accessible page
- Keep this list close to your phone and in your PDA or planner

- Make sure you advise your spokesperson anytime you offer his or her name to a reporter; do this immediately after speaking with the reporter
- Offer to share “talking points” with your spokesperson on the topic of interest to the reporter
- Consider your spokesperson as part of a “key communicator” group and provide appropriate ISD/RESA information; communicate with them regularly, not just when the media calls

Michigan School Public Relations Association

Some Sample Success Stories

Success Stories – Allegan County Intermediate School District
(These are true stories. All the names have changes to protect the identity of those involved)

Early Education Services

This family consists of just the father -- Bill and his daughter, Nichole. The mother is out of the picture due to a domestic assault charge, leaving Bill with sole custody of his daughter. Not only is Bill raising Nichole by himself, he has an illness that was ignored until EES got involved with the family.

When the Parent Educator started visiting the family, a key issue arose when Bill mentioned that he had been diagnosed with manic depression. Bill was not taking his medication nor receiving any counseling. As a result, his relationship with Nichole was distant and inconsistent. On her weekly visits, our Parent Educator stressed how important it was for him to take care of himself, so he could be a better parent for Nicole. She kept reiterating throughout their visits the importance of his well being and the long-term effects this has on Nicole. In addition, she obtained information regarding his condition to share with Bill from Community Mental Health. Recently the Parent Education was pleased to receive a phone call from Bill. He had decided to start seeing a counselor and was now taking his medication.

During their last home visit, Bill said he had planned a day at the pumpkin patch with Nicole. He was also interacting with Nicole more, and even broke into a rendition of *Itsy, Bitsy Spider* while Nicole laughed and laughed. According to the Parent Educator, “The change has been fantastic!” Bill adds when asked about the EES program, “It has been a life saver for me and Nicole. I hate to think where we would be without it.”

Supporting our partnership Programs (HEAD START)

A single father with custody of his 2 sons – ages 5 and 3 – was overwhelmed but a neighbor gave him the ACISD Early Education number and he finally was so frustrated that he called it. He was hesitant to have the Parent Educator visit, but soon the visits were welcomed. The Parent Educator suggested that the 3 year old was ready for pre-school and suggested Head Start. The father was hesitant about enrolling the child, Jacob, so the PE arranged a visit to Head Start for the father and Jacob.

Upon arrival, Jacob said, “This is cool.” He confidently entered the classroom, removed his coat and joined in the free activities. He interacted with the kids, joined in the story time, felt confident enough to speak up and share when it was appropriate, and even lined up with the kids to go out to recesses. Jacob really enjoyed his visit.

As they left, the father was so excited that he took the Head Start phone number and has since signed up Jacob for the fall enrollment. Without the PE help, this child would not be receiving this Head Start experience that will further help him prepare for school success.

EARLY ON – Helping families with special needs children ages 0-4

Tom and Susan were young parents who felt alone and with nowhere to turn. Their first child seemed fine at first but just would not suck. They were back and forth to the doctor almost daily and were sure they were the only parents with a child like Sam. It was soon obvious to the doctor and parents that Sam had issues. He was afraid of bright lights and normal new sounds. He cried all the time, He never slept. “All the dreams I had for my child were gone at this point,” shares Tom with tears in his eyes. “The future for my son looked horrible.”

Both parents were educated and worked outside the home. They knew they needed help. They needed answers. So, they started asking questions everywhere...their doctor, the Internet, their friends, etc. A friend’s child’s teacher mentioned the ACISD Early On program as a possibility. Out of desperation, Tom called and talked to the Early On Coordinator. “I felt like a huge door had been opened to us,” explains Tom. “We were not the only parents with a child like Sam, and there were people who listened, understood what we were saying, and had ideas and were here to help us. We had found an island and thought maybe we would not drown after all.”

Through the help of Early On, Tom, Susan and Sam are receiving help. Sam has been diagnosed as an Autistic Child. He is progressing slowly. Walking, talking, smiling (something he never did before), without a constant scowl on his face. “And I have dreams for my son again,” Tom says confidently.

Now Tom is advocating for the new Allegan County Literacy Initiative ... ALL children reading independently by the end of third grade. “This means ALL children,” says Tom, “and that means Sam too! He may not be ready by the end of third grade, but I have a dream that he will read. ALL children mean ALL children. Without Early On this would not be happening, this program was a lifesaver for Susan and me and for Sam.”

14 House Members Who Voted for the Woodward Popular Election
Amendment to the Election Consolidation Bill

Frank Accavitti – Eastpointe
Kenneth Bradstreet – Gaylord
Leon Drolet – Macomb Twp.
Stephen Ehardt – Lexington
Barbara Farrah – Southgate
John Garfield – Rochester
Alexander Lipsey – Kalamazoo
Andy Meisner – Ferndale
William O’Neil – Allen Park
Clarence Phillips – Pontiac
David Robertson – Grand Blanc
Joanne Voorhees – Grandville
Lisa Wojno – Warren
David Woodward – Madison Heights

Key Legislators

<u>Representative</u>	<u>D#</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>Term</u>
Daniel Acciavatti	32	Chesterfield	1
Tom Casperson	108	Escanaba	1
Bruce Caswell	58	Hillsdale	1
Craig DeRoche	38	Novi	1
Gene DeRossett	52	Manchester	3
Judy Emmons	70	Sheridan	1
David Farhat	91	Muskegon Gross Pt	1
Edward Gaffney	1	Farm	1
Lauren Hager	81	Port Huron	3
Doug Hart	73	Rockford	3
Jim Howell	94	St. Charles	3
Bill Huizenga	90	Zeeland	1
Joe Hune	47	Fowlerville	1
Jerry Kooiman	75	Grand Rapids	2
Mickey Mortimer	65	Jackson	3
Charles LaSata	79	St. Joseph	3
Tom Meyer	84	Bad Axe	2
John Moolenaar	98	Midland	1
Mike Nofs	62	Battle Creek	1
Brian Palmer	36	Romeo	2
David Palsrok	101	Manistee	1
Mike Pumford	100	Newaygo	3
Randy Richardville	56	Monroe Sterling	3
Sal Rocca	30	Height Sault Ste	11
Scott Shackleton	107	Marie	3
Fulton Sheen	88	Plainwell	1
Marc Shulman	39	W. Bloomfield	3
Stewart	20	Plymouth	2
Tabor	71	Delta Twp	3
Vander Veen	89	Allendale	2
Walker	104	Traverse City	1
Ward	66	Brighton	1
Woronchak	15	Dearborn	3