

The following is a **sample press release** that might be issued by a student media staff to contest administrative censorship. A press release provides accurate information — with a point of view — to news media, community members and others who might provide public attention or support. It generally follows a standard news story format, similar to that shown below. In addition to providing the basic facts, a press release often includes quotes from those involved and/or their supporters that offer their perspective on the controversy (and that are often used verbatim in third-party news coverage). It also tells those interested where they can obtain additional information. Because a press release is often the public's first news of a controversy or conflict and their first contact with the students involved, it is essential that it be well-reasoned, well-written, accurate and polished.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 11, 2008

Principal Confiscates Student Newspapers Claiming They 'Would Hurt School Spirit'

Students say censored column raises legitimate concerns about quality of education they receive, plan anti-censorship protest; press lawyer says censorship is illegal

CENTRAL CITY — More than 1,000 copies of Central High School's student newspaper remain locked away in the principal's office and CHS students say the time has come for them to take a stand to contest what they allege is an unfair and unlawful act of censorship by school district officials.

According to *Student Times* Managing Editor Jessica Diaz, she and two other student editors met with CHS Principal Barbara Smith and district Superintendent Tim Riley Monday afternoon, but came to no agreement.

"As far as they were concerned, the matter is closed. It's not. Locking up newspapers because you don't like what's in them is just not something government officials can do in this country and expect people to simply shrug their shoulders," Diaz said. "We intend to fight this."

Smith ordered CHS custodians to confiscate all copies of the April 4 issue of the *Student Times* shortly after the newspaper's printer delivered them to the school last Tuesday.

Smith told the staff she confiscated the newspapers because of a student opinion column that claimed there is a "lack of motivation" from students and staff at school, Diaz said.

Diaz said administrators told her and her staff that the editorial "reflects poorly" on the school and would "hurt school spirit and morale."

In the *Student Times* column, Opinions Editor Devery Sheffield wrote that he felt CHS suffered from a "lack of motivation on the part of both students and staff to get the most out of their educational experience at Central." Among other things, he pointed to students who showed up unprepared for class and too many teachers who showed little passion for their work and "make it obvious they are simply counting the days until retirement."

"Such attitudes about teaching and learning create a less-than-ideal educational environment, which may help explain Central's declining standardized scores," he wrote.

School officials did not dispute the facts contained in the editorial, Diaz said.

Frank LoMonte, executive director of the Student Press Law Center — a nonprofit group near Washington, D.C., that provides legal help to student media — said the administration's justification for withholding the newspaper is not legally sufficient.

"The First Amendment makes clear that public school officials can't censor otherwise lawful student speech simply because they think it makes the school look bad," LoMonte said.

Diaz believes the censorship is all about school officials wanting to protect the school's image.

"They want a public relations newsletter that is full of happy stories. Well, the fact is we are a newspaper. We report the news — and not all news is happy news. We think Central High School can be better than it is. That's all we are trying to say. And — as students at Central most affected by what goes on here — we think we should be allowed to say so."

To protest the district's censorship, Diaz said the *Student Times* staff will cover their mouths with tape and silently distribute copies of the First Amendment to students as they arrive on campus Thursday morning before the opening bell.

She said the staff has also created an off-campus Web site using home computers, where they have posted the contested editorial as well as other information about the controversy.

"We are proud of our award-winning newspaper and the work we do and we want our readers and other community members to make up their own minds about the censored editorial," Diaz said.

The Web site address is: <http://www.studenttimescensorship.com>.

Contact:

Jessica Diaz
Editor in Chief
Student Times
(555) 267-1896
jdiaz@isp.com

Frank LoMonte
Executive Director
Student Press Law Center
(703) 807-1904
www.splc.org

The Student Times was founded in 1957 and is the award-winning, student-edited newspaper at Central High School in Central City, Anystate.