

How to Gain Media Attention for Your School's Presidential Debate



SAMPLE

One Example

(You can use the same process for any school event.)

The weeks between Labor Day and Election Day present a challenging media environment because the presidential campaigns thoroughly dominate the environment. Unless, that is, you “go with the flow” instead of competing with it. Here is a way to use the campaign season to your media advantage.

Many high schools and middle schools will be holding presidential debates and mock elections this fall. If a teacher in your school is planning such an activity, it can be an excellent opportunity to reach your target audience — voters 50 and over, especially males and your legislators — with your target message: “I lead a well-disciplined school where students are engaging in learning.”

Here are some tips to help get the target message to the target audience:

1. Determine if a teacher in your school — perhaps an English, communications, civics, history, or public speaking teacher — is planning a student debate. Let him or her know that it represents a great learning opportunity for students, and also has potential to showcase the good work going on in their high or middle school. Seek the teacher’s cooperation.
2. Ask the teacher planning the debate to consider expanding it beyond his or her classroom. The debate, for example, would make an excellent assembly program. Following the assembly debate, conduct a mock school-wide presidential election.
3. Remember — you cannot promote or endorse a specific candidate or political party. Be sure to specifically instruct your staff that they cannot demonstrate in any way or at any time their support or opposition to either party or candidate.
4. On an evening following the assembly debate, schedule an Open House at your school and invite parents and residents to attend the second mock presidential debate.
5. Make a special invitation and a special effort to have residents of nearby “active adult” communities and assisted living residences attend the debate. Arranging rides, for example, will help.
6. No matter how much you try, be prepared for a low turnout. The only attendees you can count on are the relatives and friends of the debaters. Plan to hold the debate in an appropriate size room. Slightly too small is better than too big because a crowd makes any event appear to be a success. Guests, of course, must be comfortable, but it’s important to avoid having 32 people in the gymnasium.

7. Remember that from a communications perspective, a good turnout is not necessary for success. You will be successful if you send out a large number of invitations and if you get coverage of the event in your local newspaper. Not only do residents like to be invited (even when they decline to attend), but also they like to read about the event in the local newspaper.
8. Have a media advisory sent to your local reporters. (See attached sample.) A media advisory is an invitation to reporters to attend an event. Follow your district's protocols for contacting the media. If your district has a community relations or communications office, let them know what you want to do. They will be able to assist you. Also, even if it is not required, be sure to give your superintendent a heads-up before sending a news advisory or release.
9. Have a cadre of student greeters created. Their role is to welcome residents to the school on the evening of the mock debate. These students should be as diverse as possible, dressed in a similar way (such as chinos with a white shirt). They can sport buttons that say "May I help you?" or "Welcome to my school!" They should be carefully prepared to be gracious and welcoming.
10. Follow the directions on the enclosed flier, "How to Locate Your State Legislators." Be sure to send them a special invitation. If they attend, be sure to recognize them on the evening of the debate. Thank them for attending and for their support of public education.
11. Before the debate begins, make a brief presentation to the audience. (See attached sample.) Make sure that all staff members who contributed to the event are behind you on stage so you can recognize them.
12. If a newspaper in which you want coverage does not send a reporter, be prepared to have a news release about the event sent to your local newspaper, with a photo, the next morning. (See sample news release.) Most newspapers prefer to receive releases and photos electronically, so ask to have it sent via email if possible. Make sure the picture includes the debate team, the teacher and yourself. Make sure the person sending the release attaches the names (L to R) on a separate piece of paper, not the back of the photo, as the pen's point could hurt the photo.
13. Two days after the Open House Presidential Debate, have the results of the mock election announced. Make sure a news release is sent to your local newspaper. (See sample news release.)

How to Locate Your State Legislators



1. Go to the State Legislature's website <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/>
2. Click "Find your Legislator" in the far left column (directly under "Members").
3. You will be directed to a new page. In the far right column, under "Search Legislative Members by," click "Municipalities."
4. You will be directed to a new page with a list of every NJ municipality. Click the appropriate municipality of your school to get the name and address of each corresponding legislator (if other municipalities feed into your school, then check them as well).
5. **Call the NJPSA Government Relations Department at 609-860-1200 if you have any questions.**

Opening Remarks for the NAME Middle/High School Presidential Debate



SAMPLE

Good evening! What a pleasure to see so many new faces here at school — and so many old friends and parents as well! Thank you all for coming!

I am NAME, principal of NAME School. Here with me is NAME, TITLE, who has been preparing the students for this debate and NAME, TITLE, who assisted him/her with that responsibility. NAME will explain the debate format, its rules, and introduce the debaters in a moment.

Before we begin, I'd like to thank our Greet & Meet Team. Team, would you please come up front and center? (Be sure to rehearse this move with the team and have them nearby ready to run up front very quickly.)

We take pride in being a school that warmly welcomes parents and all residents. We're proud of who we are and what we achieve — and we want residents to see it. So the welcome mat is always out at NAME School.

But a mat is not enough. These students serve as official welcomers — an important role at school events. Let's give them a round of applause for a job well done! (Students sit.)

NAME and NAME teachers, I want to thank you especially for teaching the classic art of debate. I believe it is an important part of becoming a well-educated individual. As a formal way of arguing, it uses logic, facts, and, yes, some emotional appeal to win over an audience. One side can sometimes prevail over the other side by presenting superior "context" and/or framework for the issue. It is, in short, the art of persuasion — within an agreed upon set of rules.

Tonight's debate exemplifies the way our school team works to provide a supportive but challenging learning environment for our students. We believe in exploring our differences, testing our ideas, and discussing the best options. Most of our debates are not as formal as this one, but debates occur in our classrooms every day.

One deviation from the norm: Following tonight's debate, we will not declare a winner. We are debating to give you food for thought in preparation of the upcoming election. You must each decide for yourself which side wins.

Just know that the students were assigned to one side or the other, they were not permitted to volunteer for a candidate. So you may have real life Obama supporters on the McCain team and vice-versa.

It is in this way — forcing debaters to argue either side at will — that debate improves one's ability to understand logic and structure different lines of thinking. That is not only a critical debating skill — it is also a critical career skill.

We work hard to ensure that our students graduate with the skills they need to succeed in high school/college and at work. The ability to understand and argue all sides of an issue is critical to that goal.

Again, I am grateful to NAME and NAME for preparing our students for this important event — and for giving us the opportunity to observe it. Please join me in giving them a big round of applause! Thank you!

Download a copy of this material at www.njpsa.org.

OVER

Closing Remarks

Congratulations students! Congratulations NAMES! Let's give all our debaters a big hand! (Lead applause.) Each team made an excellent case for its candidate. Your rapid and persuasive rebuttals were really impressive. (Applause ceases.)

Now I must confess to the audience that this is not the students' first debate on this topic. They conducted a similar debate on DATE at a school assembly. That event was followed by a mock election.

We will be releasing the results of the mock election on DATE. If you have a child in school, be sure to ask him or her for the results. If you are a resident, check out the NAME newspaper next week.

Finally, I want to thank you all for attending tonight. Your presence demonstrates to our students that their education is very important. I personally appreciate that, as parents and residents, you do so much for our students.

We take the sacrifices you make to provide them with the very best very seriously, and we never take your efforts for granted. The teachers and educational support professional at NAME School are one half the educational team, and you are the other. So, thank you! Now let's give our outstanding debaters and coaches one last round of applause! Thank you and drive safely!

Media Advisory



SAMPLE

(Your media advisory for the presidential debate will probably get coverage in the Calendar section of the newspaper.)

**East Riverside School
22 East Elm Street
Sprucefield, NJ 04362**

Media Advisory

Contact: Paula Winants, Principal (or district spokesperson if appropriate)
School: 201-324-7212
Mobile: 609-732-1000

For immediate release: October 11, 2008

East Riverside School Students to Debate Presidential Candidates

Who Residents of Sprucefield and reporters are invited to attend
What NAME School students debate the presidential candidates
When 7:00 pm, Tuesday, October 22, 2008
Where Room 120
East Riverside School
22 East Elm Street
Sprucefield, NJ 04362

Please use the main school entrance on East Elm.

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SAMPLE

Your media release for an open house will probably be placed in the Calendar section of the newspaper. However, it can include the good news about what has happened to your school over the summer as a way of educating local reporters who cover the schools.

School Letterhead

Contact: Name & phone number (include mobile number if possible)

For immediate release: DATE

NAME School Invites Parents to Come Back to School!

Municipality—"Name School is happy to welcome its students' parents back to school," Principal NAME announced today. On day, date, and at time, Name School will hold an open house and provide an opportunity for parents, grandparents, and guardians to meet the school principal and their children's teachers. Parking will be provided both in the school lot and...

Visitors will see a school with a new... IDENTIFY IMPROVEMENTS MADE TO THE FACILITY OVER THE SUMMER. Also this summer, faculty and staff... describe professional development experiences.

Finally, NAME OF PRINCIPAL announced... positive changes in policies, procedures, and curriculum.

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Example:

East Riverside School

Contact: Janet Miller (School) 201-324-7212, (Mobile) 609-732-1000

For immediate release: August 22, 2008

East Riverside Elementary School Invites Parents to Come Back to School!

Sprucefield—"East Riverside Elementary School is happy to welcome its students' parents back to school," Principal Paula Winants announced today. On Monday, September 22, at 7:00 PM, East Riverside Elementary School will hold an open house and provide an opportunity for parents, grandparents, and guardians to meet Principal Winants and their children's teachers. Parking will be provided in the school lot. "No parking" rules on streets surrounding the school will be suspended for the time of the open house.

Visitors will see a school with a new roof and renovated auditorium, Principal Winants said. "Also this summer, faculty members have attended more than 22 college courses or professional development workshops. Sixth-grade math teacher Mary Ann Moore, for example, traveled to China to observe how teachers in Beijing present algebra to sixth-graders."

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SAMPLE

**East Riverside School
22 East Elm Street
Sprucefield, NJ 04362**

News Release

Contact: Paula Winants, Principal (or district spokesperson if appropriate)
School: 201-324-7212
Mobile: 609-732-1000

For immediate release: October 17, 2008

East Riverside School Students Hold Mock Presidential Debate for Residents

Sprucefield—"On Wednesday, October 16, students at the East Riverside School formally debated the presidential candidates," Principal Paula Winants announced today.

Parents and residents attended. The purpose of the public debate was to inform attendees about both presidential candidates; and for that reason, each attendee was asked to determine the winning team for themselves.

Tomorrow the school will conduct a mock election for all students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

The debate teams included NAMES OF 8 STUDENTS, all eighth graders. The debate was conducted as part of the Junior Congress Program. Mrs. Jennifer Wilkins, advisor to the Junior Congress, prepared and trained the students for the debate.

Principal Winant said, "This debate and the mock election that will follow exemplify the way our school team works to provide a supportive but challenging learning environment for our students. We believe in exploring our differences, testing our ideas, and discussing the best options. Most of our debates are not as formal as this one, but informal debates occur in our classrooms everyday," Winant concluded.

NOTE: Students in the photo are (L to R): NAMES

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SAMPLE

**East Riverside School
22 East Elm Street
Sprucefield, NJ 04362**

News Release

Contact: Paula Winants, Principal (or district spokesperson if appropriate)
School: 201-324-7212
Mobile: 609-732-1000

For immediate release: October 21, 2008

Mock Presidential Election by East Riverside School Students Gives Senator NAME a Big Win!

Sprucefield—"On Friday, October 18, students at the East Riverside School gave Senator NAME a victory over Senator NAME in a mock election," Principal Paula Winants announced today. The results were 235 votes for NAME and 197 votes for NAME. This result is (is not) similar to recent polls conducted in New Jersey.

The mock election was held two days after a student debate at an assembly for the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade classes. The debate teams included NAMES OF 8 STUDENTS, all eighth graders.

The debate was conducted as part of the Junior Congress Program. Mrs. Jennifer Wilkins, advisor to the Junior Congress, prepared and trained the students for the debate.

Principal Winant said, "This debate and mock election exemplify the way our school team works to provide a supportive but challenging learning environment for our students. We believe in exploring our differences, testing our ideas, and discussing the best options. Most of our debates are not as formal as this one, but informal debates occur in our classrooms everyday," Winant concluded.

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