



# ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

SAN DIEGO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

NO: 9015

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CATEGORY: **Community Relations**

EFFECTIVE: **1-29-62**

SUBJECT: **Release of Public Information to News Media and Public**

REVISED: **1-10-05**

## A. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1. To outline administrative procedures governing release of public information to various news media and the public by the district and by individual schools or departments and relating to newsworthy events. Requests for district documents under the Public Record Act should be referred to the Office of General Counsel.

2. **Related Procedures:**

Communications .....	EP 15
Release of directory-type student information .....	6525

## B. LEGAL AND POLICY BASIS

1. **Reference:** Board policy: A-2000, B-1000, B-3510, B-6000, E-2050, E-2450, E-4000, H-8900, K-1000, K-1500; Education Code Section 49076.
2. **District Policy.** Schools are publicly owned and supported; therefore, the Board of Education and staff have an obligation to keep the public informed of school affairs.

## C. GENERAL

1. **Originating Office.** Suggestions or questions concerning this procedure should be directed to the Communications Department, Office of the Superintendent.
2. **Definitions**
  - a. **Public information:** Information about the schools, their programs, and the students, that is legally permitted to be made public. (See Procedure 6525 for limitations on release of information about students.)
  - b. **News media:** Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television.
  - c. **Public:** Parents/guardians, students, staff, community individuals and/or organizations.
3. **Public Disclosure Policy.** The public information program is based on the premise that the public has a right and a need to know about the policies and decisions of the Board of Education, the administration and operation of the public schools, and the progress and achievements of district students.

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4. **News Media.** Good relations with news media are a key element in the development and maintenance of good school-community relations.
5. **Communications Department**
  - a. Provide leadership in cooperative development of an overall plan of information and communication involving a variety of methods and activities for keeping the public and the community informed; coordinate implementation of the public information program.
  - b. **Emergency situations.** The news media and the public have a legitimate need for quick access to accurate information in emergency situations. If problems arise or assistance is needed, the site administrator shall contact the Communications Department.
6. **Responsibilities**
  - a. **School** (through principal or school public information coordinator)
    - (1) Contact local media (primarily community newspapers) and release information concerning local school activities and achievements. (See Procedure 6525 for limitations.)
    - (2) Contact districtwide media (daily newspapers, radio, TV) and release information concerning local school activities that are not part of coordinated district or areawide activities or programs.
    - (3) Upon contact by news media, notify the Communications Department of all matters of districtwide concern, matters of unusual significance or controversy, and news developments with negative implication. (Report known facts subject to limitations of Education Code Section 49076 and Procedure 6525 concerning release of information about students.)
    - (4) In preparing written material for distribution to the public (including parents, students, or community), refer to appropriate district procedures to ensure information accurately conveys district policies and procedures. If uncertain, refer such material to the Communications Department for review.

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- b. **Managers and supervisors**, in the following situations, may want to review their presentation with the Communications Department prior to publication, broadcast, or telecast:
- (1) During preparation of any document, or radio or television program, that will include or refer to official policy or practice of the district, *or*
  - (2) If contacted by the media and the district's position on education issues may be discussed.
- c. **Communications Department**
- (1) Provide for release of information resulting from policies established or actions taken by the Board of Education or district administration.
  - (2) Provide for release of information describing general activities of the school district including curriculum development and new programs.
  - (3) Coordinate release of public information on districtwide activities that involve all or a large group of the schools.
  - (4) Answer questions and give advice to schools on preparation and placement of releases.
  - (5) On occasion, when circumstances and time permit, prepare and distribute releases initiated by a school.
  - (6) Whenever possible, handle contacts from the media, particularly those of districtwide interest or concern.
  - (7) Contact district officers or central department heads as necessary or when requested to do so by the media, or refer the media to these persons (with advance notice, if possible).

## **D. IMPLEMENTATION**

1. **Management employee** (school or central office), if called by a reporter:
  - a. Determines if he/she (the management employee) is the responsible authority for answering the inquiry. If not, refers reporter to the responsible authority or

to the Communications Department; avoids referring a reporter into a series of telephone transfers.

- b. If management employee is the responsible authority and is prepared, he/she answers promptly, specifically, factually, and honestly. If an immediate answer is not possible, advises reporter that a return call will be made as quickly as possible, and does so.
- c. Advises immediate supervisor of the nature of the reporter's inquiry and a summary of the response given.
- d. All reports transmitted by the superintendent to the Board of Education are *public records* and should be made available to news media unless they cover matters that normally are subjects for closed sessions (example: personnel or litigation), or release of which is otherwise prohibited under Public Records Act (Procedure 9010). (See Procedure 6525 concerning release of information about students.)
- e. Remembers that he/she will be quoted by name unless the reporter is advised that the proper authority to be contacted for a quoted statement is his/her supervisor or the Superintendent's Office. (For example, Communications staff normally are not quoted, but reference may be made to that office or to the Superintendent's Office.)

## 2. **General Considerations**

- a. A management employee should avoid interjecting "off-the-record" comments during an interview.
- b. A management employee is not required to express a personal opinion.
- c. It is necessary to be certain that differentiation is made between district *policies* and district *procedures*. This is an important distinction because policies are set by the board and outline the district's overall principles; procedures, established by staff, are specific, detailed rules that put policy into practice.
- d. It may be necessary to review events pertinent to the reporter's subject before launching into answers to questions.
- e. Brief notes should be kept of a conversation if it might be necessary to refer to the subject and the answers at a later date.

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- f. A reporter should not be asked to review a story with the management employee prior to its release.
- g. A reporter should not be asked to withhold a story.
- h. *News media agencies should be encouraged to contact the Communications Department first as a matter of general practice in seeking district information.*  
However, this should not hinder direct contact with schools as outlined in C.6.a.

**E. FORMS AND AUXILIARY REFERENCES**

- 1. Media Guide (revised annually), provided by the Communications Office

**F. REPORTS AND RECORDS**

**G. APPROVED BY**

*Kerry B. Flanagan*

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For the Superintendent of Public Education