

STUDENT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN SCHOOL-SPONSORED MEDIA

[C11]

I. PURPOSE

Freedom of expression is a fundamental principle in a democratic society that provides all citizens, including students, with the right to engage in a robust discussion of ideas. This policy describes how Thetford Academy protects freedom of expression in school-sponsored media, and also outlines the six exceptions related to freedom of expression.

II. DEFINITIONS

Media advisor:

A media advisor is a person employed, appointed, or designated by Thetford Academy to provide instruction relating to school-sponsored media.

School-sponsored media:

School-sponsored media is any material prepared, written, published, or broadcast as part of a school-supported program or activity by a student journalist that is distributed or generally made available as part of a school-supported program or activity to an audience beyond the classroom in which the material is produced.

Student journalist:

A student journalist is a student enrolled in Thetford Academy who gathers, compiles, writes, edits, photographs, records or prepares information for dissemination in school-sponsored media.

Student supervisor:

A student supervisor is a student who is responsible for editing school-sponsored media.

III. POLICY

It is the policy of Thetford Academy to ensure that students enjoy free speech and free press protections related to school-sponsored media, and to encourage students to become educated, informed, and responsible members of society.

No expression made by students in school-sponsored media shall be deemed to be an expression of school policy.

IV. COMPONENTS OF POLICY

A. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press

Subject only to the six exceptions below, a student journalist may exercise freedom of speech and freedom of the press in school-sponsored media. Student supervisors of school-sponsored media are responsible for determining the content of their respective media.

B. Exceptions to freedom of speech and freedom of the press

This policy does not authorize or protect content of school-sponsored media that:

1. is libelous or slanderous;
2. constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy;
3. may be defined as obscene, gratuitously profane, threatening or intimidating;
4. may be defined as harassment, hazing, or bullying under Vermont law;
5. violates federal or state law; or
6. creates the imminent danger of materially or substantially disrupting the ability of the school to perform its educational mission.

C. Restraining distribution of content in school-sponsored media

Thetford Academy employees may restrain the distribution of content in school-sponsored media that can be demonstrated to violate any of the conditions 1-6 above.

Content in school-sponsored media will not be restrained solely because it involves political or controversial subject matter, or is critical of the school or its administration.

D. Protection from discipline

A student journalist may not be disciplined for acting in accordance with this policy.

A media advisor may not be disciplined for taking reasonable and appropriate action to protect a student journalist in conduct protected by this policy or for refusing to infringe on conduct that is protected by this policy, by the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution, or by the Vermont Constitution.

ADOPTED: May 22, 2018