

Making peace with NEWS Media

Lincoln Board of Education members:

News media can play an essential role in helping you provide your community with information about our schools and school district – and information about your work on the Lincoln Board of Education. Understanding and dealing with the news media is especially critical in our work as a school district as we work with complex issues in our ever-changing community. By treating local news media with respect, you can enhance the image of the school district and the Board of Education, improve the coverage of our schools and gain a useful understanding of the community you represent.

Why deal with news reporters?

Support of public education in our community is based on trust – and trust happens when our school district is open and honest with the community. News reporters are representatives of that community – providing powerful communication connections to all our audiences: parents, seniors, business people and all of Lincoln's stakeholders. Further, news outlets can help us spread the good news about our schools, as well as provide accurate information about more challenging issues. Radio, television and newspapers all play a major role in promoting the understanding and awareness of education in encouraging support, cooperation and trust.

Please do: Cultivate a positive relationship with reporters from TV, radio and newspapers. Be available, friendly and honest. Thank a reporter for interest in the school district. Don't be afraid to offer some story ideas.

- When a news reporter contacts you, it is extremely valuable to communicate with the superintendent and the communications director for guidance. There is great value in discussing and thinking through talking points, practicing possible questions, making sure our messages are consistent. A reporter may be inquiring about sensitive issues, or issues that involve confidential information.
- From the start, be completely clear with a reporter about whether you are speaking for the entire Board of Education – as one Board member – or an individual citizen.

- Your words and thoughts are completely scrutinized and analyzed – as an elected official – so choose those words carefully. Reporters can be friendly, and even friends, but they have a job to do that is different from our job – and we should recognize and respect that.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know, but I can find out." The superintendent and staff are always willing to provide information and answer questions. Saying "I don't know" is a sign of self confidence, not ignorance – recognizing that you can't know every detail of a large, complex school district.
- Subscribe to local newspapers; read them online. Tune into the local news. But please don't over-indulge in reading blogs. The Communications Team always keeps an eye on blogs and formulates strategic responses when necessary.
- If there is an error in news coverage, you have several options: You can notify the LPS director of communications for assistance and help you consider the merits of seeking a correction in a particular case. You might also consider talking directly with the reporter, but please avoid escalating and immediately notifying the publisher or station director.
- As a courtesy, and to foster clear messages, when you speak with a member of the news media, please notify the superintendent, the communications director, and other members of the Board of Education.
- At meetings of the Board of Education, please remember that the microphone is always on – and the camera could always be focusing on you. Honor deadlines: If a reporter needs additional information following a Board meeting, try to be helpful.