



California Association of School Psychologists

This case study illuminates how targeted advocacy can sway key stakeholders, legislators and even the Governor if the advocacy team can provide the right strategic plan and implement it within the complexity of the legislative process. It has the research and planning at the front end of the process, the proper selection of a legislator with the commitment and drive to move a bill, and the grassroots and Sacramento-based legislative advocacy that can create meaningful support, and net \$20 million in valuable resources.

The Challenge

In the fall of 2013, the California Association of School Psychologists (CASP), established the legislative priority to secure funding and get the Legislature and Governor to establish and fund a statewide infrastructure that would train educators to implement positive behavior support systems in school districts that would lead to a positive school culture.

The Plan

Ball/Frost Group (then Frost, Davis and Donnelly) performed research and developed case studies showing the impact of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) and drafted bill language for introduction in the 2013-2014 legislative session. The bill, SB 1396 carried by Senator Loni Hancock from Berkeley, would establish the Safe and Supportive Schools Train the Teachers Program. Using one-time funds from Proposition 98, the bill would designate one county office of education, selected via a competitive grant program managed by the California Department of Education (CDE) and the Executive Director of the State Board of Education, to implement a regional set of trainings with the assistance of stakeholders selected by CDE.

Building Alliances & Lobbying the Issue

Given that funding for this effort needed to come through the annual budget, the real purpose of introducing this bill was to draw attention to the importance of a positive school climate and to get other organizations and stakeholders to support the funding of a MTSS as a legislative and budget priority. Our advocates worked closely with our colleagues from the statewide education organizations as well as the social justice stakeholders to get broad support for the effort. Additionally, we met with the staff of the CDE, the Department of Finance and the Governor's Office in support of the bill and the importance of and need for creating regional trainings for MTSS. These meetings allowed us to bring in experts from the field to personally explain the details of how these school climate strategies worked and what their real time impacts were to student growth and to a safe school climate on campus.

Ultimately the 2014-15 Budget Act did not contain any funding specifically for school climate or regional

training for MTSS. While this result was disappointing, our client was comforted by the knowledge that through the lobbying process key legislators, the Department of Finance staff and the Governor's Office had gained significant insights into the importance of utilizing school climate strategies as a critical means of improving student academic outcomes. The legislative efforts in 2014 were also important because we now had galvanized a large group of supporters in support of prioritizing funding for a regional training program for this new concept called "school climate."

Staying with the Issue

Because the issue of positive school climate and the need of regional training continued to grow as an issue in the field, our firm approached Senator Hancock in the fall of 2014 about carrying the legislation again the following year. She agreed to author the bill, which was finally introduced on February 25, 2015. However, a month earlier, the Governor's January 2015-16 Budget was introduced. The newly introduced budget contained an allocation of \$10 million to be managed by a county office of education to "provide technical assistance and to develop and disseminate statewide resources that encourage and assist (districts & charter schools) in establishing and aligning schoolwide, data-driven systems of learning and behavioral supports for the purpose of meeting the needs of California's diverse learners in the most inclusive environments possible."

Working Directly with the Governor

This proposed budget allocation enabled us to move the interests of our client forward and to work cooperatively with the Governor and other school climate stakeholders to make this funding a reality. We determined there was a legislative benefit to continue to move our bill through the committee process and to work directly with the Governor to fully support the budget allocation as the budget was discussed in the subcommittees.

This is where the work we did with stakeholders the prior year paid off. We organized the education organizations, groups like Children Now and practitioners from the field that worked on MTSS issues locally to also support the Governor's school climate allocation. We also began meetings with the staff of the Department of Finance to get the bill language from SB 463 (Hancock) incorporated into the budget trailer bill language that would control the direction and use of the \$10 million in MTSS funding. On June 30, 2015 the Governor signed the 2015-16 Budget Act and the education budget trailer bill into law with the inclusion of \$10 million in school climate funding. The final language was consistent with the bill language we had drafted on behalf of our client into SB 463.

Then CDE selected a county office of education to manage the MTSS implementation program. Another of our clients, the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE), had a very strong local MTSS program with experienced managers that would be capable of directing the \$10 million in funding. We were able to assist OCDE with the nuances of the application and the interview process. The grant was ultimately awarded to OCDE.

The Outcome

As the Orange County Department of Education worked in 2016 to implement the \$10 million in grant funding, the Governor introduced his 2016-17 State Budget, which included an additional \$30 million in MTSS funding. These additional funds were to be directed to local school districts and charter schools to implement specific MTSS and restorative justice programs. During the final budget negotiations, this \$30 million was reduced to \$20 million. However, our firm working with both CASP and OCDE was able to ensure that the implementation language was consistent with the goals of SB 463 and the needs of local school districts and local program providers.