



ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

RELEASE AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

1121

Procedure No.

August 1, 2006

Date

- I. **PURPOSE:** To provide procedures and guidelines for release and dissemination of public information.
- II. **INFORMATION:** The Office of Communications has primary staff responsibility for the release and dissemination of public information about the total school system, its programs, and its facilities.
- A. The Office of Communications is responsible for media relations, activities, as well as developing and maintaining other programs to inform the public of issues and activities related to the schools and to enhance public understanding of the school system. It also is charged with developing and maintaining programs for disseminating information to Board of Education employees. Additionally, its professional personnel serve as staff advisors on public and media relations to all segments of the school system.
- B. The Office of Communications provides guidance and expertise to school system administrators, and other employees in communicating with the public through the media and other means. In responding to news media inquiries and initiating media contacts, employees should be aware of advice available from the Office of Communications in media needs and interests, background on current issues, and understanding of recent Board of Education and administrative actions.
- III. **CONFIDENTIALITY OF STUDENT RECORDS AND STUDENTS' RIGHT TO PRIVACY:** In releasing and/or disseminating information, employees must be aware of statutory and policy provisions establishing information contained in student records as confidential, and protecting the privacy of students.
- A. A student's school record, and any information that would be contained in it, may be released or revealed only upon the expressed written authorization of the student's parents or legal guardians, except that information designated as "Directory Information" in Administrative Procedure 5125, as follows:

Certain personally identifiable student Directory Data, specifically limited to name and participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height of members of athletic teams, and honors or awards received, may be made known to the public through such vehicles as school athletic handbills, school playbills, school newspapers, and school yearbooks. However,



ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

RELEASE AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

1121

Procedure No.

August 1, 2006

Date

parent/guardian or student requests that such data not be released shall be honored.

School employees should not disclose to the media, the name, home address, home phone number, biography, family, physiology, religion, academic achievement, or physical or mental ability of a student.

Release of information from student records to certain authorized agents of the federal, state, and local governments is addressed in Administrative Procedure 5125 and Board of Education Policies 5125 and 5144.

- B. The school system undertakes to protect the privacy of its students. This obligation extends to protection from the interviewing, photographing, filming, or videotaping of individual students without informed parental consent.
1. Parental approval is not needed for students shown in general visual scenes of such group activities as classroom, playgrounds, etc.
 2. With the exception of student preparation for or play in interscholastic athletic events, prior parental approval shall be required for any interviews with or visual portrayal of individual students.

IV. **CONFIDENTIALITY OF EMPLOYEE RECORDS AND EMPLOYEES' RIGHT TO PRIVACY**

- A. Information regarding an employee's home address or telephone number shall not be released without the employee's consent.
- B. Personnel records cannot be released, including an application, letter of reference, performance evaluation, or scholastic achievement information.

V. **PROCEDURES:**

- A. **Release of Information – Initiated by School-Based Staff:**
1. In releasing information on specific special events or activities to the area media, schools are encouraged to use School Special Event Notice forms provided for that purpose, or to follow a similar format. Principals shall approve such releases in advance, and copies should be sent to the Office of Communications for sharing with other staff.



ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

RELEASE AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

1121

Procedure No.

August 1, 2006

Date

2. When school-based employees gather information for media, representatives' planning of news or feature stories, such information, in addition to maintaining principles of confidentiality approved by the principal before being provided to the media. Copies should be sent to the Office of Communications to permit the information to be shared as appropriate with other employees, and to provide for the coordination of information system-wide.

B. Release of Information – Initiated by Non-School-Based Staff

When non-school-based staff members gather information for media representatives for planning of news or feature stories, which will contribute to public understanding and appreciation of the school system's goals, programs, and activities, such information, in addition to maintaining principles of confidentiality and rights of privacy as set forth in Section III above, shall be first approved by such staff member's appropriate department prior to release. In the case of countywide programs, releases to the news media shall be coordinated through the Office of Communications.

C. Release of Information – In Response to News Media Inquiries

1. Employees of the Prince George's County Public Schools are encouraged to respond forthrightly to questions by the media, to the extent that they possess complete and accurate information. Employees should not represent as policy or practice matters about which they are incompletely informed or for which they have no responsibility. All employees are encouraged to consult with the Office of Communications.
2. Media representatives must make contact with an individual school through its principal. The principal, subject to existing statutes, regulations, and Board of Education Policies and Procedures, will respond appropriately to media inquiries related to that school, its operation, and programs.

D. Release of Information – In Emergency Situations

1. When an emergency occurs in a school or office, the principal or Central Office department head shall immediately notify appropriate authorities, including the appropriate Regional Assistant Superintendent and the Office of Security Services (See Administrative Procedure 6114.7). The Office of Security Services



ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

RELEASE AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

1121

Procedure No.

August 1, 2006

Date

shall immediately notify the Office of the Chief Of Staff, which will communicate with the Office of Communications.

2. The Office of Communications will assist principals and departments in coordinating the release of information to the media and the public. The presence of media representatives shall, however, be restricted by the administrators in charge to areas where there will be no interference with the educational processes undertaken or scheduled to be undertaken.

E. Visits to Schools by Media Representative

Excepting media attendance at athletic events or at special activities to which news media have been invited, all requests by media representatives to visit a school shall be made to the school's principal. The principal is encouraged to consult with the appropriate Regional Assistant Superintendent and Office of Communications. Such requests may be granted under terms and/or conditions as will prevent undue disruption of the school's instructional program. The Office of Communications should be informed in advance of such media visits to schools. Administrators should note the provisions regarding the privacy of students contained in this Procedure, Section III.

- V. **RELATED POLICY AND PROCEDURES:** Board Policy and Administrative Procedure 5125, Individual Student School-Based Records; Board Policy 5144, Release of Information Regarding Pupils, Law Enforcement Officers; and Administrative Procedure 6114.7, Emergency Operations.
- VI. **MAINTENANCE AND UPDATE OF THESE PROCEDURES:** The Office of Communications will review and update as needed.
- VII. **CANCELLATIONS AND SUPERSEDURES:** This Administrative Procedure cancels and supersedes Administrative Procedure 1121, dated December 1, 1978.
- VIII. **EFFECTIVE DATE:** August 1, 2006.

Approved by:
John E. Deasy
Chief Executive Office

Distribution: Lists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, and 11