

NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS

I. PURPOSE

To provide procedures for media access and to ensure that information concerning the District is efficiently and accurately communicated.

II. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Shelby County Schools' (SCS) students, staff, members of the Board and media representatives.

IV. POLICY STATEMENT

The District recognizes that instances arise when the media may request access to and information concerning staff, students, schools, district locations, programs, services, or operations of the school system. To ensure that information concerning students and staff is accurate and safe from improper disclosure or use, the following guidelines shall be followed.

A. Access to Students

In the interest of protecting the privacy rights of students and parents, and preserving the instructional environment of the schools, SCS shall grant media access to students only upon prior consent from their parents/guardians and approval of the District. Additionally, the District shall only grant media representatives access to schools and District locations after they have properly requested and been granted access from the office responsible for communications.

Parental Consent and Notification

Each year parents/guardians will be given the option to grant or withhold permission for public news media to conduct interviews or take photographs of their child at school. In addition, District employees may release student information to the media

only in accordance with applicable provisions of the education records laws and Board policies governing directory information and personally identifiable information.¹

Parents will be advised of this policy at such times as the student's registration and in the student/parent handbook or other publications that communicate District notifications and information to parents and students.

B. District Spokespersons

The Superintendent serves as the chief spokesperson and is solely authorized to speak in an official capacity on behalf of the District. The Superintendent at his/her discretion may designate other staff to serve as spokesperson and representative in responding to media requests or give statements on behalf of the District. Release of information to the media shall be in accordance with the law and applicable Board policies.

News Releases

The Superintendent shall plan for periodic releases to the press and other communication media which will provide information to the community concerning its schools and various phases of the school program.

News releases involving personnel must be approved by the Superintendent or his designee. When possible and practical, all other news releases should be made by the office responsible for communications.

Board members

A Board member inviting media to a SCS school or other District location shall coordinate media coverage of the event or project with the Superintendent or his/her designee.

C. Reasonable Restrictions

The District ensures the protection of individual rights to express their beliefs and/or opinions.

Subject to constitutionally acceptable restrictions of time and manner, SCS employees shall have the right to address the media as private citizens concerning District related issues. SCS employees providing information to the media shall disclose whether

he/she is providing an official statement on behalf of the District or expressing personal views and/or opinions.

Staff who violate this policy and established administrative rules and regulations may be subject to disciplinary actions up to and including termination.

IV. RESPONSIBILITY

- A. Employees and Board members are responsible for adhering to this policy.
- B. Media representatives are responsible for adhering to this policy.
- C. Parents/guardians are responsible for exercising their rights to grant or withhold media access to their children.
- D. The office responsible for communications is responsible for approving media access to schools and other District locations; and for responding or coordinating responses to media inquiries.
- E. The Superintendent is responsible for ensuring that this policy is followed.