

**Grades 9-12**

**Winner**

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9<sup>th</sup> Grade

*Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier case*

Imagine this: you've just been appointed as one of the top writers for your school newspaper and you decide to write an article that breaks the barriers of easy conversation and avoids general cliché topics. After you spend weeks researching and writing, when it's time to publish, you are told that your subject is too touchy to be published in a school newspaper. Would you accept this decision and move on, or would you do what students from Hazelwood School District did and question your first amendment rights being challenged? In *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, the students who wrote for *The Spectrum* learned from the Supreme Court how their first amendment rights truly applied when they were on school grounds. The Court ruled in the school district's favor that the denial to publish the article was reasonable.

In many ways this case has challenged my understanding of my legal protections. When I think of my rights in a situation like this, I first think, although out of context, "You have the right to remain silent." From as long as I can remember, students have been taught that when an adult or a teacher tells us something, that's final and there is no point in arguing. We have also been taught that when we step on school grounds, we lose the legal protections and the rights that we have as American citizens. But, this case changed the way I saw this because *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* proved that while yes our rights aren't as broad when we are on school grounds, they are still there. In this case about freedom of speech, I learned that the school can only deny the publishing of an article if it "materially and substantially interferes with the requirements of appropriate discipline," or if it is not appropriate for the ages that will be reading the article. I was shocked when I learned this because it was so different from what I went my whole life learning.

In *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, the Supreme Court ruled that in specific circumstances the school can censor what the students try to publish. So how does this apply to my rights as a student? These students who wanted to publish this article felt like their rights to freedom of speech and their rights to express something they felt passionate about were violated, while the school was trying to protect the other students and families who spoke on the topics. I had a personal experience that relates to this struggle. In my EAST class, we were working on loosening the stigma that surrounds mental health. We planned to build a website that would allow students to share their stories of getting over a mental health condition, but we were told no due to the risk of other students being cyber bullied. We then asked if we could make it anonymous so that students would be at less of a risk of being bullied. Denied again. So, was it reasonable for us to be told no? I think it was. I initially thought that we should have the right to build awareness about mental health, which is not talked about as much as it should be, but after I put myself in the place of our principal, I realized that the reasoning behind saying no was a good one. This experience showed me that this case can directly apply to my rights.

When I initially read this case, I was very on the fence with whether or not I agreed. But, when I really thought about it, my decision came down to the why. Why did the students feel as though they had their rights violated? Why did the Supreme Court make the decision they made? But most of all, why did the school deny the students the right to publish the article? In the case background it states that, "The principal was concerned that the unnamed students could be identified, and that the parents discussed in the divorce story had not been given a chance to respond." I do agree with the reasons as to why the principal rejected the article, but I feel he should not have completely denied it; instead, he should have allowed them to make revisions. So I have to say that I agree with the Supreme Court because I think that when they said, "the

school can only deny the publishing of an article if it “materially and substantially interferes with the requirements of appropriate discipline,” they were very precise. I think the principal had the full right to say no to that article, but I think that he could have revised the articles or changed them somehow instead.

## Works Cited

Bill of Rights Institute. "Documents to Examine- A-K. Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier (1988)." *Bill of Rights Institute*, <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/documents-to-examine-a-k-hazelwood-v-kuhlmeier-1988>.