

BOARD POLICY

MEDIA RELATIONS AND SCHOOL-RELATED PUBLICITY

The Bellingham School District is committed to cultivating and maintaining an open and productive relationship with the news media. The district recognizes that the media provide a public service and are viewed as a source of news about the Bellingham School District and seek to provide timely and accurate information toward that end.

The district maintains that the top priority of schools is to educate students and ensure the safety and privacy of all students, staff and families.

In order to balance the responsibilities of schools and the need to provide information to the media, press inquiries about the Bellingham School District or any individual school, student, staff member, program or initiative are to be directed first to the district's Communications and Community Relations Office or, if unavailable by the reporter's deadline, to the Superintendent or school's principal. All media representatives must report to the school's main office for identification and authorization before going to any part of the building or contacting any individual.

Staff members who are contacted directly by a member of the news media must first contact or refer the reporter to the Communications and Community Relations Office, which will work with staff and the media outlet to respond appropriately to the inquiry.

News releases and notification to the media of potential story or photo opportunities shall be coordinated through the district's Communications and Community Relations Office, with the exception of news about inter-school athletic events, Associated Student Body (ASB) activities, PTA-sponsored events, and release of graduation and honor roll lists. In order to facilitate a consistent and responsible communication process, the Communications and Community Relations Office shall participate in developing and distributing information for release through district communications channels and through the media. In that all schools and departments in the district are potential sources for news and feature stories, staff members are encouraged to send news and information to the Communications and Community Relations Office.

In the event that an individual school site or department initiates a media contact, appropriate notification should be given to the Communications and Community Relations Office. A staff member should secure authorization from the principal or administrator before contacting the media on behalf of the school. This shall not preclude a staff member from contacting the media as a private individual outside of work hours.

Media Relations and School-Related Publicity – 4011

District officials, schools and staff must cooperate with the news media to the extent required and appropriate by law, while ensuring that media coverage does not interfere with teaching and learning.

It is critically important to protect the privacy of students and staff while fulfilling the requirements of public records laws. Release of information about individual students is governed by federal and state statute and district policy and procedures. The Communications and Community Relations Office works closely with legal counsel to determine what information is a matter of public record and what must remain confidential. A student or staff member should be informed that he or she has the right to deny an interview or photograph. Students whose parent or guardian have signed and returned a Restriction of Release of Directory Information opt-out form for district or school-related publicity may not be recorded, filmed, photographed or interviewed. The opt-out form must be submitted annually and is provided to all district families in the Family Handbook and on the district's Web site. In addition, before allowing an individual to record, film, photograph or conduct an interview that would identify any student as a student in special education, Release Form 4011F must be completed by staff, authorized by the Communications and Community Relations Office and the school administrator, and signed and returned by a parent/guardian.

Requests from individuals, organizations or television/film production companies to record, film, photograph, or interview students or staff shall be submitted to the Communications and Community Relations Office for consideration. Such activities will be evaluated for alignment with the district's mission, goals and primary purpose of teaching and learning, impact on the learning environment, and mutual benefit to both the requestor and district/schools.

Confidential information about students or other staff shall be released only as permitted by federal and state statute and district policy and procedures.

In the case of accidents or emergencies involving students or staff members, the Communications and Community Relations Office will serve as a clearinghouse to provide accurate and timely information.

Cross Reference:	Board Policy 4000	Communications and Community Relations Program
	Board Policy 4010	Staff Communication Responsibilities
	Board Policy 4020	Confidential Communications
	Board Policy 3200	Student Rights and Responsibilities
	Board Policy 3600	Student Records
	Board Policy 4340	Public Access to District Records

Approved: 8-13-09