

BROOKSPEAK

Pebblebrook High School Student Newspaper

991 Old Alabama Road • Mableton • Georgia

May 10, 2005

Joseph Redden
Superintendent
Cobb County School District
514 Glover Street
Marietta, GA 30060

Dear Mr. Redden,

At the beginning of this school year, along with the assistance of our adviser, Jonathan Stroud, we were able to resurrect Pebblebrook High School's student newspaper. After much training, fund raising and preparation, we began publishing BrookSpeak.

The paper has been well received by the students and staff, but our most recent edition was not received favorably by the Pebblebrook administration. Their negative reaction was in response to the fact that the front page article profiled two students who were facing the upcoming difficulties of being mothers and students simultaneously. According to e-mail correspondence obtained by a BrookSpeak editor under Georgia's open records law (Ga. Code Ann. Secs. 50-18-70 to 50-18-77), on the same day Principal Randy Bynum objected to our front page article, he informed our adviser, Jonathan Stroud, that the class would be deleted from the 2005–2006 class schedule.

Principal Bynum also canceled the Literary Magazine class (also taught by Stroud) and a proposed Introduction to Journalism class. Directly before ordering that next year's newspaper class be deleted, Bynum complained that the content of the newspaper was an ill representation of the school and would have preferred to see more articles about the "good things happening at Pebblebrook" on the front page. Five days later, in an e-mail to a BrookSpeak editor, Bynum justified his decision to delete all journalism courses by claiming that his reason for canceling the newspaper was due to budget cuts in the school district.

We, the staff of the BrookSpeak newspaper, believe that the enclosed documents provide sufficient evidence that Principal Bynum's decision was made in order to censor the newspaper and not due to budget cuts. We believe that this is a violation of our First Amendment rights. In a recent U.S. District Court decision, *Dean v. Utica Community Schools*; 345 F.Supp.2d 799 (E.D. Mich. 2004), the judge ruled that school officials could not censor a student publication without a valid educational reason. As a limited public forum, we believe Principal Bynum's decision lacked a valid educational reason, and therefore is unconstitutional.

We are currently in contact with the Student Press Law Center in Washington, D.C. and have been advised of our rights in this matter. Please have a Cobb County School District lawyer review the enclosed materials. We believe he or she will come to the conclusion that the decision to delete Pebblebrook's 2005-2006 journalism classes is indefensible.

By canceling the student newspaper class, Principal Bynum is violating students' freedom of speech, and we hope you will reverse that decision. Furthermore, the school year ends in less than two weeks, which leaves us little time. Over fifty students have already gone through an application process and have been accepted into next year's journalism program, but are unable to register because the classes have been deleted from the registration forms. We hope to receive a response in writing from you by the end of the school day tomorrow, May 11.

Should you decide to uphold Principal Bynum's decision, we plan to send a press release, a copy of this letter and the enclosed e-mail to the local media in hopes of gaining the support of the community.

Respectfully yours,
BrookSpeak Editors

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