

THE Center for Education Reform

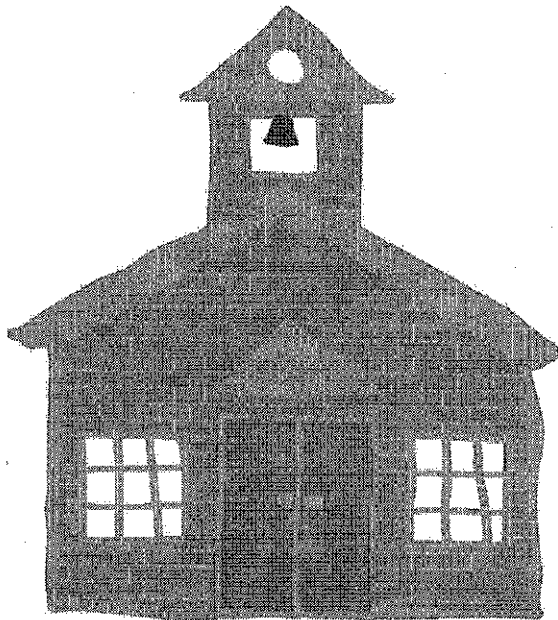


## GRASSROOTS IN THE PUBLIC EYE

*A Back-to-School Forum Exclusively for California's  
Education Reformers*

*Featuring Pat Korten, nationally-renowned public relations specialist*

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
LOS ANGELES, CA  
10:00AM — 2:00PM  
FRIDAY, AUGUST 23, 2002



**PAT KORTEN**, Vice President for Communications at the Becket Fund, has nearly 30 years of experience training America's top executives and government officials, making him Washington's first call in public relations.

### WORKSHOP TOPICS...

- Strategies on how to effectively interact with the media
- Shining the spotlight on your organization
- Shaping the debate around your issue
- How-to inform and rally the public

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PLEASE RSVP TO KARA HORNING  
BY AUGUST 16



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The grassroots movement is turning heads towards education reform throughout the country. With new federal legislation backing the reform movement, there is no better time to get the word out, especially in California.

The grassroots are the parents, teachers, grandparents, and everyday people who are in the trenches, bringing about real reform in communities all over the country. You may not feel like you hold the power, but you are the key to making schools better for all children.

Throughout America's history, grassroots groups have brought about major social changes. Today the grassroots are rallying again, and this time its about getting a quality education for all kids.

### GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

Developing a strategy for working with the media is an important step to achieving your mission. Your media strategy should be comprehensive; encompass print, radio, and television formats; and should aim to do publicize your organization, shape the debate on your issue, and inform and rally the public.

Communication is the key to school reform. The media is a powerful force shaping public opinion, as well as talking to people you would not normally be able to. Surprisingly, many Americans still do not know much about education reform – your friends, neighbors, and colleagues may be part of that group. As a champion of quality education, you may play the role of both teacher and advocate. Using the media to get your message across to a wide audience is a powerful way to inform others and rally support.



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## PATRICK KORTEN

Pat Korten is Vice President for Communications at the Becket Fund. He is a veteran of nearly 30 years in Washington, D.C., where he has worked as a broadcast journalist, government official and public relations specialist. He was director of public Affairs at the U.S. Department of Justice and director of policy and communications at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

He spent six years as anchor/reporter at Washington's all-news station, WTOP. He worked for three members of Congress and was chief spokesman for PhRMA, the pharmaceutical industry trade association. Prior to joining the Becket Fund, he spent three years as vice president at the Cato Institute.

While majoring in political science at the University of Wisconsin, he was the founding editor-in-chief of an alternative student newspaper that recently celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Contact him at [pkorten@becketfund.org](mailto:pkorten@becketfund.org).



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## **GRASSROOTS IN THE PUBLIC EYE**

**FEATURING PAT KORTEN, THE BECKET FUND**

### **ROSTER**

Jeanne Allen, The Center for Education Reform  
Steve Barr, Animo Charter School  
Lewis Beaulieu, Knights of Columbus  
Fred Black, Inglewood, CA  
Pat Black, Inglewood, CA  
Barbara Donovan, Vista, CA  
Carol Eisner, Eisner Public Relations  
Steve Guffanti, Vista, CA  
John Hall, Education Management Systems  
Mitch Hawn, Opportunities for Learning, EMS  
Gib Hentscheke, Rossier School of Education, USC  
Kara Hornung, The Center for Education Reform  
Gary Larson, CANEC  
Gregory McGinity, Former Member, CA State Board of Education  
Frank Neal  
Teresa Pina, Indio Charter School  
Dan Piro, Vista, CA  
Mike Piscal, View Park Preparatory Charter School  
Bill Ring, New West Charter School  
Kennedy Rocker, Indio Charter School  
Mike Spence, West Covina Unified School District  
Lisa Snell, Reason Public Policy Institute  
Lyn Talman  
Gary Tomak, Desert Sands Unified School District  
Jonathan Williams, The Accelerated School



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## CREATING A PROGRAM TO HELP THE MEDIA WORK WITH YOU

The care and feeding of the press is very important. Part of your job is to help them do their job. If you follow the advice below and stay in regular contact with the press, they'll come to view you as a valuable resource. They'll take your calls. They'll use your information. They will even quote you.

Newspaper reporters, broadcast journalists and the radio media are overwhelmed by the amount of material and information they receive on a regular basis. They are constantly being contacted by any number of groups trying to convince them that their story is worth telling. So, as you begin courting the media, keep in mind that you are competing with everyone who has something to share with the public. The key to winning over the media is in establishing good relationships in which they can rely on you for information and assistance in reporting education news.

### KNOW HOW THE PRESS IS STRUCTURED

Reporters come in all shapes and sizes, and so do media outlets. You must have complete list of people who may be likely to cover education reform and your efforts. Making a list of media contacts is tedious and must be updated often, but it is critical to broad, effective press coverage. (In addition to the lists below, read newspaper and magazine mastheads and watch television program credits to give you other ideas about whom you should be contacting.) Titles to look for include:

**Newspapers:** Education reporter, city or metropolitan reporter, assignment editor, metro desk editor, editorial page editor, general editor and publisher. Don't overlook the free and weekly neighborhood papers.

**Magazines:** Feature editor, editor-in-chief and publisher.

**TV:** News desk, assignment editor, education reporter, special events producer and anchor. Start off with the local network affiliates rather than the national bureaus.

Chamber of Commerce and is dedicated to raising our students' level of learning. We have collected X dollars to begin educating the people here in Smithville and plan to hold a town meeting on specific issues within the next few months. We hope to work closely with the school people, but we know this will be a sensitive issue, as they may feel targeted. Let me tell you a bit more about why we formed and what we hope to achieve."

And that is where you begin the bulk of your sales pitch, based on hard facts, insightful anecdotes and testimony, and examples of successes either in your community or elsewhere. Remember, you want your organization viewed as a source for information, not propaganda.

You already may have met with or written to your local representative, whether a state legislator, a city council member or even the mayor. As we suggested earlier in discussing endorsements from elected officials, you may want to try to get a brief quote, policy suggestion or program support from your representative for public record. You can quote that official's policies or insights on education and reform to the media. Being able to "drop a name" to the media, with a quote on your organization's behalf, shows them you've done your homework and that you're connected to and supported by representatives of the people. You'll avoid the risk of being dismissed as just one more concerned parent on a personal crusade with no real power to change the system.

#### **FOLLOW YOUR EDUCATION REPORTERS**

The key to developing a relationship with the media is in making frequent contact. It need not always be in person. You should develop a fax list and a mailing list, and frequently send communications updating media contacts on breaking local news, regional news and even national news that may not yet have reached them. (For tips on how to create and use news releases, see "Publicizing Your Organization or Event" later in this chapter.)

If, for example, you already have briefed a local newspaper reporter on charter schools and your efforts for them, then continue to keep them abreast of breaking stories in other states or regions. If you've learned that another state has just passed legislation, put out a brief news release headed with the words "MEDIA ALERT." Highlight the legislation's strong points and unique provisions, and then give the news a local spin, or "hook."

#### **MAKE YOUR PITCH UNIQUE AND INFORMATIVE**

One critical fact you should keep in mind about the media: their coverage is shaped not only by what is newsworthy, but also by what will appeal to the broadest cross-section of people. They are on the lookout for unique stories with

Each has a reputation to uphold and to build, and bad information compromises that.

A note on getting quoted: Always include in your news releases, perhaps lead with, a quote by your organization's leader, spokesperson or a recognized board member or supporter. Reporters are interested in giving all sides of a story, but they're also working against a deadline. Under such time constraints, they may not get a chance to call every source they want, and your news release or media alert may be the only contact they have with you. If you can provide them with a ready-made statement or mini-interview in the form of a news release, you'll be helping them get the whole story and, you'll increase your chances of being quoted or named as a source. With that in mind, make sure your quotes are informative, brief and catchy. Also, give credit to and quote from your information sources — it will reinforce that the issues are not far beyond your group and community.

Always continue broadening your network of incoming information, and you will soon become a valuable source of breaking news. For example, many organizations including The Center for Education Reform, the publisher of this handbook, send out media alerts and policy advisories to grass roots groups and other organizations to inform them about new and pressing developments in education reform. Go back to the list of national and regional organizations you assembled when you started to build your coalition and make sure you are on their mailing lists for policy papers and press releases; once aware of your education interests, they'll soon be sending a full supply of information from which you can pull.

### **TALKING TO THE PRESS**

There are a few important rules of thumb to follow if you're giving an interview or if you are called to comment on an issue or event. The first rule is to always be prepared. In fact, every time you talk in public about your group's purpose and goals, think of it as an interview with the press. Being prepared is the most important part of doing your job.

That is why your constant goal should be to arm yourself with the facts and examples that support your positions. For each particular occasion, consider who your audience will be — local elected leaders, state school officials, parents, voters, educators — and prepare with their interests in mind. In a media interview, think about who will be reading that article or watching that program, and address their concerns. Focus your answers or your comments on what they would find interesting or noteworthy.

When you provide your views on education reform, remember to tell the reporters that this is not an issue on which you stand-alone. Although your group may be small or your name may be new to the reporter, let her know that many, many other people are working on similar issues around the country. Whether the issue is testing, school choice, teacher reforms or money, there are an abundance of people, statistics, and case studies to support the reforms discussed throughout the School Reform Handbook. Give your reporter the big picture — give examples of the specific leaders and organizations supporting these issues in other states and on the national level, including educators whenever possible, and stress the political and social diversity of these reformers. This will help you avoid being wrongly typecast as politically or socially narrow — or as just a lone voice on a doomed mission.

### **EDITORIAL BOARD MEETINGS**

In addition to meeting individually with reporters, you should set up informal discussions with editorial boards. Contact editorial page editors and tell them you want to come by at their convenience to inform them about your new group, your work or a local issue. If they can't give you a time and date for an initial meeting, tell them you'll call back when their schedule is freer. To entice them to take the meeting, you might consider bringing along a high profile supporter as a "drawing card" — but make sure you are in basic agreement about the issues to be discussed. Whatever it takes to get a meeting, remember, you must work with the press on THEIR terms, not yours.

Approach an editorial board meeting much as you would treat a one-on-one interview. Here, however, you will have the chance to flesh out the issues more broadly, to open up a dialogue and more fully present your point of view. If you find that those present are not sympathetic to your views, all is not lost; simply acknowledge that you might not see eye-to-eye on everything, and offer to keep in touch and provide regular information to them. You can still be of help to them, they will appreciate your candor, and you have left the door open for meetings at a later date.

On the surface, many in the local media may have the wrong impression of your group, precisely because of the depiction given by your opponents in the unions and elsewhere. Nothing counteracts such bad press as showing the media that you are part of the community, out there working for kids and schools. Write complimentary letters to chosen reporters when they report well. Call them personally when you disagree, or write a diplomatic note to the same effect. After such initial correspondence, call them to invite them for coffee with you or to address your group about education and their role in the media. Building alliances will have more far-reaching consequences than sitting back and criticizing the press.



### **A NOTE ON PRESS CONFERENCES**

You can use press conferences to announce: the official formation of your organization; the results of research conducted or sponsored by your organization; policy or legislative changes supported by your group; or any other significant development your organization has been involved with. Hold the press conference at a symbolic or significant location, preferably in the morning so that the media can run your story on the evening news or in the next day's paper. In addition to getting out the media advisory and the news release, call all your press contacts by 9 a.m. on the day of the conference to confirm that they're coming.

Be judicious in calling press conferences. Remember that news releases can be used very effectively on their own to inform the media, via fax or mail, about a breaking story. Don't hold a press conference if a news release and a few personal phone calls will get you equal or better results.

### **A NOTE ON TALK RADIO**

Every broadcast area airs both national and local radio talk shows. They have a lot of airtime to fill and many local and regional shows continually search for interesting guests or unusual stories. Some may be very sympathetic to your efforts, while others may not. Pitch talk show hosts of both leanings, and get to know their producers — use the kinds of media efforts discussed above. In setting up radio broadcasts, it is important to objectively consider who in your organization is best qualified to speak in this forum; give consideration to speaking voice and conversational manner. Be honest: if it is not you, then act as the booking agent and let someone else do the interview. While you do not have to sound exciting to do a solid print interview, or even to give an effective TV sound bite, in the extended-time format of radio, you do have to sound better than the average speaker if you want to win over listeners. The main thing to remember is that you always want to be putting your organization's best foot forward.

### **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND OP-EDS**

Take full advantage of newspaper opportunities to voice your opinion or make your group known. You can use "Letters to the Editor" to clarify any press coverage about your group that may not have been clear or accurate, or to present more facts or alternative views to a newspaper report or editorial.