

# The PR Doctors are in the house

SCSBA Annual Conference

**Becky Bean**  
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SC/NSPRA President-elect*

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SC/NSPRA Past President*

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SC/NSPRA Past President*



# Preventative Care

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## Be visible in your community

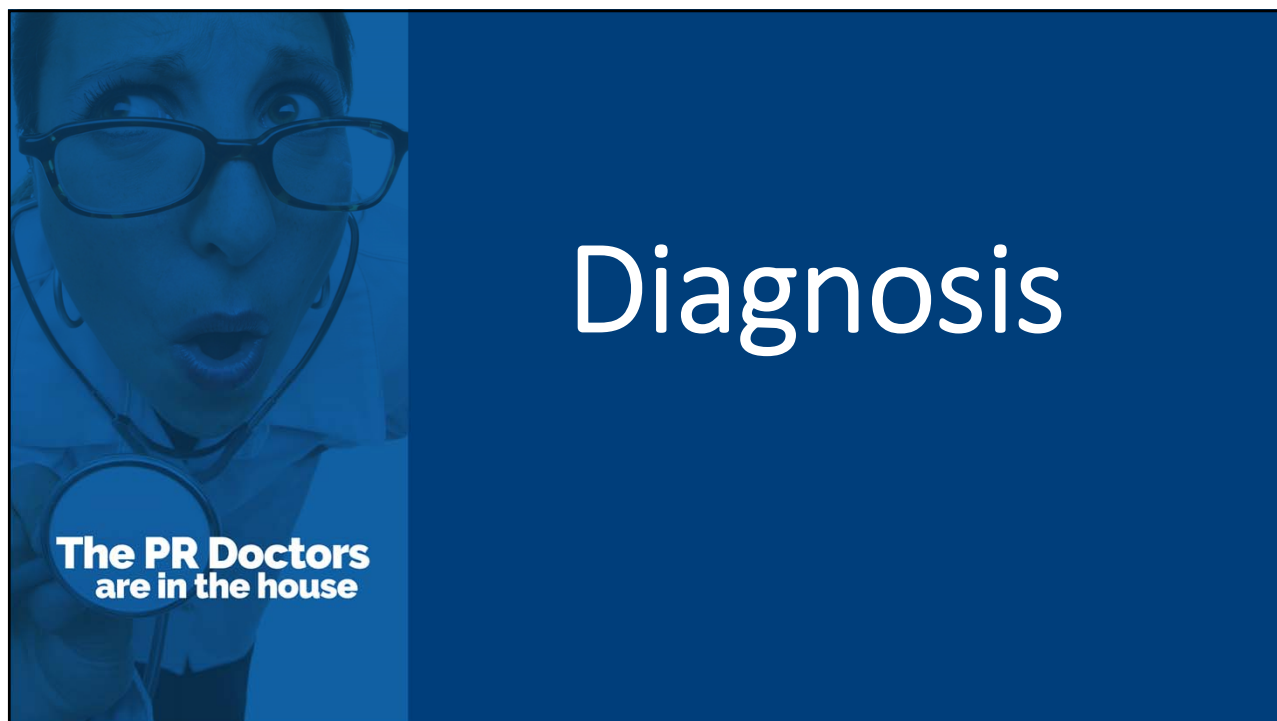
- Work with your administrative team to share positive news in the community and with civic groups (Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, faith community, etc.)
- Be involved and be seen
- Form good working relationships with other elected officials
- Be accessible
- Become informed by reading education publications, media stories and SCSBA materials and attending SCSBA training sessions



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## Board spokesperson (Board chair)

- Speaks on behalf of the board as a whole (collective)
- Eliminates confusion about the board's message



## Crucial, often overlooked step

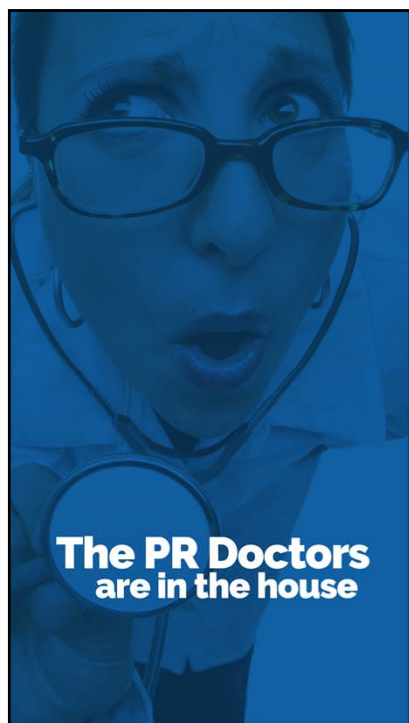
- Gather all of the facts (your people first)
- Know when the story will break (or if it already did)
- Know your process and policy
- Determine the board's role
- Know what is public vs. private (FOIA and federal laws)
- Anticipate questions



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## A board that communicates well:

- Responds appropriately to board questions vs. administrative/operations questions
- Speaks with one clear, consistent voice on behalf of students and schools
- Stays on message
- Engages stakeholders and is responsive
- Stays knowledgeable of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) laws



# Treatment

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## Be ready

- News is immediate...no more controlling the story
- Get your message out first
- “No comment” doesn’t mean no story
- OK to admit thing didn’t work out like your wanted
- It’s ok to show empathy, concern when needed



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## Media 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



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## Lessons learned

- What worked, what didn't?
- Recreate a timeline and evaluate steps
- What do others think?



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

- Respectful
- Honest
- Deliberate
- Strategic

**The PR Doctors**

Questions?



## The PR Doctors

A concerned parent signs up to speak during public participation during the ABC school board meeting.

By signing up she agrees to the guidelines for speaking during the meeting, which include refraining from naming administrators, teachers or students or discussing specific situations which would reveal someone's identity.

The parent ignores the guidelines and begins to give specific details that identify individuals connected to her issue.

How should this be addressed?



## The PR Doctors

The Citizens for a Better School District (CFABSD) has taken out ads in the local paper denouncing your school board and the group's president is known to post her negative views about the school district several times a day on Facebook. As a school board, you have tried to engage the group in positive discussions, but the group doesn't really seem to want to find solutions; they just seem to want to "stir the pot."

Now CFABSD has sent a FOIA request asking for all the emails between the superintendent and school board members for the past 12 months. One of your school board members is urging you as the school board chairperson to disregard the request and said, "They can just take us to court."

As school board chairperson, what should you do?

## The PR Doctors

Susie Smith has recently been elected to the Best School Board and is excited to make a difference for the education of young people in her community. One of her best friends, who is the editor of the local newspaper, is also excited about Susie's new role on the school board because she thinks this will mean the local newspaper will have direct access to background information about school board decisions.

As the most veteran member of your school board, Susie has come to you for advice about how to deal with the media.

What do you tell her?

## The PR Doctors

Harry Jones worked hard to defeat a longstanding member of the Great School Board and feels indebted to his constituents for putting their trust in him. As such, he has set up a Facebook page where persons can post their concerns about the school district, and he promises to personally investigate every issue.

Last night, a parent complained about an assignment that her child's teacher had given, and Harry posted, "I'm on it!" He emailed the teacher with five questions for her to answer.

Is this school board member overstepping his responsibilities? If so, how should other school board members and the superintendent handle this?

## The PR Doctors

The ABC school board voted 5 – 2 to approve the school calendar.

The two members who voted against the calendar stated they did not approve of having school on Memorial Day. Memorial Day falls on the last week of school year. The administration said if Memorial Day were a school holiday it would throw the end of the school year into the following week, which was not supported by teachers and staff.

Because of the split vote, the reporter/constituents wants a reaction from the board spokesperson and from the members who voted against the calendar.

Who should speak to the media?