

*Thank you Dr. Blystone and the members of PSPA for this honor. I am proud to represent high school journalism.*

I have a confession to make.

I am up here with a political agenda. No, I'm not running for office, but I am campaigning nonetheless. I am campaigning to keep student journalism alive in my area.

Let me explain. I can honestly say I have always been proud of the district in which I teach because the school board, administration and community have always been very supportive of my efforts as a teacher and adviser of the school newspaper. I take pride in the fact that my school administrators have never asked for prior review. They have always supported me when the paper's content was challenged.

So, you can imagine my surprise last spring, when I learned that the future of my journalism program was in jeopardy.

It was a matter of economics. There were major budget cuts in education across the state, and our district was facing cuts, too, as a result. The school board was scrutinizing class sizes and contemplating the value of classes being offered. Talk of furloughs echoed through the halls. From a fiscal standpoint, it didn't look advantageous for an English teacher to be teaching a handful of students in a journalism class when I could be teaching a packed room of 30 students in a required language arts class.

I stood in my principal's office defending my journalism program. It was at that moment, that I realized just how much my program meant to me. The student newspaper was worth fighting for.

I have the opportunity to work with the best students in the school every day. These are the students who will graduate from high school and make a difference in the world. They may not all go on to be journalists, but they have wonderful careers ahead of them. I know this because journalism students are unique. They have an innate ability to challenge and question. They are curious about the world and want to be active participants. High school journalism exemplifies the goals of education. So, why would anyone want to exterminate media programs? Money.

When I marched out of my principal's office last spring, I was angry, but I realized much of the decision was out of my hands. I knew what I needed to do. The first thing I did was call an emergency meeting with my editors. I told them what was going on, and THEY came up with a plan.

It is the journalism students who will save student media. At my school, my editors went to the school board and promoted their successes. They recruited students to sign up for newspaper in unprecedented numbers. They held a summer journalism camp, and most importantly, they started to speak up and be advocates for themselves. As a result, the school newspaper is currently stronger than ever.

All of you sitting here today need to speak up, and use your student media as a forum to challenge your communities, and defend student journalism. As Dr. Blystone mentioned in conversation with me this morning, "A school without a forum for students to have a voice, creates apathetic students."

It is also important to network with other school newspapers and attend such events as this sponsored by PSPA. Gathering ideas and challenging your staff to be competitive will result in a better quality publications. Awards and accolades speak volumes when you return to your school districts and promote your media programs.

Thanks to you, I now have another reason why my school board should continue to support my school paper, the *GM Lancer Ledger*. It is more difficult to eliminate the school newspaper when it is under the direction of the Pennsylvania Journalism Teacher of The Year.

So, while I am humbled by this award, this award means more to me than you realize. I will continue to campaign to keep my program alive in my district because I believe scholastic journalism is worth the fight.

Thank you.