

## **Fresno Unified Board Policy (BP) 1112**

### **Media Relations**

The Governing Board respects the public's desire for and right to information and recognizes that the media significantly influences the community's understanding of school programs, student achievement, and school safety. In order to develop and maintain positive media relations, the Board and Superintendent shall reasonably accommodate media requests for information and provide accurate, reliable, and timely information. We believe that public education is stronger when parents and the community are well-informed and involved in issues affecting Fresno Unified School District schools.

In conjunction with the Superintendent or designee(s), the Board shall periodically establish priorities and key messages for proactively communicating with the media regarding current district issues, activities, or needs.

The Board recognizes the public's right to information and recognizes that the media has a legitimate interest in the schools and a responsibility to provide the community with news.

News Media representatives, like all other visitors, shall register immediately upon entering any school building or grounds when school is in session.

*(cf. 1250 - Visits to the Schools)*  
*(cf. 3515.2 - Intruders on Campus)*

Staff may provide news media with student directory information, as identified in AR 5125.1 - Release of Directory Information, unless the student's parent/guardian has submitted a written request that such information not be disclosed. The district shall not release other student records or personally identifiable student information that is private or confidential as required by law, Board policy, or administrative regulation.

The use of all information media for keeping the public continuously informed concerning schools, costs, curriculum, changes, expansion, employee negotiations, special events and other items of public interest is encouraged. Good relationships with publishers, editors and reporters are vital to assure the smooth and timely transmittal of accurate information to the public.

#### **News Media Interviewing and Photographing Students**

The district shall not impose restraints on students' right to speak freely with news media representatives at those times which do not disrupt the students' educational program. Interviewing and photographing students shall not create substantial disruption to the orderly operation of the school or impinge on the rights or safety of students. Therefore, the district shall ask news media representatives who wish to interview or photograph students at school to make prior arrangements with the district's communications department. At their discretion, parents/guardians may instruct their children not to communicate with media representatives.

When interviewing or photographing a student who receives special education services, the student shall not be identified as a student who receives special education services without prior, written permission from parent/guardian.

#### **News Media Reporting on a School Campus**

When a member of the news media visits a school, invited or unannounced, the school will follow the same procedures used for all visitors. The reporter or cameraperson must sign in at the front office and wait for an escort. News media, regardless of the story angle, are not permitted to roam a school building or school grounds without an escort. Failure to follow procedure may result in the reporter or cameraperson being asked to leave the school grounds. In all situations, members of the news media will be treated courteously and professionally.

### **News Media Reporting Adjacent to School Grounds**

In certain situations, it is not possible for media to be on the school campus due to the disruption it may create or the interference it could cause for emergency responders. In these situations, school staff or a member of the district office will designate an area away from school grounds where news media can set up their recording equipment or wait for official information. News media are asked to exercise restraint when deciding to interview children who are off school campus. News Media will not be allowed to create disruption or impede traffic flow in any way.

### **FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act)**

News media often ask questions regarding students and their educational records, such as the students' grades, disciplinary record or why a student was disciplined, and/or academic program (such as if the student receives special education services). School system employees cannot comment on this information without parental/legal guardian consent, or they will be in violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) a federal law.

The district will be in violation of federal law and at risk of losing federal funding if it does not comply with FERPA. This is often why a district will say it cannot release information about a student. It is not an unwillingness to provide information or appear secretive; it is the school system's legal and ethical responsibility to protect the privacy of students and their education records.

Disciplinary hearings involving students are closed meetings. No news media are allowed.

### **Personnel Matters**

The district has a responsibility to protect the rights of its employees. No staff member shall release the confidential personnel file, disciplinary action, complaints or grievances, home telephone number or address of an employee to the news media.

The district will comply with the California Public Records Act (CPRA) and disclose only legally required information. School staff shall refer all media requests for personnel information to the Chief Communications Officer and/or Director of Communications for a determination.

*(cf. 1340 Access to District Records)*

### **District Media Contacts/ Spokespersons**

The Superintendent authorizes the Chief Communications Officer and/or Director of Communications as the district's primary media contact to whom all media inquiries shall be routed. Spokespersons designated to speak to the media on behalf of the district may include the Board president, Superintendent, administrator, or district designee. Other Board members and/or staff may be asked by the Superintendent or designee to speak to the media on a case-by-case basis, depending on their expertise on an issue or appropriateness given a particular situation.

The Superintendent, Chief Communications Officer and/or Director of Communications, or designee shall provide training on effective media relations to all designated spokespersons.

News media representatives are welcome at all public Board meetings and shall receive meeting agendas upon request in accordance with Board policy.

### Speaking with News Media

District employees are asked to cooperate with member of the news media, press, radio and television and should notify their supervisors and the district Chief Communications Officer and/or Director of Communications when media interviews/inquiries are made.

The Chief Communications Officer and/or Director of Communications will notify staff if they are authorized to speak on behalf of the District. Staff should never speculate or provide information that has not been verified as fact, provide information that may not lawfully be disclosed (e.g., confidential student or employment records), or speak beyond their realm of expertise. Specific inquiries related to the district's position on an issue, information of a sensitive nature, or inquiries related to the actions of a specific employee should be directed to the Site Administrator, Chief Communications Officer and/or Director of Communications, or Cabinet-level Administrator.

*(cf. 1110 - Communication with the Public)*  
*(cf. 1340 - Access to District Records)*  
*(cf. 5125 - Student Records; Confidentiality)*  
*(cf. 9010 - Public Statements)*

### Crises / Emergency Response Plan

The Superintendent or designee(s) shall develop strategies for working with the news media to provide timely and accurate information to students, parents/guardians, and the community during a crisis, emergency, or natural disaster. The district has emergency preparedness plans developed in collaboration with law enforcement agencies and the Fire Department. Each plan entails, but not limited to, the designation of a Safe School Leadership Team, development of evacuation, shelter-in-place, lockdown, and reunification procedures.

During crisis/ emergency situations, all news media inquiries shall be routed to the Chief Communications Officer and/or Director of Communications, which may:

1. Prepare an official statement responding to the particular situation.
2. Update the official statement as events unfold.
3. Keep staff and students informed, as outlined by the district's detailed crises/ emergency response plan.

*Fresno Unified School District prohibits discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment), intimidation, and bullying based on actual or perceived race, color, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, ancestry, age (40 and above), religious creed, religion, political belief or affiliation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, mental or physical disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy or parental status, childbirth, breastfeeding/lactation status, medical condition, military and veteran status, or association with a person or a group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics or any other basis protected by law or regulation, in its educational program(s) or employment.*

Legal Reference:  
EDUCATION CODE  
32210-32212 Willful disturbance; public school or meeting  
35144 Special meetings  
35145 Public meetings  
35160 Authority of governing boards  
35172 Promotional Activities  
EVIDENCE CODE  
1070 Refusal to disclose news source

PENAL CODE

627-627.10 Access to school premises

ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINIONS

95 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 509 (1996)

COURT DECISIONS

Lopez v. Tulare Joint Union High School District, (1995) 34 Cal.App.4th 1302

Policy FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

adopted: November 26, 1991 Fresno, California

revised: January 15, 1998

revised: August 9, 2023

*Policy Section: 1000 Community Relations*