



ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

GUIDELINES FOR PRODUCING AND PUBLISHING SCHOOL-SPONSORED MEDIA

AP 5151
Effective Date:
April 7, 2025

- I. **PURPOSE:** To establish guidelines for producing and publishing student publications.
- II. **POLICY:** The Prince George’s County Board of Education (Board) recognizes that freedom of expression and press freedom are fundamental principles in our society and that a robust and free student press is critical to the development of informed and civic-minded adults. The Board encourages student participation in the development of school-sponsored media with the support and assistance of a Student Media Advisor. (Board Policy 5151)
- III. **BACKGROUND:** Likewise, students, Student Media Advisors and faculty, staff and administration must know and practice professional standards of ethical and responsible journalism in an arena of mutual respect for all.
- IV. **DEFINITIONS:** As used in this administrative procedure, the following definitions apply:
 - A. *Defamation/defamatory* – The willful or negligent act of harming the good name or reputation of another by uttering or publishing intentionally harmful or false information.
 - B. *Libelous* – Defamation by written or printed words, pictures, or in any form other than spoken words or gestures.
 - C. *School-sponsored media* – any material that is: (1) prepared, written, published, or broadcast by a student journalist at a public school; (2) distributed or generally made available to members of the student body; and (3) prepared under the direction of a Student Media Advisor. “School-sponsored media” does not include material that is intended for distribution or transmission solely in the classroom in which the material is produced.

- D. *Slanderous* – An intentionally harmful, false, and defamatory statement or report.
- E. *Student journalist* – A Prince George’s County Public Schools student who gathers, compiles, writes, edits, photographs, records, or prepares information for dissemination in school-sponsored media.
- F. *Student Media Advisor* – An individual employed, appointed, or designated by the school administration to supervise or provide instruction relating to school-sponsored media.

V. PROCEDURES:

- A. The following guidelines for school-sponsored media are established for Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS):
 - 1. PROHIBITED ADVERTISEMENT MESSAGES - The Board prohibits advertising that (1) is vulgar, indecent, or obscene; (2) contains libelous statements, personal attacks, or abusive language, such as language defaming a person’s character, race, religion, ethnic origin, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, sexual orientation, and gender identity), family status, or disability; (3) causes or clearly threatens to cause a material and substantial disruption of a school activity; (4) encourages the commission of unlawful acts or the violation of lawful school rules or regulations; (5) is inappropriate considering the age of the students in the school; (6) includes information that is inaccurate, misleading, or false; or (7) is for any product or service not permitted to minors by law.
 - a. School-sponsored media will not include words, initials, acronyms, phrases, expressions, or other similarly printed messages which might suggest matters described as being prohibited.
 - 2. School-sponsored media will not contain commercial advertising for alcohol, tobacco, weapons, controlled dangerous substances, drug paraphernalia, sexually-related goods and services, or services which would require parental consent if offered by or referred to students by PGCPS.
 - 3. All commercial advertising must be approved by the Student Media Advisor and adhere to the following guidelines:
 - a. Student journalists and their Student Media Advisors retain the right to choose content and to determine the priority of stories for publication. In the event of a dispute, the Student Media Advisor(s) and student journalists shall meet to discuss acceptable modifications to the content in the interest of a resubmission opportunity. If the modification process does not lead to a

resolution, the Student Media Advisor determination shall prevail, unless overturned following the appeal process described below.

- b. Unresolved questions regarding the determination by a Student Media Advisor(s) may be submitted to the school's Publication Review Committee.
4. Publications will strive to present information in an objective manner. Student journalists are expected to research the views, policies, or actions that are being reported. Student journalists will use fairness, impartiality, accuracy, truthfulness, and responsibility in presenting ideas to their readers.
5. In providing guidance to student journalists, Student Media Advisors are expected to adhere to the following principles:
 - a. Strive to develop qualities of positive leadership and sound judgment in each publication's staff members;
 - b. Respect the integrity and personality of the individual school and its community;
 - c. Demonstrate positive interpersonal communication skills;
 - d. Encourage the highest standards of conduct and journalistic achievement;
 - e. Promote ethical relationships between student journalists, other students, staff, and community members;
 - f. Encourage the respect for the values of each member of the educational community; and
 - g. Demonstrate a mastery of and interest in the principles and techniques of quality journalism.
6. Regarding distribution of school-sponsored media, Student Media Advisors are responsible for establishing expectations for distribution. For online publications, account ownership must rest with Student Media Advisors on behalf of the school. Journalism teachers or club sponsors may be granted administrative access to accounts under the monitoring of the Student Media Advisor.
7. Student media advisors shall not be dismissed, suspended, disciplined, reassigned, transferred or otherwise retaliated against for acting to protect student journalists engaged in conduct or refusing to infringe on conduct that is protected by the 1st Amendment.

8. Material submitted for publication by members of the student body may be used, copied and disseminated for educational purposes by PGCPs.
 9. Each Student Media Advisor must develop and implement a process for the archiving of publications.
 10. All pages or portions of pages (online and/or print) for which a fee is charged, payment is received, or sponsorship given, shall be identified either as "Paid Advertisement" or "This Page is Paid for by (name of organization or individuals whose photographs or names are depicted therein)."
 11. All school-sponsored media must adhere to the PGCPs Guidelines for Usage of Artificial Intelligence (see attachment) and subsequent Board policy and administrative procedures that may be issued by PGCPs.
 12. All Student work products must adhere to copyright requirements in AP 6160.
- B. The following procedures are established for implementation of school-sponsored media:
1. It is the Student Media Advisor's and student journalists' responsibility to ensure compliance with the guidelines outlined in this administrative procedure (V, A) for school-sponsored media.
 2. Each school must establish a Publications Review Committee (Committee) to ensure a final review of appeals and disputes regarding the content and the publication. Membership includes:
 - a. a student representative;
 - b. school principal/designee;
 - c. library media specialist; and
 - d. two other members of the faculty, appointed by the principal at the commencement of each school year, who do not provide any assistance in the editing process of publication related to the appeal.
 3. Review process: All publication decisions are made by the team of selected student journalists and reviewed by the Student Media Advisor. In the event that either party rejects a submission for publication on the basis of editorial guidelines, the student who submitted the work can submit an appeal in writing or email expressing their right to initiate the appeals process.

4. Student Media Advisors are expected to provide rejection decisions no later than two (2) school days after the review request is made. A decision made by the Student Media Advisor regarding content of the school-sponsored media may be reviewed by the Committee, upon request. The procedure for requesting and conducting a Committee review is as follows:
 - a. A request for review of the Student Media Advisor's decision shall be made by the student journalist no later than the school day following notification of rejection to publish the proposed material.
 - b. Requests for review must be submitted in writing by the student journalist to the Student Media Advisor who will share it with the Committee no later than two business days after the request is received.
 - c. The Committee shall meet no later than five school days after receiving a request to review and shall issue a written ruling of their decision on the day of the meeting.
 - d. The Committee's written ruling shall denote the identity of the person requesting the ruling, a statement of the reason for the original rejection by the Student Media Advisor, and a thorough statement of the Committee's decision made during the review. For example:

(Student Journalist) requested a review of (Student Media Advisor's) decision not to publish (identify the material in question) because (specify reason for rejection). We concur with (advisor's) decision because – or – We see nothing offensive in the material and overrule (advisor's) decision.
 - e. The Committee will share its written decision with the student journalist and Student Media Advisor immediately upon issuance. All decisions are final. The Committee is to retain a copy of the review file and its decision for four calendar years.
5. A student journalist who believes they have been aggrieved by the Committee's decision may appeal that decision to the Instructional Director or Director of Curriculum and Instruction. The procedure for requesting an appeal is as follows:
 - a. The student journalist must file the appeal no later than three (3) school days following the date on the written decision of the Committee.
 - b. The appeal must be made in writing, either postmarked, hand-delivered, or emailed on or before the due date to the Instructional Director or other central office designee no later than 4:30 p.m.

- c. The appeal must include the written Committee decision and must identify the student journalist's reason for filing an appeal.
- d. The Instructional Director or Director of Curriculum and Instruction may rule on the appeal independently or may convene a meeting to gather additional information. If a meeting is convened, the Student Media Advisor and the student journalist(s) shall be provided with notice and an opportunity to attend.
- e. The Instructional Director or Director of Curriculum and Instruction shall provide a written decision of the appeal within two (2) weeks after it is filed. The decision will be shared with the student journalist(s) and the Student Media Advisor.
- f. Only a student journalist may appeal to the Office of Appeals. An appeal of the Instructional Director's decision must be submitted in writing to the Office of Appeals within three (3) school days of the date of the decision. The Office of Appeals reserves the right to request additional documentation or information and must render a decision in writing within two (2) weeks after the appeal is filed. The Office of Appeals decision will be sent to the student journalist and Student Media Advisor.
- g. An appeal of the decision of the Office of Appeals must be submitted to the Board in writing within 30 calendar days of the Office of Appeals decision. Appeals to the Board will follow the procedures set forth in Board Policy 4200.

VI. MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE:

Schools will maintain a copy of each Committee review request in a secure file located in the main office. The folder should be titled "School-Sponsored Media." There must be a separate folder for each school year.

VII. RELATED PROCEDURES:

Administrative Procedure 0700 – Information Technology Services - Acceptable Usage Guidelines;
 Administrative Procedure 4126 – Employee Use of Social Media and Personal Electronic Devices;
 Administrative Procedure 4170 – Discrimination and Harassment;
 Administrative Procedure 4218 – Dating and Sexual Relationships Among Students and Employees, Independent Contractors, and Volunteers;
 Administrative Procedure 5132 – Portable Electronic Devices;

Administrative Procedure 5142 – Gangs, Gang Activity and Similar Destructive or Illegal Behavior;
Administrative Procedure 5143 – Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation;
Administrative Procedure 6160 – Copyright Guidelines; and
Administrative Procedure 10101 – Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook.

VIII. LEGAL REFERENCE:

MD. CODE ANN., EDUC. § 7-121

IX. MAINTENANCE AND UPDATE OF THIS ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE:

This administrative procedure originates with the Secondary Reading/English Language Arts Office, Curriculum and Instruction, within the Division of Academics and will be updated as needed.

X. CANCELLATIONS AND SUPERSEDURES: This administrative procedure cancels and supersedes Administrative Procedure 5151, dated October 29, 2018.

XI. EFFECTIVE DATE: April 7, 2025

Attachments: PGCPs Artificial Intelligence (AI) Implementation Guide