

Column: The gray area of student speech



Recently, the Supreme Court ruled 8-to-1 in favor of former high school cheerleader Brandi Levy, who was suspended from her team after sending a profane rant to friends on Snapchat.

In *Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L.* the court decided that schools act in loco parentis (in the place of parents) during the normal school day, but that this power did not extend absolute control outside of school grounds.

The case was not groundbreaking; rather, it places merely responsibility on the parents of children to monitor activity after school. In other words, the decision bluntly reiterates the common duty of parents: "protecting, guiding, and disciplining."

School administrations come out unscathed. The supposed victory for greater freedom in public schools does not upturn any recent precedent, nor delineate any new protections of speech. In fact, tough questions about student speech on social media still lie ahead. "Because off-campus speech made through social media can be received on campus ... it often will have a greater proximate tendency to harm the school environment," wrote Justice Clarence Thomas in his dissenting opinion.

While the Court borrowed its "substantial disruption" reasoning from the landmark 1969 *Tinker* decision, numerous speech cases since then in the academic arena have favored suppression. In 1986, the justices found in *Bethel School District v. Fraser* that public schools have the right to discipline a student for giving a speech at a school assembly that is indecent, although not obscene. Two years later, in *Hazelwood School District et al. v. Kuhlmeier et al.*, they established that the First Amendment offers weaker protections to curricular student newspapers established by public schools than to newspapers that have been established independently by students or are designed as forums for student expression. And in the 2007 case *Morse v. Frederick*, the court found that the First Amendment permits schools to ban students from showing messages promoting the use of illegal drugs at school events.



Teachers union wants SLPS to mandate COVID-19 vaccines for all employees

ST. LOUIS (KMOV.com) – The union that represents teachers and staff at St. Louis Public Schools is pushing for a policy that would require all employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

“We are at a specific point in time in the pandemic with pediatric outbreaks and newly announced federal vaccine approval that the union’s leadership believes it is time for a strong response,” union spokesperson Byron Clemens said.

There are two exemptions the union would allow:

- An established sincere religious objection to vaccination
- A medical condition that would prevent vaccination

Additionally, the union proposes all students who are eligible for the vaccine be vaccinated in order to be in the classroom. They also want vaccinations to be made available at schools within the district. Some parents support the proposal.

"I'm all for it," said Tealethia Lee.

While others told News 4 they're firmly against a vaccine mandate for students.

"My kids will be going to virtual school," said Anecia Taliaferro.

A spokesman for the district said superintendent Dr. Kelvin Adams is in favor of requiring employees to be vaccinated but hasn't taken a stand on a mandate for students. The school board was scheduled to discuss the topic at a school board work session Tuesday evening.

Currently the Ferguson-Florissant, Hazelwood and Kansas City Public Schools are requiring that teachers be vaccinated. According to a Missouri National Education Association (MNEA) spokesman, that union also supports requiring vaccinations for school employees, coupled with testing for those who are not vaccinated.

The school district is already testing staff and tracking COVID-19 infections.

Hazelwood School District: Expect bus delays during first week of school

Officials cite new safety protocols and construction as the reason for delays

FLORISSANT, Mo. — One of the largest school districts in St. Louis County is thanking parents in advance for patience when it comes to bus service.

The Hazelwood School District sent a brief memo on Monday reminding families to expect delays the first week of school.

The district said new safety protocols and construction in north St. Louis County will likely delay bus service.

"To help the process, parents/guardians should make sure their student is wearing a mask when they arrive at the bus stop. Additionally, be advised that each student will be assigned to a specific seat. The aforementioned steps will assist our mitigation and contact tracing efforts," the district said in a statement.

Hazelwood has more than 17,000 students. The majority are returning to the classroom for the first time since March 2020. Last spring, Hazelwood became one of the last districts in the St. Louis region to resume in-person learning. However, fewer than 7,000 students chose to return to class. The majority stayed virtual for the remainder of the school year.

As kids return this year, the district is requiring students to wear masks on the bus and in school buildings.



University City Area High School Sports: The Week Ahead

UNIVERSITY CITY, MO — Wondering what's in store for prep teams in the University City area? Patch and ScoreStream have you covered with this week's scheduled games. Missouri and the University City area are filled with crosstown rivalries and top tier teams that make for some great local matches.

Among the local games coming up, the University City Lions will challenge the **Hazelwood West High School Wildcats Friday, August 27th.**

Fan attendance may still be limited at certain games due to the coronavirus pandemic, so it's important to reach out to the venue for guidance on admission, masks and social distancing before game time.

Here's the schedule for the next two weeks of high school games:

University City Lions — Boys Varsity Football Vs. Hazelwood West High School Wildcats

- **When:** Friday, August 27th, 6:00 p.m.
- **Where:** Hazelwood West Football Field