

Your role as a communicator

Board Chair Workshop
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Leader of the team

- ❑ Member of the school board team; not an "individual" anymore
- ❑ You set the tone as the leader
- ❑ Build the system up, not tear it down
- ❑ Common goal: academic excellence

Visible in your community

- ❑ Share positive news in community and with civic groups (Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, etc.)
- ❑ Be involved and be seen
- ❑ Get to know your elected officials
- ❑ Be accessible

Communicating effectively

- ❑ Responds appropriately to board questions vs. administrative/operations questions
- ❑ One clear, consistent voice on behalf of students and schools — one spokesperson
- ❑ Stays on message
- ❑ Responsive to and engages stakeholders
- ❑ Not constantly in the reactive mode
- ❑ Knowledgeable of FOIA

Any press is good press?



Never underestimate
how much media exposure
can benefit or harm your school district



Media check-up

- What is your board policy and/or procedure for dealing with the media?
- What media outlets serve your district?
- How does your district inform the media?
- What is the current status of the district's relationship with the media?



The spokesperson

District Spokesperson

- Works for district in official capacity
- Speaks for school system as a whole
- Has credibility as an expert
- Able to provide background and factual information



Board Spokesperson

- Speaks on behalf of the board
- Eliminates confusion about the board's actions and message



Speaking for yourself

Be clear you are not speaking on behalf of the board

Consider the impact your comments will have

Always advise the superintendent when you are going to or have had an interaction with media



Phone calls and interviews

- Take notes
- Find out what the story is about
- Ask questions necessary to clarify
- Find out the reporter's deadline
- Ask who else has been or will be called for the story



Phone calls and interviews

- Decide who is the right person to be speaking about the topic
- If necessary, return the call at a later time
- Follow through



Phone calls and interviews

Explain the issue carefully and patiently — Reporters may or may not have a good understanding of the topic

Remember “no comment” is a comment—if you cannot give specifics or discuss, then say that and why (legal issue, respect privacy, etc.)

Get to the point — Capture the essence of what you want to say in the first 1-2 remarks

Keep it simple — Give clear, simple quotes that can be understood by a wide audience

Three common mistakes

1. NOT ACCESSIBLE
2. DON'T DO HOMEWORK
3. SAY TOO MUCH



Common situations

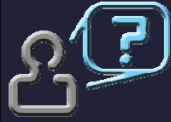
Before the board meeting

During the board meeting

After the board meeting

Hot topics

During a crisis



Common situations: Before the board meeting

Remember:

- ❑ Avoid committing to a position
- ❑ Respect the process
- ❑ Save the debate for the board room
- ❑ Consider how your comments will be perceived



Common situations: Before the board meeting

Q: I see a discussion about school closings is on the agenda. Which ones do you think will close?

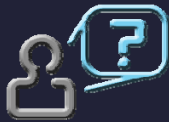
A: We're looking at all the options during this difficult budget year. I'm looking forward to hearing from my fellow board members, the staff, and the community. We'll make a decision once we've heard all the facts, gotten input from stakeholders, and weighed our options.



Common situations: During the board meeting

Remember:

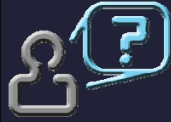
- Everything you say, and how you say it, is on the record
- Disagreeing does not mean you have to be disagreeable
- Respectfully express your opinion
- Make it clear you want to understand others' positions
- If you don't want to see it in the news, don't say it at the board meeting



Common situations: After the board meeting

Remember:

- ❑ Don't rehash the discussion that occurred at the board table
- ❑ Don't air your disappointment with fellow board members or staff
- ❑ Don't assign blame
- ❑ Abide by the board's decision

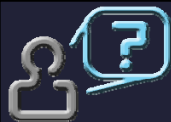


Common situations: After the board meeting

The Split Vote

Q: You were opposed to closing that school but the board voted against you. How are you going to deal with parents from that school?

A: I had my opportunity at the board table to convince the other members, and I wasn't able to do that. Now we will move forward with this decision and support families as they make the transition to a new school.

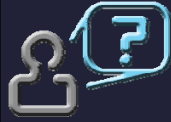


Common situations: After the board meeting

The Unanimous Vote

Q: Can you comment on the board's unanimous vote to approve a controversial plan to cut the music program?

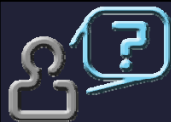
A: With tight budgets, the board has had to make some very difficult choices. After weighing the options, we voted to discontinue the music program. Our hope is when the budget outlook is better, we will be able to revisit the decision.



Common situations: Hot topics

Remember:

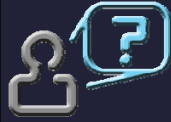
- Explain the background
- Stick to facts
- Don't make predictions
- Outline the process
- Assure proper procedure
- When appropriate, refer to staff



Common situations: Hot topics

Q: Some districts are implementing a recess policy. What is the board planning to do about that?

A: The Legislature recently passed a bill requiring school districts to consider adopting a 30-minute structured recess policy for elementary students. The board will be discussing this and will provide the public opportunity to give input before we make a decision.



Common situations: Hot topics

Q: How do you feel about the nutritional value of the meals the students get in school?

A: Our food services program follows very strict federal guidelines that not only apply to the nutritional value of the meals but also dictate how we buy the food.

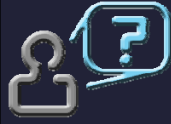
The best person to provide a more detailed picture is our Director of Food Services, who can be contacted through the central office.



Common situations: During an incident or crisis

Remember:

- ❑ Follow the law (personnel, student privacy)
- ❑ Let the district spokesperson or police speak to the specifics
- ❑ Convey that the district is in control
- ❑ Assure student safety & student support



Common situations: During an incident or crisis



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Stay in control

- Use difficult questions as a platform to repeat key messages: “What is important is...” “We have to remember that...” “The key issue is ...”
- Don’t speculate or answer hypothetical questions
- Never repeat a negative question—rephrase positively
- Don’t assume “off the record” is OK



Top 10 tips

Get to know
your
education
reporters

Maintain good
media
relations year
round

Tell the truth
& if you don't
know, say so

Be as
accessible as
possible

Make
reporters
feel welcome



Top 10 tips

Always return
phone calls

Know and
respect
reporter
deadlines

Relate good
news and
helpful
information

Respect
reporters as
professionals

Say thank
you



Final Thought

In all dealings with your community
and the media, always be:

- Respectful
- Honest
- Deliberate
- Strategic

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