

Think First

JEA
press rights
commission

Free expression
through
responsible
journalism

Questions to ask about controversial issues – and those to ask them of

By members of JEA's press rights commission

All stakeholders should ask the question:

What is the purpose of publishing this material? Then be ready to discuss the piece's pedagogy.

Things administrators can do to help with positive communication

Have an open door policy especially if students need answers

Have visibility in the program for positive interaction as well as when there is a problem

Trust the journalistic process

Provide necessary resources or offer options to obtain them

Be a liaison to central office and community Get to know the students!

Respect the First Amendment

Support risk taking and allow students to learn from their mistakes

Admit when you are wrong!

Don't become a middle man or use the adviser as a middle man refer those who need to talk to each other

Know that everything students do is not "carte blanche," and that it is Ok to address issues.

However, rather than say yes or no discuss the why behind the issue.

Things teachers can do to help with positive communication

Content should be determined by students and must be fought by students. They should be able to ethically justify anything that goes into print. If they can't, don't print it without editorial board discussion and vote. Then let responsibility fall on the entire staff.

Avoid confrontations- If someone has a vendetta against a student or story be there to support and witness

Have students meet with administration for comment and quote in news issues.

Give administrators heads up on controversial issues. If the paper is in mailboxes and something is controversial, tell the principal before he gets the calls.

Bring in the professional media for consultation as well as the Press Law Center if in doubt about anything before publication especially if you disagree with students decisions on what is to be printed. Don't make the administrator the heavy until all the facts are in.

Stay credible. Have an editorial fact and style check procedure and sign-off from writer, page editor, section editor, and editor in chief. Make sure everyone knows not just the writer looks bad when there is an error.

If a student has a hidden agenda assign someone else.

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Materials were produced for this Web site by the Journalism Education Association (<http://jeapressrights.org>) and the Center for Scholastic Journalism (<http://jmc.kent.edu/csaj>).

Free expression through responsible journalism

Clarify wording watch double meanings

Things students can do to help with positive communication

Identify to those interviewed the purpose of your story

If in doubt ask for clarification

Interview people involved in all sides of the issue

Use a potter's box. What are the consequences?

Be credible. Copy edit for content as well as mechanics. Check and double check

Listen, observe, think, act.

If you make a mistake (e.g. if comment copy more problems through misinterpretation or miss- quote) admit it and write an apology.

Clarify wording watch double meanings- connotation and denotations

Things community members can do to help with positive communication

If you have a complaint, go to the adviser for an explanation, not the principal media or school board.

Attend open meetings or visit publication labs if you question what is going on.

Things the professional press can do to help with positive communication

Don't go on witch hunts concerning community complaints about scholastic press issues. Go to the source and those involved in the school including students adviser and administrator and find out all the facts before covering the issue.