

Procedure Title	Media Relations		
Date of Issue	May 29, 2019	Related Policy	BP 1604-D
Revision Dates	October 27, 2021	Related Forms	
Review Date		Originator	Administrative Council
References			
AP 1603-D "Communications-Trustee/Administration"; AP 6801-D "Police/School Protocol"; AP 1605-D "Crisis Communications"; BP 1104-D "Role Description – Chair"			

1.0 RATIONALE

- 1.1 Bluewater District School Board (BWDSB) recognizes that establishing and maintaining positive relations with members of the media is key to ensuring an informed and engaged public.
- 1.2 By valuing and integrating practices that support open and timely communication with the media, BWDSB is better positioned to promote and sustain confidence in our education system amongst parents/guardians, students, staff, and other stakeholders.
- 1.3 Ensuring that all employees understand and embrace their individual roles as ambassadors for BWDSB is fundamental to building and maintaining public confidence with stakeholders.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 **Media**
Media, for the purposes of this procedure, includes radio stations, newspapers, and other print journalism publications, television channels, and online news platforms.
- 2.2 **Media Release**
A formal method of communicating news and time sensitive information to the media for broadcast or publication, a standard BWDSB media release is submitted on corporate letterhead and may include one or more quotes from a designated spokesperson(s). A point of contact is provided for follow-up inquiries.
- 2.3 **Crisis**
A crisis, for the purposes of this procedure, is defined as any unexpected situation that arises where there is a real or perceived threat to the safety and/or reputation of the board or a school within the board. A traumatic event impacting a large group of students and/or staff would also fall within this definition.

3.0 PROCEDURE

- 3.1 **Media Releases**
 - 3.1.1 All system wide media releases are issued by the communications officer on behalf of the director of education and/or members of the Administrative Council. The communications officer will work with the superintendent whose portfolio is relevant to the topic to finalize a draft, prior to final approval by the director of education, or designate.
 - 3.1.2 Media release distribution includes an email list of local and regional media contacts, as well as postings on the board’s website, social media platforms, and access via the board mobile app. Board staff can access

the most recent postings in Office 365 via the 'Media Releases' link in the BWDSB Home section of SharePoint.

- 3.1.3 Topics that constitute the issuing of a media release include, but are not limited to:
 - i. Ministry of Education funding announcements that are specific to the board;
 - ii. board wide recognition of education related focus weeks and special occasions;
 - iii. public meeting announcements and cancellations;
 - iv. annual trustee elections;
 - v. administrative placement announcements;
 - vi. board decisions impacting the system as a whole;
 - vii. special events of board wide interest (e.g., regional student competitions, school open houses and transition activities occurring district wide, regional student forums, etc.); and
 - viii. board wide news that is specific to student achievement (e.g., awards recognition, the introduction of new programs, etc.).
- 3.1.4 Requests by trustees for the issuing of media releases must come through the board chair. Schools and departments who wish to make similar requests should consult with their supervisors and/or the communications officer. In some cases, an alternate approach may be suggested. For example, a specific topic might be more appropriately highlighted in a news story on the board's website and social media platforms versus in a formal media release (see Appendix A: Approval Process for System Level Media Releases).
- 3.1.5 The communications officer, in consultation with the director of education, or superintendent, will determine the appropriate point of contact for any follow-up media inquiries that may result from the issuing of a media release.
- 3.1.6 Wherever possible, the communications officer will strategically time the issuing of media releases in an effort to maximize effective receipt of the board's message and to manage the volume of information distributed to the media by the board at any given time.

3.2 Schools and the Media

- 3.2.1 Schools are encouraged to seek ways to develop positive media relations, and regularly highlight their good news stories and events with the media in their geographic areas. (See Appendix B: School Level Media Communications.) At the principal's discretion, media may be invited from time to time to attend and cover specific school events (for media requests to visit a school regarding a contentious issue, please see section 3.4.5 below).
- 3.2.2 If media are attending school events, it is the principal's responsibility to ensure that necessary measures are in place for protecting student privacy. Students under the age of 18 years cannot be interviewed, or have their images used in photos or videos by the media unless informed parental consent has been obtained. Students of 18 years of age provide consent on their own behalf.
- 3.2.3 The communications officer is available as a resource to assist schools with their media relations strategies, as requested.

3.3 Crisis Communications

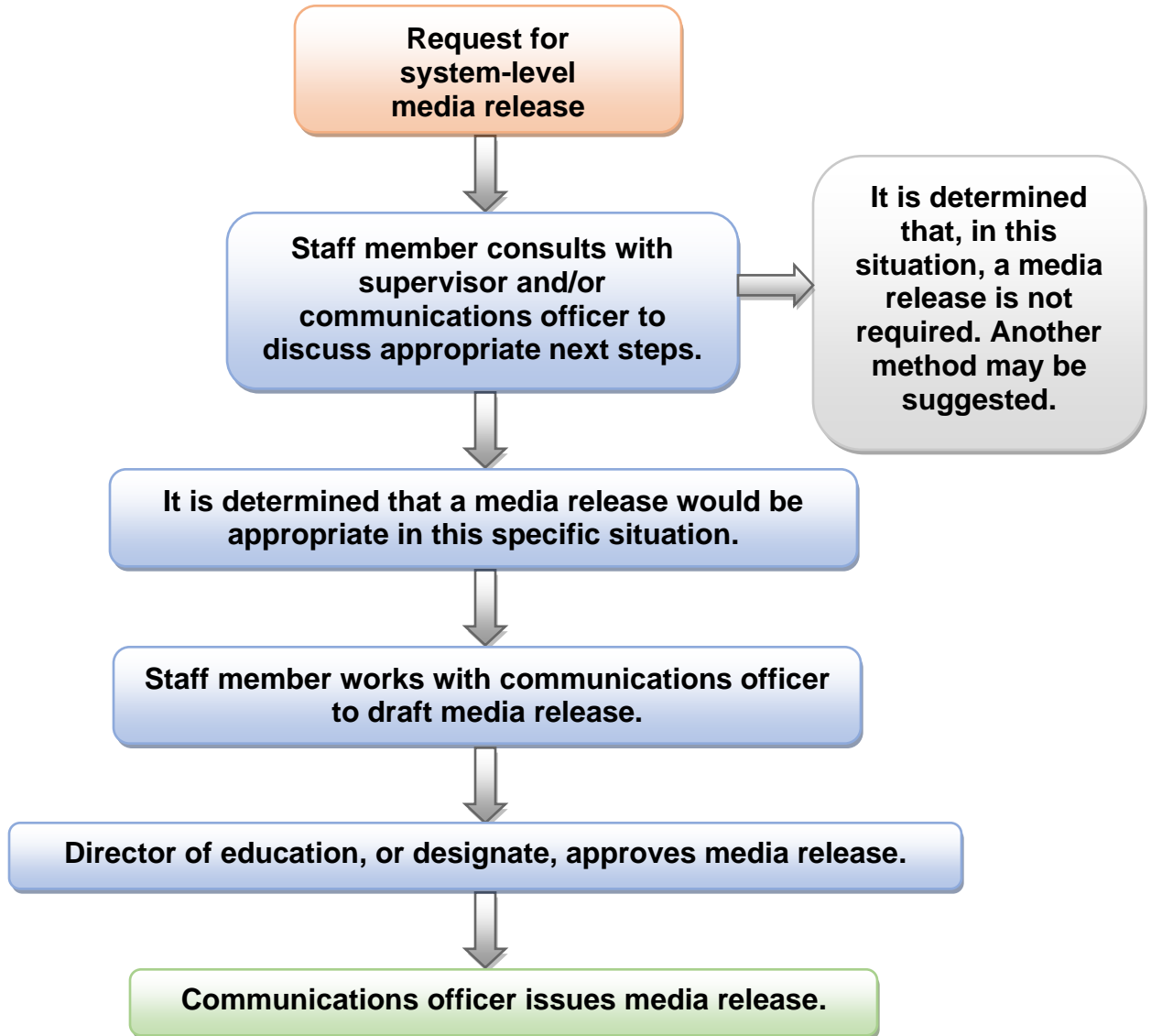
- 3.3.1 In a school crisis situation, where prompt communication with parents/guardians and members of the broader community is critical (e.g., a lockdown or an evacuation), the principal will refer to Administrative Procedure AP 1605-D "Crisis Communications".

3.4 Responding to Media Requests

- 3.4.1 The board chair is the official media spokesperson for the Board of Trustees (see BP 1104-D "Role Description – Chair"). The director of education, or designate, is the official media spokesperson on behalf of board staff.

- 3.4.2 When contacted by the media for routine matters, board staff should make every effort to provide a follow-up response in a timely manner that respects the deadline of the inquiring media. For this reason, it is important to always ask for a deadline when speaking with members of the media.
- 3.4.3 As the board's first point of contact for the media, the communications officer will ensure timely follow-up to system level media inquiries and requests. This includes responding to information inquiries and coordinating interviews with the appropriate spokespersons. As appropriate, the communications officer may on occasion act as the designated media spokesperson for the board.
- 3.4.4 If contacted directly by the media, staff should consult with the communications officer prior to providing any responses. School staff should consult with their principal prior to providing any responses.
- 3.4.5 In certain situations, media may contact a school to request access to school property as part of the development of a news story on a contentious issue. In such situations, the principal should consult with their area superintendent and communications officer prior to providing any responses. Unless otherwise determined by the area superintendent, media will not be permitted access to school property, or to conduct interviews with school staff and students in such situations. All media requests of this nature should be directed to the communications officer.
- 3.4.6 The communications officer is available as a media resource to assist trustees and staff with the development of key messages and responses that uphold the board's position and corporate image.

APPENDIX A
APPROVAL PROCESS FOR SYSTEM LEVEL MEDIA RELEASES



APPENDIX B
SCHOOL LEVEL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

