

MINNETONKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

#910 MEDIA RELATIONS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

I. PURPOSE

The Minnetonka School Board recognizes the important role of the news media in keeping the public informed about the programs, services, policies, procedures, events, public issues and decisions of the District. The purpose of this policy is to ensure there is consistency and fairness in dealing with media representatives, to present accurate information, to minimize the possibility of errors or conflicting information, to encourage respect for and cooperation with media representatives, to protect the rights and privacy of students, staff, and families, and to ensure that media relations efforts support and promote the mission and objectives of the District.

2.0 GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The Board directs the Superintendent, or designee, to establish media relations procedures that ensure proactive communication with media representatives and establish respectful, cooperative and constructive relationships that build trust and credibility with reporters.

Ensuring a positive and stimulating learning environment is critical to student success. Therefore, media relations activities should take care to minimize any distractions to student learning. Likewise, media relations activities should respect the privacy rights of students, their families and staff.

3.0 AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

In most instances, media inquiries should be directed or referred to the Communications Director. The Communications Director will attempt to answer inquiries or provide media representatives with access to personnel most knowledgeable about the issue. The Communications Director is authorized to serve as a spokesperson for the District.

The Superintendent is the primary spokesperson for the District.

The School Board Chair, or designee, is the spokesperson for the Board. The Board speaks as a whole through a vote or public consent of the majority of the Board.

Formal requests for information under the Minnesota Data Practices Act, shall be directed to the District's Data Practices Compliance Officer in accordance with Board Policy 307.

Principals shall serve as the primary spokesperson for their schools. Principals will inform the Superintendent or Communications Director about media contacts.

Employees of the District shall speak with reporters only about the employee's given area of expertise. For issues that may generate controversy or may be particularly sensitive, employees shall consult with the District Communications Director before speaking with the media. Questions unrelated to an employee's specific area of expertise shall be referred to the Communications Director. Employees shall refrain from speculation and provide only information they know to be truthful and accurate. Employees and program leaders are encouraged to consider the positive benefits of proactive media relations and publicizing events and activities that position the District in a positive light. All employees and/or Board members shall notify the District's Communications Director immediately if they are contacted by the media.

Coaches and student activities advisors are often in the position of speaking to the media immediately preceding or following an event, activity or competition. The Board recognizes the positive impact of media coverage and publicity for student recognition and program success; therefore, coaches and advisors are encouraged to speak with reporters about programs and activities, especially when the activity reflects positively on the students and the school. Coaches and advisors shall notify the Communications Director regarding out-of-the-ordinary media inquiries.

4.0 REQUIREMENTS

- 4.1 In keeping with the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, the Public Disclosure Act, the Open Meeting Law and the public's right to know, the Board believes that media representatives should have access to all public records and public meetings. Agendas for such meetings will be provided to media representatives in advance of the meeting in accordance with school board meeting posting procedures.
- 4.2 Reporters and other news media representatives are to be treated with courtesy and respect. Reporters usually work on tight deadlines and prompt replies to inquiries are important. When information cannot be supplied promptly, the reporter will be so notified.
- 4.3 To protect the privacy and confidentiality of our students, reporters, film crews and photographers must sign in at the school and must be accompanied by an administrator while on campus. Schools will maintain a record of students whom, by the direction of a parent or guardian, may not be photographed or filmed.
- 4.4 The Board recognizes that schools may be contacted for media stories related to youth or public policy issues, which may not necessarily be educational issues. When assisting in such a story will further the Mission and objectives of the District and in no way detract from our E-12 educational program, the Communications Director is authorized to assist reporters with the story. Media representatives are reminded, however, that requests for information or summary data that the District does not regularly collect or report shall not be fulfilled, except as required by the Data Practices

Act; this includes but is not limited to student or family data that is not otherwise reported by the District to city, county, state or federal agencies.

- 4.5 Media representatives are reminded that although schools are public, the property is owned and operated by the District, which has the right to monitor and limit access to its facilities. In some instances, it may be appropriate to decline to accommodate a reporter's request for access to the school or school personnel. In making a decision to grant or deny access, a school administrator will place the highest priority on maintaining an environment conducive to student learning and protecting student and staff rights to privacy. When access is granted or denied, it shall be granted or denied consistently to all media representatives.
- 4.6 Students in attendance at school during the school day shall be interviewed or photographed by the media only with a parent, staff member, or administrator present and with parental/guardian's consent.
- 4.7 While staff members have a right to speak with the media, they also have the right to decline to be interviewed. The Communications Director will work with staff members to ensure they are comfortable being filmed, photographed or interviewed before agreeing to such interviews.
- 4.8 During emergency situations, the District will designate one spokesperson and a central location for media information. Media representatives are asked to respect the District's instructions during such difficult times.

The Communications Director shall maintain a record of all news releases, media advisories, and media inquiries.

Cross References: Policy #900 — Communications and Public Information
Policy #307 — Compliance With Minnesota Data Practices Act
Policy #406 — Records Of Employees
Policy #515 — Protection And Privacy Of Pupil Records

Legal Reference: Minnesota Data Practices Act; Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

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