



February 9, 2010

Carolyn Ross
Superintendent of Churchill County School District
545 East Richards Street
Fallon, NV 89406

Principal Kevin Lords
Churchill County High School
1222 South Taylor Street
Fallon, NV 89406

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Dear Superintendent Ross and Principal Lords,

The ACLU of Nevada recently learned of your decision to support the printing of a story in the Churchill County High School student paper by student Lauren MacLean involving issues of public concern about state choir auditions. We write to commend you on your principled and correct decision to protect the First Amendment rights of your students to engage in appropriate investigative reporting. While Supreme Court precedent gives schools some leeway over school-funded newspaper content, we believe that permitting relevant school journalism on a topic of obvious public interest vindicates important First Amendment principles.

We understand that you made this decision in spite of continuing pressure from a teachers' union to remove the article. The ACLU of Nevada believes that the right to free speech is not only a fundamental part our state and federal Constitutions, but a core part of our American civic character that all schools and teachers should embody and pass on to their students.

Your decision to respect student journalism speaks well of the District, and also provides students with a real-world example of constitutional principles in

"It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech . . . at the schoolhouse gates."

-U.S. Supreme Court, *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969)

action. The ACLU truly believes that our civil liberties are an essential part of the skill set our future leaders need to participate fully in life in this great nation. We applaud your decision to permit the student paper to serve its function of informing the school community about topics of interest.

Thank you again for your wise decision to stand up for student rights.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee Rowland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lee Rowland, Esq.
Northern Coordinator
ACLU of Nevada

CC: Lauren MacLean, c/o Michael Nelson, advisor for The Flash
Steve O'Donoghue, California Scholastic Journalism Initiative
Dean Jerry Ceppos, Reynolds School of Journalism
Student Press Law Center
Churchill County Education Association