

The People

CONSTITUTION WEEK

SEPTEMBER 17-23

Essay Contest for Students Grades 5-8 and 9-12

In 2004, Congress decided that "Constitution Day" should be observed in schools each year on Sept. 17 with educational programs about the history and signing of the Constitution. To help recognize Constitution Day, newspapers serving New Hampshire schools, the state Supreme Court and Nacky S. Loeb School of Communications present an essay contest for students in grades 5-12.



The rules of the essay contest are simple:

- Essays must be postmarked by Oct. 1, 2010
- Open to all New Hampshire students and those served by participating papers in Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont
- Essay not to exceed 300 words
- Essay should clearly identify the following information: student's name, school, grade, hometown, teacher's name, teacher's email address and phone number
- Submit teacher to one of the sponsoring newspapers listed below
- Each student can submit one essay. Duplicate entries will be disallowed
- Each newspaper will select one winner from grades 5-8 and one winner from grades 9-12
- From these winners, the state Supreme Court will select one grand-prize winner in each age category
- Each winning essay will be published in the participating newspapers
- Winners, along with their families and teachers, will be invited to a special reception at the state Supreme Court in Concord. Statewide winners will be invited to the annual First Amendment Awards presented by the Nacky S. Loeb School of Communications, Inc.



Essay Question:

In your opinion, should schools be allowed to discipline or suspend students based on something they posted on Facebook or some other social networking site? Or for something they said in an e-mail? Use examples.

Many students use Facebook, Twitter, My Space, You Tube and other social networking tools, as well as e-mail, to communicate with friends and classmates. Recently schools have become concerned about what students are saying in some of the things that have been posted on the Internet. When some students were disciplined for what they posted on the Internet, they went to court saying that their constitutional right to free speech was violated:

- In Florida, a high school senior was suspended for three days and kicked out of her AP classes because she created a Facebook page encouraging students to voice complaints about an English teacher. The student was disciplined even though she took the page down two days after she created it and the teacher she was talking about never saw it.
- In Pennsylvania, an 18-year-old student was suspended for 10 days after he used a computer at his grandmother's house to make a fake webpage on MySpace about his school principal. Some teachers complained classes were being disrupted because students were talking about the page.
- In Connecticut, a student was prohibited from running for senior class secretary because she posted a derogatory message about school administrators on her blog after a battle of the bands she had helped organized was cancelled. The student argues that the punishment did not fit the crime. The judges said they sympathized with her, but said decisions on punishment were up to school officials, not judges.

Some things to think about:

- Does it make any difference where the online communication or webpage was created or where the message was sent from?
- Should schools ever be allowed to read students' messages and then take action against them for what they said?
- Should students be allowed to post their opinions about teachers and students on the Internet?
- Does it make any difference if a message referred to a teacher or to a student?



Thank you to the following newspapers for their participation:

NEW HAMPSHIRE UNION LEADER CONCORD MONITOR THE CALEDONIAN-RECORD

The Telegraph NACKY S. LOEB SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS The Keene Sentinel

VALLEY NEWS The Eagle-Tribune PORTSMOUTH HERALD Derry News

For more information or to contact participating newspapers visit:
www.courts.state.nh.us or www.loeb.school.org