

March 21, 2004

MEDIA PANEL—MAKING THE MESSAGE SING

10:45 A.M.—NOON

The Importance of a Champion in a Media Campaign

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Educating the public on the importance of a high quality preschool education during a child's early learning years can be accomplished through a well-planned media strategy. Each media strategy should be tailored to its unique situation. There are common elements of a successful strategy, including studying the target audience, creating a simple and concise message, and involving diverse supporters to develop and sustain a system of early care and education. While these components are essential to a successful campaign, there is no substitution for a champion spokesperson to elevate the message of the campaign.

A champion spokesperson is a powerful agent of change. A champion spokesperson is usually a highly respected person known through the state or country and can emerge from a range of fields including education, law enforcement, business, and legislature. Common elements of an effective champion include:

- Statewide name recognition
- Respect by a wide range of constituencies
- Political clout
- Willingness to spend political capital to see resolution of the problem to be solved
- Long-term investment in the issue.¹

The former governor of North Carolina Jim Hunt is an example of a champion for early education in his state. After hearing the need for early education from early childhood advocates and his own interest in the issue, early childhood education took its place among the top three issues during



his re-election campaign in 1992. Through his leadership and commitment to early childhood education, he was able to use his political clout for a greater investment in early childhood education that led to the development of North Carolina's SmartStart Program.

Champions make the public take the issue seriously because they lend their credibility to the preschool issue. In a media campaign, a champion is important because he or she provides a consistent voice and a clear direction to the multiple organizations and entities that are involved in creating and supporting an early childhood care and education system.²

Writing op-eds in local and state papers and delivering remarks at state and national forums are two ways that champions can voice their support for high quality preschool education. Through media outlets such as news conferences and op-eds, Wisconsin State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster publicly opposed the spending cuts proposed by the legislature and rallied public support for 4K by creating increased awareness of the importance of 4K. In a March 21 op-ed article she wrote, "[W]e must not allow legislative leaders to eliminate our investment in four-year old kindergarten in Wisconsin...As your state superintendent, I will be working with Governor Doyle and the legislature, both Democrats and Republicans, to make sure

that we prioritize in these tough times of shared sacrifice and continue to invest in early childhood opportunities.”³ In a year with a \$3.2 billion deficit, the governor vetoed proposed cuts for 4K and funding for 4-year old kindergarten was maintained.⁴

What Chief State School Officers Can Do

The media offers a wide variety of tools to promote high quality preschool programs and initiatives. Several vehicles include news conferences, individual briefings with reporters or editors, letters to the editor, and public service announcements. When developing a media strategy, chief state school officers can use one or more of the media vehicles.

Keep the education focus of preschool

Chief state school officers are the top educators in their states and can highlight to the public that preschool education is critical in the social, emotional, and cognitive development of a child. Often, preschool is mistakenly perceived as daycare, and chief state school officers can remind the public and the policymakers that high quality preschool education is an important component of the entire education system.

Develop strategic alliances and partnerships

An unexpected voice in support of preschool makes people listen. Chief state school officers can develop relationships with business people, law enforcement officers, advocacy groups, and teachers to form a common goal of promoting high quality preschool programs. Each partner brings a unique perspective to the public and the policymakers and increase the likelihood that the message is heard.

For additional information on early childhood and family education at the Council, visit [Http://www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org) or write the author at jinheel@ccsso.org.

¹Council of Chief State School Officers. (2002). *Tools for Expanding Effective Early Childhood Education: A Companion to Five State Case Studies*. Washington, DC: Author.

² Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. *Advocacy Kit: Working with the Media*. Retrieved March 2, 2004 from http://www.ascd.org/advocacykit/working_media.html.

³ Excerpt from Elizabeth Burmaster's op-ed "State's early kindergarten students reap many rewards" printed on March 16, 2003 in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

⁴ Lee, Jinhee. (2003). *Activist State Superintendent*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Advancing Quality Preschool for All is a meeting hosted by the Council of Chief State School Officers as part of The Pew Charitable Trusts' initiative to advance high quality prekindergarten for all of the nation's three and four year olds through objective, policy-focused research; state public education campaigns and national outreach.

As part of the Trusts' early education initiative, CCSSO will educate and serve its membership to build support among chief state school officers for expansion of high quality, universal preschool opportunities for 3 and 4 year-olds.

