

OMSD PR TOOLKIT



Ontario-Montclair School District Superintendent's Office

Media Relations Guidelines

These guidelines cover the basics of how to handle contact with the news media. They also provide information on news media access to students in OMSD programs.

As a public agency, OMSD has a responsibility to be open and responsive to information requests from the news media. Public awareness of our agency and its work is vital to our accountability and success. The news media are a major vehicle for communicating with our public.

OMSD's Superintendent's Office is designated as the District's principal liaison with the news media. Among its responsibilities:

- Ensures that OMSD responds to news media inquiries in a timely, honest, and cooperative way
- Works to increase public awareness about OMSD by promoting media coverage through news releases, "story pitches", events, and other strategies

The Superintendent's Office will weigh each contact to determine the best way to provide information:

In some cases, the Superintendent's Designee will act as the official media spokesperson on a given issue.

In many — if not most — cases, OMSD managers and administrators (assistant superintendents, directors, principals) will be called on to act as spokespersons because they have the needed information, knowledge, experience, expertise or perspective. District staff work with designated spokespersons to prepare for media interviews as needed.

District staff is always available to provide support, consultation, and training in situations involving contact with the news media.

When the Media Call You

A reporter, producer or other news media representative may call your office or site for a number of reasons, for example:

- To get information for a story about OMSD or one of its programs or schools
- To get information about a OMSD student or staff member
- To get information or comments for an education news story

When a news media representative calls your office/site:

All staff should act with courtesy and professionalism when taking calls from the news media. How this call is handled may be the reporter's first impression of OMSD and may be reflected in any resulting news coverage.

Try to take a media call right away or return the call within 15 minutes. If you can't do this, refer the media representative to the OMSD Superintendent's Office. (We don't want news stories involving OMSD to say that we were unavailable for comment — which is what could happen if we don't return the call),

When answering or returning media calls, determine:

- The reporter's name, media outlet, phone, fax, e-mail
- The reporter's deadline
- The subject/intent of the story
- What the reporter wants — information, interview, photo/ videotaping, site visit

When referring the media to the Superintendent's Office, please don't say you are not allowed to talk to a reporter or have to get permission to do so. (That would actually violate your constitutional right to free speech). Instead, tell a reporter: "Our Office policy is to refer all media inquiries to our Superintendent's Office. You can reach them at 909-418-6444."

Don't let a reporter compel you to answer questions on the spot. It is always beneficial to prepare for an interview to provide accurate information. Reschedule the interview for a mutually agreeable time so you can gather information and prepare a response.

Work with the Superintendent's Office to determine the appropriate response.

Inform the Superintendent's Office as soon as possible if and when you have contact with the news media.

Ensure that the reporter's deadline is met, if possible.

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When the Media show up

A reporter or camera crew may show up unannounced at an OMSD site. This is most likely to occur in crisis situations at the site or in the community. Or it could occur if the media learn about an event at your site from another source.

When dealing with reporters and camera crews who may show up unannounced, use the same general guidelines for handling media calls.

A Few Additional Considerations:

Even if a reporter is on site, you don't have to answer questions on the spot. Reschedule the interview for a mutually agreeable time so you can gather information and prepare a response.

News media representatives have certain rights of access to public schools for legitimate news-gathering purposes. At the same time, school officials have the authority to deny such access when they believe the media's presence is disruptive or interfering with classes or other school activities.

OMSD encourages site administrators to make every effort to accommodate the reasonable requests of the legitimate news media for access to our schools and sites so long as that access does not disrupt the peaceful conduct of educational activities.

However, OMSD students who are under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court and/or supervision of the Probation Department cannot be interviewed, photographed, or filmed— even on a confidential basis — without prior approval.

Special education students have a legal right to maintain confidentiality of the nature of their disability. Members of the media should be requested not to reveal the nature of a student's disability in any news coverage. Ensure that any students to be interviewed or photographed have a signed Media Release form on file.

When You Want to Call the Media

When you believe you have a positive news story to share with the public, contact the Superintendent's Office. The Superintendent's Office coordinates OMSD's media contacts and is the only OMSD department authorized to distribute news releases or hold news conferences.

Please do not call a reporter directly without first consulting with the Superintendent's Office.

Contact the Superintendent's Office at least two weeks in advance of events you want to publicize.

What makes a school activity newsworthy?:

Is it about something new/unusual/a first? Is this a new approach to solving problems? Is this a new way of doing things?

Is this story interesting and relevant to the public who reads the newspaper, listens to the radio or watches TV? Editors and reporters will want to know why their readers, listeners, and viewers should care about the story — not why it's important to OMSD.

Is this story timely? Is it tied to an issue/event currently in the news?

Examples of strong news stories include:

- Unique or unusual programs or special events
- Expert commentary on and interpretation of current events (especially if it's a new or controversial point of view)
- Interesting or unusual student/staff stories/profiles with strong human interest

Examples of weaker stories include:

Conferences, guest speakers, and visitors
Programs/events that are not unique — unless they represent an interesting trend
Awards/appointments
Open Houses/BBQs

Some news items may be more appropriate for internal publicity, such as through OMSD-published newsletters and web pages. These include the Superintendent's Constant Contact newsletter distributed to all OMSD staff and Community Leaders, and/or OMSD TV.

Media Interviewing Tips

- Identify 2-3 key messages you want to deliver and stick to them.
- Use anecdotes and facts to illustrate your points.
- Be brief and to the point.
- Speak in complete sentences; include the reporter's question in your response. (Often the reporter's question is rarely included in the story).
- Use plain language. Don't use educational acronyms.
- Be honest, open, and cooperative. NEVER LIE.
- Anticipate difficult questions.
- Never say "No Comment". It sounds like you are hiding something. If necessary, explain why it is not appropriate or possible for you to answer.
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know". But do find out the answers for a response, or point the reporter in proper direction for information.
- Never speak to the reporter "off the record".

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BLACKBOARD CONNECT CALLS

Schools - Required Messages	Schools – Suggested Messages	District Messages *cc messages to Principals via email
Attendance Calls – daily (1 time recording only)	Back to School Night Reminder**	Attendance Default (1 time recording only)
Mandatory Health Announcements**	Open House Reminder**	Board Announcements
Testing Dates/Reminders**	Student Performances**	Superintendent Announcements
School Lockdown (reminders throughout the lockdown—if extended time)	Field Trips	Community Messages**
Lockdown Lifted	Principal/Site Messages	Holiday/Calendar Reminders**
	Parent Conference Schedule**	
	Change in Traffic Pattern Announcements**	
		Emergency Closing of Schools**
		Natural/Man-made Disasters**
	**Post messages on website	