Forging Strong School-Media Relationships:
Ten tips to improve your image

1. **Create a relationship:** Don't presume it's the reporter's responsibility to curry a relationship with you. Get to know the person writing about your board. That will allow your perspective to come through.

2. **Identify a board spokesperson:** Usually the chairman. This doesn't mean others cannot talk to a reporter, but having one person take the lead helps keep your message consistent.

3. **You can do better than "no comment."** Here's an example: "We can't discuss that because it's a personnel matter, but we are working to resolve this situation as quickly as we can while we focus on our core goal of providing a first-rate education."

4. **Don't panic:** When a reporter calls, say you need some time to research the issue. Then consult with your superintendent, gather your facts and jot down some reminder notes before calling back.

5. **Get specifics:** Ask the reporter precisely what the story is about. What prompted it? Is he or she talking to other board members? The more you know the better you can respond.

6. **Confused reporter?** Email data or an explanation of complicated issues. Find district personnel who can explain. Ask the reporter what he or she heard you say to ensure that quotes are accurate.

7. **Off the record?** Reporters have a cardinal rule: Everything you say is on the record unless you state and he or she agrees otherwise. Assume that every word you say will appear in print.

8. **Don't nitpick:** If a story is factually inaccurate, of course you should bring that to the reporter's attention. But if a word is missing or a nuance was missed just let it go.

9. **Problem reporter?** Keep a precise record of inaccurate or unfair coverage. Meet with the reporter first, and if that does not resolve the problem, take your specific examples to the editor.

10. **Build the relationship:** This is the extension of Tip 1. Offer story ideas. Meet the reporter over coffee. Provide constructive feedback. Consider writing an op/ed piece or suggesting an editorial.