



WINDHAM SCHOOL
DISTRICT

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SUPERSEDES:

SUPERINTENDENT DIRECTIVE

SUBJECT: NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS

AUTHORITY: *Public Information Act, Tex. Gov't Code §§ 552.001-.353; Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1232g, 34 CFR Part 99; Windham Board Policy (WBP)-03.02, "Windham School District Superintendent Responsibilities and Authority"*

Reference: American Correctional Association Standards 4-4021, 4-4099, and 4-4279; TDCJ Executive Directive (ED)-02.40, "News Media Relations"

APPLICABILITY: Windham School District (WSD)

POLICY:

The WSD partnerships and information resources specialist (PIRS) shall serve as the primary contact between the WSD and the media.

DEFINITIONS:

"Authorized Personnel" are the employees of the WSD who have received authorization to speak on behalf of WSD with the media on a particular subject matter or event. This policy does not include or pertain to the Texas Board of Criminal Justice, which serves as the WSD Board of Trustees (board), or entities that report to the board.

"Holidays," for the purpose of this policy, are non-working days established by the WSD Official School Calendar, as authorized by the superintendent, to include state holidays, designated non-working days, and spring break.

"Media" is any member of the editorial and reporting staff of any newspaper or magazine listed in the *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media* or the *Editor & Publisher International Year Book*, the editorial and reporting staff of any radio or television station, or individuals who have otherwise been identified as news media by the PIRS.

“Newsworthy Event” is any incident or situation that attracts, or has the potential to attract, the attention of the news media. Examples include, but are not limited to, WSD staff or student deaths or injuries, disturbances at WSD schools, memorial or dedication ceremonies held at WSD schools, graduation ceremonies, or other events involving the WSD.

PROCEDURES:

I. Contacting the PIRS

- A. The WSD PIRS may be reached by telephone at (936) 291-5307 or by fax at (936) 436-4031.
- B. During normal business hours, which are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., except holidays, all WSD staff shall notify their principal or supervisor, who shall advise the PIRS of any newsworthy event or agency policy operational changes that might attract public interest or news coverage.

II. Release of Information to the Media

- A. The release of information on newsworthy events occurring within the WSD shall be made by the PIRS. Any event involving the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) shall be coordinated with the TDCJ Public Information Office (PIO). Any event involving the board shall be coordinated with the board chairman or designee.
- B. The PIRS shall coordinate with the respective division directors or regional administrators to obtain necessary factual details of a newsworthy event prior to the release of information.
- C. The PIRS may release information not prohibited by law, as the PIRS deems appropriate through coordination with the superintendent or designee.
- D. Media inquiries regarding ongoing litigation within the WSD or directly impacting the WSD shall be referred to the WSD Office of the General Counsel for coordination of a response.

III. Media Agencies Receiving Releases

Routine release of information on WSD-related matters may be sent to the major news outlets, including newspapers, radio stations, and television stations, upon approval of the superintendent or designee.

IV. Response to Media Inquiries

- A. All WSD employees shall immediately notify the PIRS of all media contacts and the nature of those contacts.
- B. Only authorized personnel shall make official responses to news media inquiries. The superintendent shall personally grant this authorization.
- C. Division directors or designees may be authorized to provide responses to media inquiries upon receiving approval from the superintendent or PIRS.
- D. If a request is made concerning operations and events at a specific school, the principal or designee may be authorized to respond to media inquiries, only after coordinating such release of information with the superintendent or designee.

V. Media Access to Units

- A. All media visits to units are subject to prior approval by the warden and the TDCJ PIO. A warden may, after coordination with the TDCJ PIO and WSD, impose limitations on or set conditions for media access to the unit when, in the warden's judgment, such media access would disrupt the safety and security of the unit or cause serious operational problems. Media interviews shall not be scheduled on weekends, holidays, or during offender visitation. Exceptions may be made for media attending a WSD-sponsored event scheduled on a weekend, such as a WSD graduation.
- B. Media representatives may be denied access to units during emergencies, disturbances, and other situations that may disrupt normal operations. Media representatives may be denied access until normal operations are restored.

VI. Interviews with Specific Offenders

- A. A media representative may interview a WSD student or former student as arranged by prior appointment and with the written consent of the student on a WSD Media Release Form, which may be obtained from the WSD share drive at SUPT/Public/MEDIA RELEASE FORMS or from the PIRS.
 - 1. Each interview shall be no more than one hour in length; and
 - 2. The warden or warden's designee may authorize non-contact interviews.
- B. An interview with an offender may be prohibited by the warden, after consultation with the TDCJ PIO and WSD, when the interview, in the warden's judgment, would impair the rehabilitation of the offender, detract from the deterrence of

crime, negatively affect a victim or victim's family, disrupt the safety and security of the unit, or cause serious operational problems. In addition:

1. Interviews with offenders who are housed in the TDCJ medical or psychiatric facilities are prohibited. Due to medical confidentiality laws, this reason shall not be cited.
2. An interview may be prohibited when the offender has been temporarily restricted due to disciplinary violations, or if the offender has made threats against TDCJ employees or WSD staff, other offenders, or other public officials.
3. An interview may be prohibited for a reasonable adjustment time for a newly received offender or an offender who has returned to prison due to parole revocation or sentence reinstatement.

IX. Other Conditions of Media Access

- A. Live television, radio or satellite interviews, and telephonic media interviews with offenders are prohibited.
- F. Offenders may not receive compensation for interviews or participation in any media project. Media found to be providing compensation to an offender or offender family shall not be allowed access to any TDCJ facility.

X. Photographs of Offenders

Photographs or videos of offenders require the written consent of the offender when the offender's face can clearly be identified. Exceptions would apply to photos or videos showing the offender from behind, or other angles, which would render individual identification impossible.

XI. Access by Other Writers and Researchers

- A. Access to offenders for WSD-related interviews for editorial researchers, independent filmmakers, documentary filmmakers, book authors, magazine writers, freelance journalists, and other non-news media representatives may be permitted on the same basis and under the same conditions as access by media described in this policy, with the permission of the TDCJ PIO director and the WSD superintendent or designee. Scholastic research requests shall be made to TDCJ Executive Services in accordance with TDCJ Administrative Directive (AD)-02.28, "TDCJ Research."
- B. Book authors and freelancers shall provide a copy of their contract or other form of contractual relationship with a news organization, production company, or publisher prior to obtaining authorization to interview an offender.

Signature on file
Dr. Clint Carpenter, Superintendent
Windham School District