

Communication PRinciples for Principals

July 2009

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



IDEA

DoDEA employees who choose to write a letter to the editor should clearly state that the views expressed are those of the individual only and not those of the Department of Defense (DoD) or the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), to ensure that personal letters to the editor do not imply any official endorsement of the viewpoint being presented in the letter.



DoDEA HQ Communications Office

4040 North Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22203
USA

Telephone: 703.588.3030
Facsimile: 703.588.3000

Frank O'Gara: 703.588.3260
Frank.O'Gara@hq.dodea.edu
Elaine Kanellis: 703.588.3265
Elaine.Kanellis@hq.dodea.edu

Visit the DoDEA website
for more information.
<http://www.dodea.edu>

Employees Have Opinions

DoDEA employees are contributing members of military communities around the globe. In addition to providing support for the DoD mission by educating and caring for children of military families, they are also valued citizens who have personal opinions about our schools and communities.

From time to time, an opinion letter written by an employee will come to the attention of a Principal prompting the question, "Are employees allowed to express their opinion(s) in the newspaper on school issues, policies, procedures, etc.?"

This tip sheet provides Principals with guidance related to implied official endorsements when an employee chooses to express his/her personal opinion in a "letter to the editor" of a newspaper. This tip sheet does not include guidance on the use of blogs or other social networking tools.

Employees may express their opinions in a Letter to the Editor

DoD civilian employees may express their opinion(s) by writing an Op-Ed piece or a "letter to the editor". In doing so, employees may identify their official position and location when writing an opinion letter expressing the employee's personal views on public issues with the following caveats:

- the action is not part of a partisan activity; they are not a partisan candidate; and/or fundraising activity; and
- the employee clearly states that the views expressed in the letter represent their personal views only and not those of DoD or DODEA.

In other words, employees are free to express their opinions, consistent with the law, but they must be clear that their opinions are their own and do not necessarily reflect the DoD or DoDEA position(s).

Employees Must Maintain Confidentiality

Employees who choose to express personal opinions in a "letter to the editor" of a newspaper should not include any personally identifiable and/or personal information about students, parents or other employees. A failure to do so may result in a violation of the Privacy Act.

Employees Cannot Use Nonpublic Information

Employees cannot not use information gained through their DoD employment that they know or should know is unavailable publicly to further their own private interest or the private interest of another.

Employees Must Use their Personal Computer/Email When Expressing Personal Opinions

DoDEA employees are obligated to use government resources and equipment, including government e-mail accounts, for official use and authorized purposes only. Sending an opinion letter to the editor of a newspaper is done in the employee's personal capacity. As such, an employee that chooses to write or email a letter to a newspaper editor should use his/her personal time and equipment to do so.

Employees Should Be Able to Express Personal Views Without Fear of Reprisal

DoDEA employees may appropriately express their personal views on education or school-related issues in a "letter to the editor" of a newspaper without fear of reprisals or repercussions. DoDEA supports the free and open flow of opinions and ideas and welcomes constructive input from employees, union representatives, and the customers we proudly serve.

We Are Here to Help!

If you have questions about "letters to the editor" or any media related issues, call your Area or HQ Public Affairs Office. If you have questions regarding First Amendment issues (such as Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Expression) or endorsement issues, please contact your local Office of the General Counsel.

Your Area Director's Office and HQ Communications Office have public affairs officers available to assist you with any news media-related questions or issues. DoD installations have a Public Affairs Office (PAO) staffed with military and civilian practitioners specially trained in media relations.

TIPS



Contact telephone numbers for
DoDEA Public Affairs Officers:

HQ: (703)-588-3030

DDESS: (678) 364-8044

DoDEA-E: (49) 611-380-7612

DoDEA-P: (81)-611-744-5878