



Communications Now

March 2015

Being sensitive to cultural differences.....	4
Establishing rapport with your new reporter.....	6
Tips for strengthening your volunteer program	9
In Weblinks	
“Shakespeare Selfie” youth writing challenge.....	11
In Resources for Families	
Teaching kids goal setting skills	

commitment to covering your schools. Express your excitement about the opportunity to meet a new reporter and help get them cranking out stories as soon as possible.

Be proactive

When a new reporter is hired, take the first step.

Call and introduce yourself. Let them know how happy you are that they are going to be covering your schools and offer your help in any way possible.

Reporters are like anyone else. Some have outgoing personalities and others are more introverted. An outgoing reporter will engage right away in light conversation and will appreciate your outreach. A quieter journalist may tend to keep conversations very short and to the point as they get to know you.

Remember, you have probably had your job and lived in your community much longer than the new reporter, so even if the new reporter is quiet, you could comfortably reach out a hand of welcome first.

Offer a tour of your schools

During your introductory conversation offer the new reporter a guided tour of your schools and review the organization chart. Pick them up at their office and drive them to key buildings including the school board meeting room and central office.

How to establish rapport with your new reporter

Turnover is a fact of life in the media. Young reporters move around in order to move up.

That mobility is good for the reporters’ careers but it can be frustrating for school jurisdiction leaders who feel like they are constantly “breaking in” a new education reporter.

It takes time to develop any working relationship, but the following tips can reduce the time it takes to get the new reporter up to speed and your media relations firing on all cylinders just like it was with the previous reporter.

Connect with the editor

The period between education reporters is the time to reconnect with the editor. Reporters come and go much more frequently than the editors who supervise them.

Send your news items to the editor until a new reporter is hired. Let the editor know how much you appreciate their paper or station’s



Communications Now

If you have a communications department, show them that office and introduce them to staff. Introduce them to other key staff.

Drive the reporter to some of your schools. Show them the variety of neighborhoods and the age of your buildings. If you take them to a brand new building, be sure to take them to an older one as well. Take them to the schools in your most well-off neighborhood and your least well-off so they can get a sense of the range of students you work with.

Depending on your jurisdiction's size, that might be enough for the first meeting.

Consider scheduling another time to meet at the reporter's office or a coffee shop to talk about common issues and protocols. Your goal shouldn't be to "tell the reporter how it is" but to share what has worked in the past with other reporters and why it works from the jurisdiction's perspective.

Talk about how you handle 'good news' stories

Your second meeting is a good time to share pride points. Let the reporter know some good things that have happened recently and that are coming up soon. Share stories that have been covered by the media and a few ideas that have not been covered yet.

Then move into a discussion about how the jurisdiction and your schools share their good news with the media. Explain that some principals are skilled at sending good news to the media, but others are more modest, or get caught up in their daily school schedules and forget to inform the media of events. Great things are going on, but the local news media might not learn about it from each of the principals. Share your commitment to helping them get good stories from your schools.

Ask the reporter how they like to work. Ask what kinds of stories they are interested in. Ask

what their daily deadline is and discuss how that aligns with jurisdiction and school workday schedules.

From a jurisdiction perspective, explain how you share highlights with the media. Do you post success stories on your website? So you send an email? Tell the reporter who the best sources for news stories are and who can help hunt for stories. Invite the reporter to call you when they need story ideas and then honor that commitment when they do call.

Help a new reporter understand the way your jurisdiction deals with Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPP), and how that applies to their interactions with students.

Explain your work flow

If the reporter has never covered a school jurisdiction before, the monthly and annual work routine will be foreign to them. Even if they covered another school board they may have had other protocols and norms.

A discussion about the jurisdiction business functions and timelines can help set realistic expectations and prevent wasted effort and frustration.

- Discuss your school board proceedings and your budget process. Ask if they have covered budget processes in other public agencies. Find out what kind of budget stories interest them.
- Talk about your school board meeting format and your school board's role in media relations.
- Provide an overview of timelines for the release of provincial achievement test / diploma exam results which the reporter will probably want to localize.



Communications Now

- Share contact information for your internal experts on each issue unless you have a designated contact for all media requests.

And if there is bad news

As much as we'd rather it not be true, bad things do happen every year in schools.

Seasoned education reporters have a sense of how to cover a bomb threat or a teacher being arrested because they have covered similar issues in the past.

A new reporter may have no idea what to expect and how to pursue the story when things go awry at school.

If a reporter comes from the police beat, they are used to receiving fairly detailed police reports on incidents. They may not be prepared for the smaller amount of detail your jurisdiction may provide on discipline issues involving students or personnel issues involving staff.

A frank conversation at the beginning of your working relationship is better than a heated discussion during an incident or crisis later.

Share past incidents and what you released versus what you could not release. Share your reasons. Talk about FOIPP which protects student academic records and discipline records. Talk about employment law that protects staff personnel information.

Common occurrences that you might consider discussing include:

- bomb threats
- fights
- students arrested / staff arrested

- lawsuits against the jurisdiction
- parent complaints and inflammatory testimony at board meetings

Discuss how you handle each of these issues and what kind of information you release versus withhold. Offer to follow up anytime if the reporter questions why the jurisdiction handles certain types of incidents in a certain way.

After hours stories

Nobody looks forward to media calls on the weekend or in the evening. But sometimes, it benefits the jurisdiction to get messages out after hours, so that the morning paper or the evening news has your side of the story right away.

Consider sharing your home phone number or cell number with the reporter and discuss what kinds of issues you can help with during off hours.

If you have a young family, let the reporter know that nights and weekends can be very busy so those calls should be reserved for emergencies.

It is a matter of time

No amount of preparation can take the place of simply spending time with someone and working through issues. But by reaching out right away and setting the stage for a positive relationship, a jurisdiction and a new reporter can get off to a better and quicker start than by simply just letting time pass.

Contributed by Jay Remy, communications director, Salem-Keizer Public Schools