

# PTA and the Media

*Working with the media has its risks and rewards.*

*To minimize the downside and maximize the benefits, follow these*

## *Tips for Getting the Story You Want*



### **Before the interview:**

- ***Editors and writers are looking for interesting stories.*** Consider the “hook” that will draw them in; provide the insight that makes your story different and “news-worthy.”
- ***What are your objectives for the interview?*** Write down brief, direct sound bites that you can use as answers.
- ***Is there a metaphor or short story to demonstrate your point?*** If so, remember to keep it as simple, short, and straightforward as possible.
- ***What is your important point?*** Studies show that highest retention will be on your first point and your last point. If you have an important point to make, make it either right at the beginning or right at the end of the interview.
- ***What could a reporter say or do to fluster you?*** Brainstorm most likely topics/questions ahead of the interview and write down your responses. Anticipate negative questions and be prepared to turn them around. With advance planning, you can use negative questions as a bridge to your main points.
- ***Good reporting takes time and preparation.*** Give media representatives enough lead time to schedule your event and read background materials you provide.

## During the interview:

- **Choose your words carefully.** You can easily be misquoted; written statements ensure that what you say is what you *intended* to say; slow down and don't be rushed to make a statement hastily.
- **Stay "on message."** Know what you want to say and say it; be prepared with strategies to redirect the interview to your message if/when you are drawn off course.
- **Stay calm.** PTA advocates are, by nature, passionate about representing the needs of children and families; showing your enthusiasm is great, but make sure your emotion doesn't lead to statements you wouldn't want to see in print or on video.
- **Know the facts.** If you do not know the facts, do not, under any circumstances, try to fake it. "I don't know" is a reasonable answer; offering to find out or directing to an information resource is even better.
- **"No comment" is not a good response.** It never makes anyone look good. A better response is, "I am not the right person to answer that question."
- **Never speak "off the record."** There is no such thing. You may, however, choose to speak "on background," providing factual information that explains the points you are making.
  - **Controversies make stories more interesting.** They also carry more risk for undesirable coverage; don't be caught off guard by probing questions that seek to expose a conflict, a contradiction, an error or ill-intent.
- **Reporters are not the enemy.** Good, objective reporting requires curiosity and, to some extent, skepticism; it's our job to be prepared to respond knowledgeably, respectfully and effectively.

*Tips were adapted, with permission, from "PTA Tips for Working with the Media" by Melissa Baten Caswell, Palo Alto Council of PTAs*

