

ECKEL & VAUGHAN

MEMORANDUM

T O: NC Education Human Capital Roundtable
F R O M: Eckel & Vaughan
R E: Proactive Media Strategy
D A T E: April 13, 2022

OVERVIEW

Over the last few weeks, members of PEPSC and the RT have gotten various inquiries surrounding the RT's work, PEPSC's proposal and the UpliftEd coalition. Many important stakeholders around the state have questions about what this means for them, and, unfortunately, many of them have begun to make their own assumptions. It is time for our communications efforts to become more proactive, as opposed to reactive, with the goal of educating the stakeholders. In this memo, Eckel & Vaughan (E&V) outlines a recommendation for this proactive media strategy that it believes is imperative to ensuring that the proposal gains enough support to become legislation.

MEDIA STRATEGY

This media strategy is divided into three major tiers or phases that coincide with the timeline up to the launch of the coalition. E&V has strategically identified the spokespeople it believes will be most salient amongst our audiences and the mediums through which their messages will be best received, with the end goal being, again, to educate those vital stakeholders throughout the state.

Phase 1

Phase 1 consists of two-major efforts to hit two of our important stakeholder groups:

- Offering interviews with Maureen Stover to reporters statewide;
- Publishing an opinion piece in a major outlet in the Charlotte market, (i.e., *The Charlotte Observer*), authored by Johnny Belk.

When it comes to media relations, it is important that we are meeting reporters where they are to ensure that we can get our message out to as much of our audience as possible. This ideology has played largely into how we suggest positioning both Maureen Stover and Johnny Belk.

Maureen is a vibrant spokesperson, with intricate knowledge of the system and the proposed changes that lead to PEPSC's ultimate proposal. She would perform well in a two-way interview setting and can speak to the problem and the need for the solution, similar to what she did in the opinion piece she authored for *EdNC*. The ongoing conversations around this new model have already made it to the national level, making it a hot topic right now. Offering an interview to reporters statewide is an opportunity many will likely jump at, and by offering a teacher

voice, we can work toward gaining the trust of teachers around the state who are still skeptical about how they fit in to the new plan.

While Maureen can help us fill in gaps within this conversation, Johnny Belk's public show of support will speak to the larger business community. Johnny Belk is a well-regarded name throughout the state of North Carolina, which also means that his opinion will carry great weight. The Belk Foundation's reputation for investing in the improvement of education will bring legitimacy to the proposed solution once he voices that support. Because Johnny Belk is not as privy as Maureen to the intricate policy details, we would rather use his voice in a one-way communication format, such as an opinion piece. The Charlotte market, being one of the larger markets in North Carolina and home to Johnny Belk himself, is a great target market to land this piece in.

Phase 2

Phase 2 will be focused specifically on making sure we are speaking to all of our educators in each region of the state. While we may offer interviews with Maureen to reporters statewide in Phase 1, we still may not be able to land in every target market. For that reason, we want to follow up by identifying teacher voices in each market that would be willing to submit an opinion piece in support to the changes to the system to a targeted outlet in their region. This way, we can better guarantee coverage and be sure that we have touched every part of the state with our messaging.

Phase 3

Phase 3 will make the largest impact within this strategy, which is why it is important that it lines up closer to the launch of the UpliftEd coalition. The final phase of this plan will entail publishing an opinion piece, authored by former Governors Hunt and Martin. Their voices bring even greater legitimacy to the new proposal among various stakeholders, but most importantly, they bring greater legitimacy to the new plan in the legislative arena. This part of the strategy needs to follow our educational efforts to ensure that the correct information is amplified following the former governors' contribution.

NEXT STEPS

Due to the current media landscape, E&V suggests moving into Phase 1 as soon as possible. To do so, we suggest moving forward with the following next steps:

- Getting approval from Maureen Stover and Johnny Belk on their participation;
- Identifying and recruiting teacher voices in each media market;
- Drafting the various opinion pieces and identifying target outlets for pitching.