



Getting media coverage for the positive events in your district

Whether you're looking to inform your community about a new school program, accolades for the district or a critical levy issue, media coverage is one of the best ways to get noticed. Unfortunately, getting press coverage isn't as simple as firing off a press release and hoping for the best. Successful media coverage is the result of careful planning and hard work.

Reporters traditionally have been taught to check in regularly with their sources. However, as newsrooms have downsized, reporters have more to cover and are putting more effort into social media to gain followers. School communicators can serve their districts well by understanding reporters' time constraints and their daily requirements, which often include posting on social media and recording videos as well as reporting and working on stories to fill the daily newspaper or evening newscast. Assisting them in every way possible for their production needs goes a long way in scoring media coverage.

5 ways to connect with reporters *before* you need them

Typically, a reporter from the local newspaper has been assigned to cover the school beat or board meetings on a regular basis. Generally, that information is available on the newspaper's website, including a phone number and email address. Get to know the education reporter ASAP. Invite them to coffee or lunch, and make sure you're armed with story ideas when you connect.

- **Find out a reporter's preferences** — How does the reporter like to be contacted for stories? Email? Text? Social media? What deadlines does the reporter have on a weekly basis? Know that journalists, like school communicators, have very busy schedules with constant deadlines. Scheduling a Friday afternoon meeting is one of the worst times for a newspaper reporter because he or she is likely crunched to provide stories for Saturday, Sunday and Monday. What type of stories does he or she like to cover? Every reporter is different.
- **Be available and easy to find when a reporter needs you** — When you want to promote your event or story, don't put off reporters. Your availability helps them do their job better and also builds a relationship with the reporter, who will want to continue working with you. A timely reply also can help expand the story. Your

information may help lead to the reporter to positive perspectives from other sources. Be sure to let reporters know how they can reach you, either by email or phone.

- **Before pitching a story idea, get to know more about the reporter** — Doing some extra homework will go a long way in connecting with a reporter for the first time. Google them and find out what stories he or she has covered. Does the reporter provide fair and balanced media coverage? Get a sense of what he or she likes to cover. Also, a little flattery can go a long way.
- **Create thoughtful ideas** — Be brief and clear on why a reporter should care about an event. Help the reporter have an idea about what his or her story might look like, including examples of photos or possible sources. Could it be a feature story? Or, perhaps, be part of a national story or trend? And, it's OK to follow up, just don't be a pest.
- **Stay in touch** — Building good relationships with reporters requires you to stay in touch, even when you're not pitching a story. One way is to let them know you're reading or seeing their work. Follow them on social media and share their work. Finally, meeting for coffee or lunch is a great way to build strong relationships with members of the media.

