

Free Speech Under Attack Part II: Curriculum Sabotage and Classroom Censorship

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The Elimination of Ethics in Education

My name is Elle Caldon, and I am a student at MacArthur High School in Irving, Texas. Thank you to the U.S. House of Representatives Oversight Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties for providing me the opportunity to take part in the nationwide battle against the repression of free speech in classrooms. I will be sharing the pressing failure at my school since the censorship of the formerly permitted GSA stickers. The proscription of a sticker abruptly transfigured to the uprooting of revered teacher, Ms. Stonecipher, reconstructing the sticker plot to now be a targeted case of restriction on expression.

During the weekend of August 27-29, administrators covertly removed the rainbow stickers from the campus, an incoherent gesture that left students and teachers disorientated, panic-stricken, and, most exigently, insecure. Grievously, students and teachers' perceptions of acceptance and assurance linked with the vision of safe space stickers vanished. Perplexity prevailed, and after Ms. Stonecipher vocalized the circulating confusion when the stickers evanesced, she was curtly removed from my newspaper class on September 16. As a student in Ms. Stonecipher's newspaper class and a member of her Philosophy club and Uil Journalism team, I have been forced to contend with an academic downfall that many other students can, unfortunately, empathize with. Before Irving ISD compelled Ms. Stonecipher into a mandatory leave, she dedicatedly and diligently taught English 2 honors, managed the only newspaper, journalism, and yearbook classes, and sponsored Uil Journalism, Philosophy Club, and GSA.

Since the deprivation of Ms. Stonecipher, students, teachers, and outside supporters have made every effort to keep their concerns on the school board's agenda -- measures that have been disregarded and barred. Personally speaking, administrators and district officials have coerced me to veil my values, and I have been degraded and knowingly overlooked when questioning and challenging the district's motive behind terminating a teacher that thought the world of her students and that would outperform other teachers to proffer prime educational insights of literary texts, writing, and philosophy. The scheme to obliterate curiosity is a rationale I do not coincide in nature with and has only heightened the grave destruction since the loss of Ms. Stonecipher.

Last year, Ms. Stonecipher taught me AP English Language and Composition, a course that left me with keen enlightenment on analyzing and crafting arguments and kindled my pursuit to study law. Ms. Stonecipher was the first teacher that had a constructive response to my writing, which instilled the merit of words in my perception of the world. Ms. Stonecipher introduced me to journalism culture and vitalized and supported my interest in joining her newspaper class as the Editor-in-Chief. As the new newspaper teacher this school year, Ms. Stonecipher invested her wisdom and permeated her passions with students to turn the less than 5 newspaper writers into a lively 30-student staff. At every turn, Ms. Stonecipher truly transcended the responsibilities of her job; within two weeks of school, the newspaper staff had a brand-new name and design concept and over 15 articles in production. However, succeeding the leave of Ms. Stonecipher, our virtually reached intent to produce the school's first physical newspaper came to a brisk ruin.

After her disappearance, Ms. Stonecipher's English, newspaper, journalism, and yearbook students were relocated to sit in the gym for one week without any lesson plans and

unescorted by justification. Once we were provided a permanent substitute, the newspaper and journalism classes were undervalued and obliged to complete the English assignments for her English 2 course, an action that felt like a dissuasion of student publication. On September 29, I met with a school administrator to enunciate the newspaper mishap and lay bare what happened to Ms. Stonecipher. The administrator convinced me to believe they were oblivious to the different classes Ms. Stonecipher taught and were “not the one who contacted HR.” The administrator promised a follow-up meeting with me, but this discursive level of information I received marked the end of our conversation.

The newspaper stall sustains. The article topics we are qualified to cover are bounded. In November, I interviewed Ms. Stonecipher’s students about how they felt about her disappearance and investigated what students were facing when the stickers came down. I composed these themes into a news article, and on November 9, I was ordered to hold off on submitting my story because it would be prohibited from making it in the school newspaper regardless since it encompassed “personnel matters.” Soon after, our next newspaper assignment was to write a persuasive statement to argue why our chosen topic was “important enough” to be news, with a statement at the bottom that said “not every topic will be approved,” which seemed like a direct reaction to the article I produced.

Bearing a resemblance to the way the administration curbed Ms. Stonecipher for questioning the uncommunicated ban of the safe space stickers, I feel like the district is averting students from investigating the indecipherable leave of Ms. Stonecipher. In a discourse I had with a district official, I imparted the educational crumble since Ms. Stonecipher has been absent, and the response I received was to take the angle of my complaint off of Ms. Stonecipher. The

crackdown on free speech at MacArthur High is more than an absence of a sticker; it's an absence of ethics in education.

Link to my newspaper article: <https://dallasvoice.com/we-will-not-back-down/>