

Stratford Public Schools Guidelines for Submitting Event Listings and Articles to the Press

As a part of the Stratford School system, you are asked to continually search for new ways to enhance our system's mission of providing the best possible education for the students of Stratford.

Public relations can be a very useful communications tool for advancing the Stratford School system's philosophy of Children First and building community support for our schools and their activities. These guidelines are being provided to give you a structured system through which to submit listings of upcoming activities as well as written articles concerning your school to the local press.

What is the press interested in?

Information sent to editors must describe local, timely, newsworthy events that will appeal to readers, listeners, and viewers.

The following is a sample list of school activities in which the media may be interested.

1. Awards presented to students, faculty, and volunteers, from both inside and outside your school.
2. New PTA officers.
3. PTA or school events open to the entire community.
4. Stories on outstanding volunteers in your school.
5. Interesting class projects.
6. Innovative or unusual programs for students.
7. School-based community efforts (i.e.: food drives, clothing drives, etc.).
8. School art or performing arts projects and programs.
9. School anniversaries.
10. Scholarship winners.
11. Honoring students for academic achievement.
12. Spotighting outstanding teachers.
13. Almost anything that is superlative: biggest, smallest, latest, newest, oldest.

This list is just a sampling of the types of events at your school that might be of interest to the local news. There are bound to be others specifically related to your school community.

Newspapers are always receptive to good photo opportunities. Give special thought to events that will provide interesting photo opportunities (i.e.: students in action type situations rather than a check presentation or other standard "grip and grin" scenarios).

How Can I Let the Press Know About Events at Our School?

A Media Alert is simply a notification of upcoming events at your school to let the press know the what, when, and where of activities they may wish to cover. Media Alerts

should cover a minimum of a two week period. Also, the press needs to receive a Media Alert at least two weeks prior to the first event listed on it. As mentioned above, be sure to indicate which events would make good photo opportunities. Media Alerts should be prepared in an electronic file format (Microsoft Word is preferable) for easy e-mailing. Keep the format simple with plain text (no bold, italic, underlining).

IMPORTANT NOTE: To be more efficient in supplying Media Alerts to the press, reports from each school will be compiled at the central office and then submitted en masse to the press. Please send your Media Alerts via e-mail to XXXXXXXXXXXX by the Friday that is at least two weeks prior to the first event listed on it.

See Sample one for a format to utilize when preparing Media Alerts for your school.

Sample One

Media Alert
Judson School
1313 Mocking Bird Lane
May 1 through May 14

May 1 - 5: Teacher Appreciation Week

May 2: Grandparents Day
9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Grandparents and other family members are invited to visit the school and sit in on classes. An assembly is planned in the Judson House auditorium at 1 p.m. that includes musical performances by the school's choir and band.

GOOD PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

May 4: Mother's Day Plant Sale
9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Classes are allowed to purchase plants for Mother's Day in the School Gym.

May 4: Children's Relay for Life
9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Classes will take turns walking around the school's playing fields to raise awareness of cancer and help raise funds for Relay for Life. Students have been collecting donations from family and friends. A representative from the American Cancer Society will be on hand at approximately 1 p.m. to accept the donations.

May 9: Family Literacy Night
6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Special guest readers (including the mayor, superintendent of schools, chief of police) will be reading to students and parents in various classrooms throughout the building. Groups of parents and students will rotate from room to room at 15 minute intervals to hear different readers.

GOOD PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

May 11: Creation Celebration
9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

A daylong celebration of the arts. Students will experience various performers (dance troupe, musicians, and a theater company) as well as prepare their own artwork in workshops run by professional artists and volunteers. Please contact the school for a more detailed listing of times and performers.

GOOD PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

If you are interested in attending any of these events or you would like more information on any of them, please contact John Doe, principal, Judson School, at 555-5555.

If the Media Can't Attend an Event, How Can I Get Them a Story and Photos?

There will be occasions when the press will not be able to cover an event at your school. Although they might not be able to assign a reporter to your event, you can still submit a story and photos on the activity that the newspaper could use in a Press Release format. Press Releases should be prepared in an electronic file format (Microsoft Word is preferable) for easy e-mailing. Keep the format simple with plain text (no bold, italic, underlining). Press Releases should be prepared immediately after the event being covered to ensure timely coverage.

IMPORTANT NOTE: To be more efficient in supplying Press Releases to the local press, reports from each school will be compiled at the central office and then submitted en masse to the press. Please send your Press Releases via e-mail to XXXXXXXXXXXX immediately following your event. Press Releases must be submitted by Friday to be sent to the press on the following Monday.

Press Releases that require the least amount of effort on the part of the editor have the best chance of publication. When sending any materials (including press releases, photo releases, and media alerts) to an editor or broadcaster, always make certain you do the following:

- Remember that the appearance of any Press Release or other correspondence reflects the professionalism of your school and yourself.
- Keep the information as brief and concise as possible.
- Format releases double-spaced on 8½ by 11 inch page
- Make margins at least 1 inch on both sides of the release for editing and making notes.
- Include the school contact person's name, title, and telephone number, and the school name and address, in the upper right-hand corner of the release's first page.
- Precede your first paragraph with the city and state/province (printed in all caps) where the information originated, as well as the mailing date.
- If your story runs more than one page, use the word "more" at the bottom of each page except the last.
- Use the symbol "###" centered on a line by itself after the last paragraph, to indicate the end of the release.
- Standard language describing your school and its mission should be included in every Press Release.
- For future reference, keep copies (paper and electronic) of all information you send.

How Should I Write a Press Release?

- Use a short, eye-catching action headline (title) on your release.
- Identify the primary purpose or goal of your release and make it your "lead" in the first paragraph. Write your lead so it will catch and hold the editor's attention.
- Make sure that your release answers six important questions about your topic: Who, What, Where, When, How, and Why.

- When writing your release, always put the most important information at the beginning. Organize the information in order of descending importance with the least important facts at the end. (If the media cuts the release to make it shorter, most often they'll cut the end and the most important facts will still be included.)
- Make sure the names, numbers, quotations and other factual information are correct. Make sure all quotes are properly attributed to the person saying them; include the person's name and title.
- Keep the information factual; avoid opinions, except in attributed quotations.
- For every person quoted in the release, always obtain verbal or written consent to have his or her name and statement published.
- Keep your release short and to the point. A Press Release should be very focused, discussing one subject at a time.

See Sample two for a format to utilize when preparing Press Releases for your school.

Sample Two

Feb. 30, 2006

Stratford Public Schools

News Release

For more information contact: Jane Doe, Principal – Judson School, 555-5555

Release Date: Feb. 31, 2222

Subject: JUDSON SCHOOL STUDENTS RAISE MORE THAN \$2,500 FOR INDIA EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS

STRATFORD – Concerned students at Judson School showed how fast loose change can add up when they raised \$2,545.94 during a “penny” drive for the victims of the recent earthquake in India.

“The students were awesome! They should feel really proud of themselves. Even though they are young, they really made a difference in someone’s life halfway around the world,” said Lucky Lindy, president of the Judson School Parent-Teacher Association and organizer for the event.

To facilitate collecting the funds (which included loose change other than just pennies) 45 new gallon milk jugs (donated by Peter Cottontail from Buffet Food Services) were placed in classrooms to make collecting and transporting the change easier, Lindy said. She added that arrangements were made throughout Tom Thumb from Big Bank on Jefferson Street to have the coins sorted and counted at no charge. The change was counted at the main branch of Big Bank in Bridgeport at no charge.

“Incredibly, it took the tellers two days to process all that change,” Lindy said “Thanks to Teller One, Teller Two, Teller Three, Teller Four, and Teller Five for listening to that coin machine for all those hours! Even though these people are not part of the Judson School community they were inspired to help by the students’ generosity and caring.”

The devastating earthquake struck at 9 a.m. on Feb. 20, 2006, according to Dr. Marcus Wellby, who worked with Lindy to send the money collected to relief efforts in India. The earthquake struck the western state of Gujarat with the epicenter located in the part of that state known as Kutch. The funds collected at Judson School were being sent to relief efforts in that area. He added that the earthquake had a magnitude of 6.9. Wellby said that nearly 25,000 to 30,000 people lost their lives, property damage was in the hundreds of thousands dollars, and many towns were totally destroyed.

“On behalf of the people of Gujrat, I am very grateful (for the monies raised),” Wellby said.

Judson School with its student population of 800 students is a microcosm of the town: mixed racially, socially, economically and in individual student capability. The school’s mission statement is “To develop a community of learners in which all students acquire the knowledge, skills and confidence to meet the challenges of a changing and increasingly diverse society.”

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What type of Photos Will the Media Use?

Action photos illustrate your activity. They are not posed. Photos of people lined up in rows staring back at the camera are not action photos and are not really representative of all the ways your school is working for our children and the community. When possible, take a photograph of the program or item the story is about: children romping on playground equipment, students using new computers or text books, etc.

Photos being sent as digital files via e-mail should be attached to an e-mail as separate attached .jpg or .tif files and not as part of a Word document. "Raw" un-sized photos files from your digital camera should be sent to ensure that the file is large enough for use. Images should be at least 5 inches wide and have a resolution of 300 dpi or greater. Images that look great on your computer screen may lack sufficient resolution for publication in the magazine. In general, the greater the resolution the better the image will reproduce in print. Be sure to include caption information in the e-mail. Because of the larger size of digital photo files, only one or two should be attached to an e-mail.

Here are some suggestions to follow when taking photos:

- When posing a photograph, be sure that any students in it have a **completed Permission for Media Coverage form on file** (see *Appendix A*).
- Photograph people while they are actually involved in an activity. Don't stop them and line them up in a row.
- Get close to the action. When you think you're too close, move a bit closer. People's faces are possibly the most interesting part of any photo; they should be prominent.
- Limit the number of people in each shot and identify them by name and title.
- Photos should be clear and in focus. Be mindful of the lighting. Use a flash indoors; remember that the range of the flash is limited.
- When setting up a photo make sure the background is simple and uncluttered.
- Try to include people in the shot whenever possible. Because they will represent your school, make sure your subject appears neat and comfortable, not posed. Also, try to include some school identification ... school banner, sign, t-shirts, or sweatshirts, caps, etc.
- Try to get action that tells a story into your photograph. Instead of getting a photo of a newly donated computer (or the people who donated it standing next to it with school administrators -- a "grip and grin" photo), create a photo of students (and possibly the people who donated it) using that computer.
- Always send a photo caption, identifying the people from left to right, with the photograph with your e-mail. Double check all names and titles.
- Never write on the front or back of a photograph or staple it to a press release.
- Do not request Central Office to return photos. Produce enough copies to keep one in your files.

IMPORTANT NOTE: To be more efficient in supplying photographs to the local press, photos from each school will be compiled at the central office and then submitted en masse to the press. Please send your photos via e-mail to XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX immediately following your event. Photos must be submitted by Friday to be sent to the press on the following Monday.

ALWAYS REMEMBER WHEN SUBMITTING PHOTOGRAPHS OR WRITTEN OR VISUAL WORKS BY A STUDENT FOR OUTSIDE PUBLICATION TO CHECK TO SEE IF THAT STUDENT HAS A PERMISSION FOR MEDIA COVERAGE FORM ON FILE STATING THAT THE STUDENT'S PARENTS/GUARDIANS HAVE GRANTED PERMISSION FOR THE PUBLICATION OF THE STUDENT'S PHOTO OR WORK.

Please utilize all of the suggestions above in preparing materials for distribution via the central office to the media. In this way we can all work toward spreading the word about the great things that are being accomplished in our school system.

Appendix A

PRESS COVERAGE OF SCHOOL EVENTS/USE OF PHOTO/VIDEO/WRITTEN MATERIALS PERMISSION SLIP

Every school wants to have positive press coverage of its events and achievements. While seeking media attention for your events coverage of our schools' events, please be sure that staff members follow the proper channels by observing the procedures listed below.

1. No one should contact the media to cover school events without first getting permission from the building principal or his/her designee.
2. The building principal may give permission but must notify the Superintendent in a timely manner. The building principal must make sure the appropriate up-to-date photo/video releases (see attached) are on file for a student to be photographed, filmed or interviewed. Please feel free to duplicate the attached form for your use. Releases are needed for non-public events such as "staged" events (*check or food donations, classroom speakers, special learning programs, classroom/school Web sites, etc.*) especially those held during school hours. (Note: *Media releases are not needed for events that are open to the general public such as sports events, concerts, plays, graduation ceremonies, Board of Education ceremonies, and similar events*).
When in doubt please contact the Superintendent's office.

3. All call from attorneys or media regarding controversial, sensitive personnel, or student conduct issues must be referred to the Central Office for advice and direction.

On the next page you will find the Permission for Media Coverage form that must be signed and returned by each family. Please distribute or mail this form at the start of the school year to every student. Use these forms as the basis for a list of students who are not to be photographed or videotaped or have their written/visual art materials submitted for outside publication. Make sure each teacher has an access to this list. If this form is not returned to the building principal, it will be assumed that parental permission has been granted for media coverage of the child during the school year.

Stratford Public Schools
1000 East Broadway
Stratford, CT 06615

Permission For Media Coverage

Attention Parent/Legal Guardian:

There may be times throughout the school year when media professionals working for local or national newspapers, television, magazine, or similar outlets may be present at Stratford Public School sponsored programs or events. In addition, school personnel may, at times, photograph students in an educational setting for inclusion in Stratford Public School sponsored PowerPoint presentations, videos, Board of Education website, or various other school publications.

In either of these circumstances, your child may be photographed or interviewed to illustrate students' participation in our educational programs.

By law (Federal Education Protection Act - FERPA), the Stratford Public School System protects the privacy of its students and is prohibited in most cases from releasing confidential student record information to third parties without written parental or student (if age 18 or older) permission.

PLEASE PRINT

Student Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Please do not allow any media coverage of my child _____

Parent / Guardian Signature _____

Parent / Guardian (Print) _____

Date _____

Please return this form to the school Principal.

Revised 5/20/09

Appendix B

Local Media Contact Information

If you have any questions for the media below are come contact sources for you to get more information. Please note that all Media Alerts, Press Releases and photographs are to be submitted to Jenifer Smolnik at the Central Office for final submission to the media. Media Alerts should be submitted to the Central Office by the Friday that falls at least two weeks before the date of the first event listed in the alert. All Press Releases and photographs should be submitted by Friday for submission to the media on the following Monday.

Media Contacts:

Stratford Star: Fred Musante, 203-926-2080, stratfordstar@addinc.com

Stratford Bard: Tristram DeRoma, 203-876-6800, stratfordbard@ctcentral.com

Connecticut Post: Richard Weizel, rweizel@ctpost.com

New Haven Register: Phil Helsel, 203-876-4772

Channel 8 News: New Room, 203-784-8801, news8@wtnh.com

News 12: Assignment Desk, 203-750-5769, news12ct@news12.com

WICC Radio: 203-366-6000

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