

Building a Communications Strategy: How to Make Your Message Resonate

Honing Your Message

An important first step in effective communications is building a message framework. This framework helps you and your allies develop clear, concise, and consistent messaging in written and verbal communications. Without a framework, messages can become fragmented, off topic, and ineffective.

The process of building a message framework has three steps:

1. **Develop a core statement.** This main point focuses the discussion on what you want.
2. **State talking points.** The talking points (aim for three) support your core message, and include both objective and subjective information.
3. **Restate the core message.** A conclusion must restate the “ask”.

Develop a core statement about each area or what you want to see changed in policy and practice. In general, and where state or district policies are concerned, no more than three areas should be addressed at one time. Each area should be broken down into a brief framework to ensure that the most succinct and compelling case can be made—and to not confuse your audience!

Keep in mind, a message framework is not set in stone—the core and supporting statements can be adjusted as a situation changes.

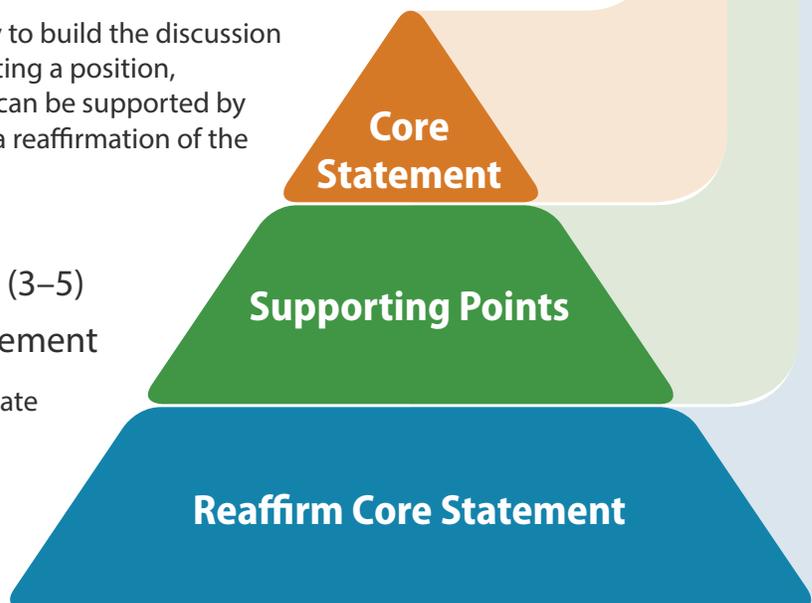
Building Your Message Pyramid

Although messaging is an abstract concept, a commonly used visual is a pyramid. At the top of the pyramid is the core statement. In the middle are three to five supporting points, and at the end is a reaffirmation of the core statement—the same point as before, stated in a slightly different way.

The following graphic represents a way to build the discussion and guide you through a “lesson”—stating a position, supporting points that are factual and can be supported by personal experience, and closing with a reaffirmation of the main point.

- | Step 1: Core Statement
- | Step 2: Supporting Points (3–5)
- | Step 3: Reaffirm Core Statement

No matter who you are talking to—a state education official, legislator, district superintendent, parents or even a colleague, the message pyramid can be used as your personal communications plan.



Developing Your Communications Plan

Using the key messages of the [Principals Action Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act](#), here's how you can build your own plan:

Core statement

"Our district must set a shared definition among educators of a well-rounded and complete education for every student."

Supporting points

1. A well-rounded and complete education goes beyond curriculum expansion. It should mean access to key services and opportunities to support all children, such as high-quality early learning.
2. Every school must be able to support social and emotional learning, this includes programs and services as well as professional learning for all educators.
3. Over the past five years, a great deal of evidence has shown that the more we meet students social and emotional well-being, the greater their academic success.

Reaffirm

Our district must adopt a definition of a well-rounded and complete education in its ESSA plan to guide programs and implementation for schools across the district, and provide all schools with the resources to meet students' needs. It is essential to help every student succeed and lead to overall school improvement.

From this messaging pyramid you can build your brief case: a concise, to-the-point message that quickly conveys the most important points of your issue (also known as an "elevator speech"). Imagine that you have the undivided attention of a key lawmaker—for five minutes! Practice what you will say in the shortest amount of time. This will help you stick to your points and not lose your train of thought.

Bridging and Pivoting

Sometimes you may not immediately get the chance to state your message—and sometimes the party you are speaking to may question or challenge what you are saying. This is when it is important to know how to bridge and pivot to redirect the conversation to the issues you want to discuss, and why it is important to include both objective as well as subjective information.

A bridge directly acknowledges a question or statement, then reframes that question and pivots the conversation to your topic. Remember to always bring your audience back to your core statement and reaffirm the action you want them to take.