

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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We stand with free speech

Staff Editorial

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

These are the timeless words stated in the majority opinion of the 1969 Supreme Court case [Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District](#). Back then, the court's decision in this case made history after it declared that the suspension of public school students who wore black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War was unconstitutional.

This was a landmark ruling primarily due to the fact that the Supreme Court ruled in a broad sense that public school students have free speech and expression rights so long as there is no substantial disruption to another students' right to an education.

Unfortunately, the court [has yet to side](#) with any public school students in First Amendment lawsuits since the Tinker case, and now the time has come again for the highest court in our country to rule on yet another free speech issue. [Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L.](#) is a court case that is going to define the free speech rights of public school students for decades (see "What's the reach on free speech?"). Both the district court and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit have sided with B.L. The



Voting results of the Knight Media staff in regards to this editorial.

initials "B.L." represent the cheerleader's name, [Brandi Levy](#), but her name was abbreviated when the lawsuit was initially filed by the American Civil Liberties Union.

The big question before the court is something that could not have been anticipated in 1969 with the Tinker ruling. Social media did not exist back then, so the question of whether or not a school has the right to regulate off-campus speech was not on the court's mind because there were no social media platforms leaving written evidence of off-campus speech. Levy's case is now catching national attention, and opinions on this issue vary from person to person regardless of political ideology.

For example, President Joe Biden has [voiced his support](#) for the Mahanoy Area School District in this case for the sole reason that he believes that off-campus threats of violence and cyberbullying need to be within every school's disciplinary jurisdiction. However, many of

the justices appointed by Democratic presidents have indicated support for Levy in their oral arguments — indicating that this issue is one based on how individuals interpret the Constitution rather than on their political beliefs.

We, The Prospector, strongly support Levy and the ACLU in the Mahanoy case because of the dangerous precedent that is set if the ruling goes in favor of the school district. If schools are suddenly granted the right to regulate and punish students for off-campus speech that does not disrupt the

educational process, we will be living in a censored society that is the antithesis of every principle this country was founded on.

In this country, the free speech and expression rights guaranteed to all Americans — including us high school students — are sacred and cannot be infringed upon. Contrary to what the Mahanoy lawyers are arguing, we do not support cyberbullying or off-campus school threats in any way, and [the current laws in place](#) already protect the school's rights to punish students for this kind of behavior.

Even with the Tinker ruling, a Prospect student does not have the right to walk into a classroom and shout "fire" because when a student makes a threat like that at the school, they are disrupting the educational process. When a student harasses and bullies another student online, they are breaking [state anti-bullying laws](#). The narrative being pushed by the school district that free speech advocates are advocating for bullying is laughable. Yes, Levy was acting childish in her reaction to not making the varsity cheerleading team, but that aspect of the case is irrelevant and a mere distraction from this case's impact. Turning a very serious free speech issue into a fake war against cyberbullying is a desperate attempt by a school district that is clearly in the wrong to overturn the rulings of two federal courts.

This time it is "F*ck cheer," but next time, it could be a student speaking out against [a sexist dress code, a biased school curriculum or an unfair bag search](#). Our free speech rights are slightly regulated at the schoolhouse gate, but if the Supreme Court rules in favor of the school district, our cell phones become the new gate and that means our speech will always be regulated.

That isn't democracy. ➤

Summer brightens as camps open

Since I was in 7th grade, every summer I would take a bus filled with kids ranging from my age all the way down to six-year-olds to Camp MacLean in Burlington, Wis. The stuffy coach bus was filled with the sounds of excited children, tired teens and the occasional adult telling everyone else to calm down.

The hour-long ride was hardly interesting; there was never anything fun to look at



MAEVE MOLINA
Executive Features Editor

outside the widows, aside from the cow or horse you'd see every few towns. But once I saw the wooden arch and the hanging sign of Camp MacLean, I knew I was about to have the best time of my life.

Summer camp, a Disney Channel summer experience like the ones in the corny kids shows, is real, believe it or not. The whole idea of sleeping in a cabin with strangers and sharing a bathroom with every girl there is an experience that I'm sure every kid dreams of.

But in all seriousness, my best summers were spent on the rock wall, zip lines, kayaks and, yes, communal bathrooms in the "middle of nowhere" YMCA summer camp. It is true what the corny shows say; camp really is a home away from home.

My sophomore year, I was hired as a junior counselor at Camp MacLean, which has been my dream ever since my first year at camp. I wanted to be the cool counselor — the one who showed the campers what an amazing summer they would have. I wanted to be the counselor that makes kids come back to camp.

I wanted to watch those little kids have a summer they would remember for the rest of their life.

I had been hired and was waiting to get my pack list for the upcoming trip, but like everyone else's summer plans last year, it was cut short before it even started.

Camp MacLean announced that its gates would be closed for the summer of 2020. The moment I received the email that was basically firing me from my dream summer job,

it felt like COVID-19 had taken everything from me. It felt like the world fell down upon me and said "Screw you; no fun summer for you."

COVID-19 shut down [62% of camps](#) all across the country during the iconic summer of 2020; now, a year later with summer approaching, summer camps are once again starting to get prepped for the sounds of young children and teens coming through the wooden gates and having the summer of their lives.

Yet the question remains: how will this summer be compared to the last? Since our life is not yet back to our normal, how can camps go back to being what they were?

Summer camp is a big deal. Not only to the campers, but to the counselors, administrators and the camp itself. It was devastating when the camps shut down. The closure left campers and staff disappointed, and it was predicted that the industry took a [\\$16 billion revenue hit](#). Many camps lost all the revenue from camp registration, special trips and additional merchandise sales.

Like schools, opening summer camps back up required lots of planning and setting up. CDC guidelines include a section about summer camps and how they can operate while being safe. Like in other public spaces, all campers, staff and visitors in camp will have to wear masks at all times with exceptions for certain people with approved medical conditions. Exceptions are also made for certain settings or activities, including eating, swimming or sleeping.

Many camps will also be cohorting their campers. These cohorts, or "pods," are groups of campers and staff that stay together throughout the day. This will [minimize exposure](#) to other people at camp. Campers and staff will be assigned to a specific cabin group and unit.

Camp MacLean is also restricting the mixing between their cabin groups; the campers will take part in activities, like rock climbing, arts and crafts and archery only

with members of their assigned cabin group. This is different from previous years where campers would be able to do these activities with any camper from any cabin.

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cartoon by
Ondine Cella

