

THE
Citizenship
Challenge

Pennsylvania

Write an Essay!



GET INVOLVED!

Enter your class with a written essay on an issue facing our democracy.

Open to 4th and 5th grade classes in public, private, or parochial schools across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 19, 2021

1 GRAND PRIZE: \$1,000

Check payable to the winning school to be used toward a program that promotes civic learning and engagement in the student body.

3 RUNNER-UP PRIZES: \$500

Check payable to the winning school to be used toward a program that promotes civic learning and engagement in the student body.

More Information at RendellCenter.org

The Rendell Center

for

Civics & Civic Engagement

Inspiring the Next Generation of Citizens

Rules and Submission Criteria on the Following Page





OFFICIAL RULES AND ENTRY SUBMISSIONS

The Citizenship Challenge is an opportunity for 4-5th grade classrooms in public, private, or parochial schools across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to express themselves regarding a current issue facing our democracy. Students in teams or individually will be asked to write an essay that addresses their point of view on the issue. Essays should take one position and defend the argument in a concise written document of a minimum of 300 words. The contest is drawn from PA Civics standards relating to principles and documents of government; rights and responsibilities of citizens; and information on how government works.

This Year's Citizenship Challenge Question: *Should Schools Be Able to Discipline Students for What They Say on Social Media?*

WHO CAN ENTER:

The Citizenship Challenge contest is open to students/classes in grades 4-5, who are enrolled in public, private, or parochial schools and home schools across Pennsylvania.

HOW TO ENTER:

The deadline for submissions is November 19 2021. Have your voice heard! Classrooms should submit their entry in an essay form and may include a supplemental PowerPoint or video. Essays should be a minimum of 300 words. Essays should be double-spaced using Times New Roman 12pt. Essays should include a cover sheet with the following information:

School name | Grade level | Teacher's name | Teacher's email | School phone number | Class size

Essays need to be submitted by midnight on November 19, 2021 to info@rendellcenter.org or mailed to:

Beth Specker
c/o The Rendell Center for Civics and Civic Engagement
PO Box 1033, Berwyn, PA 19312

Once your entry has been submitted, you will receive confirmation that the judging committee has received your submission. If you have any questions about your submission, contact Beth Specker, Executive Director, The Rendell Center for Civics and Civic Engagement at bspecker@rendellcenter.org or call 484-568-3910.

JUDGING CRITERIA:

The PSSA Persuasive Scoring Guideline will be utilized. The essays will be judged on the four areas of Focus, Content Development, Organization, and Style. Each area will be worth 25 points.

GOOD LUCK!

We look forward to your entry!

RendellCenter.org



This Year's Citizenship Challenge Question: *Should Schools Be Able to Discipline Students for What They Say on Social Media?*

*A student posts a photo of the food in the cafeteria on Snapchat and writes that it looks disgusting.

*A student makes an offensive joke on Instagram.

*A student makes fun of another student on social media and gets hundreds of likes from classmates.

Questions to consider?

1. Should schools be able to discipline students for what they say outside school or on social media? Why or why not?

2. Give some examples from real life or hypotheticals that you think should be censored or punishable by schools and other examples you believe should be protected by free speech.

The Supreme Court of the United States is the ultimate court that decides these questions. Take a look at the background decisions effecting free speech in school. Then write your essay on the question as if you are the Supreme Court giving your decision. Please consider if the social media speech was done outside of school? Does the post create a substantial disruption to the school environment and learning? Was a school computer or device used? Did the post happen during the school day hours?

Please use the following Sticky Situation to help discuss the Challenge Question with your students.

A student in your 5th grade class named Charles has always been considered a leader by many of the students in your school. He is often selected to read over the school intercom for morning announcements. He is almost always chosen to be the captain of any sports team on which he plays. He always gets the best parts in the school music festivals and plays. Then one day a new student joins your 5th grade class. Everyone in the class seems to treat the new student as if he were the class leader. This makes Charles very angry. He decides that the best way to regain his position as a leader is to post something on social media that describes very negative comments the new student is making about members of the class. He goes home, writes, and sends a message out to all of the students in the class describing in detail the horrible things the new student is supposed to have said about members of the 5th grade class. Charles' media post becomes the talk of the school, and the new student becomes the victim of bullying.

Once the Principal becomes aware of the details of what Charles did, she disciplines him. Charles is no longer able to participate in after-school activities, and has to give up his leading role in the school's Spring Music Festival.

Charles and his family feel that what he wrote might have been unkind, but, since it was written at his home, the principal has no right to punish him.

Think about the scenario above. Should schools be able to discipline students for what they say on social media outside of school?



BACKGROUND:

In terms of the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech, the case of *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* (1969), was an important benchmark. In *Tinker*, five students in Des Moines, Iowa, decided to wear black armbands to school in protest of the Vietnam War and were suspended by the School District as a result. The children and their parents brought suit in federal court challenging their suspension as a violation of their First Amendment right to freedom of speech. Mary Beth Tinker one of the students was only 13 years old. The Supreme Court held that without evidence of substantial disruption of school activities, the school could not prohibit and discipline students for wearing black arm bands under the First Amendment. The Court first explained that the First Amendment rights are available to students and teachers at school. Schools also have the authority, consistent with the constitution, to control conduct in the schools. In *Tinker*, the Court recognized that wearing an armband for the purpose of expressing certain views is like to "pure speech." There was no evidence of any interference in the school's work or the rights of other students. The school was required to show that the discipline was necessary because of "more than a mere desire to avoid the discomfort and unpleasantness that always accompany an unpopular viewpoint." The Court said that these principles apply to student speech not only in the classroom, but also "in the cafeteria, or on the playing field, or on the campus during the authorized hours." The *Tinker* decision says that officials may regulate speech that "would 'materially and substantially interfere with the discipline and the operation of the school,'" but otherwise, are subject to the same constitutional requirements as any other government entity.

In other Supreme Court Cases decisions there have been different decisions and the court has agreed with the right of school authorities to suspend a student in a number of circumstances. First, in *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser* (1986), Matthew Fraser, a high school senior, was suspended for two days by the School District after he gave a speech at a school assembly of 600 high schoolers supporting his friend's candidacy for a student government position. Some in the audience believed Fraser's speech had inappropriate content. Fraser brought suit in federal court challenging his suspension as a violation of his First Amendment right to freedom of speech. The Supreme Court said that school officials may properly punish student speech with suspension if they determine that speech to be offensive, or disruptive to the school's basic educational mission. The Court concluded that the First Amendment did not prohibit schools from prohibiting inappropriate speech when the speech was inconsistent with the "fundamental values of public-school education."

In the case, *Morse v. Frederick* (2007), Joseph Frederick, a high school senior, was suspended by the principal (Deborah Morse) for ten days after he displayed a large banner reading "Bong Hits 4 Jesus" at a school-supervised off-campus event. Principal Morse justified her decision by citing the school's policy against material that promotes the use of illegal drugs. The Supreme Court said school officials may prohibit student speech that can reasonably be interpreted as promoting illegal drug use.

Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L. raises the issue of what protection student speech enjoys that occurs off campus, but that might interfere "with the school's work or . . . the rights of other students to be secure and to be let alone." Ninth-grade high school student, B.L., who having not been selected for the varsity cheerleading team posted on Snapchat a selfie of herself and a friend making an obscene hand gesture and writing captions with inappropriate gestures. The school had a rule that students must "have respect for [their] school, coaches . . . [and] other cheerleaders" and avoid "foul language and inappropriate gestures." Another school rule prohibited cheerleaders from posting negative information about cheerleading on the internet. Because of her post, B.L. was suspended from the junior varsity cheerleading team. The Supreme Court ruled that Pennsylvania high school officials lacked the authority to discipline a student for an off-campus, Snapchat post that she made in frustration after not making the varsity cheerleading squad. The Supreme Court ruled that the social media post did not cause a substantial disruption of the school.