



## Spokespersons

[www.parentsunited.org](http://www.parentsunited.org)

A key step in raising awareness and educating the public is to identify and train representatives to conduct media interviews and appear at speaking engagements. These spokespersons establish a relationship with local media and help put a face on the issue. Since most people don't have the time to commit themselves full-time to such a role, it is important to train several backup spokespersons so you never miss a chance to spread your message.

Parents can make powerful statements about what is and is not working because their children are experiencing what is happening in schools. They can be wonderful advocates for public education both in their own schools, and by spreading personal stories of successes or failures of past policies or reform efforts. Obviously, they have even more of a vested interest in the education system than the average citizen, so hearing their personal stories and displaying their vested interest can compel many others to join the movement and garner support from local officials.

### Selecting a spokesperson

When selecting a spokesperson, one of the most important things to look for is someone who has a working knowledge of education issues. Other qualities include:

- Be personable and at ease when speaking publicly
- Have a clear, pleasant speaking voice
- Be an interesting conversationalist
- Have some public speaking experience, or experience talking with the media
- Be "fast on their feet" and able to handle non-scripted responses

### Preparing parent spokespersons

If parents are willing to speak, you may want to offer the following suggestions:

- Remember to speak from your heart and your own experience
- Decide what you most want to say and then practice how you will say it. Have a friend, family member or colleague ask sample questions to help you rehearse
- Expect difficult questions. It is always okay to say you don't know the answer to a question, or that you don't want to continue
- Be a good listener. Maintain eye contact. Ask questions to clarify what others are saying. Restate what you think you heard to check meanings and interpretations
- Recognize that people hear others through the words they say, the tone and inflection of their voices and their body language.

### Preparing background information

Prepare your spokesperson(s) with a press kit (for reference) that includes talking points, a single page of bulleted messages about specific issues and your local responses, and a contact sheet with telephone numbers and Web sites.

The kit should also include a one paragraph biographical sketch of the spokesperson (not a full resume) that describes the credentials that qualify him or her as an "expert."

### Deploying your spokesperson(s)

Build opportunities to utilize your spokesperson(s) into your group's communications plan. The most effective speaking strategies are:

- One-on-one, face-to-face
- Small group discussions
- Phone conversations; and
- Speaking before a large group

Arrange for people to learn through experience. People remember 20% of what they are told; 30% of what they see; 50% of what they see and hear; 70% of what they say, and 90% of what they do.

### When that person is you

When this task falls on your shoulders, here are tips to help you prepare:

- Know what your community wants from its schools and be prepared to explain how your organization is working to accomplish those expectations. Surveys show the number one result people want is increased student achievement. Can you describe how your group's efforts relate to student achievement?
- Know your facts. Gather the statistics that show your district and school is accountable. Know how many students are passing the state tests, and how many didn't pass in each subgroup. Know what is being done to help struggling students.
- Once you know the facts, make them available to others (parents, staff and community members) so they have the information they need to speak up for schools too.