

# External Communications Policy

## **Reason:**

Pittsburg Community Schools USD 250 ("the District") needs to be able to communicate accurately, effectively, and consistently with diverse audiences, including the media. The Public Information Director ("the director" or "Communications Director" or "Communications Department") is the primary and official liaison to news media outlets. It is the director's responsibility to develop and maintain productive and beneficial relationships with news media in communicating District news and responding to media requests.

The Communications Department is responsible for disseminating and pitching news stories, responding to media inquiries, and arranging interviews centered on the District's academic goals, objectives, and mission.

This policy is intended to outline existing communication policies and clarify communication procedures as it pertains to the District while continuing our commitment to excellence in education.

## **Application:**

This document applies to all employees; administrators, certified, and classified personnel at all levels, as well as employees of ancillary organizations working within the District (e.g., SEK Interlocal, CHC/SEK, Communities in Schools, etc.) through the partnership of those organizations.

This policy applies to employees while acting in their capacity as employees of the District, including when asked questions in a public setting, in person and online.

## **Policy Statement:**

### ***A.) Requests for official District position or response:***

All inquiries seeking an official District response or a statement on behalf of the District should be directed to the Communications Department at 620-235-3100.

Authorization to speak on behalf of the District will only be given by the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, or Communications Director. No employee or employee of any ancillary organization may make official statements on behalf of the District without first consulting with and gaining the approval to do so from the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, or Communications Director, and in some instances, in conjunction with approval from ancillary organization leadership.

The Communications Department will coordinate the District response with the appropriate members of the District.

All requests for an official response or statement from the USD 250 Board of Education should be reported to the Communications Director and the Board President. The Board President or Vice President is the only representative of the Board, with the exception of the Public Information Director, to make any response on behalf of the Board. The President and Vice President will work with the assistance of the Communications Department in the creation of Board statements.

Any employee or employee of an ancillary organization who has not been authorized by the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, or Communications Director to speak to the media in the context of his or her role within the District must direct inquiries from the media about the official District comment on all matters regarding the District to the Communications Director.

No employee or employee of an ancillary organization is authorized to speak "off the record" on behalf of the District to media on any matter which involves the District.

All District employees and employees of an ancillary organization must adhere to all Pittsburg Community Schools USD 250 policies as well as federal, state, and local laws and policies regarding the release of information about activities of the District, its employees, students, volunteers, including all which apply to privacy of education records such as HIPAA and FERPA.

### ***B.) Request Regarding Expertise on Specific Subject Matter***

We are proud of the caliber of expertise and quality of knowledge our educators bring to the District to help educate our students. Individual faculty, administrators, and staff experts are encouraged to provide subject-specific commentary based on their academic concentration or their expertise in their professional field. This includes activities coaches and staff on matters related to District athletics and extra-curricular contests and team or program-related matters.

When media has contacted a school or individual, that school or individual is encouraged and expected to notify the Communications Department that a representative of the media has made contact. The Communications Department is available at all times to consult with administrators, faculty, and staff to prepare for media interviews, and advise the most effective ways to work with the media.

Any questions outside of an employee's academic expertise or area should involve consultation with the Communications Director, who can be a resource. Questions may also be referred to the Communications Director. Inquiries seeking an official District comment must be directed to the Communications Director.

If an employee is unsure of whether a question or request for comment from a media representative concerns their expertise or area of teaching or seeks an official position, the Communications Department must be contacted.

### ***C.) Personal Speech***

Nothing in this policy is intended to restrict the freedom of any employee or employee of an ancillary organization to engage in their scholarly activities or personal involvement in community activities. Nothing in this policy is intended to affect an individual's right to express personal opinions on District or non-District actions and policies. Nothing in this policy is intended to restrict an employee or employee of an ancillary organization from commenting on matters of public concern implicating an employer's official dishonesty, any deliberate unconstitutional action, other serious wrongdoing or threats to health and safety.

When speaking or writing as a citizen, an employee should be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that he/she does not speak for the District.

The District reaffirms its continued commitment to the principles of academic freedom and protections under local, state and federal law, including its continued policy of nondiscrimination as the Pittsburg Community School District provides a positive and productive learning and working environment, free from discrimination, including discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, creed, age (for employment), marital status (for programs), sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic status (for programs) in its educational programs and hiring practices.

### **Enforcement:**

Violations of this policy may result in appropriate disciplinary measures in accordance with District policy, applicable collective bargaining agreements, and any other applicable local, state, and federal employment law.

**APPROVED: October 2018**