



Media Interview Guide

Before you Interview:

- Know your local reporters, their deadlines and the types of stories they cover.
- Know the subject of the interview. Ask the reporter ahead of time the topic of the story and the kinds of questions he or she would like to address. Anticipate probably questions and plan your responses.
- Review any background information and gather information to give the reporter.
- Know your goal for the interview. Consider the three major points you'd like to make. These are your key messages.

During the Interview:

- Concentrate on communicating your key messages.
- Always speak in plain English. Avoid education jargon.
- Speak in "headlines." Offer conclusion first, briefly and directly, then back it with facts or details. Don't over-answer. Short answers are better than long.
- Always be honest. Never lie to a reporter.
- Three acceptable responses to a reporter's question: I know and I'll tell you; I don't know; and I know and I can't tell you. When you don't know, try to find out and get back to the reporter. The last response—I know but I can't tell you—should be used only rarely, as in cases of student confidentiality.
- Always explain why you can't respond.
- Follow the open meetings/public records laws.

Do's and Don'ts:

- Don't repeat a reporter's negative statement. Frame your reply as a positive statement.
- If you don't want to see it in print, don't say it. Always assume that the microphone is on or that the reporter is taking notes, even if you don't see a notebook.
- Never say "no comment."
- Relax, stay calm and be yourself. Show enthusiasm and smile. If you get angry, don't argue with the reporter. Count to 10 and calm down. Take time to think before you answer a question.
- Don't tell a reporter how to write the story and don't ask to see a story before it is printed.

When Dealing With a Negative News Story:

- Don't try to cover up bad news. Be the first with good news and bad.

- Use your district spokesperson so the facts are consistently portrayed.
- Don't lecture the reporter about how this story will "hurt" education or the school district.
- Don't say what you don't know. Stick to the facts. Don't inject personal opinion or guess what might have happened. Say what you know and stop.

Preparation + key messages = success