

Dividends? Invest in the Media!

Principal says hours cut at York Mills Collegiate due to
May 5, 2009): GT03. [CPIO \(Canadian Periodicals\)](#)
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so that half of them signed a petition
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with school libraries in a positive way.
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Library's secret Volume! Volume! Volume!; Bitten by the reading bug, Scarborough high school students borrow up to 100 books for summer.(GTA)

"Library's secret Volume! Volume! Volume!; Bitten by the reading bug, Scarborough high school students borrow up to 100 books for summer.(GTA). ." [The Toronto Star \(Toronto, Ontario\)](#). (June 19, 2009): GT01. [CPIO \(Canadian Periodicals\)](#). Gale. SOLS - Oakville Public Library. 16 July 2009 <<http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T004&prodId=CPI&docId=CJ202064033&source=gale&srcprod=CPI&u>>

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More than 24,700, and counting.

For a high school with just 550 students, the number of books borrowed from the library at Sir Robert L. Borden Business and Technical Institute is the highest in the Toronto board, higher than secondary schools four times its size.

experience, editors get a lot of media releases and phone calls. He reminds library staff, "What is important to you or your organization may not be important to the media outlet. This is the most fundamental and frequent miscalculation that occurs when organizations pitch to media." To improve the odds, he advises, "Keep it simple. Keep it relevant. Have your facts, dates, events, and points of contact all available." Whenever a school library event does get coverage, it's a good idea to notify the board's communications department so that it can be included in daily media clippings. Media successes should be shared, and you can often append electronic newspaper coverage to your library website.

It is important to know why you are seeking media attention. Sharlene Hunter observes that whether they are giving an interview or preparing a media release, library staff can influence the shape of the story the public will read, hear, or see. Reporters put the most important information or the "lead" at the beginning of their stories; so key messages should be delivered first in a clear, digestible form. They should be followed by appropriate details and quotable quotes. It is helpful to the reporters if sources remember to include the elements of a good story, such as the 5 Ws, human interest, drama, conflict, or controversy.

Keep in mind that the goal of interaction with the media should be to provide "positive drama," rather than to "fuel controversy." Focus on the message you want to send about your school library and avoid buying into a negative question, speculating, getting defensive, or commenting on something outside your area of responsibility.

This last point is particularly important. When dealing with the media, remember your position within the school or school district. Although advocacy is an important part of work in school libraries, staff are subject to policies mandated by employers and elected politicians. Most boards encourage their staff to share good news and information with the community, but it is a good idea to discuss plans for contacting the media with the school administration so as to avoid conflicts with other school activities, and to give administrators a chance to become involved and support the library's efforts. Principals can recognize sensitive issues and help staff steer clear of potential conflicts of interest. It is advisable to refer questions about board policy, government funding, incidents at the school, or anything that would be controversial with implications beyond the school, to the staff in charge of communications at the board's central office where they may have key messages prepared or be able to put reporters in touch with the correct spokesperson who is an expert in a particular area.

So, what are you doing in your library? More importantly, what are teachers and students and other members of the community doing in your school library? You know, and they know, better than anyone. Wouldn't it be great if more people knew? The media can help you get the word out, to engage more people, and to win more resources and support for school libraries. Communicate with the media about your school library. A thoughtful investment in time could bring many dividends. ■