



## High school censorship: administrators should get real



By [Patriot-News Op-Ed](#)

on April 19, 2009 at 3:47 PM, updated September 22, 2009 at 2:30 PM



Last year, I wrote an article about censorship in schools for my own school newspaper after witnessing countless great ideas shot down because they were considered to be "too controversial."

Ironically, after being told that if I made the requested changes it would be printed, the newspaper adviser censored my article about censorship. When I asked why it was not in the issue, I was told that the subject material did not concern, nor was appropriate for the student body. Outraged, I printed out my own copies and distributed the article myself.

The U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights has existed for 220 years. The Bill of Rights grants American citizens the most basic of all civil rights and liberties: freedom of religion, freedom of the press and several others.

But most importantly, the Bill of Rights grants the freedom of speech and expression, a right that should not be taken for granted. These rights are guaranteed to all American citizens, but in the last 50 years, certain restrictions have been placed on them.

School environments have been restraining students through acts of censorship that infringe on students' rights to free speech and expression. It is becoming more and more difficult to wear a shirt or write an article without being punished for it.



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These acts of censoring minors should no longer be accepted as correct; rather, they should be viewed as undemocratic and unnecessary.

The topic of censorship of minors arose during the controversial era surrounding the Vietnam War, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of a group of student protesters, saying that students should not be required to check their basic rights, such as freedom of speech, at school doors.

The court declared that in school environments, students still retain their rights, as long as they are not causing a disruption and are expressing themselves in a peaceful manner. However, student rights were infringed upon when the Supreme Court ruled in the *Hazelwood vs. Kuhlmeier* case that censorship of school newspapers was constitutional.

The main argument for censorship is that all constitutional rights are relative, but not absolute. If school districts deem something inappropriate, they have a responsibility to protect the rights of the majority before the rights of the minority. High schools are comprised of students from the ages of 14 to 18; the younger ones need to be protected from controversial material.

Although schools need to protect those who might not want to view something a student might have written, censoring the student is not the answer. Almost everyday, we as high school students are being reminded that we are being prepared for "the real world."

Well, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but there's a lot of controversy in the real world, and sooner or later teenagers are going to be subjected to it. The age of reason is seven, and students are given another right: the freedom of choice. No one forces students to read something they don't want to. They have the freedom to choose what they want to view. Certainly high school students have the sensibility to know what they want to view and what they don't.

This is not an argument against censorship for students who want to express controversial ideas simply for

the sake of controversy. It's not so students can print obscenities and claim that it's OK because they have the freedom of speech or write gossip columns that infringe on other students' rights to privacy. This argument is about protecting opinions.

We spent our childhood being told to have our own views and ideas. Why is it that when we transcend into high school, suddenly our opinions are repressed just because they might offend someone else? Instead of exercising unreasonable censorship, schools should encourage students to express themselves freely, as a way to teach students to peacefully accept and tolerate different beliefs. By limiting these rights, schools are doing more harm than good.

Students should not be asked to abandon their rights at school doors. They should not be the subjects of constant censorship of school officials. The school environment is one of the few places that students should feel comfortable expressing themselves in an effort to grow and mature intellectually.

Schools are hurting their students by censoring them, not helping them. Although schools think they have students' best interests in mind, they are really infringing on their basic rights.

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