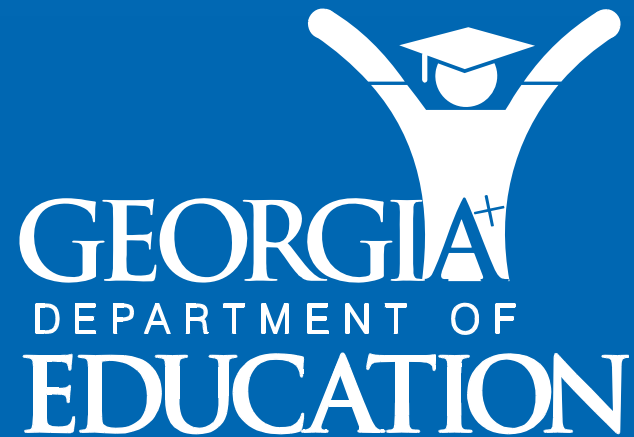




Surviving a Media Encounter



Dana Tofig
Communications Director

July 15, 2008

WE WILL LEAD THE NATION IN IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

How Reporters See Themselves



How Others See Reporters



YOU ARE CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE...



Carlton Allen
GaDOE

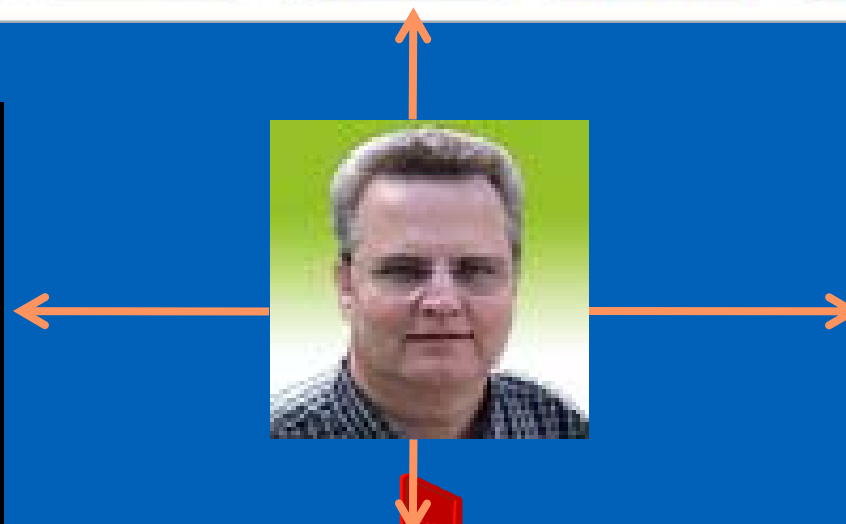
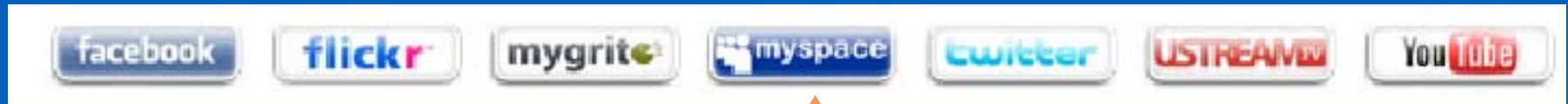


What should you do?

THE TRUTH!

- The news media is...
 - Under pressure from their bosses
 - Appreciative of complete information
 - Generally interested in getting to the truth of what happened (although there are exceptions)
 - Overworked and underpaid
 - Well-connected
- Most importantly, they are the main conduit for information, but...

...THEY ARE NOT THE ONLY SOURCE OF INFORMATION



Surviving a Media Encounter Takes...

- Preparation
- Information
- Determination



PREPARATION

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A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN!

- Create a “strike team,” for public response
 - Who are the spokespeople? Who answers the phones? Who will coordinate the press conferences?
 - If this is a news event with a “site” (e.g. bus crash, fuel spill), who will be the on-site informer?
- Build Contact Lists
 - Media
 - Other “influencers” (board members, parents, teachers, student leaders)
 - The general public (taxpayers, chambers, rotary, clergy, baristas, bartenders...)

A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

- Prepare Communications Templates
 - Emails, letters, e-blasts, text pages, press releases
 - Think about social media: (YouTube, Facebook, MySpace)
 - Remember technology (cell phones, iPhones, Blackberries)
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE
 - Make it part of your emergency drills
 - Review plans at least yearly to make sure all contact info is updated

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- Don't wait until there's an "incident" to get to know your local reporters (newspaper, TV, radio, etc.)
 - **Invite journalists "inside" to do stories**
 - First and last day of school
 - New technology the district/state just received
- **Outside influencers**
 - **Know the heads of the local Kiwanis Club, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce**
 - **Attend events and hand out business cards**
 - **Always get contact information and add to contact lists**

THE “YEAH, BUT...”

- Communication alone cannot solve problems
 - If local policies and practices are broken, they must be fixed
 - If employees are doing the wrong thing, it must be stopped
 - Communications **CANNOT** drive policy



PUTTING LIPSTICK
ON A PIG



INFORMATION

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Two Major Types of “Events”

- **AN INCIDENT**
 - **A bus crash**
 - **A student gets off on the wrong stop and is reported missing**
 - **An arrest and/or incident involving an employee**
- **A BIG DEAL**
 - **A review of inspection reports finds problems**
 - **Parent protest over bus stop locations**
 - **A debate over a particular policy or practice**
 - **Seat belts on buses?**
- **Either way: USE THE PLAN!**

Getting the Message Out Quickly

Three major points you want to get across

- **EARLY ON IN AN INCIDENT (Within in an hour)**
 1. Police are investigating a bus accident (when, where and other pertinent information)
 2. No children were seriously injured but a few were taken to nearby hospital for observation
 3. Parents should call (404) 555-5555 for more information

- **REMEMBER: Media outlets want to be sources of information!**
 - If you give them information to share, they can be an asset to you

Early Incident Landmines

- Don't wait for all the answers before sending out information
 - **Send out what you have and promise regular updates**
- Don't say what you don't know
 - **Promise you'll get back to people**
 - **These words are BANNED: "think," "guess," and "it's possible that..."**
- Who are the people who are scared, worried or threatened?
 - **Don't let them become "sound bytes."**

As the Story Rolls On...

Refine your message

– **REFINED TALKING POINTS (within a day)**

1. Police have determined that the accident was not the fault of our bus driver and records show all inspections and maintenance were up to date.
2. All children are safe and are expected to return to school tomorrow.
3. The investigation is continuing and we are fully cooperating with authorities

– **REMEMBER: The need for information doesn't wane for the media right away**



DETERMINATION

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Stick to the Plan!

- Keep the information coming
 - Using all sources and methods, keep updating the media and the public
- Think about who's talking
 - Spokesmen and PR people are great but, sometimes, people want to hear from the person in charge
- Take care of your local folks first
 - They are the ones who will cover you long-term
 - National TV cameras and reporters disappear

Stick to the Plan!

- **DEPENDING ON THE STORY...**
 - **Get ready for Freedom of Information Act Requests**
 - **Work with your Communications people to anticipate questions – or ask a communications pro**
 - **Be accessible to the public: Don't "bunker down"**
- **DON'T GET WEARY**
 - **Sometimes, stories last longer than you think**
 - **Stay on message and keep informing people as quickly as you can**
 - **If the "three points" have to change, make sure you inform everyone who might be asked that they've changed**

A Quick Test

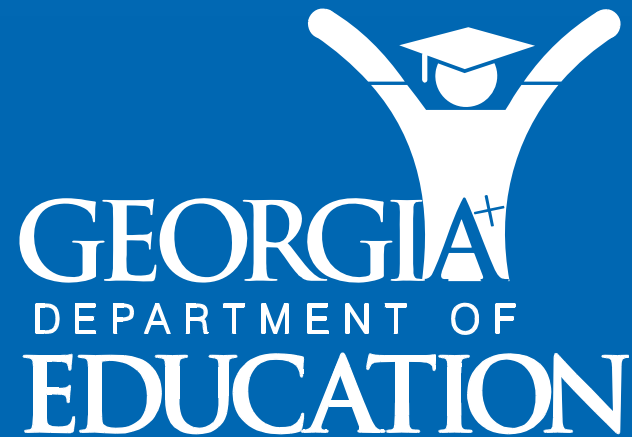
- Describe the No Child Left Behind Act
 - **Definition should include**
 - A description of AYP
 - A understanding of consequences schools could face under NCLB
 - What options parents have
- You have 50 words at most!
- This is what reporters face every day – keep that in mind when you're communicating

Stay on Message

- No Child Left Behind is a federal law that mainly uses test scores to hold schools accountable. Schools that don't meet academic goals – or make “adequate yearly progress” – could face serious consequences, including state takeover. The law gives parents options such as school choice and tutoring.



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