

Student Publications

Official school publications defined.

An “official school publication” is a student publication or broadcast, including, but not limited, to newspapers, yearbooks, literary magazines, television, radio or cable television programs produced in curricular or co-curricular journalism or journalism-related activities under the sponsorship of the District and made available to students and community. Each school determines its own production and distribution schedule.

Prior Restraint of Material Prepared for an Official School Publication.

No student shall publish in an official school publication material which:

- is obscene
- is libelous/slanderous
- causes material and substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the school
- infringes on the rights of others
- encourages students to commit unlawful acts
- encourages students to violate school/District policies, regulations and procedures

Definitions.

For purposes of an audience of students, forms of expression that are vulgar, indecent, lewd, or sexually explicit may be considered obscene.

“Obscene Material” means that which the average person, applying community standards, finds as a whole to appeal to a minor’s prurient interest in sex, and depicts or describes in an offensive way sexual conduct or sexual acts, and which lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value.

“Encourage” means to spur on, stimulate, or foster. Note: mere factual reporting of controversial issues shall not be considered encouragement.

“Libelous” statements are false, unprivileged statements the average reader would interpret as statements of fact and which damage the reputation of an individual or business.

“Material and substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the school” means student actions or behaviors that can reasonably be believed or feared to significantly interrupt school activities or intrude unreasonably in school affairs. The phrase also includes interference with the rights of others.

Student journalists shall be provided the opportunity to inform, entertain, investigate, interpret and evaluate in their work. Student journalists are entitled to the protection of the “fair comment rule,” which provides that all persons are free to express opinion on matters of common interest. Students are free to comment responsibly on school policies and the performance of school administrators, teachers, or other employees provided the comments or criticisms are statements of opinion and are not libelous. However, student journalists are not entitled to a wholesale defamation exemption under the fair comment rule merely by including the disclaimer “In my opinion” or a similar phrase in conjunction with a false and damaging statement.

Students and other interested persons shall have an opportunity to express their attitudes and views as long as those expressions do not violate the above prohibitions.

Responsibilities of Faculty Advisors.

Schools have a substantial educational interest in teaching student writers journalistic skills. Journalism advisors will supervise student writers to maintain professional standards of English and journalism and to comply with Iowa law, including the restrictions in the Code of Iowa. The duties of the advisor include:

- to teach and implement accepted, responsible journalism;
- to teach students the mechanical procedures in publishing a media project;
- to supervise any fundraising activities, including advertising;
- to advise and to counsel the students in the implementation of the criteria for the inclusion of stories and other material in the publication;
- to maintain professional standards of English and journalism and to comply with Iowa law, including the restrictions in Iowa Code;
- to read the students' work prior to publication to ensure that it adheres to Iowa law.

Appeal Procedure.

Students who believe they have been unreasonably restricted in the exercise of their freedom of expression in official student publications have the right to appeal the decision by invoking the student grievance process outlined in Board Policy.

Any person aggrieved by the content of official student publications is directed to use the complaint procedure as outlined in Board Policy.

Legal Reference: Code of Iowa §§ 280.22

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