

Media Communication Strategies

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Inform Officials Early. Make sure school and community officials are informed fully of the results in advance so they can support you if contacted by the media.

Be Prepared with Data and Answers. Prepare answers in advance for the kinds of questions people are likely to ask about your CHKS results and your related programs. Include all the basic journalistic questions (i.e., who, what, why, when, where, and how) and questions about specific results likely to attract media attention. Clear these prepared answers with appropriate administrators and your public affairs office before results are released. Prepare a statement to read and distribute that highlights your CHKS results and their programmatic implications.

Be Open—Don't Appear to be Hiding Something. Do not appear to dodge questions or withhold critical information. Avoid secrecy and defensiveness. Reporters tend to press harder for information if they feel the people they are interviewing are trying to hide something. In dealing with sensitive data, enlisting the media as a partner can yield the best results.

Maintain Confidentiality. Do not feel obligated to divulge everything about your survey. A common problem that can occur is media demand for confidential information, such as survey results breakdowns by different schools or by ethnic groups. Keep your word if you promised to keep the names of schools confidential. Make sure you do not violate anyone's trust. This could do great damage to future surveys and your programs. Be ready with an explanation for why you cannot provide this information. This is why it is important to demonstrate a sincere desire to inform the public.

Be Concise. Keep your responses to questions as concise as possible. Long, complex responses may not be reported accurately or may be misinterpreted. If a question cannot be answered well without additional information, be sensitive to a reporter's deadline and follow up as soon as possible.

Don't Overreact. Anything said to a reporter can appear in the media. Despite your best efforts, the media reports of the results may not correspond to your expectations. Don't overreact to inaccurate information, being misquoted, or negative stories that appear. Simply try to set matters straight with a simple request for a correction or clarification. Your long-term goal is to enlist the media in supporting your program and addressing the problems that have been identified. Make them your allies.

Nurture Your Contacts. If your story is covered well, send a personal note from your program to express your thanks.