Building Public Awareness: Framing That Works
Explaining Complex K-12 Initiatives To the Community
Building Public Awareness
Framing that Works

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FrameWorks is on a mission...

to advance the nonprofit sector's capacity
to frame the public discourse on social and scientific issues
What is a frame?

Frames are sets of choices about how information is presented:

What to emphasize, how to explain it, and what to leave unsaid.

When differences in presentation lead to differences in responses, this is a frame effect.
Which frame “works?”
Look to evidence to answer that question

Selected results from experimental survey FrameWorks conducted in Australia, 2018

* = P<.01

![Bar chart showing percentage point increase in policy support over control for two frames: “Effective parenting” and “What children need.”]
Today’s presentation is based on what we have learned…

Through > 10 Years of Research

Supported by > $10 Million

Involving > 100,000 Participants

Relying on > 10 Different Research Methods
When a frame “works,” it moves thinking in multiple ways

knowledge
- Does this framing build more accurate understanding for non-specialists?

attitudes
- Does this framing spark dispositions that allow productive consideration of the issue?

policy support
- Does this framing attract people to evidence-based practices or policies?
When a frame “works,” it moves thinking in multiple ways

*Sample items from a FrameWorks message testing experiment*
*Study supported by a grant from the Open Society Foundations Racial Equality Fund*

Students of color are more likely to be arrested at school than white students for the same actions.

Strict rules and harsh punishment are an ineffective way to handle behavior issues among students.

When school discipline policies are being applied more harshly to students of color and local school systems can’t or won’t address the issue, it is appropriate for civil rights agencies to step in.
AVOID

- Individual benefits
- Broken beyond repair
- Pockets of excellence
- Stark statistics on inequities

ADVANCE

- Shared, collective benefits
- Targeted, feasible improvements
- Broader momentum is building
- Join our journey toward justice
AVOID

Individual Gain

ADVANCE

Collective Benefits
Reframe to foreground the common good

Students, teachers, and parents deserve our fullest support.

Children hold the potential of our future social and civic vibrancy. When we strengthen our public schools, we also strengthen the aspects of our community we value the most.

Our goal is to ensure that children have the opportunity to succeed in school, move on to college or a career, and become financially self-sufficient.

When we support our schools, our community benefits now, from the professionals and economic activity that a strong school system attracts, and in the years to come, from young people prepared to contribute to a skilled workforce.

**THEM vs. WE**
Frame: Graduates Earn More

What are the short- and long-term benefits to our community of a 90% high school graduation rate, as compared to the Class of 2015’s graduation rate of 86%? The community would have gained 4,630 additional graduates. These graduates would have earned $59.6 million annually in additional income. This additional income means more money flowing into our local economy.

Reframe: Schools Power Communities

High quality public education - open to all of the community’s members - powers prosperous communities. Strong public schools attract families and businesses, boosting the local economy. They also attract positive attention and interaction, whether through sports, theater, or other community-oriented events. Top-quality public education makes communities dynamic and vibrant.

Adapted from Generation All messaging
AVOID

TO DO LIST
1. SO
2. MANY
3. THINGS

Broken Beyond Repair

ADVANCE

Improvement is Feasible
When advocacy narratives lead with problems, they make it harder for the public to see solutions.
INSTEAD OF THIS

“The outlook is bleak for children in our nation. Too few have access to what they need to grow, develop, and thrive - and the lack of opportunity is structured by race and racism.”

TRY THIS

“Right now, strong schools are plentiful in some communities and scarce in others. We can’t continue to allow access to a good education to be structured by race. We must live up to the core American value of justice for all. And all means all. Our district is committing to quality schools in every neighborhood - especially in those that haven’t had them.”
When advocacy narratives talk about positive developments as if they were individual accomplishments, the public doesn’t see how to engage.
Framed with *Caring Teacher*

One word helps to explain Denise Calvin’s success in the classroom: persistence. “I will do whatever I need to do” to reach a student, says the veteran educator who teaches math at Valley Central High School. It’s a subject that challenges many students, and Calvin has become adept at helping her students overcome their math anxiety.

“I believe—and this is not to be pat—I really believe I was created to be a teacher,” she says. Calvin simply enjoys helping others learn, especially those who require significant support. To that end, she has always taught at least one class to academically struggling students. This year is no different: She teaches four algebra classes, made up of students who either failed a previous math course or failed the state assessment.

Reframed with *Scaffolded Teacher*

One word helps to explain why students who previously struggled in math become strong mathematical thinkers at Valley Central High School: coordination. The entire school community— including administrators, the school board, educators, and families— takes responsibility for making sure every student masters skills needed for today’s data-driven world.

For example, rather than giving the state teacher of the year only students who already love math, administrators asked this skilled teacher to take on classes made up of students who failed a previous math course. She agreed—and suggested that all math teachers develop skills for managing student math anxiety. The school board, for its part, has approved a schedule that lets math teachers work in teams. And the community voted for a tax levy that made these changes possible financially.
Avoid

**THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP STARTS AT BIRTH**

- **1,100** words
  - Child from Professional Family
- **500** words
  - Disadvantaged Child

Stark statistics

Join our journey toward justice

Advance
Framing can build support for racial equity policies - and boost belief that they’ll make a difference

Collective Efficacy
(Can We Make A Difference?)

Collective Responsibility
(Does Society Have an Obligation to Equity?)
Framed with *Big Problem, Unreachable Solution*

Despite progress, racial disparities in educational outcomes remain imposing. While 87% of white students, for instance, graduate from high school on time, that number falls to 76% for Hispanics, and 73% among African Americans. And although white, African American and Hispanic students are now about equally likely to start college immediately after completing high school, black and brown students remain much less likely to complete a BA within six years.

This all hints at the large, enduring differences in the communities where minority students live – and differences in K-12 preparation. Truly leveling the playing field will require difficult changes, such persuading more of the best teachers to work at the schools facing the most obstacles rather than those enjoying the most advantages.

Reframed with *Aspirational Vision*

Today, at this moment, our community is recommitting to achieving equity in our schools. This vision within our reach. We have principals who have led their schools to adopt a “learning opportunity” approach to discipline, and away from punitive approaches that end up harming mostly Black and Brown students. We have teachers who know how to cultivate skills in two languages, which is essential for bringing out the full potential of Latino students. We have engaged community members who will help us get things right and hold us accountable when we don’t.

So - we have done some of this work. But we see too many instances of unequal outcomes to deny that we have farther to go. Today we have the opportunity to get it fully right. Will you join us?
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“A talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change.”

-Richard Rorty
Thank you!
Let’s continue the conversation.

You can access FrameWorks research on framing education here:

http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/issues-education.html

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