

Richmond County School System Protocol for Working Effectively with the Media

Public schools are of great interest to citizens, and, therefore, to the media. The Richmond County School System believes the media is an essential component of the communication process. Establishing good, productive relationships with the media requires balancing the rights of the general public to be informed with the legitimate privacy rights of the system's employees, students, and parents and the organization's right to fair, balanced coverage.

The Communications Department serves as the liaison between the school system and the media. Its role is integral to the development and maintenance of effective media relationships. Toward that end, the department is guided by the following protocol:

- All media requests will be coordinated through the Communications Department. If a school or central office department is contacted by the media and has not received prior notification from Communications, the reporter should be directed to our office before any response is given. The same applies if a reporter shows up unannounced, or if an individual threatens to take an issue to the media. A staff member from Communications will make every effort to contact principals and system leaders about media requests regarding their school or department.
- In a crisis or emergency situation, staff in the Communications Department will coordinate all communication with the media. This includes serving as spokesperson, managing the flow of information to the media, and providing on-site assistance.
- At times, the principal or system leader may be called on to serve as a spokesperson. In such cases, Communications staff will provide support in terms of messages and delivery.
- Students should not be interviewed, photographed, or videotaped by the media at school without parental and principal consent. (This does not apply to public meetings or events after the school day). For stories on controversial topics, it is recommended to contact parents for permission on those specific issues.
- Principals and school system employees have rights and responsibilities and are expected to assert those rights to protect campuses, students, and instructional time. The media does not have the right to come on campus, enter classrooms, sit in on faculty or staff meetings, attend professional development sessions, or attempt to interview students or staff without prior approval. They will not be permitted to disrupt the school day.
- As part of maintaining a good working relationship with the media, RCSS will hold the media accountable for its performance. RCSS will respond aggressively to errors, misrepresentations, and biased reporting. We will expect the media to comply with acknowledged standards of journalistic quality and ethics.
- The news media will be treated with professional courtesy, and will be expected to show the same in dealing with RCSS staff. Employees will not be asked to cooperate with reporters who are discourteous and/or disrespectful.