



May 28, 2024

Bruce Doughty
Board of Education President
Glenbrook High School District 225
3801 W Lake Avenue
Glenview, IL 60026
Sent via Email: boardofeducation@glenbrook225.org

Re: Public Response to the *Etruscan*

Dear Board President Doughty:

We write to you concerning the unenviable task of sorting through public comment during this evening's board of education meeting, in which the recent *Etruscan* yearbook publication has become the subject of intense dispute. The Student Press Law Center and the Journalism Education Association's Scholastic Press Rights Committee stand in strong support of the student journalists who published the yearbook spread in question, and would be happy to discuss with you and your fellow board members questions or concerns you may have regarding applicable legal provisions related to student press freedom. Those especially include the [Illinois Speech Rights of Student Journalists Act](#), and your own Parent and [Student Handbook](#) (1.36 - Guidelines for School-Sponsored Publications, Productions and Websites).

The Student Press Law Center (SPLC) is an independent, non-partisan organization of attorneys that, since 1974, has helped students of all ages participate in civic life and learn essential skills, ethics and values through the vehicle of journalism. Our hotline provides free legal services to student journalists and advisers. As such, we have assisted with matters of controversy arising from yearbook publications across the country, including [within your own district one year ago](#).

The Scholastic Press Rights Committee supports free and journalistically responsible student media programs through its work with student journalists and their advisers as they develop critical thinking skills, engage in ethical decision-making and protect diverse viewpoints in their coverage.

The law is clear in this context: the student journalists control the content of their output under Illinois law. 105 ILCS 80 provides “the appropriate student journalist is responsible for determining the news, opinion, feature, and advertising content of school-sponsored media.” At issue here is an opinion generated by an interviewee student, and opinion is specifically listed among the statute’s covered speech. Nothing in the targeted passages consists of unprotected speech under the law.

We urge you not to give in to the anger of those, many of whom are from outside your community, who have targeted the student journalists and adviser for reporting on the varying sentiments of their student body. There are very real conversations to be had about the opinion expressed - which is why it is protected speech - but many of the messages the *Etruscan* team have received from across the country go far beyond that. The safety of your students and faculty, including those surrounding the *Etruscan*, is paramount, and we hope that you release a statement memorializing that priority. We further urge you to trust the instinct and analysis of the building principal involved; she is getting it right. It is incredibly difficult to stand in the shoes of such an administrator in the trenches, wading through an ever-expanding quagmire of messages of outrage and threats related to lawfully-reported opinions expressed in student media, something we have unfortunately witnessed across the country far too often over the past months.

We also wish to clarify that rancor from beyond your community is a reaction to an abridged version of what was published in the yearbook. One student voice is featured without the other side, which the students reported with diligence and accuracy. Complaints of bias are unfounded here. Instead, some have taken it upon themselves to publicize far and wide the identity of a student speaker and student editors and wish harm upon them. Surely, the district’s priority should be to put a stop to this as best as it can while upholding the rights of the student journalists as enshrined in the above law.

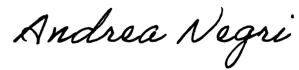
We finally urge you to disregard calls for disciplinary action against the yearbook adviser, tasked with imparting best practices of journalism and upholding the rights of her students, and not to control the content of the publication, as Illinois law assigns that role squarely to the student journalists. Any form of adverse employment action against the yearbook adviser here would be inappropriate and incongruous with the law.

Again, we stand ready to assist in conversations and brainstorming as to how to proceed amidst such a tumult of emotion and outrage. Know that the student journalists in your district are well-taught, and have done nothing to deserve the clamor and indignation that they are currently facing. We hope to hear from you, and thank you for your time and talent.

Respectfully,



Jonathan Gaston-Falk
Staff Attorney
Student Press Law Center



Andrea Negri
Scholastic Press Rights Director
Journalism Education Association