



Frederick County Public Schools
Board of Education
SCHOOL-SPONSORED MEDIA
Policy 436

A. Policy Purpose

1. To recognize and respect a student journalist's constitutional right of expression in school-sponsored media while also protecting the rights of others and the normal functioning of the school environment.
2. To encourage student journalism through school-sponsored media and publications.
3. To establish authority of the school principal to review and monitor implementation.

B. Definitions

1. "Libel" is defined to mean a defamatory statement expressed in a fixed medium, especially writing, but also a picture, sign or electronic broadcast.
2. "Obscenity" is defined to mean the characteristic or state of being morally abhorrent or socially taboo, especially as a result of referring to or depicting sexual or excretory functions.
3. "Publication" is defined to mean a substantial dissemination of school-sponsored media.
4. "School-Sponsored Media" is defined to include any material that is:
 - a. Literature produced by Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS) students in any form and made generally available to the school community, including any book, magazine, pamphlet, newspaper, yearbook, picture, photograph, drawing, or any other written or printed or unusual representation, as well as materials in print, online, and audio/video media;
 - b. Prepared, written, published, or broadcast by an FCPS student journalist;
 - c. Distributed or generally made available to members of the student body and/or school community, including print and online publications; and
 - d. Prepared under the direction of a student media advisor.
5. "Slander" is defined to mean a defamatory assertion expressed in a transitory form, especially speech.
6. "Student Journalist" is defined as to mean an FCPS student who is responsible for gathering, compiling, writing, editing, photographing, recording, or preparing information for dissemination in school-sponsored media and may not be disciplined for acting in accordance with provisions under this policy or Maryland law.

7. “Student Media Advisor” is defined as an individual employed, appointed, or designated by the Board of Education of Frederick County (Board), FCPS or the school principal to supervise or provide instruction relating to school-sponsored media.

C. Policy Statement

1. The Board recognizes and respects a student journalist’s constitutional rights of expression in school-sponsored media, understanding that such speech is not absolute but also adheres to protecting the right of others.
2. The Board supports the balance of those rights as determined by the U.S. Constitution, Supreme Court decisions, and Maryland law.

D. Implementation

1. School-Sponsored Media

- a. School-sponsored media shall not be published or distributed, in whole or in part, if the content:
 - i. Uses language that may be defined as] lewd, vulgar, or obscene;
 - ii. Is libelous or slanderous;
 - iii. Constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy;
 - iv. Uses language that has the intent to harass, threaten, or intimidate;
 - v. Violates federal or State law; or
 - vi. Incites students to create a clear and present danger of the commission of an unlawful act, the violation of Board policies or FCPS regulations, or the material and substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the public school.
- b. Principals shall make known to students systemwide guidelines for school-sponsored media. Student rights and guidelines shall be included in the [FCPS Student Code of Conduct](#) published each year.
- c. The school principal or [their] designee, in consultation with the student media advisor and appropriate curriculum specialist, will review publications that may be deemed in violation of standards as outlined in this policy and take action accordingly. Such decision may be appealed in accordance with [Board Policy 105, Appeal and Hearing Procedures](#).
- d. Nothing in this policy may be construed to prevent a student media advisor from teaching professional standards of English and journalism to student journalists.

2. Student Media Advisors

- a. All school-sponsored media will have a student media advisor.
- b. A student media advisor is charged with teaching the professional standards of English and journalism to student journalists, and will review print materials characterized by accuracy, responsibility and integrity.
 - i. Accuracy
 1. Exert maximum effort to print the truth in all statements and visuals.
 2. Strive for completeness and objectivity in reporting.
 3. Guard against carelessness, bias or distortion by either emphasis or omission.

- ii. Responsibility
 - 1. Use mature and considered judgment in the public interest at all times.
 - 2. Select, edit and display information on the basis of its significance and its genuine usefulness to the readership.
 - 3. Edit information with candor and good taste and avoid an imbalance of sensational, preponderantly negative or merely trivial news.
 - 4. Define sources of information and clearly tell the reader when competent sources cannot be identified.
 - 5. Respect rights of privacy.
 - iii. Integrity
 - 1. Deal unemotionally with controversial subjects and treat issues with impartiality in reporting.
 - 2. Provide a forum for the exchange of pertinent comment and criticism.
 - 3. Label editorial views or expressions of opinion.
 - 4. Help to protect all rights and privileges guaranteed by law.
 - 5. Ensure academic honesty as outlined in the [FCPS Student Code of Conduct](#).
 - c. A student media advisor may not use the advisor's position to influence a student journalist to promote or oppose an official position of the Board, FCPS, or the individual school.
 - d. A student media advisor may not be dismissed, suspended, disciplined, reassigned, transferred, or otherwise retaliated against for acting to protect a student journalist for exercising freedom of expression or refusing to infringe on conduct that is protected by federal and State law, Board policy, and FCPS regulation.
3. The Superintendent is directed to establish regulations to implement this policy, including setting guidelines regarding the time, place, and manner of expression by a student journalist in school-sponsored media.

E. Related Information

- 1. **Board Policy**
 - a. [Policy 105, Appeal and Hearing Procedures](https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/105)
(<https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/105>)
 - b. [Policy 115, Responsible Use of Social Media](https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/115)
(<https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/115>)
 - c. [Policy 404, Student Rights and Responsibilities](https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/404)
(<https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/404>)
 - d. [Policy 509, Extracurricular and Co-Curricular Activities](https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/509)
(<https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/509>)
- 2. **FCPS Regulations**
 - a. [Regulation 301-03, Technology Use, Staff](https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/301-03)
(<https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/301-03>)
 - b. [Regulation 305-01, Intellectual Property & Royalties](https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/305-01)
(<https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/305-01>)
 - c. [Regulation 400-77, Computers: FCPS Website Publishing](#)

- (<https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/400-77>)
- d. [Regulation 400-96, Student Data Privacy](https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/400-96)
(<https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/400-96>)
- e. [Regulation 434-01, Technology Use, Students](https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/434-01)
(<https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/434-01>)
- f. [Regulation 500-29, Copyright](https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/500-29)
(<https://apps.fcps.org/legal/documents/500-29>)

3. **FCPS Resources**

- a. [Calendar Information](https://www.fcps.org/about/calendar_information)
(https://www.fcps.org/about/calendar_information)
- b. [FCPS Student Code of Conduct](https://www.fcps.org/families_students/student_code_of_conduct)
(https://www.fcps.org/families_students/student_code_of_conduct)

4. **Federal Law**

- a. U.S. Const., First Amendment
(https://fcps-md.info/First_Amendment)

5. **Maryland Law**

- a. Maryland Declaration of Rights, Art. 40
(https://fcps-md.info/MD_Const_Declaration_of_Rights_Art_40)
- b. New Voices Maryland Act (2016)
(https://fcps-md.info/New_Voices_Maryland_Act)

6. **Maryland Statutes**

- a. [Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 7-121](https://fcps-md.info/MD_Educ_Code_7-121)
(https://fcps-md.info/MD_Educ_Code_7-121)

F. Policy History (Maintained by Legal Services)

<i>Responsible Office</i>	Curriculum, Instruction, and Innovation
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Review Dates	
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