

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
Board of Education  
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

5151  
Policy No.

BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY

STUDENTS

Student Journalists and School-Sponsored Media

**I. POLICY STATEMENT**

The Board of Education recognizes that freedom of expression and press freedom are fundamental principles in our society and that a robust and free student press is critical to the development of informed and civic-minded adults. The Board of Education encourages student participation in the development of school-sponsored media with the support and assistance of a Student Media Advisor.

**II. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to recognize the freedom of speech and freedom of press rights of student journalists in school-sponsored publications and to ensure that sponsored publications and productions which provide a vehicle for student expression are consistent with legal and regulatory requirements, school system policies and procedures, civil discourse, responsible journalism, and professional standards.

**III. DEFINITIONS**

- A. Defamation/defamatory: the willful or negligent act of harming the good name or reputation of another by uttering or publishing intentionally harmful or false information.
- B. Libelous: defamation by written or printed words, pictures, or in any form other than spoken words or gestures.
- C. School-sponsored media: any material that is: (1) prepared, written, published, or broadcast by a student journalist at a public school; (2) distributed or generally made available to members of the student body; and (3) prepared under the direction of a Student Media Advisor.

“School-sponsored media” does not include material that is intended for distribution or transmission solely in the classroom in which the material is produced.

- D. Slanderous: an intentionally harmful, false, and defamatory statement or report.
- E. Student journalist: a Prince George's County Public Schools student who gathers, compiles, writes, edits, photographs, records, or prepares information for dissemination in school-sponsored media.
- F. Student media advisor: an individual employed, appointed, or designated by the Administration to supervise or provide instruction relating to school-sponsored media.
- G. Unwarranted invasion of privacy: the unjustifiable intrusion into the personal life of another without consent. This may include the unauthorized use of a person's picture or name; the intrusion into another's private affairs, seclusion or solitude; the publication of potentially misleading or damaging information; or the publication of private facts that would be highly offensive to a reasonable person and is not of legitimate concern to the public.

#### IV. **STANDARDS**

A student journalist may exercise freedom of speech and freedom of the press in school-sponsored media, subject to the guidelines below:

- A. A student journalist is responsible for determining the news, opinion, feature, and advertising content of school-sponsored media with guidance from the advisor and/or other professional staff employees, however, the advisor cannot use the advisor's position to influence the student journalist to promote an official position of the county board or public school.
- B. School-sponsored media includes, but is not limited to, school yearbooks, newspapers, literary magazines, journals, or other material produced by students (print and electronic versions).
- C. A student journalist shall produce content based upon professional standards of accuracy, objectivity, and fairness.
- D. A student journalist is prohibited from publishing school-sponsored media that:
  - 1) Is defamatory, libelous, or slanderous;
  - 2) Constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy;
  - 3) Violates federal law, state law, or Board of Education policies;
  - 4) Contains language that is as profane, vulgar, lewd, or obscene, or language that has the intent to harass, threaten, or intimidate; or

- 5) Incites students to create a clear and present danger of the commission of an unlawful act, the violation of county board policies, or the material and substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the public school.
- E. A student media advisor is expected to teach professional standards of English and journalism to student journalists.
- F. A student media advisor may not be dismissed, suspended, disciplined, reassigned, transferred, or otherwise retaliated against for acting to protect a student journalist engaged in conduct authorized by law and this policy.

**V. IMPLEMENTATION RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Board directs the Chief Executive Officer to implement administrative procedures consistent with this policy and relevant laws. The Chief Executive Officer will include in the administrative procedures a process for a student journalist to appeal a decision to place a limitation on school-sponsored student media.

**VI. REFERENCES**

Maryland Code, Education Article section 7-121

Board Policy and Administrative Procedure 5143 – Bullying, Harassment and Intimidation

Administrative Procedure 5151, Guidelines for Producing and Publishing Student Publications (Print and Electronic Versions)

**VII. HISTORY**

Policy Adopted 07/28/21