Communication PRinciples for Principals

SPEAKING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA



News media representatives should always contact you first if they want to interview you, a staff member, or a student. They should never show up un-announced.

The News Media – Part of the Customer and Audience Segments at Your School

Your school has a wonderful story to tell. The following guidance and tips will help you to be ready to handle most media inquiries that come your way!

THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER CAN HELP!

You have a call, an e-mail, or a visit from a member of the news media! Here are some ideas to help you get off to a good start:

- ➤ Your District Superintendent's Office has a public affairs contact who can help you respond to questions from the news media or provide guidance in dealing with the media.
- Your Area Director's Office and the DoDEA Headquarters Communications Office have public affairs officers to assist you and your employees with any news media-related issue.
- All installations have a Public Affairs Office (PAO) staffed with military and civilian public affairs practitioners who can help you work with the news media. In fact, they are the first people you should call if the media contact you. They can help you coordinate interviews, provide tips on how to respond to questions, and give you assistance with preparing for a media visit.

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MEDIA ACCESS AND VISITS

Remember that your school is located on a military installation, and the installation commander has responsibility regarding media access. If you know the media will be visiting your school, coordinate with the installation public affairs office to ensure you have the proper permissions and, if necessary, the proper documentation. This is an important protocol. Commanders should never be surprised by media coverage happening on their installation.

- ➤ You are the person in charge on your school's property and you are the chief spokesperson for your school. As the principal, you have the right to request that any member of the news media who wishes to visit your school (classrooms, facilities, or school grounds) coordinate with you first.
- Members of the news media may be visiting other installation tenants, covering their activities, or interviewing their personnel. If they come by the school with a request, don't assume they have the commander's or public affairs officer's knowledge or blessing to visit your school. If you find yourself in this situation, it's always best to check with the installation public affairs officer.
- News media representatives should always contact you, the District Superintendent's Office or the Area Director's Public Affairs office to request an interview. They should never be trying to interview or photograph students or your staff members unannounced or uninvited. While it is not our policy to control or limit access or censor what is said, school administrators have a right to know when the news media wants to talk with you, your staff members, or your students.
- ➤ If approached independently by a reporter, contact your installation PAO, District Superintendent's Office PAO, or Area Director's PAO for assistance.
- If your staff members or students are approached by a reporter on school grounds, have them notify you immediately.

MEDIA PROTOCOLS AND COURTESIES

- News media representatives should always contact you first if they want to interview you, a staff member, or a student. They should never show up un-announced.
- DoDEA's student enrollment process and Form 600 provides a means for parents to authorize use of their child's image in general media coverage. The permission covers the majority of media coverage you may encounter at your school including programs or individual photos where students will not be specifically named or identified.
- Make sure you have signed permissions from your students' parents for their children to be interviewed or photographed individually for any news media purpose. This often requires some coordination beforehand, and news media organizations must understand and respect the need to be mindful of students' and parents' rights to participate or not participate in interviews or photographs.

As a principal, it's probably safe to say that someday you will talk with the media. Think about handling your responses in the same way you approach the rules of the road when you are coming to a traffic light.





- If a student will be specifically interviewed and named during the course of detailed or targeted media coverage, ask parents to sign a separate permission to cover the situation. Your area PAO has a format you can use.
- Accredited journalists should always have press credentials and show you those credentials and/or identification when they arrive for an interview or meeting.
- Make sure the installation public affairs officer is aware of any news media visits to your school. They can even help escort the media on a visit to your school. It's highly recommended that you have a media escort available to help media navigate major events at your school.

NAVIGATING THE MEDIA INQUIRY OR VISIT

Most of the time, if you're invited by a public affairs officer to be interviewed, it's a good idea to participate. Keep in mind that if you back away or refuse to be interviewed, it is often perceived negatively by the public. Many might think you are deliberately withholding information and you can inadvertently cast a negative shadow on your school, and you risk possibly sending the wrong impression about your school and DoDEA's mission in general.



- ➤ Remember that you are representing your school, and ultimately, the Department of Defense. As a Department of Defense Activity, we must abide by the Secretary of Defense's Principals of Information. They can be found at http://www.defenselink.mil/admin/prininfo.html.
- It's easy to participate if the story is a good news story. It's much harder to handle the incident, accident, negative, or controversial story. Your District Superintendent's Public Affairs representative, Area Director's Public Affairs Officer, DoDEA Headquarters Communications Staff and your installation public affairs officer can help you prepare for the worst situation. With the proper guidance and preparation, you can help reporters get it right!
- Never ask a news reporter to "run a story by you" before it goes to print or broadcast. Reporters have a job to do. After your interview is finished, you have no editorial rights or authority. That's why you need to do your homework up front. A public affairs specialist can help you prepare for the interview so you don't have to worry about how it will look to the audience.



THE TRAFFIC LIGHT APPROACH

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THE CARDINAL RULE - STAY IN YOUR LANE!

GREEN LIGHTS

- Try to always accommodate interviews whenever possible. Promptly return phone calls or e-mails from reporters.
- Make sure that you know in advance what the reporter's interest is in. You will never know all of the questions you might get asked, but you should know the topic. Talk about what you know your job, your mission, your classrooms, and your school.
- > If you're presented with a multi-part question, answer one question at a time.
- You can and should control the interview. Control your answers, emotions, and the amount of time you spend in an interview. Keep your comments brief and to the point. It's perfectly proper to say "I don't know," if you really don't know.
- Let the reporter ask the question before you respond. Try to use part of the question in the answer to give proper context to your response.

YELLOW LIGHTS

- If the reporter wants information that isn't within your scope of responsibility or authority, refer them to the local installation public affairs office, your District Superintendent's Office, your Area Director's Public Affairs Office, or the DoDEA Headquarters Communications Office. **STAY IN YOUR LANE!**
- If your school is in an area facing an emergency, authorized departure or evacuation, let the local commander speak to the issues. They are the best sources of information in these situations.

RED LIGHTS

- > Don't try to answer questions that are above your level of authority/representation or outside your area of expertise.
- Never make a comment that puts DoDEA Schools at odds with the host nation, local civilian community or government, commander, or Military Service.
- Don't respond to questions about political or foreign policy matters.
- > Don't respond to rumors, hearsay, or anecdotes.
- ▶ Don't discuss specific force protection/security procedures and practices.
- Don't discuss any information on employees or students protected by the Privacy Act.
- ➤ Don't speculate or try to answer the "what if" question.

Remember that all news media inquiries aren't about negative issues. Approach all media inquiries with an open mind and, when necessary, a healthy dose of curiosity and caution.

Use the attached Tip Sheet to help you do your best in an interview!

