

## **Procedure for developing editorial policies**

**Journalism provides us with something unique to a culture – independent, reliable, accurate and comprehensive information that citizens require to be free. Anything else – from review to censorship – subverts democratic culture.**

### **The Elements of Journalism Kovach and Rosenstiel**

Editorial policies are among the most important documents you and your students will create. Done correctly, they will protect you and your students, your administrators and your school system against unwanted legal issues.

The first educational mission for all schools: To develop responsible citizens, critical thinking and decision making.

Done incorrectly, they will lead to such unwanted legal issues. Past experiences show sound policies are well worth the time and energy it takes to develop them.

Steps to develop policies include:

- Research
- Study
- Activity

### **Research**

Search:

1. The SPLC site for policy models and articles about them
2. The Internet for sample school policies
3. The Internet for articles of the value of publications or editorial policies
4. Provided links and articles included in this unit
5. Research data and academic studies for research into editorial policies
6. Specific administration organization Web sites
7. Terms can include:
  - Editorial policies
  - Publications policies
  - Staff policies
8. Conduct interviews with those who are familiar with sound policies and those who have had issues with weaker ones. Some of the stronger policies can be found at <http://jmc.kent.edu/csj/documents/forumschools.html> .

### **Study**

1. Examine gathered material. What makes policies acceptable? Unacceptable?
2. Based on readings or examination of a PowerPoint included on editorial policies, what topics or concepts need to be included in acceptable policies? Which ones should be avoided? PROVIDE ANSWERS IN PRINT?
3. Compile arguments for and against concepts and specific wording
4. Evaluate selected points for strengths and weaknesses
5. Outline acceptable policy sections and points. Reference models your work should be based on
6. Evaluate your outline in separate groups and set up a process to complete the next steps

### **Activity**

1. Evaluate a draft policy for effectiveness and completeness
2. Compare your draft policy with other student media policies
3. Identify and communicate with scholastic media experts and legal experts about the effectiveness of the draft :
  - a. Megan Fromm
  - b. Mark Goodman
  - c. John Bowen
  - d. Candace Perkins Bowen
  - e. Vince DeMiero
  - f. Randy Swikle
  - g. Tom Eveslage
  - h. Nancy Smith
  - i. H.L. Hall
4. Analyze your work to date as a means for reaching a conclusion on your policy.
5. When you finalize your policy be sure to credit other's works you relied on in creating yours.
6. Brainstorm approaches to achieve administrative input and acceptance of your policy either as school or publication policy and/or practice. This could involve special presentations, meetings or other communications sessions.
7. Develop and publish a community statement about the importance of the policy to the learning environment of your school. This would summarize the value of a sound policy in educational terms and could be presented at a school board meeting, as a guest column in local media or at student-led forums in the community.

### **Information included in a policy:**

- Statement of mission and journalistic principles
- Statement on forum status/ prior review
- What is protected and unprotected speech
- Role of the publication/media

- Role of the adviser/school system
- Rights and responsibilities of the student staff
- Who makes final decisions of all content and the value of that
- Letters to the editor, advertisement policy, how to handle death reporting, use of others' images, photo-manipulation
- Other as needed (but be careful not to overload the policy or make it into a staff manual)

**Other questions to consider:**

- Mission: educate, inform, entertain? Accurate? Public relations? Limited public forum? Thorough? Maintain professional standards? Prior review?

**Instead consider:** Mission – Accurate, thorough, fair (in terms of background and perspective) reporting accomplished while maintaining professional standards and integrity; Interviewing and researching using the best and most reliable sources available

- Forum status: Closed, limited, open? What are the educational benefits of each? Limited for student expression? Who are the publication's audiences? Can a publication be a forum if it allows anyone but students to make decisions or to influence decisions?

**Instead consider:** Forum Status – open forum or designated public forum for student expression

- Unprotected speech: What will student staffers agree not to publish? Are there precise definitions for these things? Are statements like this precise enough?

**Instead consider:** Unprotected speech – libel, obscenity, material disruption of the school process, copyright infringement, unwarranted invasion of privacy

- Or other 'unprotected': What is material inconsistent with the shared values of a civilized social order? What is prejudicial speech and material harmful to impressionable students?

**Instead consider:** The publication's role and purpose should be compatible with its educational mission — to teach the skills and values of objective, thorough and accurate journalism. In cases of conflict, is it the topic that is not educationally sound? Or how the topic is reported?

- Letters to the editor: Will you publish all letters? Will you withhold names? Will you edit for content, grammar? How would this affect your forum status?

**Instead consider:** Letters to the editor – Run all letters (based on staff and space decisions and constraints). If there are content, authorship or grammatical questions, return the letter to author for resubmission

- Advertising: Who makes the final decision on advertising? The principal, as some policies state? The students? What ads can and cannot be published in student media? Can student media endorse political candidates? Should they?

**Instead consider:** Obituary, advertising, Web and photo manipulation – Have policies in place to avoid confusion or decisions that result in “viewpoint discrimination.” Apply your policies consistently (print and Web should be the same).

**Process steps to consider:**

- Keep the wording positive; students can... students will
- Keep the policy relatively short, but precise. Vague terminology leaves too much room for interpretation.
- Explain why, in educational reasons, students should make decisions, be a forum, etc.
- How can we, as educators, encourage school systems to respect and practice unfettered student media as a major building block of improving civic education?

**Examples of wording to be cautious of:**

- “When questions of good taste arise, or those which surpass social norms of good taste and decency, they shall be resolved in consultation with the involved reporter(s), the managing editor, the executive editor and the advisers.”
- “Material that endorses any candidate for public office or takes a political stand on any issue.”
- Wording like publication is “ an open forum” but superintendent has final say, etc.
- “Associates the school with any position other than neutrality on matters of political controversy.
- “Material not generally acceptable to this community” or “significant minority or the majority of the community.”

- Develop acceptable methods for preserving the constitutional provision for free speech.”
- To serve as public relations media.
- To promote and encourage school-sponsored activities.
- To promote cooperation among taxpayers, parents, the school and its students.
- Materials offensive to good taste.”
- “To create a wholesome school spirit and to support the best traditions of the school.”
- “ The XXXXXX adviser and/or editors have the right to deny publication of any editorial, column, review, or comment.”
- “In serving as a limited public forum for the school, top priority will generally be given to letters to the editor written by current students and staff members. However, when letters surface from outside writers, alumnae, taxpayers and other community members and are considered by the staff to be newsworthy, their inclusion in the school’s publications is permissible.”