

Project Title: Proactive Media Relations, 2020-2021

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Research: Every month Guilford County Schools (GCS) tracks media coverage through a media report. Through this report the district measures number of mentions, what the topic of the story was, whether or not the story was positive, negative or neutral and who is producing the news story. In January of 2020, GCS was mentioned 177 times in television news coverage. In February, GCS was mentioned 186 times. While these numbers are not bad by any means, we wanted more coverage. The coronavirus would be a challenge unlike any the district had ever seen, but it could also be a catalyst for news coverage.

Analysis/Planning: To increase our coverage overall, we knew we needed to be more proactive in pitching. Yes, we were able to get a lot of coverage by responding to media inquiries. However, if we could add on stories that we were pitching to individual reporters or at press conferences this would help us capitalize on the great work being done in the district. As the coronavirus began to find its way into our lives, the district also realized the tremendous efforts by our employees could be leveraged as positive news stories on a new level than ever before.

Communication/Implementation: Much of the implementation was a concerted effort to make sure the work being done in the district was highlighted and shared with the community. Many aspects were important need-to-know information for the community. In those instances we called press conferences virtually. For other less urgent, but no less impressive, news we would write press releases or pitch the stories to reporter individually. One such release that was very successful was a “by the numbers” release highlighting how many devices had been handed out, how many meals had been served and more. As other industries and corporations in the area had less news to share, GCS took advantage and filled that news hole to much success.

Evaluation: The results of these efforts were clear. As was mentioned in the research section, in January of 2020 GCS was mentioned 177 times on television. In January of 2021, GCS was mentioned 657 times with 44% and 44% of those mentions being positive and neutral respectively. 657 mentions in television was a new record for the district. In fact, prior to January, GCS had set television mention records twice in 2020 once these efforts were made. In October of 2020, GCS was mentioned 496 times and in September GCS was mentioned 566 times. In both months, GCS was able to have more positive and neutral coverage than negative. Guilford County Schools also garnered national media attention throughout this time frame. GCS was mentioned by The New York Times in October and had a student featured in a live interview on CNN in November.