



EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DISTRICT 112

February 27, 2023

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Superintendent
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Nominating:

ESD 112 Communications & Public Engagement

A department within ESD 112, which is an educational agency in Washington State.
Vancouver, Washington

1. *Nominee's creative function within the overall organization?*

ESDs provide equity for all students, in all school districts.

After more than 50 years of service to 30+ school districts in six Southwest Washington counties, ESD 112 remains focused on providing quality support services to our educational clients. Together with the urban and rural districts we serve, we are able to use a small amount of state funding to build effective, cost efficient, and innovative programs that help districts save money and leverage resources.

Increasingly, Washington's ESDs are depended upon to provide essential services for school districts and communities, and to help the state implement legislative education initiatives. Smaller districts often have fewer resources and rely heavily on ESDs. The state's larger school districts also take advantage of ESDs for cost efficiency, resource sharing, technical assistance and program implementation.

The Communications & Public Engagement department at ESD 112 provides communications and design services to all 30 school districts in the ESD 112 region, as well as to districts around the entire state and even into Oregon. ESD 112 Communications also serves our internal programs.

COUNTIES

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COWLITZ
Klickitat
PACIFIC
SKAMANIA
WAHkiakum

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TIM MERLINO

2. *Why should this team be recognized? What do they do that is exceptional?*

The ESD 112 Communications department is the largest school communications program of the nine educational service districts in the state and provides the most robust menu of personalized services tailored to the needs of their school district clients. This 11-person team is unique in Washington--no other ESD or state agency provides the level of service or the breadth and depth of expertise in the field of school communications. I believe one would even be hard-pressed to find another team like this in the entire country. Our communications team is so highly regarded that school districts from outside our region have demanded of their ESDs that they be allowed to contract with ESD 112 (it is required that school districts utilize their local ESD for support services unless there is a special request/need).

During the pandemic, when school districts across our state were struggling to communicate confusing, ever-changing rules and regulations in a polarized political environment, our ESD Communications team stepped up to face the challenge head-on. They coordinated daily calls between school superintendents and county public health departments, [developed templates, letters, flow charts and messaging](#), and acted as crisis communication leaders in our region and beyond. Of course, the team did all this collaborative work while working remotely from their own homes.

The surprise that came out of the remote work of the pandemic was that this team is actually more productive working that way. To this day, most of the team works remotely and does so very successfully. In fact, the team increased their billable hours by 19% last fiscal year, and so far this year has increased their billable hours by an astounding 41%. That increase in hours represents an increase in vital services being provided to Washington school districts.

3. *Team age, history, or perspective if relevant*

ESD 112 has provided school districts with communication services since its founding in 1969. The longest-serving member of the current communications team is the Creative Director, who started in the department 27 years ago, but most others were hired in the past several years. While the communications group grew and adapted to meet needs over the decades, today's current team has undergone many changes. In the past 5

years: the long-time department head retired, a new leader was hired, and almost immediately thereafter there were several challenging education events including widespread teacher strikes (seven in our region, which we supported), the COVID pandemic, widespread unrest on a variety of issues in education (mask requirements, vaccine requirements, diversity & inclusion unrest, sexual health education unrest, etc.). Additionally, several team members left the team and the industry during the pandemic, requiring the hiring and training of a new group. Despite these many challenges, the current team under the current leadership is thriving and generating more department revenue than ever before.

4. *Previous recognition: i.e. internal and/or awards*

This team has won **numerous awards** from the **Washington School Public Relations Association**, the National School Public Relations Association, WMA (Web Marketing Association) WebAward, Washington Association of Educational Service Districts, and the International Design Awards (IDA).

5. *Examples of work product*

Please take a look at the ESD 112 Communications online portfolio and blog, which gives dozens of examples of their amazing, high-quality work in education communications:

comms.esd112.org