

Toronto District School Board

Operational Procedure PR.555

Title: **MEDIA RELATIONS**
Adopted: December 1999 (Media Inquiries)
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Authorization:

1.0 OBJECTIVE

To prepare and assist employees when responding to and soliciting media involvement

2.0 RESPONSIBILITY

Director, Communications and Public Affairs

3.0 PROCEDURES

Table of Contents

3.1	Overview	2
3.2	Role of the Communications and Public Affairs Department	2
3.3	Responding To Media Inquiries.....	3
3.3 (a)	Media Inquiries to Schools or Individual Staff.....	3
3.3 (b)	Media Inquiries to TDSB Spokespersons	7
3.3 (c)	Media Inquiries to the Communications and Public Affairs Department.....	8
3.4	School and Department/Program Request For Media Coverage.....	9
3.4 (a)	Local media (e.g. community newspapers)	9
3.4 (b)	Daily/mainstream media (Toronto, national or international)	9
3.4 (c)	Additional Information	9
3.5	Media Releases And Media Advisories	10
3.6	Media Conferences	11
3.7	Crisis Communications.....	12
3.8	Official Or High Profile Visits and Special Events	12

Appendix A: Protocol for the Board's Spokespersons

3.1. Overviews

The Toronto District School Board is the largest school board in Canada and is a public institution committed to being transparent and accountable to all of its stakeholders. The Board is committed to sharing information with students, parents/guardians and the general public in an open, honest and transparent manner.

The media, on the other hand, has a mandate to provide news and information to the general public. In addition, some would argue, they also have a mandate to act as “watchdogs of society”.

The responsibilities of the media and the Board overlap. As a result it is in the interest of all those involved, to create a positive working relationship between the media and the Board. It is vital that we, at all levels of the organization, develop and maintain a healthy and respectful working relationship with the media in order to ensure that accurate and balanced information is relayed to the public, our public. In order to accomplish this, the Board must have a clear and concise media relations procedure.

This operational procedure will:

- prepare and assist staff to respond to the media in a way that serves the interests of students, staff, community and the Board
- outline the procedures for responding to media inquiries at the school, individual, Communications and Public Affairs department, and Board levels
- provide guidance on garnering media coverage, including media advisories, media releases and media conferences
- establish a protocol for spokespersons to speak on behalf of the Board

3.2. Role of the Communications and Public Affairs Department

The Communications and Public Affairs department provides the lead on all the Board’s media and communication issues. In some cases, all necessary communications work can be done by the Department. In other cases, the Department can provide media and communications counsel, guidance and support to the Board’s community. Specifically the department:

- develops and implements media strategies and response plans in support of the Board’s priorities;
- develops relationships and works with media (mainstream, community and ethno-cultural) to proactively promote the programs, services, successes and initiatives of the Board;
- responds to media inquires, as outlined in the this procedure, and requests for information and interviews;
- provides advice and counsel to senior staff and trustees on media issues and crisis communications;

- provides media training to the Board's spokespersons and administration to build staff capacity to respond with confidence to media requests;
- recommends and organizes media conferences and produces/distributes media materials (such as media releases, press kits, etc.);
- evaluates the media environment, including media monitoring and analysis.

3.3. Responding To Media Inquiries

The media regularly contact schools, individuals employed by the Board, and the Communications and Public Affairs department for a variety of reasons: general interest stories, school crises, academic issues, responses to events as well as community and educational concerns. Regardless of the reason, it is important to remember that all employees have a responsibility to protect the identity and the rights of students and staff, and that all media relations activities must be in keeping with the Board's mission statement and commitments and cannot contravene Board motions, policies or procedures.

Only individuals identified in Appendix A: Protocol for the Board's Spokespersons are official Board spokespeople when responding to media inquiries. If a person is not speaking on behalf of the Board as a the Board's spokesperson, they must clearly state that they are not representing the Board in an official capacity at the beginning of the interview.

(a) Media Inquiries to Schools or Individual Staff

To assist staff to respond to the media in a way that serves the interests of students, staff, community and the Board, the following procedures apply.

(i) When an individual has first hand factual information (e.g. about your school, program, initiative, event such as the number of students at school, details about a special event, grade configuration, languages spoken, etc.).

- Individuals may answer/respond to media questions if they have the knowledge/facts and are authorized by the principal to speak to the media.
- Individual should consult with the principal, Site Manager or Supervisory Officer first to formulate an appropriate response, as required by the school or department.
- Individual should also notify their FOS Communications Officer of the media interview request.
- Individual does not need to refer the media to contact the Communications and Public Affairs department, as approval is not required for this type of media inquiry (see examples given previously).
- The principal, site manager or supervisory officer sends an e-mail by 4 p.m. that day to the Communications Coordinator in the Communications and Public Affairs department to advise of upcoming or com-

pleted media activity. The e-mail should include the following pertinent details: media outlet, topic of interview, person(s) interviewed, how the interview came about (media called your school/site or you called the media outlet), if there is concern regarding any inappropriate questions which were asked and/or answered that were inconsistent with the initial topic of interview and when the story/interview will be aired/published.

(ii) During an interview

- If the individual cannot answer specific questions, he/she should state so and advise the reporter that someone will get back to him/her regarding these questions by their deadline.
- The individual consults again with the principal, site manager or supervisory officer as well as their FOS Communications Officer for an appropriate response.
- Once the appropriate response is determined, the individual or principal, site manager, supervisory officer or their FOS communications officer returns the media call in a timely manner.
- The principal, site manager, supervisory officer or FOS communications officer sends an e-mail (outlining the pertinent details) to the Communications Coordinator in the Communications and Public Affairs department to advise of upcoming or completed media activity by staff by 4 p.m. The e-mail should include the following pertinent details: media outlet, topic of interview, person(s) interviewed, how the interview came about (media called your school/site or you called the media outlet), if there is concern regarding any inappropriate questions which were asked and/or answered that were inconsistent with the initial topic of interview and when the story/interview will be aired/published.
- For unresolved questions/issues, or if the individual is not comfortable in continuing to speak with the reporter, FOS communications officer contacts the client services manager for consultation/advice.
- The client services manager, in consultation with the Media Relations Team, determines the most appropriate media response plan:
 - Provides guidance and speaking points to the principal, site manager, supervisory officer or FOS communications officer so he/she can respond to the media inquiry; or
 - Oversees the request following Section 3.3 (c).

(iii) When factual information is not available

- The individual contacted by the media should ask for detailed information about the request (*see sample script below*) and then consult with his/her principal, site manager or supervisory officer as well as their FOS communications officer for an appropriate response.
- For unresolved questions/issues, the FOS communications officer contacts the client services manager for consultation/advice.
- The client services manager in consultation with the Media Relations Team determines the most appropriate media response plan:
 - Provides guidance and speaking points to the principal, site manager, supervisory officer or FOS communications officer so he/she can respond to the media inquiry; or
 - Oversees the request following Section 3.3 (c).

Sample script: *I do not have the information you are requesting or I am not the appropriate person you need to speak to about your request/question. Can you leave me your name, the name of the media outlet you represent, your telephone number(s), and your deadline, and someone will get back to you as soon as possible?* Also confirm the nature of the request and detail any specific questions.

(iv) Subject matter is contentious or potentially controversial

- The individual contacted by the media should ask for detailed information about the request (see sample script in Section 3.3 (a) (iii) above) and then immediately consult with his/her principal, site manager or supervisory officer and their FOS communications officer.
- The FOS communications officer contacts the client services manager.
- Based on this discussion, the client services manager, in consultation with the Media Relations Team determines the most appropriate media response plan based on Section 3.3 (c).
- In certain situations, a school or schools may receive direct instructions from the Communications and Public Affairs department to respond to media calls for specific situations/issues in the following manner:

Special sample script: *Thank you for your call. The Board's Communications and Public Affairs department is handling all media calls. Please contact them directly.*

When instructed by the Communications and Public Affairs department, use the above message to respond to media calls. Even when the media ask you questions (for example, "How shocked was your school when you heard the

news?” or “What are your students and staff saying or feeling today?”), simply repeat the script above that media calls are being handled by the Communications and Public Affairs department.

(v) Important Notes

- As outlined in operational procedure PR.523: Trespass to Property, schools are not public property. Any person entering onto a school property must have a valid and/or lawful reason to be on school property. The signs that are posted on the entrances to schools state, “that all visitors will first report to the main office”.
- Although the media have the right to arrive at your school and ask to speak with you, your staff, or students, they do not have the right to force you to answer questions, to photograph or interview you, your students or your staff. They do not have the right to wander through your school. Media must report to the office as soon as they arrive on school property, and should always be accompanied by a staff member.

For unexpected face-to-face encounters with media (notably under Section 3.3 (a) (iv)), you are not obligated to respond with information or an interview. You should politely but firmly decline, and suggest that the reporter contact the Communications and Public Affairs department.

- Although media cannot be on school property without your approval to interview/film/photographed students and staff, media can do so on public property, which includes sidewalks adjacent to school property.
- In order for students under the age of 18 to speak and/or be photographed or filmed by the media on Board property, it is the Board’s policy that a completed Student Media Release Form (Form 529B, Student Media Release) be signed by the student’s parent/guardian. The Principal is responsible for collecting and maintaining student media release forms for the school.
- For sample scripts for various media scenarios, visit the Communication Tools section on the Principals’ Site on TDSBweb. Sample scripts include what and when information can be released to the media or public when dealing with Board students and staff.

(b) Media Inquiries to the Board's Spokespersons

At times, the media may directly call Board spokespersons, including subject matter experts (i.e. the media may have the spokesperson's contact information from a previous media call) for comment or an interview. Depending on the nature of the media inquiry, the following procedures apply.

(i) Factual information is available

Board spokesperson should answer/respond to media questions directly if:

- request adheres to Appendix A: Protocol for the Board's Spokespersons and he/she is the appropriate spokesperson for the subject matter;
- media inquiry is straightforward (versus Section 3.3 (b) (ii) below); and
- other media relations activities have not been planned/scheduled (i.e. media conference or media scrum) on the topic in question.

The Board's spokesperson sends an e-mail by 4 p.m. that day to the Communications Coordinator to advise the Communications and Public Affairs department of upcoming or completed media activity. The e-mail should include the following pertinent details: media outlet, topic of interview, person(s) interviewed, how the interview came about (media called your school/site or you called the media outlet), if there is concern regarding any inappropriate questions which were asked and/or answered that were inconsistent with the initial topic of interview and when the story/interview will be aired/published.

(ii) Individual is not the appropriate Board spokesperson, the subject matter is contentious or potentially controversial, or the topic in question will be considered by the Board at an upcoming meeting

The individual contacted by the media should refer the media to contact the Communications Coordinator in the Communications and Public Affairs department directly (see sample script below).

Based on this discussion, the Communications and Public Affairs department determines the most appropriate media response plan based on Section 3.3 (c).

Sample script: *I do not have the information you are requesting or I am not the appropriate person you need to speak to about your request/questions. Please contact the Communications Coordinator in the Communications and Public Affairs department at the Board – they will be able to help you with your request.*

For highly sensitive or controversial issues, the individual should immediately contact the Communications Coordinator in the Communications and Public Affairs department to advise them of the media inquiry.

(c) Media Inquiries to the Communications and Public Affairs Department

When a call is received by the Communications Coordinator or any member of the Communications and Public Affairs department, she/he will ask the media various questions to determine the scope of the inquiry in order to determine the most effective and efficient use of staff time and resources. The Communications and Public Affairs department can respond to factual information requests (Section 3.3 (c) (i) and Section 3.3 (c) (ii)). Board spokespersons, including subject matter experts, are called upon to address in-depth or complex inquiries (Section 3.3 (c) (iii) or contentious or controversial matters (Section 3.3 (c) (iv)).

(i) Factual information is already available to the Communications and Public Affairs department

The Communications Coordinator in the Communications and Public Affairs department answers/responds to media questions directly, using information provided on Media Backgrounders.

(ii) Factual information is not currently available to the Communications and Public Affairs department

The Communications Coordinator in the Communications and Public Affairs department contacts appropriate internal staff member (may be the subject matter expert from the Board's spokespersons list), who will provide the requested information (on Media Backgrounder form) within a reasonable timeline (based on the media's deadline, which is normally within 3 hours).

The Communications Coordinator then answers/responds directly to media questions.

(iii) Subject matter expert required for in-depth or complex information

The Communications Coordinator in the Communications and Public Affairs department contacts the designated Board spokesperson, including subject matter experts, to arrange a suitable interview time within the media's deadline.

Only individuals identified as spokespersons in Appendix A: Protocol for the Board's Spokespersons are official Board spokespeople.

(iv) Contentious or controversial inquiries

The Communications Coordinator consults with the Media Relations Team and the Director of Communications and Public Affairs to determine next steps for a response, and notifies the Chair of the Board (Chair) and Director of Education (Director), as required.

The Communications and Public Affairs department ensures the appropriate Board spokesperson addresses the media inquiry, as outlined in Appendix A: Protocol for the Board's Spokespersons.

The Communications and Public Affairs department provides Media Briefing Notes to help prepare spokespersons for interviews, as required.

(v) Important Note

The Communications and Public Affairs department e-mails (subject: Today's Media – [Date]) a summary of media activity (calls, responses and possible coverage) to trustees and Senior Team by the end of each workday, or as required. Earlier notifications may be e-mailed to trustees and Senior Team for time sensitive or controversial matters.

3.4. School and Department/Program Request For Media Coverage

(a) Local media (e.g. community newspapers)

- Individuals are encouraged to contact and build relationships with their local community media to garner media coverage of good news stories and events.
- Individuals should first formulate a media strategy in collaboration with their principal, site manager or supervisory officer.
- The principal, site manager or supervisory officer may contact the communications officer for their school for media counsel/guidance, local community media contact information and samples of media advisories.

(b) Daily/mainstream media (Toronto, national or international)

- Individual should first determine whether their event or story idea meets the criteria for what mainstream media would be interested in covering. Guidelines are in the Communication Tools section on the Principals' Site on TDSBweb.
- If the event or story idea fits the criteria, the individual (in collaboration with the principal, site manager or supervisory officer, if necessary) should fill out a Great Things Happen Submissions Form in a timely manner.
- The Great Things Happen submissions forms are reviewed on a daily basis to determine the most appropriate media strategy such as:
 - school events and photo opportunities that may be of interest to media in the Board's weekly *Media Advisory – TDSB Week at a Glance*, or
 - if warranted, preparing a separate media advisory for board-wide or innovative programs and initiatives that will be distributed to media (also Section 3.5).

(c) Additional Information

Schools and programs/departments are encouraged to consider other options for sharing and promoting their good news stories beyond the media (visit the Communication Tools section on the Principals' Site on TDSBweb). All com-

munications activities should be aligned with the school's or program/department's communications objectives for the year. All items must be approved by the principal, site manager or supervisory officer before the story is submitted. For example:

- (i) Individuals can submit their story to *Great Things Happen at TDSB Schools* (icon on the homepage of TDSBweb) for consideration on the Board's website(s).
- (ii) Schools can post information and news on their own school website, while programs/departments can post news/stories on their respective web pages (public and intranet).
- (iii) Articles and stories can be included in the school's newsletters, parent information handouts and school signage.
- (iv) Schools can establish a Key Communicators Network to help promote and disseminate information (visit the Communication Tools section the Principals' Site on TDSBweb for more information).

3.5. Media Releases And Media Advisories

A media advisory or media release may be released on particular issues, programs and initiatives based on the following procedure.

- (a) The Chair and/or Director can issue media releases on behalf of the Board. Media releases issued on behalf of the Board must be in keeping with the Board's mission statement and commitments and cannot contravene Board decisions, policies or procedures.
- (b) The Communications and Public Affairs department also distributes a weekly *Media Advisory – TDSB Week at a Glance*, which includes school events and photo opportunities that may be of interest to media. Board-wide or innovative programs and initiatives may warrant a separate media advisory.
- (c) Media advisories and media releases issued by the Board will be forwarded to all trustees and Senior Team via e-mail prior to distribution to the media.
- (d) Unless otherwise directed by the Board, the Chair and Director are spokespersons for Board media releases. The Chair may designate a Committee Chair or another trustee as spokesperson. The Director may designate a staff member as spokesperson (see *Appendix A: Protocol for the Board's Spokespersons*).
- (e) Individual trustees may wish to issue media advisories or media releases under their own name. Trustee Services' staff will keep an updated media contact list with phone and fax numbers so that trustees can contact the appropriate media organization directly.

- (f) The Communications and Public Affairs department is responsible for providing media updates to the Trustees' Services office. The Communications and Public Affairs department is responsible for providing a template with instructions for individual trustee media advisories or media releases to Trustees' Services office staff.

3.6. Media Conferences

Media conferences hosted on behalf of the Board must be in keeping with the Board's mission statement and used in conjunction with Section 3.5, Media Releases and Media Advisories. When the Board hosts a media conference or briefing (formal presentation) or media scrum (informal) to speak to the media face-to-face, the following procedures preside.

- (a) The Chair or Director can host a media conference, briefing or stage scrum on behalf of the Board.
- (b) Media conferences, briefings hosted on behalf of the Board must be in keeping with the Board's mission statement and cannot contravene Board motions, policies, or procedures.
- (c) Media conferences, briefings or scrums hosted on behalf of the Board will be announced by a media advisory and forwarded to all trustees and Senior Team via e-mail prior to the distribution of media advisory to the media.
- (d) Unless otherwise directed by the Board, the Chair and Director are spokespersons for Board media conferences, briefings or scrums. The Chair may designate a Committee Chair or another trustee as spokesperson. The Director may designate a staff member as spokesperson (see Appendix A: Protocol for the Board's Spokespersons).
- (e) Only media conferences, briefings or scrums hosted by the Chair, Director or their approved designates will host such activities on Board-owned properties (i.e. administrative buildings and schools).
- (f) If individual trustees wish to host a media conference, briefing or scrum in a Board-owned property they must notify and request permission from both the Chair and Director and notify the C&PA.
- (g) No third-party group or external organization will be permitted to host a media conference, briefing or scrum in a Board-owned property unless the Chair and Director have been notified and grant permission.
- (h) Trustee Services' staff will keep an updated media contact list with phone and fax numbers so that trustees can contact the appropriate media organization directly.

3.7. Crisis Communications

In the event of a crisis, media relations procedures follow those outlined in Operational Procedure PR569: Crisis Reporting and Communications.

3.8. Official Or High Profile Visits And Special Events

Media relations activities related to official or high profile visits and special events follow Operational Procedure: PR 529 Official or High Profile Visits or PR 570 Special Events.

4.0 APPENDICES

Appendix A: Protocol for the Board's Spokespersons

5.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Operational Procedures

PR 569: COM: Crisis and Incident Reporting

PR 529: Official or High Profile Visits

PR 570: Special Events

Protocol For the Board's Spokespersons

The following identifies media spokespersons who will represent the Board on specific issues when responding to media inquiries as outlined in Sections 3.3 (c) (iii) and (iv). This process will improve the Board's ability to build positive relationships with all media.

The complete list of names and contact information of Board Spokespersons and Designates is maintained and updated yearly, or as required, by the Communications and Public Affairs department.

1. Operational issues that are district-wide, planned and/or anticipated
 - Chair of the Board (Chair) or Director of Education (Director)
 - Associate Director of Education (Associate Director)
 - OR specific person as designated by the Director
2. Political issues that are district-wide, planned and/or anticipated
 - Chair
 - Vice-Chair of the Board (Vice-Chair)
 - OR specific trustee as designated by Chair
3. District-wide issues resulting from an incident/crisis, not anticipated
 - Chair or Director
 - Associate Director
 - OR specific person as designated by Director, i.e. Superintendent of Education of affected area
4. Issues that relate to negotiations
 - Chair
 - Vice-Chair
 - Chair, Negotiations Steering Committee
 - Senior Staff member if required, i.e. Finance
5. Issues specific to Standing or Special Committees either planned/anticipated or in response to media queries
 - Standing/Special Committee Chair
 - Chair
 - Vice-Chair
 - OR designated person
6. Ward, family of schools, or school specific issues planned and/or anticipated
 - Principal

- Local trustee
- Chair
- Vice-Chair
- Superintendent(s) of Education
- Or designated person

Important Note

If this issue is district-wide but originates at a local school, Protocol Numbers 1 to 4 supersedes Protocol Number 6. For example, if an issue arises at a local school regarding negotiations with one of the Board's employee groups, the local trustee does not serve as media spokesperson, the Chair of the Board, Vice-Chair of the Board or designated person speaks to the media.

- Essential Requirements for Official Spokesperson
- Available within 30 minutes of the Communications and Public Affairs department's contact via cell phone or through their assistant
- Participate in media training for all dedicated spokespersons (Chair, Vice-Chair, Standing/Special Committee Chairs), Senior Staff, designated subject matter experts
- Have declared any conflict of interest as media spokespersons
- Provide their schedule of availability to streamline the media response process
- Communicate directly with the Communications and Public Affairs department, providing details of all media calls they receive directly from the media
- The Communications and Public Affairs department notifies the Chair and Director, if necessary