

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines related to school-sponsored student publications and productions.

Definitions

Within the context of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- A. Advisor/Sponsor – A qualified certified employee designated by the principal to oversee a school-sponsored publication or production.
- B. Defamatory Material - False representations about individuals or identifiable groups which harm the reputations of the subjects by lowering them in the estimation of the community or deterring others from associating or dealing with them. Such materials may be written (libel) or spoken (slander).
 - 1. A false statement about a public official (one who holds an elected or appointed public office) or a public figure (one who either seeks the public attention or is well known because of his or her achievement) is considered defamatory only if the material was published/communicated with malice; that is, the author knew the statement was false or the author published/communicated it with reckless disregard for the truth.
 - 2. A false statement about a private individual is considered defamatory if it is published/communicated willfully or negligently and the author knew it was false or failed to exercise the care a reasonably prudent person in the author's circumstances would exercise to verify its truthfulness.
- C. Libel – A false written statement that damages a person's or organization's reputation.
- D. Obscene – Publication or productions that:
 - 1. The average person, applying contemporary standards of the school community would find that the material, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest of the age level of the intended recipients;
 - 2. Depicts or describes sexual conduct, including intimate sexual acts, excretory functions and lewd exhibitions, in a manner that is patently offensive to prevailing standards in the community concerning how such conduct should be presented to the age level of the intended recipients; and
 - 3. When taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value to the intended recipients.
- E. Profanity – Vulgar, vile or contemptuous language.
- F. School-Sponsored -Taking place with the knowledge and approval of school-based administration and including the promotion, leadership, and/or participation of school employees. The assignment of a teacher, administrator, or other school employee to a meeting for custodial purposes does not constitute sponsorship of the meeting.
- G. School-Sponsored Media - Any material that is prepared, written, published, or broadcast by a student journalist; distributed or generally made available to members of the student body; and prepared under the direction of an advisor/sponsor. (Examples include but are not limited to newspapers, yearbooks, literary magazines, or similar publications, including electronically

published documents, web-based programs, and social media platforms, which are school-sponsored).

- H. Slander - A false oral statement that damages a person's or organization's reputation.
- I. Student Journalist - An ACPS student who gathers, compiles, writes, edits, photographs, records, or prepares information in school-sponsored media.

Policy Statement

The Board of Education recognizes that providing opportunities for responsible student expression is an integral part of the Allegany County Public Schools System (ACPS) program. Student journalists have the right to exercise freedom of speech and freedom of the press in school-sponsored media, subject to certain specific restrictions. The Board also recognizes its responsibility to the schools, students, and community to ensure that school-sponsored media which provide a vehicle for student expression are consistent with legal and regulatory requirements, school system policies and procedures, civil discourse, responsible journalism, and professional standards.

Legal Reference			
Policy History	Adopted	Reviewed	Revised – June 25, 2018, 1 st Reading July 17, 2018, 2 nd Reading Sept. 24, 2018, 1 st Reading Oct. 9, 2018, 2 nd Reading