



GUIDELINES for BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS with NEWS REPORTERS

The California School Health Centers Association believes that reaching out to the local news media builds greater public awareness and support of school health centers. School health centers have the advantage of being an education story, a health story and a youth story. And with education reform and health care reform as top priorities of the Obama Administration, it's a great time to get your school health center story in the news.

Reporters aren't going to naturally come to you. You have to reach out to them. But it's not that difficult or as daunting as it may first appear. CSHC is confident that because your school health centers put care where the kids are, the more your communities know about them, the more they will help support and enhance them. **Having a solid relationship with reporters establishes you as a valuable resource when they want to report about education, student health, and school health centers!**

The following is a list of guidelines for building a relationship with your local news media.

Research Local Media

Explore your local media outlets and target three reporters from three different papers, radio or TV stations for outreach. Select reporters who:

- A. Have covered health issues, school issues or children and youth issues in past.
- B. Have shown previous interest in your school health center or school.
- C. Work for papers or stations that reach an important target population (e.g., families or students who use your school health center, local decision makers, communities that are trying to start a health center).
- D. Work for newspapers or stations that are generally supportive of expanding access to health care (i.e., avoid conservative papers that may want to highlight abstinence only programs).

Outreach

Assemble a small informational packet with a cover letter to each reporter. Send the hard copies via U.S. mail. The packet should include:

- A. An introductory letter that explains the importance of your center(s) to the community.
- B. Fact sheets about your school health center. You can also include CSHC's materials:
 - o Overview of California's school health centers
 - o School health centers support student learning
 - o Governor's White Paper on School Health Centers
 - o About CSHC

Follow-up Phone Call

One week after sending your outreach materials, follow up with a phone call:

- A. Invite the reporter to visit your center(s). If possible, have a student or parent available to speak to the reporter about how the school health center has benefited them. (The reporter may decline a visit, but the invitation is a very useful gesture.)
- B. Encourage the reporter or editor to contact you if they have any further questions about school health centers or child/adolescent health issues.

On-going Support and Communication

You can continue to build your relationship with reporters by:

- A. Forwarding to them articles on school health centers or other related topics.
- B. Sending reports or other relevant information that will help them better understand the issues surrounding school health centers.

These important activities keep you visible as a reliable resource for the reporter, and help them develop an understanding of, and connection, to the school health centers.

Pitching a Story

It's easier to pitch a story when it's connected to a larger event, trend or national issue. Don't be afraid of using any education, health or youth-related news story for the purposes of promoting school health centers. For example, if the Governor's budget includes funding for school health centers, CSHC will issue a news release; your school health center can follow-up by calling your news media contacts and bringing the issue to their attention. In this follow-up, you can highlight your center and point out the opportunity for them to write a story on the topic featuring your center. Another example is if you see a news story about asthma rates among young people, pitch a story about how your school health center is being proactive by helping diagnose and treat students with asthma. Or if you received a large grant or received a prestigious award, that's a good local hook for reporters.

Keep in mind that your first one or two attempts may not result in a story about your center, but remember, having a solid relationship with reporters establishes you as a valuable resource when they want to report about education, student health, and school health centers!

Acknowledgement

If your school health center gets in the news, send the reporter a brief hand-written thank you, and remember to add compliments if you were pleased with the story. You can provide clarification or more information if you felt the story was inaccurate or incomplete. Remember that you are also building a relationship for the future, so be positive.

For more information

If you have questions or would like assistance with news media outreach, please don't hesitate to contact CSHC's Communication Director, Dara Tom, at 510-808-4079 or dtom@schoolhealthcenters.org.

January 2009