

EDITORIALS

west opinions

Should school administrators be allowed to censor high school newspapers?

Staff



Evan Bauman

Yes, if the content is harmful to students and their educational opportunities.

Senior



Danika Meheux

No, because I feel that we should have the right to say what we want.

Junior



Priscilla Davila

No, because students should have the freedom of speech and press.

Sophomore



Abtaha Ahmed

No, because the students' writing should be protected by the First Amendment.

Freshman



Rexly Penaflores III

No, because students should be protected by the freedom of press.

Administrative overview not First Amendment issue



Zoe Ljubic
Editor in Chief

Every month after *West Word's* publication, the staff compiles over 90 exchange issues to send to schools from Florida to California. In return, *West Word* receives various exchange issues as well.

Typically, I sit down each month and flip through them in hopes of finding new, creative ideas for our publication. Instead, my attention invariably is drawn to the focus sections—and sometimes front page articles—on teenage love, sex and drugs.

Meanwhile *West Word* covers all the news around the school, previews each sports season and reviews new around town hot spots. It does not update students on the homecoming/prom king and queen nominations or the cutest couples. Lastly, it does not publish students' attitudes on drugs and sex. Other schools' papers seem to do all of the above on an almost monthly basis. As I have flipped through exchange issues, there has not been a single time when I have made it through five exchange issues before coming across a spread on dating or safe sex. Of course, the publication does quote those in favor of abstinence and the dangerous side effects of drugs; however, that is not the point.

Last month, the Stevenson High School's *Statesman* lost its adviser. This student newspaper has won the National Scholastic Press Association's Pacemaker Award and the Illinois Journalism Education Association's journalist of the year competition, according to www.chicagotribune.com. Due to a "centerpiece on casual teen sex encounters," school officials mandated a policy in which the paper must be submitted to administrators prior to publication. Instead of submitting the *Statesman* to the scrutiny of the administration, former adviser Barbara Thill stepped down. While there is not a bigger supporter of the First Amendment than I, I could not agree more with Stevenson school officials who believe this "hooking up edition" was "irresponsible, unbalanced and had no news value."

High school newspapers are not *Seventeen* magazine. Do not get me wrong, I do not have anything against teenage publications. In fact, I enjoy reading *Teen People* and *Seventeen*, but the material such publications cover is not journalism and has no place in any organ that calls itself a newspaper. Likewise, the gossip that flows through the hallways of the school must remain among students. Student newspapers should cover only appropriate news. Where

does teenage scandal fit into a newspaper? It doesn't.

If schools want to publish such information, they should do so in a magazine or underground publication not funded by or sanctioned by the school, school tabloids if you will, that are designed to contain creative and attention grabbing information. Tabloids contain gossip and scandal, while newspapers are designed to inform the student body about, well, news.

As for the *Statesman*, Thill should have swallowed her pride and continued to advise the newspaper. This is not, as many attest, a First Amendment issue. As *West Word* adviser Michael Conroy notes, "The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Hazelwood School District vs. Kuhlmeier* in 1988 that because school districts fund school newspapers, their administrators are the *de facto* publishers. If Rupert Murdoch, Sam Zell or any other owner or publisher does not like what a reporter writes in the *New York Post*, *Chicago Tribune* or any other paper, he is within his rights to pull it. No one bats an eye. If the government censors an article, *that* is a First Amendment violation."

Indeed, *West Word* submits all of its articles to Principal Kaine Osburn (as it did with previous principals) prior to publication, and this has proven to be effective. Osburn never has censored sensitive material, but he sometimes corrects misquoted or misinterpreted information regarding top stories. This allows the *West Word* staff to publish accurate information and maintain positive relations with the administration. We are not above going to the wall for a story in which we believe, but we realize that the principal has the final say. According to Conroy, only two articles have been pulled in his nine-year tenure, and those were for reasons that had nothing to do with inappropriate content.

Those who publish content better left to *Seventeen* do so for an obvious reason. The *Tribune* emphasized the fact that over 3,400 issues flew off the rack when the latest hookup edition in the *Statesman* was published. *West Word* would need three months to generate that type of circulation. The *Statesman* staff might argue that by publishing such information, readership will increase. They might believe that in order to get more students to pick up the paper, publications must give the students the full scope of teenage behavior. If that were the case, the only reason that would be valid would be if the *Statesman's* operating budget were self-generated by circulation and/or ad revenue. Since the administration intervened, this is obviously not the case. So, why the urgency to *give away* newspapers?

The goal of any facet of a high school newspaper is to educate, not merely to entertain. Unless high school journalists plan to work for *TMZ* or the *National Enquirer*, it is imperative that high school newspapers focus on maintaining journalistic standards and preparing student journalists for the real world, one in which publishers can expunge articles as they please and one in which the intimate details of people's lives are better left to the tabloids.

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West Word is a student-produced newspaper published monthly during the school year. Editorials represent the general view of the staff; otherwise, commentary pieces and columns reflect the views of the individual writer and not necessarily *West Word*. Replies to pieces from *West Word* are strongly encouraged as are letters to the editor reflecting the views of the school community. This correspondence can be delivered to *West Word*, located in room 3160. Letters may also be mailed to *West Word*, 5701 Oakton, Skokie, IL, 60077 or submitted to westword219@yahoo.com. Where noted, pictures courtesy of MCT Information Services are used with permission.

WestWord

STEM Lab to revolutionize math and science departments

Editorial

Recently, District 219 made an important decision to create the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) lab at Niles West. According to Superintendent Nanciann Gatta, this lab will function as a center for student and teacher-based research facility. The lab will also be utilized as a place for applied science classes to build curriculum-based projects. As the world moves toward more innovative teaching methods, establishing this new STEM lab will definitely broaden the horizons for learning and teaching methods applied at West. Thus, *West Word* supports the addition of this new STEM lab.

By utilizing the lab, students gain the opportunity to use knowledge they have learned in the classroom and actually apply it. Normally, students begin research and lab work in college. The STEM lab will introduce West's students to research work at an earlier stage in their lives. This is something that Ivy League schools and other notable colleges really appreciate.

Currently, the prestigious Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA) has a research-based lab on its campus. This lab has produced immense opportunities for its students and for the school as a whole. When the STEM lab opens, it will heighten West's science, math and applied science and technology departments to the level of such schools as IMSA.

Students also will gain insight on the work that is done in specific fields of sciences and engineering. This will help students plan ahead on their future, as it introduces them to career options.

The projects that students will take on in the STEM lab will enable collaboration between different classes such as applied sciences and laboratory sciences. Each student will be working together with other students and teachers. Such partnership mirrors group work these students will eventually come across in their

future jobs. Students will not only be building these projects, but also learning important collaboration skills that they will apply in their careers. Thus, the STEM Lab is preparing West's students for the real world.

The STEM lab will broaden the credibility and name of our school. Research conducted here at West will be reviewed by notable institutions such as Abott Laboratories and others. For a student participating in the STEM lab, gaining recognition from such intuitions can have infinite advantages.

Those who oppose the creation of the STEM lab claim that the \$367,500 that will fund this project is too much for the District 219

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budget to handle. However, *West Word* believes that the money will be well worth it. The investment will prove beneficial when our students get more readily accepted to colleges and jobs because of their work with the lab. Furthermore, one can't place a price on the students' unique learning experiences that they will gain from their access to the STEM lab. Kudos, District 219—the STEM lab is an inspired idea.



West fails to educate students on current affairs



Uzma Ahmad
Editorials Editor

Currently, the condition of America and the world as a whole is desperately declining. Our economy is in the tank, our country is involved in two agonizing wars, and the gap between social classes is exponentially increasing.

Yet, the majority of my peers remain completely uninterested and uninformed about the situations around them. Part of the problem for this lack of involvement is rooted in the fact that as students, we receive minimal information on current events in our classes.

Knowing historical dates, the metaphorical quality of a green light at the end of a dock and the symbols of the period table are only parts of the vast quantity of knowledge that students should strive to acquire. Information on the conflicts that currently pertain to our globe is another vital component of student knowledge. Being well informed about current events elevates student intellect and reason. Studies and discussions based on current problems promote diversity of thought. Thus, it is absolutely necessary for every student to be aware of the situations that are unfolding in the world around him/her.

Currently, West offers global problems, a class that is aimed at

discussing contemporary global issues. More important the class is designed to introduce students to human rights and examine human welfare around the globe.

However, this class is only available for seniors. Underclassmen are not given the opportunity of involving themselves in current affairs

As a participant in Model United Nations, many of my peers and I feel that conferences for this club are the only outlet through which we can broaden our knowledge of what is actually going on in the world around us. Involved in debates over real global issues, I feel as though such give and take would be extremely beneficial for the entire student body to discuss current events.

Some social studies teachers sidetrack onto the discussion of current affairs in their classrooms. However, most teachers tend to refrain from addressing global issues, perhaps because in this diverse environment, it might lead to controversy in the classroom, as students tend to view the world through the lens of their own beliefs and biases. School is a great place for students to acquire unbiased and credible information about any global issues. Social studies teachers should work to increase attention to current events in their instruction. Perhaps contemporary global issues could be opened to underclassmen; maybe another elective class (preferably one with a higher grade weight) could be introduced; at the very least, teachers could allot one day out of the week to discuss issues such as current politics, economy and foreign relations.

Many students around the school are unaware of so many of the conflicts and crises in which our country is involved. If we expect the youth of today to be an integral part of the solution to our global problems in the future, it absolutely necessary to raise their awareness of the issues that face us all.

Service America Act confirms Obama's promise for change



Rexly Penaflores II
Managing Editor

Last week, President Barack Obama signed the Serve America Act. According to the *New York Times*, the act seeks to increase the number of members in AmeriCorps, the volunteer program that former president Bill Clinton started during his presidency, and also increase the stipend to \$5,350. The act also plans to give volunteers a \$1000 educational award that could be passed on to the volunteer's children or grandchildren.

If there were any piece of legislation that could immensely help out the American public, this would be that legislation. Surely, this act is something on which legislators on both sides of the aisle can agree, one that will help Americans because it gives a sense of pride and patriotism and also a chance for some financial aid toward a college education.

In times such as these, it is highly beneficial that the public gets a boost. I am not talking about economics. Rather, I am talking about morale. Ever since the beginning of the decline of the economy, American society has not been the same. People are

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not spending as much as they used to in previous years. Crimes are at an all-time high due to lack of jobs, and radio stations are even having prizes such as posting someone's resume at a job website for six months. Let us face it. It is not exactly the Great Depression, but it is depressing for all of us.

This volunteer act could help people become more involved in the community and at the same time develop a sense of pride, knowing that their actions could spark a chain reaction, thus creating an even larger group of volunteers. The signing of the act occurred just when Americans needed it most.

This is not to say that the act is all about morale. Volunteers will receive a \$1000 educational award that they can give to their children or grandchildren. Nowadays, college tuition is becoming more and more expensive, and in the current economic climate, students cannot simply turn to financial aid or student loans anymore.

With this little bonus from volunteering, students can finally get the help that they deserve. Sure, \$1000 might seem very miniscule

As slogans go, I prefer "Yes We Can," from the President's campaign. Now, we can fully say those words with a true purpose

in terms of paying tuition and fees, but anything helps. To think that if even the smallest amount would help is something that would make people very optimistic.

Throughout his campaign, Obama talked about bringing change to the country. One hundred days have passed since he took office. We have seen a lot of change in the economy, politics and the everyday lives of Americans. I have lived in this country for nine years now and I have seen more positive change in the past 100 days than in the rest of my time in the United States.

If the President wanted to finish the pivotal first 100 days with a flourish, the signing of the Serve America Act did just that. I was tempted to say "Mission Accomplished," but we have heard that slogan before, with much less credibility.

As slogans go, I prefer "Yes We Can," from the President's campaign. Now, we can fully say those words with a true purpose. Yes we can come together as one whole nation to volunteer to help others. Yes, we can help our children with their college tuition by providing money from volunteering.

In a country so much in need opportunity and hope, this single act could have a much bigger impact than even the President might have suspected.