

# THE FIRST AMENDMENT

**Understand the roles of a free press in an open democracy.**

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; **or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press;** or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”*

## **The press is:**

- ▶ Interpretation and context — Rather than simply providing facts, journalists tell us what’s important. They interpret facts and provide context so people can make sense of the issues.
- ▶ Watchdog — The press holds the government accountable. It makes visible to the people what the government is doing, so people can judge the actions.
- ▶ Safety valve — Allowing friction and actually encouraging it means a free and open society confront its own problems. Open discourse and peaceful discussions ultimately preserve the entire system of democracy.
- ▶ Trustee — The media provides accurate information from experts.

## **News v. yearbook journalism**

- ▶ The difference between news and yearbook journalism is the shelf life of the contents. Whereas news articles are time-sensitive and can be updated and corrected as needed, yearbook stories cannot. Once the book is printed, the stories live forever. Give careful consideration to each story in your book. Think about the events you would want to remember 10, 20 and 30 years from now. Properly vet anything controversial before including it in the book.

## **The Fourth Estate**

- ▶ When the architects of our democracy designed the government, they intended journalists and a free press to be the “fourth estate” to provide checks and balances to the three branches of government. They knew a well-informed citizenry to be the only way to protect and preserve our freedom. America needs journalists.

## **Do students have fewer rights?**

- ▶ The First Amendment guarantees your right to free expression, which means the government does not have the right to forbid you from saying and writing what you like. In school, you have the right to free expression as long as the expression doesn’t “materially or substantially” disrupt classes or other school activities.

## **The First Amendment does not protect:**

- ▶ Obscenity, fighting words, defamation, perjury, blackmail, incitement to riot, true threats or calls to commit crimes.