

New Voices in Minnesota: The Legislative Fight for Student Press Freedom

The year was 1965 and Mary Beth Tinker, a 13-year-old middle school student from Des Moines, was growing increasingly distressed by Vietnam war footage on TV. Years later, she recalled watching soldiers in body bags and Vietnamese children screaming and running away from burning huts. It was December, nearing Christmas time when families in the US gather to celebrate the holidays. To Tinker, this felt wrong. She was compelled to take action. Tinker and fellow students resolved to wear black armbands with a peace sign symbol to school on December 16 1965, as an act of protest against the Vietnam War.

A black and white photo of Tinker shows her and her brother triumphantly holding the black protest armbands up to the camera lens. Her short hair is tucked neatly behind her ears and is splayed out at the ends. She wears a proud, defiant smile as if to say, “You can’t stop me.”

Indeed, Harding Middle School’s administration could not stop her. Though the students who participated in the protest were suspended, parents of the offending middle schoolers sued Harding Middle School, claiming that it had violated their children’s right to free speech. The case advanced to the United States Supreme Court, and in *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969) the Court ruled that high school students “don’t shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gates.” The justices ruled 7-2 in Tinker’s favor, opening up doors for students to practice first amendment rights in public schools.

But this standard of free speech is no longer the reality for many high schoolers across the United States. In 1983, Cathy Kuhlmeier was a senior in a Journalism II class at Hazelwood East High School near St. Louis, Missouri. She and some classmates wrote about their peers' experiences with divorce and teen pregnancy for their school's newspaper, *The Spectacle*, only to have the principal delete those pages of the paper without informing the students before they went to print, finding the coverage "inappropriate." Kuhlmeier and her classmates appealed to U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit and won. The Eighth Circuit ruled that school newspapers are "public forums" that extend beyond the walls of the school – thus, school officials should only have the right to censor under extreme circumstances.

Hazelwood East officials appealed this decision and it landed in the United States Supreme Court, which overturned the Court of Appeals' decision in a 5-3 landmark decision. The Court ruled that student newspapers are not, in fact, public forums – rather, they are limited forums subject to editing and prior review. The student press, under federal law, is subject to lower levels of First Amendment protection than other media outlets.

More than three decades later, students in Minnesota feel the repercussions of this landmark case. Although 14 states have passed legislation protecting the First Amendment rights of student media outlets, Minnesota is not one of them. One Minnesota high school in particular takes advantage of its ability to censor all content that could potentially spark controversy.

Columbia Heights High School graduate Kira Greenfield, now a Macalester College first-year student, served as editor-in-chief for her school newspaper during her senior year. Columbia Heights High School is a 10-minute drive directly north of Minneapolis. The school is nestled into a residential neighborhood, a sprawling grid of modest suburban houses and untamed green and brown lawns. It is small for a public school, with around 500 students in total.

Greenfield rolled her eyes as she recalled an especially poignant experience of censorship from her high school principal.

“We did a [front-page story] on gun control,” Greenfield said. “We wanted to show both pro-gun-rights and pro-gun-control, and then a perspective piece from two different people that picked one of those sides.”

“Throughout that process, it was a day-to-day meeting with [our principal] of ‘what exactly can I say, how can I phrase this to make this okay?’” she continued with a hefty sigh. “And we came to the end of it, and he basically said ‘no, we’re not gonna run it,’ despite the fact that we met with him every single day to check on all these things, he was proofing everything. When it came to print, the day we distributed, he made us stop, go to all the classrooms, take all the papers back.”

According to Jill Jungen, former Columbia Heights high school journalism advisor, the school was protecting its increasingly poor reputation.

“Because we’re a first ring suburb, we started to get that perception of being ‘Ghetto Heights,’” said Jungen. She recalled a conversation with an acquaintance. After Jill revealed that she works at Columbia Heights High School, the acquaintance told Jill that her husband interviewed for a job there. However, he declined to take the position, as he had heard the neighborhood was “really dangerous.”

This perception was not entirely unfounded. According to neighborhoodscout.com, Columbia Heights has a crime rate higher than 87% of cities and towns in Minnesota. For a suburb with a population of 20,000, 158 violent crimes occur per square mile - that number is only 23 statewide for Minnesota, and 31 nationally. However, Jungen insists that Columbia Heights is not an unsafe place to live. She sympathizes with the high school administration’s investment in fighting back against the label of “Ghetto Heights.”

“I do understand how hard [Columbia Heights Administration] worked to change that perception of us,” she said. “And so I think that administration used that fear: they said ‘if you print things about us that are negative, we’re going to go back into that perception.’ I say well, have some faith and trust that we’re not going to.” She paused thoughtfully. “You can’t ignore the truth.”

In the wake of such incidents of censorship, the frontier of student journalism is a contested battle in Minnesota right now. The Student Press Law Center is a national non-profit organization that advocates for the legal protection of student press outlets. Their campaign titled “New Voices” aims to pass legal protection at the state level to ban unreasonable censorship of student media outlets. One Minnesota State Representative, Cheryl Youakim (D-Hopkins), is at the frontlines of this struggle in the state.

The Minnesota State Office building is easily overshadowed by the neighboring State Capitol, which is sculpted out of pristine white marble and granite, and overlooks a rolling grassy hill leading to downtown St. Paul. A golden sculpture of a horse-drawn chariot is the centerpiece of the building, perched atop the building’s main structure and standing upon its intricate rotunda. The much humbler State Office building faces the Capitol on the other side of Martin Luther King Boulevard. Its grey slate structure and red ridged roof stand literally in the Capitol’s shadow.

The inside of the building is a maze, and brims with activity during the legislative season, which takes place between January and May. Somewhere tucked within the web of offices, hallways and waiting rooms is the Office of Representative Cheryl Youakim (DFL). Youakim represents District 46B in the Hopkins and St. Louis Park area, two wealthy western suburbs of Minneapolis. Youakim is also the Chair of the House Education Policy Committee. Back in 2016, Hopkins High School and St. Louis Park High School journalism advisors, Jeff Kocur and

Lori Keekley, approached Youakim to propose legislation that protects student press. Keekley is the director of the Scholastic Press Rights Committee, an association of student journalism advisors who advocate for student press freedom through education and legal advocacy. Keekley's phone number is a hotline for student media outlets facing censorship across the country. Kocur is a member of the Committee. Both of these educators recognized that censorship was pervasive in student journalism programs in Minnesota, and wanted to take action.

Youakim was on board immediately. As a graduate of the University of Minnesota's journalism program, she understood the value of a free and open press. But the bill Kocur and Keekley proposed never got a hearing back in 2016.

"We [Democrats] were in the minority [in the House] and Representative Sondra Erickson (R-Princeton) was the chair at the time. And she wouldn't hear it. She wouldn't hear the bill," Youakim said. She shook her head and sucked her teeth in disapproval. "And so now that I'm the chair, we're gonna hear my bill," she chuckled.

The "New Voices" bill is numbered House File 1868 in 2018's legislative session. The bill promises that "a student journalist has the right to exercise freedom of speech and freedom of the press in school-sponsored media." The bill also ensures that "a school district or charter school must not discipline a student journalist for exercising rights or freedoms under

... the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.” These protections do not come without reasonable caveats, however. The bill explicitly neither protects defamatory, profane, and harassing conduct, nor does it tolerate speech that violates state or federal law. The bill requires schools to adopt and make public a journalism policy in line with these requirements.

The bill received a hearing in the House Education Policy Committee in early March 2019. Students, advisors, administrators and others all testified. It passed through committee and made it onto the General Register, meaning the bill was due to be heard on the House floor. The bill was incorporated into the House Education Policy Omnibus bill, a compilation of 25 education policy proposals.

However, the bill made no progress in the Republican-dominated Minnesota Senate. The equivalent bill, Senate File 2057, never made it further than an initial reading in early March, and never received a formal hearing. Furthermore, student press protections were not incorporated in the Senate Omnibus Education Policy bill. Student press freedom now awaits its fate in Conference Committee, where legislators from the House and the Senate will negotiate and combine the two bills into one. Whether student press protections will survive in the resulting joined bill remains to be seen.

“I just knew how important it was, in this day and age, for students to learn how to find their voice,” Youakim said. She clasped her hands together on the large redwood desk that sat front and center in her office space. “How to practice in a safe environment to do that, and learn the good standards of journalism, because those are kind of going by the wayside in our nation right now,” she continued, shaking her head.

The bill’s hearing in March 2019 in front of the Education Policy Committee brought many of the underlying tensions surrounding student press freedom in Minnesota to a head. Present to testify in support of the bill were St. Louis Park High School journalism advisor Lori Keekley, St. Louis Park senior Emma Yarger, Hopkins High School journalism advisor Jeff Kocur, and Minnesota Newspaper Association Newspaper attorney Mark Anfinson. Testifying against the bill were David Adney and Roger Aronson of the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals.

In a windowless room within the State Office building, Chair Youakim sat at the head of an oblong formation of chairs around a U-shaped table. Surrounding this center stage was an audience of about 20, many of whom were present to learn House File 1868’s fate. Youakim gave a brief overview of the bill - her voice conveyed a sense of urgency and conviction for the bill’s transformative potential.

“This is a bill I’ve been working on for about four years,” she said. “It’s close to my heart as a former student journalist. We have before us a bill that would allow student journalists, that learn journalistic standards, the freedom to practice their craft in a safe setting of our schools. This bill would allow student journalists to produce news under the supervision of a student media advisor without fear of complete censorship.”

Youakim walked through the bill section by section and explained the implications of each.

“You will see that school administrators still retain a lot of control,” she said. “School administrators would still have the ability to prevent students from pitching stories counter to the journalistic standards they’re learning, that are defamatory, profane, harassing, threatening or intimidating. If the story constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy, violates federal or state law, causes material or substantial disruption of school activities, or incites lawless action the story can be pulled. And a student journalist can also be prohibited from printing a story that’s in violation of lawful school policy or rules that have been adopted from the school or in accordance with our state school standards. So as you can see the administration still retains quite a bit of control. So you may ask – why do we need the bill?”

“AMEN” rung out from one unidentifiable audience member. Youakim ignored the outburst.

Once Youakim had summarized the bill for the audience, guests descended to the center of the room one-by-one to testify. Lori Keekley was first. In her journalism classroom, students are not subject to prior review from their administration. They are free to write about what they want. Keekley sees her journalism program as a model for how students can thrive when they are free from censorship.

“My students function under the ‘*Tinker*’ standard today,” Keekley said. “My editors make all of their own content decisions, and by empowering their voices, they learn not only to report on issues important to teens, but also learn the responsibility and importance of discussing these issues. By allowing students to robustly tell their stories they learn to research for content, context and to interview all stakeholders. They learn how to produce credible journalism.”

Every three Monday nights, staff members of the St. Louis Park *Echo* congregate in a small classroom within the St. Louis Park high school building complex. One of the concrete walls features the First Amendment in decorative blue and red script in a sprawling mural. Another wall is occupied by one rectangular white board with page counts and layouts for the night, and the rest of the wall space is an array of award plaques from student press organizations. Twelve desktop computers form a rectangle around the perimeter of the room. Sitting in front of them were *Echo* staff members at work.

Monday night is layout night. The students take their reporting, writing, photographs, designs, and worked to arrange it into one 12-page issue to be released the subsequent Wednesday.

Between 3:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. on April 15, the room was lively with chatter, but an occasional lull overcame the students as they became absorbed in their work. Keekley roamed around the room to answer some questions, but mostly to engage in lively and friendly banter with her students.

“I’m just kind of here to walk around and give advice. And they don’t always take my advice,” she added, chuckling.

The *Echo*’s February issue, copies of which were strewn about the room, is the result of these students’ work, and their freedom to work without prior review. The front page showcases an article on the government shutdown and its effect on the community, as well as a feature on the rise of youth-led activism in the United States. Further in, among the coverage of sports events and charity fundraisers, are articles on the school’s controversial attendance policies and two opposing op-eds on St. Louis Park’s decision against becoming a sanctuary city. These are the kind of stories that some schools may demand to review prior to publication, but St Louis Park’s administration does not do so. St. Louis Park students get to report on them, and their numerous accolades from newspaper associations indicate that they report on them well.

With journalistic freedom comes journalistic responsibility. At around 5:00 p.m., the students were well into their work for the night. However, the *Echo*'s two photo editors shared a panicked moment when they realized they did not know the identity of a student featured in a photo they were printing for a sports article. This means they cannot get her permission to use her likeness in print – because the photo was taken at a private school event, her consent is necessary. The editors wouldn't take the chance that this student will not notice or care that her likeness is used. Cutting corners is not an option for them. The photo editors frantically circulated the room, asking around to see if anybody could identify the student. Eventually, an *Echo* staff member was able to identify her. The photo editors breathed a collective sigh of relief.

These students do not get paid for their work of providing information to their local community. When asked, they told me that they do what they do out of love and passion for journalism and for the truth. They do not take their journalistic responsibility or commitment to journalistic ethics lightly.

Emma Yarger, one of these St. Louis Park High School journalists, was next to testify in support of House File 1868 back at the Minnesota State Office Building.

“As citizens of the US we have been granted with first amendment rights, and our position as students does not reduce our access to these rights,” she said. “Most of us cannot vote, therefore

this is the greatest opportunity for civil engagement in our school. *Echo* has taught me the importance of truth, especially in today's political climate.”

She described overseeing a younger student writer, who wanted to write an opinion piece about the encounter between Covington Catholic High School students and a Native American elder that caused media uproar back in January of 2019. The encounter occurred during a “March for Life” protest which is a mass demonstration against abortion in the United States in Washington D.C. A viral video showed several male students from Covington Catholic facing a Native American activist on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. One student stood at the front, grinning and staring down the elder as he stared back, beating a ceremonial drum. The student Emma worked with took to defending those high school student in an op-ed – a position that Emma vehemently disagreed with. But understanding her responsibility to fair, unbiased journalism, Yarger worked with the student to publish her piece. Yarger said that this experience is just This example of her commitment to fair journalism. But she believes all students can harness this understanding when given the opportunity to practice journalism without censorship.

Leading the charge against student press freedom are Roger Aronson and David Adney, Attorney and Executive Director for the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals respectively. Their testimonies leaned away from the optimistic tone of those leading up to it.

“This is a solution looking for a problem,” Adney said in his testimony. He did not buy the idea that censorship is an important issue, and he is concerned about school liability. As the former principal of Minnetonka High School in Minnetonka, Minnesota, his stake in this issue is quite different than that of students and advisors. He worries that a bill such as this one would allow student news outlets to print whatever they please, and that this could incriminate the school and its reputation. Aronson agreed.

“Frankly, we think it’s best that the adults set these policies,” Aronson said. “That’s what my clients are hired to do. You know, we didn’t control students, we try to influence them.”

Aronson’s words are drawn out and pronounced - as if he is trying to explain something to someone who just doesn’t get it.

These two echo the concerns of Columbia Heights High School’s principal: that allowing students to report on incidents that put schools in a negative light, administrators will take the blame, and may even be subject to legal action.

According to Youakim, such an instance of censorship occurred at Minnetonka High School. In January 2019, one unnamed Minnetonka High School student asked their peer to prom with a Nazi-themed poster featuring offensive jokes about the Holocaust. The student posted their proposal on Instagram of the pair holding the poster and doing a Nazi salute. The post sparked

viral outrage, and St. Louis Park High School students covered the incident in their school newspaper - as did NBC News and CBS. But Minnetonka High School students themselves were not allowed to cover the incident.

“We received confirmation from [a Minnetonka high school student] that because the St. Louis Park paper covered it, they were told they couldn’t cover the story,” Youakim said.

Adney was not the Minnetonka principal at the time of this controversy—he left the position in 2013 to work for the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals . However, he was subject to his own controversy during his tenure as Minnetonka’s principal in 2012. He sent out an email to the student body that was meant to clarify student dress code but made specific comments about “high-definition leggings” worn by female students wore in school. “Cover your butts up” were his exact words in a follow up interview with *The Star Tribune*.

“Ten years ago, I became known as the yoga pants principal across the United States,” he said some weeks after testifying. “The paper ran something on it, and it went across the whole United States. The reaction [to the yoga pants email] was far more positive than I would have remembered. But kids can frame that in a variety of ways.”

Adney's thoughts on news coverage of the yoga pants ordeal were not exactly clear - he never explicitly praised or condemned the way the media framed the story. Students' coverage of the controversy is not currently available on the website for Minnetonka High School's newspaper, *The Breeze*. Regardless, his experience becoming the center of a media controversy seemed to inform his opinion on student press freedom. He brought up the yoga pants incident both in his testimony for the bill and in a follow-up interview.

One word seems to come up over and over again in these testimonies – “self-censorship.” Youakim, Kocur, Yarger and Keekley make the case in their testimonies that, when students continuously face censorship of their work, they eventually no longer write important articles or engage with topics that could be controversial. They believe that when these students no longer think deeply and thoughtfully about the topics they want to write about, they lose the ability to think critically about the world around them.

“Last year we asked student journalists across Minnesota what they would cover if they were able to without fear of retribution or judgment,” said Keekley. “A sampling of these stories include everything from the vilification of conservative viewpoints, to racism, to where the money for their parking passes goes.”

But at the core of the argument against student press rights is a fundamental mistrust of students to accurately represent their school communities and other controversial issues. Administrators like Adney believe that this bill will lead to increased issues of liability for schools, in the event that students publish an article that puts the school district in possible legal trouble. Ultimately, Adney doesn't think that high school students can manage the responsibility to represent their school and grapple with difficult issues – there needs to be an administrator acting as a middleman. He makes a poignant analogy – the fictional “Tom” at the senior pep rally.

“Tom, the senior class president, is gonna run the pep [rally]. And the most dangerous thing [that the student can use],” Adney said, “is the microphone. And you give it to Tom, and you say ‘okay, run the pep [rally],’” he pauses. “You would never do this, there’s not a single principal that would allow that in the world.”

In other words, Adney believes that by giving students a platform, some are bound to abuse it. He thinks that teenagers cannot be trusted with the responsibility of expressing themselves freely, and by allowing students this freedom, administrators will suffer the consequences. But advocates make the case that students do in fact have the maturity to reasonably express their voice. In the United States, young people are forced to contend with a rapidly changing and increasingly uncertain world. Economic inequality, gun violence in schools and climate change pose a threat to the future that high schoolers face. But these young people fight to make their

voices heard, and have a broader platform than ever before to do so on social media. From the Parkland High School students confronting politicians to Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old Swedish high schooler who started an international movement with her school strike demanding climate action, young people are leading movements for transparency and social change. Advocates for New Voices think that this is what their movement comes to— students’ freedom to report on important events and controversial issues that affect their lives.

Response to the testimony from House Education Policy was mixed; some Representatives expressed unfaltering support while others raised concerns. But one comment from Representative Glenn Gruenhagen (R), who represents a south central region of Minnesota, stirred the meeting more than others.

“I need an article in front of me that somebody has censored in our school district and I want to look at that and see why our current policy is inadequate to address our concern,” he said. “Until I see a series of examples like that, I have a hard time supporting changes based on allegations and circumstantial evidence.”

The lack of a testimony from censored students or advisors was a hole in the argument for student press freedom that Gruenhagen ripped open. Keekley admitted students are reluctant to come forward out of fear of retribution from their school administrations. It is, in fact,

exceedingly difficult to find people willing to share their stories of censorship publicly. For instance, the only people willing to speak out about the censorship at Columbia Heights are those that are no longer enrolled or employed at the school. This makes their point difficult to prove – if they can't give examples of censorship, then perhaps they cannot prove that legislation preventing it is necessary?

An audience member requests to comment.

“I'm Glenn Morehouse Olson. I am an advisor from St. Francis High School that did experience censorship and I'm actually nervous to be here. It was a censorship issue that actually hit national news and I survived the most difficult and terrifying year of my life as a teacher,” she said.

Saint Francis is a small town of around 7,000 people, an hour north of Minneapolis and St Paul. St. Francis High School is the biggest high school in the region, enrolling nearly 2,000 students. Olson traveled all the way from her rural town to be at this hearing.

Olson is a decorated journalism educator, having received the Dow Jones Special Recognition Advisor Award in 2007 and the Journalism Education Association Rising Star Award for the 2007-2008 academic year. She is a member of several journalism associations and has served as

a journalism educator for 10 years. But back in 2007, Olson feared losing her job over a controversial photograph that her students wanted to print.

In December 2006, Olson's students expressed concern that a photo of last year's school play, "The Children's Story", had been removed from the hallways without any notice or explanation. The play is an allegorical reimagining of what America would look like if the country had lost the Cold War. It centers around a third-grade classroom in which the teacher has been replaced by a foreign agent, who brainwashes the students into supporting America's occupation. The photo of the play in the hallway featured a scene from the play in which the students are seen cutting up the American flag, which Olson said was actually a simulation – they did not dare cut up a real American flag in front of an audience. Those students were actually holding tatters of Fourth of July regalia on stage in the photo. Nonetheless, the photo was removed from the hallways, and the staff of St. Francis' newspaper *The Crier* wanted to know why.

"[We learned that] one of the assistant principals seized the photo and said it was problematic," Olson said, months after her testimony in front of the Education Policy Committee.

"The theater kids see this as a slap in the face to their hard work and dedication, that this image representative of their play has been removed," she continued. "A discussion ensues on why it was removed without asking any of the theater people."

Staff members from *The Crier*, upon learning about the controversy, knew they wanted to cover the incident.

“The headline was ‘Concerns over Context,’ she said. “The principal had been interviewed, as well as the theater teacher, theater students, and veterans. The principal was afraid that if war veterans walked into our school, they’d be offended by seeing this picture.”

The story was ready to run on the front page of *The Crier* that week. However, when the students wanted to print the censored photo along with the article on the front page of the issue, a conflict ensued. *The Crier*’s Editor-In-Chief, who thus far had a good relationship with the St. Francis principal, met with him to let him know that they planned to print the censored photo.

“The principal was angry and started yelling at my student,” Olson explained. “The student had the foresight to say, ‘I don’t feel comfortable having this conversation with you without my advisor present.’”

“The principal followed him down the hallway and...” She paused, “well, he tore us both a new one.”

St. Francis high school's principal froze the paper's assets. The students could not go to print with the photo in question on the front page. At the time, the school district of which St. Francis is a part had a '*Tinker*'-like policy with regards to student journalism, meaning that administrators could only censor students in very specific circumstances. On *The Crier's* website's "about" page is a policy expressing that their newspaper is an open forum for student expression, in which students make final decisions about the content. Though *The Crier* had previously clashed with their school's administration, this was the first time the administration actively attempted to censor an article. This one controversial photo led to months of tense meetings between the *Crier's* team and school administrators.

"Lawyers got involved," Olson said. "Students talked to the Student Press Law Center, and the [American Civil Liberties Union] sent someone to present during a school board meeting. This was months of drawn-out difficulty."

The incident actually ended up making news headlines – first being covered by local outlets Pioneer Press and Karel 11, and making it on the front page of the *Star Tribune*, Minnesota's largest newspaper company. *USA Today* ended up covering the incident. After months of turmoil, the conflict came to a resolution.

“We compromised,” Olson said. “We printed the article. The article changed from being about the censorship of the photo in the hallway to the censorship of the photo in the paper. We agreed to print the article with a blue box on the cover that said ‘originally there would have been a photo but it was censored by the principal.’”

To Olson’s surprise, the principal agreed to print the censorship disclaimer rather than the photo itself.

“At one point the principal, on record to my students, said ‘what happens if we print the photo anyway?’ and the principal said [I] could be fired for insubordination,” she said.

Olson’s job is now no longer under siege since she and her students came to an agreement with the school administration. But despite the compromise Olson came to with school administrators back in 2008, she is haunted by the experience to this day.

“I still have post-traumatic stress. I have a different principal now, it’s awesome, but still if I go to the principal office, I have a panic attack,” she continued.

Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier (1988) took away much of what *Tinker* gave to high school students—the right to express one’s full First Amendment rights while on school grounds.

Minnesota students are fighting to bring back the ‘*Tinker* Standard,’ but it is unclear how far they will be able to go. With very little momentum in the Senate, student press freedom in Minnesota faces an uncertain future. In conference committee, when the Minnesota House and Senate come together to draft a joint Educational Policy omnibus bill, there is no saying whether New Voices legislation will make the cut. Legislators will meet every day to workshop the omnibus bill until May 20, which marks the end of the legislative session. If the press freedom amendment is cut from the omnibus bill, it will die this legislative season. But Youakim plans to reintroduce it come January 2020.

Youakim admits she has no idea whether or not the 180 words outlining a new standard for student press freedom will make it into the final draft of the Education omnibus bill. In conference committee, a few have asked questions some questions about it, but its contents have been largely overshadowed by other provisions that make up its 138 pages.

“It’s an ongoing process,” she said.

Though New Voices has momentum in Minnesota, it is not the only battleground for student press freedom. In fact, several instances of censorship and prior review have made it onto national headlines in recent months.

In March 2019, students from Bear Creek High School in Stockton, California wanted to profile one of their fellow students for their newspaper, *The Bruin Voice*. The National Scholastic Press Association recognizes their newspaper as one of the top high school papers in the country. The student featured in the article is pornographic actor (she is 18), and the students wanted to write a story about her that would humanize her and show the reality of her work and life. When the principal learned about the article in question, he asked for a copy of the article to review prior to publication. Their staff advisor Kathi Duffel refused.

Senior members of the Bear Creek administration threatened to fire Duffel. She consulted an attorney from the Student Press Law Center. National coverage of their story ensued – it was picked up by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Associated Press* and others. The students were able to print the story following negotiations with the school district. Nonetheless, the incident showcased the prevalence of censorship and clashes between high school administrators and student journalists.

At the beginning of the year, the Student Press Law Center declared 2019 ‘the year of the student journalist,’ and have revamped their efforts to promote statewide legislation protecting student journalists from prior review. A New Voices bill passed in Minnesota could be just what the movement needs to turn the tides in the United States, setting a precedent for students across the

nation to practice journalism without fear of censorship. Regardless of what happens to the bill this legislative season in Minnesota, the fight for an end to censorship is far from over.

“This is the foundation of democracy,” Olson said. “I really think that if we want to teach students to be good citizens we need to teach them about the first amendment. After all, journalism is the only profession protected in the amendment.”

##