

Administrative Procedures for News Media Relations (Attachment for Policy No. 911)

Purpose

The School District of Philadelphia (“District”) recognizes the important role that local and national news media -- print (e.g. newspaper or magazine), digital (e.g. website/blog), and broadcast (e.g. radio, TV) -- play in providing students, families, employees, staff, and communities with accurate and timely information on District matters. These procedures provide guidance to employees speaking in an official capacity to media on behalf of the District.

Procedures

In an effort to ensure that members of the media -- both professional as well as student journalists -- have complete and accurate information regarding District news, the Office of Communications’ [Media Relations Team](#)¹ (“Media Relations Team”) is responsible for managing media engagement for official District matters. The Media Relations Team is committed to actively working with news media to support the development of news coverage that properly depicts the diversity of District staff, students, and families and is free of bias concerning race, ethnicity, education, income, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. This will be done by, but not be limited to:

- Planning and executing events specifically designed for press, i.e. press conferences;
- Developing and distributing news releases and advisories, and official District statements; and
- Coordinating and staffing media visits to District offices and schools.

News Media Requests for Information or Access²

General Media Guidelines

All members of the news media should contact the Media Relations Team to:

- Arrange for access to administrative personnel and schools for interviews;
- Seek official statements regarding District matters; or
- Request to get "b-roll" footage of students walking through hallways, in the cafeteria, etc. on a school site. All such recordings must be done in such a way that no one student can be identified in order to protect those students without media releases.

Timeliness of the information or interview request may affect the ability of the District to comply with the request; therefore requests should be submitted sufficiently in advance to allow coordination with the Media Relations Team in light of the requestor’s deadline or proposed coverage date and time.

¹ The Media Relations Team webpage is available at <https://www.philasd.org/newsroom/>

² Right to Know Law Requests are treated separately and should be made in accordance with [Policy 801](#) - Public Records. [1]

Media on School or District Property

- Visits to District buildings by media representatives should be coordinated through the Media Relations Team and conducted in the company of a member of the Media Relations Team, a site administrator, or a principal or their designee to ensure student and staff safety and privacy.
- Coordination of all news conferences and District-wide events will be through the Media Relations Team.
- Principals shall notify the Media Relations Team and the appropriate assistant superintendent prior to any arranged media visit or of any invitation extended to media representatives to cover an event or visit the school location.
- Media representatives are considered visitors and must follow District policy when visiting District schools and offices. All media are required to check in at the main office or security station prior to any media activity.
- The Media Relations Team, principal, or site administrator of a school will designate specific press areas in which media personnel must remain for any interview, news coverage, or event.
- Requests to visit other areas, beyond the press area, within a school building may be granted by the school principal or site administrator upon request.
- Media who wish to conduct parent/guardian interviews or get video footage of District buildings are asked to do so outside of District buildings, with appropriate permissions, unless otherwise arranged with the Media Relations Team. This is to avoid disrupting the learning environment and to avoid blocking any entryways.

Staff Guidelines

When Speaking as a Private Citizen

District staff who are engaging with the media as private citizens and not as designated employees speaking on behalf of the District should:

- State clearly that their comments represent their personal views and not those of the District;
- Not do so during work hours;
- Not make public statements known to be false or made without regard for truth or accuracy;
- Not make comments that would interfere with safe and orderly school operations; and
- Not take action that would be in violation of the Employee Handbook.

If Designated to Speak in an Official Capacity on Behalf of the District

- If an employee is contacted directly by the media for an official District comment, staff are to refer the request to the Media Relations Team and inform their principal, supervisor, and office chief.
- A member of the Media Relations Team will assist the media and follow up with appropriate staff to provide information, or coordinate any dates, times, and locations for interviews or photographs, depending on the request or inquiry. This allows staff to focus on their normal duties while the Media Relations Team arranges the logistics of the request.
- Anyone designated to speak on behalf of the District will:
 - receive direct support from the Media Relations Team to empower and prepare them to speak publicly with confidence without violating the privacy protections for staff and students, and
 - conduct themselves professionally and in accordance with the Employee Handbook.

Media Requests of Students

- In order to ensure that students have the necessary clearances and parental authorization to speak with media, all media requests to interview students during school hours on school property should be fielded through the Media Relations Team in partnership with the school principal.
- The Media Relations Team will then coordinate details in consultation with the school principal and other District staff as needed.

Students' Right to Privacy

- Media interaction involves any time student images, voices, videos, work, and/or names are used to promote or represent the District, District programs, and/or District events in the news media including, but not limited to, television, print, and on the web.
- To protect student privacy, a student media release form must be on file, before any media interactions with students can occur.
 - Principals or their designee shall distribute and collect [student media release forms](#),³ signed by the student's parent/guardian, and maintain the forms on file at their school.
- Schools may post information about a student on District websites and official District social media pages (including, but not limited to Facebook®, Twitter®, YouTube®, and Instagram®) only in accordance with [Policy 815.1](#) - Internet and Media Presence. [2]

³ Student media release forms are available at <https://www.philasd.org/communications/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/11/PermissionForm.pdf>

- The Family and Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”) and individual parent/guardian authorization for release must be observed at all times, as set forth in the FERPA Notice for Directory Information and Release of Directory Information Opt-Out Form. [3]

Photography And Filming

- Photography or filming (including videotaping or creating digital images) by members of the news media may not take place at a school location without the prior consent of the Media Relations Team and school principal or representative.
- Filming, videotaping, or photographing students at a school location by media sources is allowed only if there is a signed parental consent form or release form for each child who participates in such activity.
- Filming, videotaping, or photographing students at a school location who are engaged in a public facing activity does not require signed parental consent or release forms.

Emergency or Crisis Situations

- Media are not permitted in a school or on school grounds in emergency situations where a school site is secured or locked down. A media staging area will be identified by the Media Relations Team and/or emergency management officials, and communicated with media.
- The Media Relations Team is responsible for fielding questions and inquiries or identifying a District official to speak with media during emergency situations. All other staff should refrain from commenting.
- The Media Relations Team’s first priority is to support the school and collect accurate information. Once that information is collected, the Media Relations Team will be present at the staging area to update media as necessary.

Public Events

- Media covering public events will not need to coordinate with the Media Relations Team as long as they are only present for that event and are not reporting on other items.
- Media may photograph, film, and report from the press box or from behind the sidelines so long as they do not interfere with the event itself, or related business.
- Media should be prepared to present work ID, if requested, at the event.

Maintenance Schedule

The Office of Communications will review these procedures annually.

Legal References:

1. [Policy 801](#) - Public Records
2. [Policy 815.1](#) - Internet and Media Presence
3. [FERPA](#)

Related Information:

[Media Relations Team webpage](#)

[Policy 815.1](#) - Internet and Media Presence

[Student Media Release Form](#)