

Good afternoon. My name is Trish Whitcomb Sipes, and I want to welcome you to 8th annual First Amendment Symposium on behalf of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Glenda Ritz.

Superintendent Ritz regrets that she cannot be here today, and in fact, she called just a few minutes ago to make sure that I told you she is thinking of you and the terrific work that you did to get to this point. She sends her congratulations.

Last year she attended this same symposium and learned that one of the winners chose journalism courses even though that choice prevented her graduating as valedictorian.

Upon learning of that situation, Superintendent Ritz asked me to investigate. I contacted Diana Hadley, your IHSPA Director, and she confirmed that many diligent high school students experienced similar frustrations.

Ms. Hadley and I investigated, and contacted a member of the State Board of Education, Andrea Neal, a former journalist who now teaches at St. Richard's School. We thought that she would be a solid ally if we needed SBOE action. We were correct; she is with us on this issue.

The good news is that we discovered we do not need State Board of Education action. The action can happen at your local school board level. The granting of credits for honors diplomas is a matter of what we in education policy refer to as "a matter of local control."

We will be working on the DOE web site to make that point clearer, but in the meantime, please make an informed, polite request of your local school board to give Academic Honors or weight to your journalism classes.

On another day, please stop by the Superintendent's office to see my personal homage to the free press. A well-informed citizenry is the best defender of freedom and it is only when you students take the challenge of encouraging participation, preserving democracy and advocating what is best for all citizens that the promise of America can be delivered.

Thank you for your work. Stay engaged!

Trish Whitcomb Sipes
Special Advisor
twhitcomb@doe.in.gov
office 317.232.0581
cell 317.460.3699

