



Connecting with Your Community: 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 district or board. That will allow your perspective to come through.
- 2. Identify a district/board spokesperson:** For districts, often the superintendent; for boards, 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 others? 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.