



Illinois Journalism Education Association

Journalism Department • Eastern Illinois University • Charleston, IL 61920

Dear colleagues,

Over the past six years I have contacted you about the successes of *The Pacer* and many of its staff members.

Their success has been predicated on a number of variables – hard work, cooperation from everyone in the building, but most importantly, passion for journalism – not just scholastic journalism – journalism.

Statistically, the bulk of *working* journalists in the United States are scholastic journalists. Present and past reporters and editors like Jimmy Hibsich, Matt Vasilogambros, Alexandria Johnson, Kristen East, Mike McKenna, Claire Brady, America Cordero, Salena Samani – and many other scholastic journalists who reflect the diversity of Rolling Meadows High School.

While many people consider journalism a dying art, just the opposite is true. Journalism as an art continues to flourish, however, the canvas on which it is presented is changing. While journalism is changing, one thing has not – the basic premise of the First Amendment.

Journalists in the United States have the greatest freedom of any country in the world – Freedom of the Press.

Monday, May 3 has been declared World Press Freedom Day when President Obama will host world leaders to address the need for a free and open press worldwide.

As you will note in the ad on the opposite side, which ran in the April 15 editions of *The Washington Post*, the Student Press Law Center, along with a wide variety of journalism organizations, urged President Obama to extend the nature of a free, open and responsible press to scholastic journalists as well.

Rolling Meadows High School has gained considerable notoriety in scholastic journalism circles, largely because of your support. It is my hope that you will take a moment to read the Washington Post ad and, if appropriate, share the message with your classes. Also, if you see a Pacer staff member on May 3, tell them how much you appreciate their ethical and professional journalism practice.

Thanks for your support and cooperation.

Regards,

Stan Zoller, MJE
Pacer Adviser
Vice President
Illinois Journalism Education Association

AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT OBAMA ABOUT WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

On May 3, the United States will, for the first time, play host to World Press Freedom Day, an event that will focus an international spotlight on the state of press freedoms in our own country as well as abroad.

You and your administration, and in particular Secretary Clinton, have been commendably forceful in pressing foreign governments to remove the fetters from online communications that obstruct the free flow of ideas. As Secretary Clinton said in her February 15, 2011, address on Internet freedom at George Washington University: “Some take the view that, to encourage tolerance, some hateful ideas must be silenced by governments. We believe that efforts to curb the content of speech rarely succeed and often become an excuse to violate freedom of expression. Instead, as it has historically been proven time and time again, the better answer to offensive speech is more speech.”

Regrettably, the United States will lack the full moral authority to advocate for world press freedom so long as our laws fail to effectively protect the majority of the Americans who gather and report news each day: Those working for student media.

The values conveyed by journalism – attribution, verification, fairness, accountability – are the values that every young person needs as a citizen of the online world. Because the professional news media cannot be everywhere, our society needs candid reports from “embedded” student journalists to tell us what is going on inside of our schools.

Yet far from embracing the educational benefits of journalism, school after school has done just the opposite. Those bearing the brunt are America’s journalism teachers, the best of whom go to work every day certain that the question is when, not if, they will be fired in retaliation for what their students write.

A generation ago, the Supreme Court rolled back students’ First Amendment rights significantly in its *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* ruling. We have now 23 years of experience with *Hazelwood* – a generation of students from kindergarten through college – and it is undeniable that *Hazelwood*, having done nothing to improve student learning or school safety, is a failed experiment on America’s children.

American’s most vulnerable journalists need those who have spoken out so persuasively against censorship abroad to speak with that same forcefulness at home. We urge your administration to publicly acknowledge the unfinished work of press freedom in our own nation, to denounce the shameful practice of stifling candid discussion of school issues, and to ensure that this World Press Freedom Day concludes with a global commitment to protect the rights of all journalists, even the youngest.

Get the facts
www.splc.org/wpfd



Paid for by the Student Press Law Center, Journalism Education Association, Society of Professional Journalists, College Media Advisers, Inc., National Scholastic Press Association, and Quill & Scroll International Honorary Society for High School Journalists

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