

How to involve local spokespersons

One key step in involving the media and educating your community is to identify and train representatives to conduct media interviews and appear at speaking engagements about the governor's proposed budget cuts to our schools.

These spokespersons will establish a relationship with local media and help bring the issue to life. Since most people do not have the time to commit themselves full time to such a role, it is important to train several spokespersons who can serve as alternates so your district/county office does not miss a chance to spread the message. Often the board president or superintendent speak on behalf of the district/county office.

When selecting a spokesperson, look for people who are very familiar with the facts, current stories and issues.

This will maximize the effectiveness of any media coverage.

An ideal spokesperson:

- Is personable and at ease when speaking publicly.
- Has a clear, pleasant speaking voice.
- Is an interesting conversationalist.
- Has some public speaking experience and, preferably, experience talking with the press.
- Has a working knowledge of the issues.
- Is "fast on his or her feet," comfortable speaking without a script and able to weave key messages into interviews.

Preparing spokespersons

When conducting interviews, or making other public appearances, the spokesperson should be prepared with the following:

- General information about the governor's 2008–09 state budget proposal.
- Answers to questions about the local impact of the governor's budget proposal and state/local responses to the issue.
- Phone numbers and contacts at your district/county office to call for more information and/or a Web site address.
- A press kit, for reference. The kit should include a press release that weaves in the talking points and attributes quotes to the designated spokesperson(s), facts about your local district/county office, a single page of bulleted messages that show the impacts the governor's budget proposal will have on your schools and students.
- When scheduling media interviews, press conferences or speaking engagements, provide the reporter or organization with a paragraph-long biographical sketch (not a full resume) of the spokesperson that includes credentials that qualify him or her as an "expert."

Write to your elected officials

Educate your elected officials about how the governor's budget proposal will impact your schools. Share specific local concerns and provide specific examples on how the reduction of state revenues will affect your students. Alert them to the kinds of programs that would be cut if education funding is taken away.

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Stage a town meeting

Conduct town meetings or “piggyback” on existing meetings about education.

Stage a town meeting or make your designated spokesperson available to serve as a guest speaker at existing community meetings (e.g., site council meetings, local PTA/PTC meetings, etc.) to communicate the concerns of your school district or county office of education.

Write an op-ed piece

The opinion/editorial (op-ed) pages of newspapers include articles written by experts in certain fields, who offer viewpoints on current events and hot topics. An op-ed should be sent to the editor of your local newspaper. You can locate the editor's name at the top of the op-ed page in each newspaper. Find out what local editor looks for in an op-ed and remember to ask for word-count limitations.

Keep in mind that newspapers are more likely to publish your op-ed submission if you include local examples of how the governor's budget proposal will impact your schools and students.

Also, districts/county offices that have strong partnerships with their local chambers of commerce and business or civic groups should also consider submitting a joint op-ed piece. It sends a strong message to the community about your local schools when op-ed pieces are presented jointly with education leaders and business or civic groups who are well respected in the community.

Submit a press release to a local newspaper or radio/TV stations

Press releases are designed to generate publicity. They lay out the “who, what, where, when, why and how” of a story. Use them to catch the media's attention and inform the public about education issues and what's being done about them.

Send press releases to radio and TV stations, as well as local newspapers. Before submitting your materials to any media outlet, find out about the news organization's format and tailor your release to fit the format.

Districts and county offices might also consider hosting a media event or press conference to dramatize how the governor's budget proposal would impact the local schools, teachers and students. Provide specific examples of how the proposed budget will hurt education in your community. And please notify Susan Swigart or Brad Sherwood at CSBA about what public or media events you host by calling (800) 266-3382.

