

Title: School-Sponsored Student Publications

The District offers various opportunities for students to become involved in producing publications and other types of communications media that are specifically intended to be distributed to a broader audience than just the students who are participating in a particular class or course. Such opportunities may be provided directly through coursework during the instructional day and/or in a manner that supplements such coursework through District-sponsored extracurricular and co-curricular offerings. The purpose and intent of such opportunities is to provide District-directed and District-supervised learning activities, as opposed to creating an unrestricted forum for any and all student expression or creating an independent media outlet.

The purpose and goals of such activities include the development of:

1. Writing, presentation, and other communications skills
2. Project planning and leadership skills
3. Responsible use of electronic media and other forms media
4. Responsible, accurate, and objective journalism, for journalistic activities
5. Respectful dialogue and debate over controversial issues
6. An understanding of the differences between personal expression and communicating on behalf of a group, organization, or entity
7. Specific media-related skills (e.g., interviewing, graphic design, etc.)

In providing direction and oversight for such activities, the administration and staff are expected to consider factors such as (1) the purpose of the specific activity (student journalism, commentary/editorializing, art/entertainment, marketing/promotion, etc.); (2) the age, skill, and maturity of the participating students; and (3) the identity of the intended or likely audience for the publication/communication.

Notwithstanding the various grounds on which the District may ultimately decide to restrict certain student-driven content, it is not the intent of the Board or this policy to require restrictions on student exploration and presentation of content solely because the content (1) addresses a controversial topic; (2) presents an unpopular viewpoint; or (3) although educationally appropriate for its particular school-related context, may be considered disagreeable to some people.

Any teacher or other District-assigned advisor supervising the particular activity is expected to be aware of and, to the extent consistent with the nature of the activity, review the substantive content of District-sponsored student publications and other communications. The teacher or advisor and the applicable school principal are authorized to direct that particular content be modified or withdrawn prior to publication/distribution/presentation, or, if necessary and practical, after any initial publication or distribution.

The following are examples of content that are never appropriate for inclusion in any publication or other form of communications media that is governed by this policy:

1. Content that violates District policies or rules related to harassment, intimidation, bullying, or discrimination, including content that attacks or threatens a person or group on the basis of personal attributes such as race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or disability.
2. Content that is defamatory, or that places the party responsible for the communication at substantial risk of a finding of defamation.
3. Content that incites, threatens, or promotes unlawful violence or other criminal behavior.
4. Content that contains depictions or descriptions of sexually-explicit or other conduct that is considered harmful to children, as further defined under state law.
5. Content that incites or promotes conduct that would (a) be contrary to District policies and learning objectives regarding the use of tobacco/nicotine, alcohol, or drugs, or (b) otherwise pose a similar type of threat to the health and safety of students.
6. Content that is plagiarized.
7. Content that violates the legal rights of another person, such as a legally-protected privacy right or intellectual property right (e.g., copyright or trademark).
8. Content that would violate the legal prohibition on the use of public funds for express political advocacy by the District as a governmental entity.

Although it is not possible to list and define all other possible grounds under which the District may prohibit certain content or require content to be modified or withdrawn, a supervising teacher, advisor, or administrator, may also restrict student-driven content upon a determination that the content is, for example:

1. Inconsistent with the purpose of the particular publication/activity;
2. Inconsistent with the educational goals and objectives of the publication/activity;
3. Unduly invasive of a person's privacy, even if not a clear violation of a specific law;

4. Likely to cause a material and substantial disruption to school operations or the learning environment;
5. In conflict with other Board policies; or
6. Otherwise inappropriate for the educational and school context in which it originates.

Assuming that students are substantively involved in the creation/selection of content and/or in the production process, examples of the publications and other communications media that are intended to be covered by this policy include the following, regardless of the format in which they are created or distributed: school newspapers, other school news programs and news media, school yearbooks, class/school newsletters, etc.

LEG REF: Wisconsin Statutes Sections §118.13, §948.11

Wisconsin Administrative Code PI 9

Policy Adopted: May 17, 2023