

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Students of the West Des Moines Community School District are protected in their exercise of freedom of expression by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Iowa, and by Iowa Code Section 280.22. Understanding the meaning of the First Amendment's protection of free speech is an important part of the learning process, and school is an appropriate place for inquiry and learning through the expression and exchange of ideas. Student expression in official school publications is specifically defined and protected under Iowa law.

Student expression, other than student expression in student-produced official school publications, made on the school district premises or under the jurisdiction of the school district or as part of a school-sponsored activity may be attributed to the school district; therefore, student expression must be responsible. Student expression must be appropriate to assure that the students learn and meet the goals of the school activity and that the potential audience is not exposed to material that may be harmful or inappropriate for their level of maturity.

Students will be allowed to express their viewpoints and opinions as long as the expression is responsible. The expression will not, in the judgment of the administration, encourage the breaking of laws or lawful school regulations, will not be libelous or slanderous under Iowa Code Chapter 659, will not be obscene or indecent, and will not cause a material and substantial disruption to the orderly operation of the school. The administration, when making this judgment, will consider whether the activity in which the expression was made is school-sponsored and whether review or prohibition of the students' speech furthers an educational purpose. Further, the expression must be done in a reasonable time, place, and manner that is not disruptive to the orderly and efficient operation of the school district.

Students who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary measures. Employees will be responsible for insuring students' expression is in keeping with this policy.

It is the policy of the West Des Moines Community School District that all official school publications will be free from prior restraint by school officials except as provided by law. An editorial board consisting of participating students under the supervision of publication advisors will be responsible for the content of official student publications. The editorial board will be guided by the Code of Iowa and by ethical standards adopted by professional associations or societies of journalism. All publications will provide students a full opportunity for the exchange of ideas and robust debate about topics of student interest, including those that may be controversial.

Student expression in official school publications is not an expression of school policy. Public school districts and employees or officials are not liable in any civil or criminal action for any student expression made or published by students, unless the school employees or officials have interfered with or altered the content of the student's speech or expression, and then only to the extent of the interference or alteration of that speech or expression.

Schools possess a substantial educational interest in teaching student writers journalistic skills. Journalism advisors will supervise student writers to maintain professional standards of English and journalism and to comply with Iowa law including the restrictions against unlawful speech in the Iowa Code.

It is the policy of the West Des Moines Community School District to encourage the resolution of complaints arising from the application of this policy through an appeal process.

The administration is directed to develop reasonable rules including time, place, and manner restrictions regarding official student publications in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the United States and the State of Iowa. This policy and its accompanying rules will be made available to all students.

Approved _____ Reviewed _____ Revised 04-13-09