

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Student Free Expression Law

Date: Thursday, January 23, 2020 at 3:21:01 PM Mountain Standard Time

From: Ben Reed

To: Yanes Sergio, Jack Kennedy

Sergio and Jack,

I'm so glad you're fighting to make this change. While I personally haven't been threatened, things have been dicey for me before.

When the shooting at Arapahoe High School occurred in 2013, my students were greatly disturbed and distressed. The shooter at Arapahoe entered through a side door that was locked but had been propped open. At Standley Lake, we had a similar side entrance that always had rocks propped in it. For nearly a year, my students petitioned and pleaded with administration to do something about this. When no action was taken, the editors of the school newspaper decided to do a little investigating of their own.

In January of 2015, they released a full issue dedicated to school safety. In addition to looking at the failures in security at our school, they also investigated several other local schools. They scheduled interviews with the principal, but arrived early and attempted to enter the building from a side entrance. They were able to find a way in to every school but one. When the issue was released, district personnel pounced on the school immediately. Instead of praising the students for exposing flaws in the system that could be addressed, they threatened the editors with potential lawsuits, saying they could be liable if a shooting occurred as a result of their investigation. They did this in a closed door meeting without their parents' knowledge or consent.

After some time passed, however, the district did relent. Jeffco is in the process of alarming every side door in every school in prohibit entry and exit. And, as a result of my students' activist journalism, Standley Lake was the first school to have the alarms installed.

While the district personnel never took any action against me as the adviser, I knew I was taking a huge risk by overseeing this reporting. I knew that I could be removed from my position as adviser, and I knew I could land in a heap of trouble.

The proposed amendment to the Student Free Expression Law would ensure my security as an adviser. I would be able to encourage my students to take necessary risks to investigate sensitive subjects without fear of repercussions. Students must learn to take ownership of their world, to be allowed to speak truth to power when necessary and take hold of the reigns of the Fourth Estate in our communities. Without protection for the adviser, students may not be encouraged to do their real job as journalists. As an adviser, I can't teach them to the best of my abilities, and students cannot learn to the best of theirs.

I'd be willing to testify in person if you think it would be a good idea.

Thanks!

—
Ben Reed
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