



## **Staff Manual, Editorial Policies and Procedures**

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### **Overview**

This editorial policy serves as *The A-Blast's* foundation for operation. This is a working document that is revised yearly in the summer, prior to our first publication. Sources consulted in the yearly revisions of this document include: the Fairfax County Public Schools Student Responsibilities and Rights; the Student Press Law Center model

policies; *The Washington Post* editorial policies; various legal texts; and policies of award-winning high school newspapers nationwide. Our policy reflects how we practice journalism, and we publish an abbreviated form of this policy in the first issue of each year. This policy is also available for other schools and institutions to modify for their own educational purposes.

### **Changes to “Staff Manual, Editorial Policies, and Procedures”**

While suggestions for the revision of the “Staff Manual, Editorial Policies, and Procedures” can come from any member of *The A-Blast* staff or the adviser, a formal, detailed suggestion must be put into document form and presented before the Editorial Board (explained below) in a closed meeting. All suggestions require a 2/3 majority vote by the Editorial Board to be incorporated into the “Staff Manual, Editorial Policies, and Procedures.” The adviser may veto any incorporated suggestion at any time. This veto may be overridden by a 3/4 majority vote in a quorum vote of the entire *A-Blast* staff in favor of incorporation of the suggestion, conducted the very next day after the veto is issued. If it is impossible to obtain the vote of each member of staff, than any vote determined by the quorum is void, and the veto stands. Any suggestion that is rescinded from incorporation, either by the Editorial Board or an adviser veto that is let to stand, cannot be brought into suggestion until six months has elapsed since the date of the formal presentation of the suggestion before the Editorial Board. Suggestions do not have to be based on a vote to be incorporated into the document if there is a clear grammatical mistake inherent in the wording of the “Staff Manual, Editorial Policies and Procedures,” as agreed upon both by the Editors in Chief and the adviser. However, all other suggestions, ranging from, but not limited to changes in the verbiage of internal, established sections to the addition of new sections must undergo the procedure explained above in order to be incorporated into the “Staff Manual, Editorial Policies, and Procedures.” No changes or suggestions may be incorporated into this clause of the document unless they are purely of a grammatical nature.

### **Purpose**

The goals of this publication are to inform, educate, and entertain the student body, faculty and staff, and community readers. We will report and analyze the issues that concern our students in a manner that is fair, impartial, objective, responsible, and accurate. While serving as an educational opportunity for the students of Annandale High School, we will also provide an open forum in which community members may express their attitudes and opinions relating to current issues that affect students' lives. This newspaper also provides a medium for commercial message for profit and nonprofit organizations. Although the newspaper is printed as a co-curricular class, the newspaper itself is not an extension of the curriculum offered by FCPS. *The A-Blast* holds no captive audience over its readers and the student newspaper is not subject to the educational standards of the Program of Studies. Though *The A-Blast* is full of information useful to a variety of readers, the newspaper is the “first rough draft” of the school’s history—produced by teenagers—not a textbook for didactic instruction.

## Nature of Content

### Diversity

It is the goal of *The A-Blast* to include material pertinent to the interests of students from all races, nations, ideologies, religions, beliefs, and cultures. Not only does *The A-Blast* give an equal amount of space and time to covering news and events that stem from all of the subcategories of these different areas, but it is the mission of *The A-Blast* to continually look beyond published material and seek to cover news and events in the interests of those not yet covered. *The A-Blast* prides itself on informing a school as diverse and varied as Annandale High School and continually strives to report on all multifaceted areas in full.

### News/Feature Coverage

*The A-Blast* will focus on feature and future coverage of school events, while giving community and national events secondary coverage. State and national issues that have a direct relevance to the lives of students will be given coverage through the "local angle," but this paper will not recount what has already appeared in other local and national media unless relevant to the lives of AHS students.

It is also the responsibility of this paper to report on social trends and take an in-depth look at what happens in the lives of our students. We will explore topics of teen interest such as drug and alcohol use, relationships, racial, gender, sexuality issues, college preparation, and health issues. While mirroring and analyzing our student body, we may, when necessary, "report on our reporting."

### Editorials

This publication will provide insightful commentary about the issues that are relevant to student life. Editorials relating to newsworthy subjects that are interpretative, critical, persuasive, appreciative, entertaining and sometimes visual will provide an analytical voice to the paper. Unsigned editorials represent the majority opinion of a quorum of the staff; signed editorials represent the individual author. Viewpoints expressed in this publication are not necessarily consonant with the opinions of the adviser or other faculty, administration, or school board. Opinionated articles will appear only on the editorials page(s), unless otherwise labeled as a review, analysis, or column. This publication will not endorse candidates for student office or for public office at any level, though signed articles written by individuals may do so. Readers from the community are encouraged to contribute to the discussion through letters to the editor and guest editorials. Equal time and consideration will be given to all viewpoints. All submissions and freelance material must comply with the legal standards of the editorial policy.

### Reviews

Movie, book, theater, and song reviews are an example of trivial stories that have an educational, redeeming quality. Reviews are editorialized, but balance in coverage will

be provided through interviews with the author/artist, or publication of lyrics or plot synopses. This newspaper will review both local and national artistic events and publications, and student reviewers will have working knowledge of the work he/she is reviewing. For example, a play review will be written by someone who has had theater experience and an album review will be written by someone who has followed the career of the artist as to use past works as a basis for comparison. Whenever possible, the reviewer will include quotations from the artist to help balance and "tell" the story.

### **Illustrations**

Photos, artwork, and graphs (both hand-drawn and computer-generated) will be used to support an accompanying story, or to stand alone for their own value. Editorial caricatures may distort the physical appearance of public figures, but not to excessive ridicule. Public figures include persons who hold an elected or appointed public office, or people who seek public attention or are prominent through personal achievements. Students are not considered public figures.

These illustrations will not make subjects look foolish for any physical handicap. Illustrations will also follow obscenity, libel, slander, and invasion of privacy laws and standards defined in the Profanity section of this policy. Illustrations will not occupy an inordinate amount of space as determined by the individual page editors.

### **Corrections**

Errors identified in a printed paper issue will be identified and corrected in the left hand rail of the Page 2 the following issue. The corrections will be made to [www.theablast.org](http://www.theablast.org) immediately. Journalism students will always take the swiftest course of action to correct mistakes, including talking in person with a wronged source or reader.

### **Trivia**

Trivia, though entertaining, will be given little attention in this publication. This newspaper will not sponsor or print popularity contests or polls, song dedications, "boy and girl of the issue" features, gossip columns, or other items of trivia that are void of news value. Features like "best place to buy ice cream," or "heap of the week" may be used if there is a redeeming, educational quality to the story. The Editorial Board will have ultimate say over what is deemed trivia or educational material.

### **Obituaries**

This paper treats the deaths of students, staff or faculty as news items that are given sensitive coverage. Cause of death will be published only if considered pertinent and newsworthy by the Editorial Board with input made by the adviser, and coverage will not "eulogize" the person by giving undue attention and space. Time and location of services will be published if deemed necessary by the Editors in Chief.

### **Controversial Issues**

Subjects that are controversial, thought provoking, and debatable will appear in this paper, but not without careful consideration by the editorial board. The board will be aware of the potential positive and negative effects of covering controversial issues, and will ensure that these subjects receive proper reporting, depth, objectivity and balance throughout the writing and publication process. This paper will focus on the issues of controversy and persons' behavior associated with the subject, not the personalities.

While acting within legal parameters, the staff will consider the following ethical questions when covering controversial subjects: Is the information accurate from multiple, credible sources (at least three)? Is it true and verifiable? Has the information been obtained through ethical, reporting methods? Has respect for the dignity, privacy, rights, and well being of people involved been maintained? What are the motives for publication: personal or beneficial to the public? How does this information benefit the general public? What is the public's need to know? What are the consequences of publication? Will the journalistic profession or reputation of the paper be damaged or somehow hindered in future newsgathering efforts? What are the consequences to the individual(s) involved? Should anonymity be granted to the source? What if the reporter is asked to reveal the source?

Before publication, it should be determined by a three-fourths majority vote of the editorial board that the controversial issue has truth, a justifiable purpose and a likely good consequence. The ensuing consequences cannot always be accurately predicted, but issues lacking in truth and justifiable purpose will not be printed.

### **Graffiti**

When instances of graffiti, or the defacement of property with images or letters and without the owner's consent, occur on school property or within the community, they shall be covered by *The A-Blast* only when newsworthy. However, in such instances, photographs of the graffiti itself will not be printed or displayed in any way in order to deter others from vandalizing property in order to gain attention.

### **Objectionable Material/Profanity**

*The A-Blast* publishes in accordance with the FCPS SR&R and the freedom of expression guidelines established in the *Tinker v. Des Moines (1969)* standard. Although the freedom of expression is a paramount right to be preserved, this publication will not publish material of any sort (printed words, artwork or photographs) that invades an individual's right to privacy, or is obscene, libelous, or slanderous as defined by state and community laws. Material that incites readers to create a clear and present danger of the commission of unlawful acts on school premises or the violation of lawful school regulations, or the material and substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the school will also not be published.

The editorial board shall be the determining voice in these matters and shall be convened whenever questionable material is presented. This publication also adheres to

the Student Press Law Center's Guidelines for Student Publications in matters concerning prohibited material.

*The A-Blast* understands the importance of being sensitive to reader tastes in the matter of profanity. The written word often carries more weight than what is spoken, and where what is spoken may not always be heard, people will always have the opportunity to reference this publication and reread what appears on its pages, in print and online.

Material considered profane by the community standards of the paper will not be used unless the words themselves have contextual relevance that, when omitted, would significantly change the meaning of the sentence and/or article. Of chief importance is the consideration of *who* said the words. For example, it is not news if a student curses. It is news, however, if a superintendent curses. The preferred method of quotation shall be (expletive) in place of the offensive word. When necessary, omitting certain letters of the word will be used to retain the meaning of a specific word. An example is "f---." This publication will follow this method to show sensitivity to its audience unless the editorial board deems the entire word should be published. The publication of profane words other than "damn" or "hell" must always be approved by a majority vote by the editorial board.

#### Nature of Production

##### Code of Ethics

All students working for *The A-Blast* must sign the following Honor Statement before beginning work on the newspaper after having read through *The A-Blast* Staff Manual, Editorial Policies and Procedures, and must sign the statement again at the start of every new school year that the student continues to work for *The A-Blast*

#### Honor Statement:

On my honor, I swear to uphold the ethics and virtues of *The A-Blast* as stipulated in *The A-Blast* Staff Manual, Editorial Policies and Procedures and as established by the tradition of *The A-Blast* including those of academic and journalistic honesty, impartiality, objectivity, accuracy and service to the educational community of Annandale High School and beyond.

I swear to abide by all procedures stipulated in the document including those dealing with the content and presentation of material in *The A-Blast* and decisions over such content. I will carry out the responsibilities of my position on *The A-Blast* to the best of my ability and will work agreeably and in coordination with my higher editors if there are obstacles in the production of my needed material.

**On my honor I swear that all of the work that I produce will be my own** and that I will always abide by the merits of respecting the work of others, abiding by the "three word" or paraphrasing plagiarism rules and rules regarding internet content or courtesy content. I realize that working for *The A-Blast* is a great responsibility, and I will commit myself to supporting its historic reputation through the addition of my own, unique voice.

### **Staff Writing**

All writings, editing, design, photography and distribution of this publication represent student journalistic efforts. Editorial board members must be enrolled in the Journalism II, III and IV classes. Students in these courses are required to contribute to this publication, and freelance work from students not enrolled in these courses is encouraged, but will be edited and printed under the page editor's discretion. The adviser never contributes written or photographic material to *The A-Blast*. However, he/she reads reviews and edits all published material, providing instruction and guidance throughout the publication cycle.

### **Bylines/Credit**

This paper wishes to recognize the work of its practicing journalists, as well as inform the readers who is delivering the news to them. Any story (longer than 300 words), artwork or photograph will be bylined and given credit. Stories that are not editorials represented by the paper will be bylined at the beginning of the article unless the story is placed on the rail, at which point the byline will appear at the end of the article, and photo credits will appear vertically at the lower right corner of the photo. The artist will sign artwork inconspicuously.

### **Anonymous Sources**

Reporters for *The A-Blast* under certain circumstances will choose to print information taken from a source without identifying the source by name, or, in another given circumstance, by any other identifiable information. The name of a source will not be printed only if printing the name will seriously endanger the source and only if the source is the only bearer of needed information.

### **Staff Dismissal**

A student may be released from his/her editorial or newsgathering position by failing to meet the requirements of the Journalism II-IV class, falsifying quotes or information, plagiarizing or repeatedly missing deadlines.

Each of these actions seriously impairs the publication's trust and relationship with the school and entire community. They will not be tolerated in any form.

Plagiarism is defined by using more than three consecutive words of another person's work or the deliberate paraphrasing of another person's work. In cases where plagiarism is questioned, a comparison of the original work and the student's work needs to be conducted by the adviser and Editors in Chief. The adviser will invite the student in question to defend his/herself.

Upon missing the first major deadline without approval of the adviser and the Editors in Chief (such as completion of a major story or page design), the student will be placed on

probation for the rest of the year. If he/she misses another deadline, the student will be dismissed.

Enrollment in the Journalism II, III and IV classes is a privilege, and not a right. The adviser will determine whether or not a student can remain in any of the classes.

### **Manner of Distribution**

*The A-Blast* is a fourth class matter published roughly every three weeks, with established publication dates announced at the beginning of the year. All Annandale High School students and faculty receive a free copy of the newspaper.

Distribution is held on either a Tuesday or a Wednesday, whichever is the first White Day. Distribution will be held during Flex and all staff members are required to participate and wear their staff T-shirts for a grade. On the day of distribution, the journalism class for that day is responsible for completing circulation. Circulation consists of folding, addressing and sorting all newspapers for subscribers. The method of circulation is to be outlined by the circulation manager, but must be completed in a timely manner.

All school board members and Cluster III leaders are sent a free copy of *The A-Blast* through the mail, and readers can subscribe to *The A-Blast* for \$15 per year upon request.

The A-Blast Online ([www.thea-blast.org](http://www.thea-blast.org)) is paid for and maintained by journalism students. It is hosted at a 3<sup>rd</sup> party Web site. It is not hosted by, paid for or officially connected with Fairfax County Public Schools or [www.fcps.edu](http://www.fcps.edu).

### **Printing Partnership**

*The A-Blast* is printed through an ongoing partnership with *The Washington Post* Springfield plant.

### **The A-Blast and the Public**

#### **Letters to the Editor**

This paper will provide an open forum in which diverse opinions of the students, faculty, and staff and wider community may be expressed in exercise of democratic rights. Submission of letters to the editor and guest editorials by any reader of this publication are welcomed. Letters should not exceed 250 words; editorials will be limited to 1,500 words. The editorial editor will edit for length, clarity, punctuation, and grammar. Letters and guest editorials will also be edited for legal and ethical concerns outlined in the profanity section of this policy. The editorials editor will always give the submitting author the “final word” in phrasing his/her words in *The A-Blast*.

All works must be signed. Names will be published unless special, justifiable circumstances warrant their withholding, which are determined by the editorials editor.



Both Editorials editors must ensure the signed name reflects the actual author of every letter/editorial via verbal or personal communication. This publication will provide equal space and adequate response time for other letters/editorials of opposing viewpoints. The editorials editor will determine when an issue has been given ample, balanced discussion space on his/her page, thus allowing room for other opinions relating to other issues. An abbreviated form of this policy will appear in every publication, including delivery instructions for letters/editorials.

### **Advertising**

This publication will solicit advertisements from merchants who sell products that are legally available to the student readership. Alcohol, firearm, and tobacco advertisements do not qualify. Political advertisements, individual student ads (including Valentines, personal, or classified ads) will not be solicited or published. The staff will review advertisements for services/products that may cause harm to students, such as tanning salons.

Published advertisements must be accompanied by a pre-signed, prepaid contract, unless the merchant has an established, one-year credit rating with this publication. Advertisement rates and payment terms are established within the terms of the contract. Public service announcements will be printed as space allows and do not require prepayment or contract signing. The Editors in Chief determine ad placement, and competing ads will be placed on different pages as space allows. Advertisements will not appear on the front page, in-depth or editorials pages.

*The A-Blast* reserves the right to reject and/or disassociate itself from speech (whether from students, advertisers or others) that is inconsistent with the school's educational mission. All advertisements must comply with obscenity, libel, invasion of privacy, and physical disruption guidelines established in the Objectionable Material/Profanity section of this policy.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

A member of *The A-Blast's* staff who also participates in an activity deemed worthy of coverage must recuse himself/herself from the reporting on that topic. These members shall not write the story or be quoted within the story unless he/she occupies a leadership position, such as club President, and the absence of his/her view would damage the integrity of the coverage.

### **Web/Online Policies**