



## Community Voice

Getting your message out

## Setting the Record Straight

*You've worked hard to be heard. You've crafted clear key messages, and they've been given wide distribution via both traditional and non-traditional media. You've struck the right balance when it comes to reinforcing your message through repetition—not so much that it becomes white noise, but not so little that large segments of your community miss it altogether. You have recruited your partners and allies to lend their voices to the cause, which is, as always, student success and well-being. But still, somehow, somewhere, something has gone wrong, and your message has become twisted or garbled. At times like these, you need to decide whether you need to **set the record straight**.*

"I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant." That statement pretty much sums up the complexities and ambiguities of human communication. Between voice and ear, there are countless pitfalls and obstacles that can impede the successful delivery of your message.

When this happens, your first task is to decide whether or not the misinformation warrants a correction. If someone has misspelled your name, for instance, sure—let them know so they can get it right the next time, but don't expect a printed correction. At the other end of the scale, if a story includes a factual inaccuracy, or your comments have been taken out of context, try to get a correction. The key word here is "try," because you don't control what the media does or doesn't do. *If* you've established a good relationship with a reporter, and *if* your approach to that reporter is non-confrontational, and *if* they haven't already moved on

to something else, you may get your correction. But if you don't, there are still things you can do.

Use your own communications networks to distribute the correct information. If your letter to the editor challenging an inaccurate story isn't published, post that letter on your website or Facebook page, and tweet the link to your followers. Share the real story with your partners and allies, and ask that they spread the message through their own networks. If the story raises red flags about student learning or well-being, communicate directly with parents, and make sure they know the real facts of the matter.

When it comes to **setting the record straight**, always remember these two things. First, correcting factual errors is relatively simple, but correcting—or more accurately changing—the interpretation of those facts is anything but. Where one person sees a 95% success rate, another sees a 5% failure rate. The facts are the same, but the emphasis is completely different. Decide when working to change entrenched positions is worth the effort, and when it's better to just walk away from the debate. Second, each time you work to correct a fallacy, you run the risk of repeating and therefore reinforcing that fallacy. When you work to set the record straight, make sure that your message and the correct information is front and centre, and that you minimize exposure for the story you are contesting. Do these two things when you need to set the record straight, and they will help you **get your message out**.

