



SPRC Model policies

Policy 1: [NAME OF SCHOOL] student media are designated public forums in which students make all decisions of content without prior review by school officials.

Comment: This contains only the basic statement of journalistic responsibility. It is usable at the board level to outline the basic principles of external oversight, leaving the process to other internal packages, like ethics guidelines and staff manuals. This removes from consideration the possibility of board attempts to change process-oriented direction.

A short statement like this clearly establishes the principles and responsibilities that guide all other statements. With no prior review added to it, it has the three crucial points in a policy: (1) designated public forum status in which (2) students make all final decisions regarding content and (3) do so without prior review. Decisions on matters such as letters, bylines, staff disciplinary actions, coverage of death and more are best detailed in ethical guidelines and staff manuals.

Designated forum: This language (designated forum in policy or practice) should be included in policies at board or publication level because all public forums are designated either by action or inaction (unless the board clearly says otherwise). Being silent as students operate as a forum is really permitting a designated forum.

Policy model 2:

Policy 2: [NAME OF SCHOOL] student media are designated public forums in which students make all decisions of content without prior review from school officials.

Freedom of expression and press freedom are fundamental values in a democratic society. The mission of any institution committed to preparing productive citizens must include teaching these values and providing a venue for students to practice these values, both by lesson and by example.

As preservers of democracy, our schools shall protect, encourage and enhance free speech and the exchange of ideas as a means of protecting our American way of life.

[NAME OF MEDIA] and its staff are protected by and bound to the principles of the First Amendment and other protections and limitations afforded by the Constitution and the various laws and court decisions implementing those principles.

Comment: Again, this board-level model policy removes process details from being points of board action or meddling. It also introduces educational and philosophical language to give administrators insight into and understanding of why student media do what they do. It can aid in community understanding and support of the forum process.

This policy is slightly longer because it adds philosophical wording to support the decision-making without review. This policy could be effective at the board level because it allows others points to be explained in the ethics guidelines and staff manuals.

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Policy model 3:

Policy 3: Freedom of expression and press freedom are fundamental values in a democratic society.

The mission of any institution committed to preparing productive citizens must include teaching students these values, both by lesson and by example.

For these purposes, as well as to teach students responsibility by empowering them to make and defend their own decisions, school-sponsored student news media, print or online, at [NAME OF SCHOOL] are established as designated public forums for student expression in which students make all final decisions of content.

Such news media will not be reviewed by school officials outside the adviser in his/her coaching role or restrained by school officials prior to, during, or after publication or distribution.

Therefore, material published in school-sponsored news media may not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the [NAME OF SCHOOL] District, and neither school officials nor the school are legally responsible for their content.

Students are protected by and bound to the principles of the First Amendment and other protections and limitations afforded by the U.S. Constitution and the various court decisions reaffirming those principles.

Comment: This is the same as model two but also includes a statement that student media do not intend to reflect the opinions of school authorities. Like model two, this model addresses the educational value of student media and attaches these issues to legal language. The three essential points made in earlier models appear here as well.

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