



Board Agenda Item #	IV D Information Item
Date:	July 18, 2019
To:	Magnolia Public Schools - Board of Directors
From:	Alfredo Rubalcava, CEO & Superintendent
Staff Lead:	Ismael Soto, Director of Partnerships
RE:	Magnolia 2018-19 Communications Report

PROPOSED BOARD MOTION

This is an information item, no action is required.

INTRODUCTION

In 2018-2019, Larson Communications (LC) focused on successfully navigating a leadership change and developing a refreshed proactive communications strategy that reflected new CEO Alfredo Rubalcava’s priorities.

We concentrated efforts on building on the steady cadence of positive stories generated by Magnolia and raising the schools’ profiles among the public, education reform leaders and philanthropists. The themes of our proactive communications strategy emphasized Magnolia as a high-quality network of schools that prepares students for college and careers, offers a STEAM-oriented program and meets the academic and emotional needs of all students.

In the summer of 2018, LC created a comprehensive strategic plan for the 2018-2019 school year by holding a series of strategic planning meetings with the Magnolia team. We updated messaging and planning documents, developed a plan for Rubalcava’s thought leadership platform and provided high-level strategic recommendations for social media.

From that meeting, we decided to introduce Rubalcava to stakeholders as Magnolia’s new CEO with a letter capturing his vision and mission for the organization as the new leader, a welcome message for the website and a CEO narrative—which has continued to guide how we share Rubalcava’s story. We reached out to local reporters to announce Rubalcava’s new role and then placed an [op-ed on his behalf in The 74](#). This op-ed helped continue to establish Rubalcava and Magnolia as leaders in supporting students affected by trauma—an issue that LC will continue to promote when the work on the ground becomes more rooted.

In June, LC helped guide Magnolia staff as they worked with a KPCC reporter on an [arts feature](#) highlighting Magnolia’s commitment to all STEAM subjects. LC also placed a [story with the LA Daily News](#) which showcased MSA-1’s major facilities update, and shared the larger context of how these improvements will positively impact the overall community and serve as a vital part of the “Sherman Way” revitalization. Later, LC provided support for a [CBS story on the Maker Faire](#).

Continuing on the message that Magnolia is an expert in providing holistic care for all students, LC placed two stories on Telemundo 52 around the [Positive Behavior Intervention System](#). One of the segments landed on [Telemundo’s Pizarron 52](#), a special segment focused on education. These Spanish-language segments reaches a distinctly important audience for Magnolia—current and prospective parents, education leaders and philanthropists.

In order to emphasize Magnolia’s commitment to creating a solid foundation to lead many Magnolia graduates to STEM careers, LC partnered with Magnolia to plan a STEM-focused event where students participated in a pop-up robotics competition before a screening of the documentary, “Science Fair.” LC conducted extensive media outreach and received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback from reporters who voiced interest in covering similar, future events. An ABC cameraman came to record the students, but due to breaking news, the station was unable to run the segment. Nonetheless, this was a strong

opportunity to generate additional awareness about MPS and their commitment to a STEAM-focused education, which generated a lot of activity on social media.

In addition to proactive storytelling, LC played an essential role as a thought partner for Magnolia renewal hearings for MSA-6, MSA-7 and MSA-Santa Ana by providing strategic counsel and drafting specific messaging. We developed talking points and offered training to parent, teacher and student speakers ahead of all of the hearings, including the ACCS Renewal Hearing and the California State Board of Education (CSBE) renewal hearings. LC carefully analyzed the staff recommendations to create strategic testimonies to present to the boards, which highlighted and mirrored the board's reasoning while showing the strong community support for the school. These efforts, in coordination with the Magnolia team and spanning many months, thankfully led to a successful outcome with all three schools' charter being renewed.

LC also garnered interest from Howard Blume, Los Angeles Times education reporter, in including Magnolia in two stories, one of which would highlight a student who requires additional time on the SATs. Our team provided on-site support when Blume visited the school. This story, which will likely be published in June 2019, is aimed at showing Magnolia's robust services for students with special needs. The Los Angeles Times' story will be critical to keeping Magnolia in the spotlight as a high-quality school network, as this outlet reaches the city's decision-makers, education leaders and broader population throughout the state.

LC also supported Magnolia by providing strategic counsel, preparing for media requests and drafting key communications.

The work included:

- The LC **team participated in two strategic planning sessions** with Rubalcava, as the new CEO, and the Magnolia communications team, which included updating the organizational and communications objectives, target audiences

and potential vulnerabilities, while we identified our upcoming proactive communications campaign for the next school year.

- LC also **drafted a messaging exercise** for the Magnolia team, which informed the messaging refresh that LC finalized.
- LC **updated and finalized the 2018-2019 Magnolia Strategic Plan and Communications Calendar** which will guide our work throughout the school year.
- To proactively tell new CEO Rubalcava's story with the larger Magnolia community, appropriate for each audience, LC **drafted a CEO letter, CEO welcome message for the website and CEO narrative** that will guide how we share Rubalcava's story going forward.
- LC **drafted** two versions of a script for a two-minute video introducing new CEO Rubalcava. This project was ultimately put on hold.
- LC reached out to local reporters regarding **doing a profile on Rubalcava in his new role as CEO.**
- LC worked with the MPS team **to identify and prepare Magnolia parents** for an interview with an EdWeek reporter where the parents shared their positive experience at Magnolia for an upcoming piece.
- LC assisted Magnolia with an **issue at MSA-4 by providing strategic counsel and drafting two letter templates** for Magnolia parents and teachers to weigh in on a school matter.
- LC **provided strategic counsel and drafted a letter** to the MSA-San Diego community regarding a staff leadership change.
- LC **reviewed all of Magnolia's social media in a thorough audit** which included strategic recommendations for all platforms.
- LC worked on a proactive communications campaign to promote the unique after-school programs run by MSA-Bell and MSA-Santa Ana.
 - To do so, LC coordinated with MSA-8 principal Jason Hernandez to learn more about the after-school program at MSA-Bell. LC then drafted a press release and researched appropriate media targets.
 - LC also spoke with Varol Gurler, Principal of MSA-Santa Ana.

- LC finalized a press release about MSA-Bell's unique after school program which coincided with their peak student participation period.
- To prepare for the promotion of the MPS Practitioners Symposium in October 2018, LC began conversations with Ismael Soto and Jenny Obuchi.
- The LC team **provided strategic counsel** in preparation for the renewals of MSA-6, MSA-7 and MSA-Santa Ana. Our efforts, along with the Magnolia team's work and dedication, ultimately resulted in approval for MSA-6 and MSA-7.
 - LC **drafted talking points and shared speaker tips** ahead of the local school board, ACCCS and CBE hearings.
 - LC drafted talking points for both the preliminary hearing and final hearing for approval for MSA-Santa Ana's leadership team.
 - LC **provided strategic counsel to Magnolia leaders and shared speaker tips** ahead of the hearing.
- The LC team conducted targeted outreach to local media around the launch of the PBIS kick-off event. This outreach **resulted in a broadcast hit on Telemundo 52, "[Noticias local.](#)"**
 - From this, LC secured an opportunity for **Magnolia to be [featured on Telemundo's Monday education feature, "Pizarron 52."](#)**
- The LC team **partnered with the Magnolia team to begin planning for a large-scale event** around the movie, "Science Fair." LC provided insights from a strategic media perspective.
 - LC **finalized the media advisory and conducted broad outreach to local media, including print and broadcast.** From this, LC secured interest from ABC Los Angeles. A cameraman came to the event to record, though the station ultimately did not run the segment due to conflicting breaking news.
- LC **developed new messaging around trauma-informed education and mentorship.**
- LC **offered support to MSA-San Diego for the Maker Fair.**
 - This resulted in a [broadcast hit on CBS 8.](#)

- **LC provided Magnolia messaging for the press release** about the LA Rams event.
 - LC's efforts and messaging helped secure a story in the [LA Daily News](#) and on [The Rams](#) website.
- LC drafted and **finalized the letter to parents to celebrate Magnolia SBAC scores.**
- LC **finalized a pitch** around Magnolia's Virtual Reality program but ultimately outreach was paused because teachers were not planning to leverage the technology within the classroom.
- LC **provided resources and insights around best practices for a teacher transition.**
- LC provided strategic counsel around potential media opportunities, analyzing events including the alumni dinner, non-parties and candidate forum at MSA-8 and PACE program.
- LC placed an **[op-ed](#) on behalf of Rubalcava in The 74, furthering his thought leadership platform.** The op-ed was also included in The 74 newsletter and promoted on the outlet's social media channels.
- **LC provided strategic advice on how to amplify Rubalcava's op-ed in The 74.** We also conducted outreach to Education Dive, EdSource, Politico Morning Education and the National Alliance for Charter Schools to request that the op-ed be included in newsletters.
- **LC provided strategic counsel ahead the California State Board of Education renewal hearing** in March. LC drafted talking points for supporters ahead of the hearing.
- **LC secured interest from The Orange County Register** around telling a story about MSA-SA's dedication to helping homeless students succeed. We also conducted expanded outreach to local editorial boards.
- LC provided media counsel when CBS Los Angeles included footage of a Magnolia school and when Spectrum News 1 reporter visited MSA-1
- **LC provided strategic counsel around potential media opportunities,** including MSA-2 robotics, MSA-8 basketball, the gold medal story, the STEAM

Expo, college signing day, college acceptances, the NPR Student Podcast Challenge, college acceptances, MSA-SD archery and the Amazon Future Engineer Scholarship.

- LC conducted extensive outreach around the Computer Science Diversity Award.
- LC provided information about an opportunity to feature student graduation stories on the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools blog.
- LC **provided social media recommendations** around leveraging the College Signing Day events at MSA-2 and MSA-Santa Ana.
- LC secured interest from Howard Blume at The Los Angeles Times around a story on students who need extra time on the SATs.
- LC **provided counsel and drafted a stakeholder letter** addressing the salary scale increase.
- LC conducted research and provided a list of recommended videographers for a Magnolia promotion video.
- LC drafted a stakeholder letter addressing changes to the summer school program.
- LC worked closely with MSA-3 Carson leadership on a school-site related issue.

Media Placements

- [“How does a school that used to focus on science integrate the arts?”](#) KPCC, June 8, 2018.
- [“Magnolia Science Academy’s charter school campus is part of a bigger picture for revamping Reseda,”](#) LA Daily News, June 15, 2018.
- [Broadcast segment about PBIS kick-off event](#), Telemundo 52, Sep. 18, 2018.
- [“Maker Faire San Diego,”](#) CBS 8, Oct. 4, 2018.
- [“LA Rams touchdown at San Fernando Valley schools with message of diversity,”](#) Daily News, Oct. 16, 2018
- [“Rams Partner With Beyond Differences To Celebrate ‘Know Your Classmates Day’”](#) The Rams, Chase Isaacs, Nov. 1, 2018.
- [Broadcast segment about PBIS on Pizarron 52](#), Telemundo 52, Oct. 15, 2018.

- [“Rubalcava: California Helps Schools Treat Kids With Trauma Before a Crisis Occurs. Other States Should Give Students This Kind of Support,”](#) The 74, Alfredo Rubalcava, Feb. 6, 2019.

Hours worked by Larson Communications: 748.97 hours

- July 2018: 93.84 hours
- August 2018: 85.20 hours
- September 2018: 71.67 hours
- October 2018: 132.09 hours
- November 2018: 72.88 hours
- December 2018: 34.68 hours
- January 2019: 54.59 hours
- February 2019: 61.35 hours
- March 2019: 60.31 hours
- April 2019: 41.88 hours
- May 2019: 40.48 hours*

**As of May 29, 2019.*

Next Steps

Looking forward in the next few months, LC’s primary focus will be to begin to prepare for the two renewals happening this fall before LAUSD. We’ll incorporate our strategic recommendations into our 2019-2020 proactive communications plan, which will develop with Magnolia leadership this summer. We’ll be working closely with MSA-SA principal Varol Gurler to tell the story of MSA-SA students who have overcome homelessness to graduate and go on to college. Furthermore, we’ll be reaching out to regional Tv stations to promote Magnolia’s different graduation ceremonies, highlighting the students’ success and college-going culture to encourage coverage.

As mentioned, over the summer, Magnolia plans to work with the leadership team to update the strategic plan and build out a list of proactive communications ideas to execute

for the next school year. In addition, LC will be doing a refresh of Magnolia's messaging to ensure it is accurate, compelling and dynamic.

BACKGROUND

About Larson Communications:

Larson Communications is the only strategic communications firm in the nation specializing in public education reform and has been a partner of Magnolia Public Schools since December of 2015. They work selectively with groups that are committed to advancing academic achievement and increasing access to quality educational opportunities. They help organizations tell their stories. They specialize in five key areas of communications: strategic positioning, public relations, storytelling, crisis management and public advocacy.

Larson Communications works with education leaders and organizations across the country, including public school systems, charter school networks, education technology organizations, advocacy and research groups, and higher education institutions. Many of their clients are particularly focused on improving education for students in underserved communities. They raise their visibility, strengthen their narratives, and work closely with them to plan and execute communications campaigns that inspire their communities, so that they can have the greatest possible impact on students' lives. Our clients are regularly featured in The Wall Street Journal, Good Morning America, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune, The Atlantic, People Magazine and USA Today, among many others. They also utilize our decades of expertise in education policy and politics to advise clients as they navigate the challenges of education reform.

With offices in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland and Chicago, they are a team of inspired individuals with one common goal – to tell the most compelling stories that inspire and inform change as we guide organizations toward reaching their objectives. Their team brings decades of experience in education reform communications, which includes strategic positioning, public relations, storytelling, crisis communications and

public advocacy. Their expert strategists also serve as our tacticians, ensuring that the quality organizations with whom we work always achieve lasting results.

Larson Communications was founded by Gary Larson in 2007 after he built a career shaping the positive narrative that charter schools are part of the solution towards improving public education. With the goal of serving the best organizations offering real and impactful solutions for students, parents and teachers, Gary founded the only communications organization in the nation to specialize in education reform, Larson Communications.

ANALYSIS

Not applicable

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications

EXHIBITS (attachments):

None