



2025 Local News

Monitoring Project

**Misinformation, Omission, Denial,
and the failure to serve the public good**



Jeff Smith

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The author of this report, Jeff Smith, is a dedicated community partner and founder of the Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy (GRIID).

Jeff has supported the Urban Core Collective through his news monitoring project. His efforts provide invaluable insights into how local media narratives shape public opinion, particularly around our focus areas.

We are grateful for Jeff's commitment to amplifying the voices and experiences of historically marginalized communities in Grand Rapids. Insights from his media monitoring work help to support and inform our strategies and our collective efforts to create a more equitable and just society. Take a moment to read Jeff's words about the impactful work he's been doing.

—Raven and Alisha,

Co-Directors; Urban Core Collective

In 2025, GRIID conducted a study of four local daily news agencies - MLive, WOODTV8, WZZM13 & WXMI 17 - from January 1st of 2025, through the end of June 2025.

In this 6-month news study, I looked at three critical community issues:

- The Grand Rapids Public Schools
- Climate Change/Environmental Justice
- Public Safety/GRPD

I tracked these three themed news stories from the online portals of each of the four news agencies. All of the hyperlinks to those stories are part of [Appendix #1](#). In addition to monitoring all of these stories, I monitored the sources used in each story, the racial and gender makeup of the sources used (only for TV stories), and how the stories were framed. All of this data is included in [Appendix #2](#).

For the Public Safety/GRPD stories I monitored, I also tracked images of crime suspects that appeared on the three local TV stations, which I include in [Appendix #3](#).

What follows is a breakdown of the three critical community issues I monitored, with some content analysis.

Monitoring local news media is an important tactic that can help us all reflect on the kinds of information we are receiving. The way stories are reported (or not reported) can influence public opinion, as can the sources used and the way local news stories are framed.

It is true that we live in an information-saturated world, but what makes local news media unique is that they may be the only sources of information we have access to regarding what is happening in our community. Understanding this fact can help us see the tremendous responsibility local news agencies have to serve what the Federal Communications Commission refers to as “serving the public interest.”

In addition, it is important that we not just focus on individual news stories and what they mean. What media analysis has been saying for years is that we need to pay attention to the cumulative effect of coverage around issues like policing, public education, and climate change.

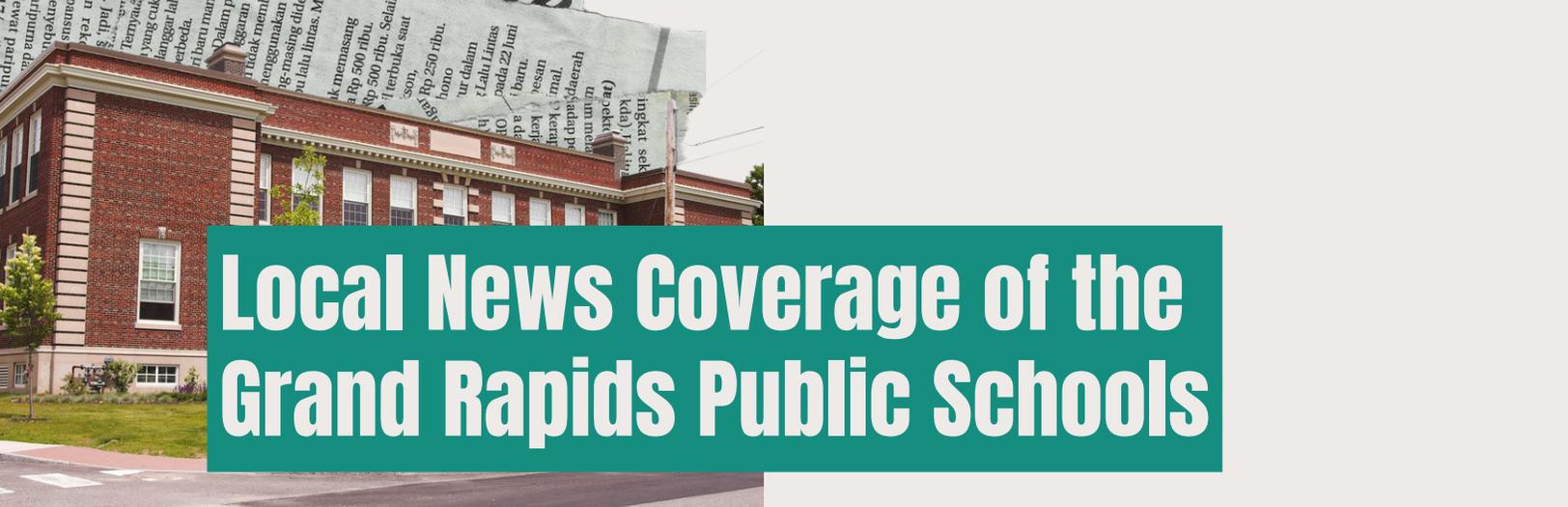




Summary of Findings

- The local news media primarily rely on sources from systems of power and privilege - the courts, the GRPD, and GRPS administrators, instead of utilizing more community-based sources for stories.
- Crime coverage dominates local news coverage and takes priority over public education and Climate Change.
- Local news coverage of the issues monitored in this study received superficial reporting, with very little investigative reporting, especially around public policy matters.
- Local TV news often reported on crime using suspect images, which were disproportionately images of BIPOC people, thus perpetuating racist stereotypes. (See [Appendix #3](#))
- Despite the fact that the first half of 2025 was one of the hottest on record, in the 9 local news stories that deal with extreme heat and extreme weather, only **once** were the words “Climate Change” used.
- A disproportionate amount of crime/community safety coverage also centered around the courts, especially since there was the before, during, and after coverage for the trial of former GRPD cop Christopher Schurr, who shot and killed Patrick Lyoya. The total number of crime/community safety stories was 432, with 199 of them related to Patrick Lyoya’s death and the Schurr trial.





Local News Coverage of the Grand Rapids Public Schools

Over the first 6 months of 2025, there were a total of 31 stories related to the Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS). Here is a breakdown by news agency:

MLive - 18 stories

WOODTV8 - 7 stories

WZZM13 - 2 stories

WXMI17 - 4 stories

MLive not only had the most stories about the GRPS, but they also did the best job out of the four news agencies monitored. The three local TV stations generally reported on issues like building construction, weather-related school closures or specific programs happening in some of the GRPS schools. (See [Appendix #1](#))

MLive did provide coverage of policy related issues, such as:

- School performance and graduation rates
- GRPS policies on Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) matters and whether or not they would adopt a Sanctuary policy
- Teacher salaries and contract negotiations
- Homeless student population
- A Statewide Ballot Initiative
- GRPS annual budget meeting

However, in most of the more policy related stories, MLive still relied heavily on the GRPS Superintendent, School Administrators, GRPS Board members and other GRPS spokespersons. GRPS students were only cited once and other local community members, which included the local teacher union, were cited only three times. However, the issues that these kinds of stories addressed were not covered adequately and there were too few stories that I could find that would be considered investigative. This was especially true in regards to stories that were not event specific, such as School Board meetings or the Budget hearing. Local news agencies need to devote a great deal more time to investigate issues like the annual budget, teacher salaries, community feedback and other policy matters that the public needs to know about, especially since public money funds the Grand Rapids Public Schools. (See [Appendix #2](#))

Local News Coverage on Climate Change

Of the three issues I monitored during the 6-month study, Climate Change received the least amount of coverage. There were only 9 related stories during the 6-month study combined for the 4 local news outlets that I monitored. Here is a breakdown of the stories by the local news outlet:

MLive - 4 stories
WOODTV8 - 2 stories
WZZM13 - 2 stories
WXMI17 - 1 story

Many of the first few months of 2025 have been the hottest in recorded history, based on several of the following independent studies:

- **State of the climate: 2025 close behind 2024 as the hottest start to a year**
- **Yale Climate Connections report for January 2025**
- **Yale Climate Connections report for May 2025**

None of the data reflected in these climate reports is communicated in the local news coverage, aside from one story on WZZM 13, which aired on January 9th. (See [Appendix #1](#)) The channel 13 story centered on the research of a GVSU Professor, which not only provided solid data, good sourcing, and the use of a local expert.

Unfortunately, out of the 9 stories about climate-related extreme weather, only once were the words "Climate Change" ever used, which happened to be the same channel 13 story. So few stories about extreme weather and only one story that uses the words "Climate Change" are a kind of climate denial. In this case, the denial is not that Climate Change doesn't exist, but it is a denial by omission. When news agencies choose not to report on Climate Change, it becomes a form of denial.

Equally important is that the lack of coverage doesn't contribute to greater public awareness or increased community action to address Climate Change at the local level. The lack of coverage also means that the communities most impacted by Climate Change, specifically BIPOC communities, are not being addressed, despite the significant human rights consequences.



Local News Coverage on Public Safety/GRPD

Compared to GRPS and Climate Change coverage, policing, the courts and public safety coverage dominated the 6 month local news study.

A disproportionate amount of crime/community safety coverage also centered around the courts, especially since there was the before, during and after coverage for the trial of former GRPD cop Christopher Schurr, who shot and killed Patrick Lyoya. The total number of crime/community safety stories was 432, with 199 of them related to Patrick Lyoya's death and the Schurr trial.

The local news primarily relied on the GRPD, Judges, and Lawyers as sources in public safety related stories.

There were very few stories that were investigative around policing and the courts, which could be understood that the local news internalizes and normalizes the values of those institutions.

There were a total of 9 stories that local news reported on the All Access GRPD TV Show, with no investigation or critique of what that show was designed to communicate to the public.

Out of the 433 stories that were about the GRPD, the courts or public safety matters, only once was there a story where the GRPD prevented a crime or violence.

Local News Coverage on Public Safety/GRPD

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As has already been noted, crime coverage, the GRPD, and the courts dominate local news coverage, and almost always from the perspective of those institutions. This has been a pattern during the last 25 years that I have been monitoring the local news.

What was different in this study was the amount of coverage around the trial of former GRPD officer Christopher Schurr, who shot and killed Patrick Lyoya in 2022. As noted in the Summary, nearly half of the crime/courts/public safety stories were devoted to the Schurr trial, before, during, and after, with 191 out of 433 stories.

The 4 local daily commercial news agencies that I have been tracking have spent a great deal of time reporting on the upcoming trial for ex-cop Christopher Schurr. I want to look at the number of stories, who may have initiated the coverage, the sources used, the omissions, and what narratives these stories have created.

Amount of local news coverage

The number of stories varies regarding the coverage for the upcoming trial of Christopher Schurr, but the amount of stories reflects the larger political tension that exists in Grand Rapids over those who unconditionally support the GRPD and those who have been calling for greater police accountability, the defunding of the GRPD, and even the abolition of policing. At the end of this post, I am including a link to all 46 stories that the 4 local news agencies collectively ran.

- MLive – 24 stories
- WOODTV8 – 8 stories
- WZZM 13 – 11 stories
- WXMI 17 – 3 stories

Local News Coverage on Public Safety/GRPD

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Who initiated these stories?

Most of the news stories that have been generated regarding the upcoming trial of Christopher Schurr for killing Patrick Lyoya have either been about the just selection and process or stories that came from either the legal team defending Schurr or the lawyer representing the Lyoya family. Of the non-jury stories generated, there were more stories that were initiated by the legal team representing Schurr than there were stories initiated by the lawyer representing the Lyoya family or community groups like the NAACP.

The legal team representing Schurr was definitely on the offensive with their own public statements and Press Releases, with MLive being the primary news agency to generate stories based on Schurr's legal team.

Here are several examples from MLive:

- [Former Grand Rapids officer's state of mind, not Patrick Lyoya's, focus of murder trial](#)
- [Will ex-police officer testify at his own murder trial in Patrick Lyoya's killing?](#)
- [Judge bars Taser demonstration at Grand Rapids police officer's murder trial](#)
- [Former police officer accused in Lyoya killing wants U.S. Supreme Court to hear civil case](#)
- [Christopher Schurr's attorneys experienced in police defense, high-profile cases](#)
- [Ex-Grand Rapids officer seeks gag order for Patrick Lyoya's family, attorney in civil case](#)

Local News Coverage on Public Safety/GRPD

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The lawyer representing the Lyoya family, the Kent County Prosecuting attorney, and community groups demanding justice for Patrick Lyoya initiated fewer stories combined compared to the legal team of ex-cop Schurr.

Sources used in the coverage leading up to Schurr's trial

Considering that there were more stories initiated by the legal team for Schurr, it is no surprise that those lawyers were the primary sources used. There were just a few times that local news consumers would hear from the lawyer representing the Lyoya family, very few stories with comments from the Kent County Prosecutor's office, and only 3 times out of 46 stories I tracked where community voices were included. There were also several stories that included what the news media often referred to as "experts."

Here are some examples:

- **Police experts clash over Patrick Lyoya's killing as ex-officer's trial nears**
- **De-escalation expert explains actions former officer Christopher Schurr took before deadly shooting of Patrick Lyoya**
- **SCHURR TRIAL: What to expect from jury selection to closing arguments**

While there might have been 46 stories created regarding the upcoming trial of Schurr, there have been two things that stand out. **First**, the local news media missed opportunities to do a deeper dive or investigation into issues like whether or not the racial makeup of juries will have any influence on the outcome of this trial. See the recent report, **Race and the Jury**, from the Equal Justice Initiative.

Local News Coverage on Public Safety/GRPD

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The local news also could have created stories by talking with people and organizations in the community that have been organizing fundraisers for the Lyoya family, marches, protests, and even those who have been arrested by the GRPD for demanding justice for Patrick Lyoya.

Second, most of the 46 stories generated have been recycling the same narratives about the GRPD killing of Patrick Lyoya some 3 years ago. This recycling of story narratives is a disservice to the public, and it disproportionately reflects a bias that favors the GRPD and how policing is done in Grand Rapids. If I were someone who hadn't already formed an opinion about what happened the day that Schurr shot Lyoya in the back of the head, I would most likely be swayed by the most recent pre-trial coverage.

Once the Schurr trial had begun, I wrote a series of articles on the GRIID blog that also centered on aspects of the trial that the local news media either did not address or addressed in a superficial manner.

Here are those GRIID blog posts:

New story omissions and narratives

As the jury prepares to render its decision in the Schurr trial, why is there so little attention paid to police killing civilians and cop convictions? <https://griid.org/2025/05/05/as-jury-prepares-to-render-their-decision-in-the-schurr-trial-why-is-there-so-little-attention-around-police-killing-civilians-and-cop-convictions/>

Responses to the mistrial of ex-cop Schurr, who killed Patrick Lyoya – Part I <https://griid.org/2025/05/11/responses-to-the-mistrial-of-ex-cop-schurr-who-killed-patrick-lyoya-part-i/>

Responses to the mistrial of ex-cop Schurr in the death of Patrick Lyoya – Part II <https://griid.org/2025/05/12/responses-to-the-mistrial-of-ex-cop-schurr-in-the-death-of-patrick-lyoya-part-ii/>

Local News Coverage on Public Safety/GRPD

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Here are those GRIID blog posts (cont'd):

New story omissions and narratives

Responses to the mistrial of ex-cop Schurr in the death of Patrick Lyoya – Part III <https://griid.org/2025/05/13/responses-to-the-mistrial-of-ex-cop-schurr-in-the-death-of-patrick-lyoya-part-iii/>

Chief Winstrom is now saying that Patrick Lyoya was killed because the GRPD was understaffed <https://griid.org/2025/05/15/42056/>

There are reasons why the Kent County Prosecutor will not re-charge Schurr for murdering Patrick Lyoya <https://griid.org/2025/05/22/there-are-reasons-why-the-kent-county-prosecutor-will-not-re-charge-schurr-for-murdering-patrick-lyoya/>

Mayor and City Manager statement after County Prosecutor's decision to not re-charge Schurr for the killing of Patrick Lyoya praises the GRPD and wants lawful and civil responses from the community <https://griid.org/2025/05/26/mayor-and-city-manager-statement-after-county-prosecutors-decision-to-not-re-charge-schurr-for-the-killing-of-patrick-lyoya-praises-the-grpd-and-wants-lawful-and-civil-responses-from-the-comm/>

I include these articles because they communicate two things.

First, these articles demonstrate the reality that local commercial news agencies don't question systems and institutions of power. In fact, I would argue that they begin with the premise that the GRPD and the local courts are both necessary and provide essential services to the residents of Kent Count. The other conclusion to draw is that it underscores the point that when commercial news agencies don't hold power accountable, the public needs other sources and other news or news analysis sources, especially around critical issues like public safety.

Appendix Table

Appendix #1

Appendix #2

Appendix #3