




Neshaminy High School revokes student newspaper editor's access to post and edit online stories

By [Jordan Gass-Poore](#)¹ | Published 06/13/16 5:11pm |  Email |  Print | 
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PENNSYLVANIA — Access to post and edit content to the online version of [The Playwickian](#), the student newspaper at Neshaminy High School in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, has been revoked for more than a month after student editors decided not to publish the word Redskin in a news article, despite being directed to do so by the school's principal.

Now, *The Playwickian*'s editor in chief, Tim Cho, has teamed up with the Philadelphia-based law firm Levine, Sullivan, Koch & Schulz to protest the actions taken by the Neshaminy High School administration.

A [letter they sent](#), dated June 6th, states that the school's administration violated Cho's federal and state constitutional rights.

"I suppose the administration has underestimated us," said Cho, a Neshaminy senior, on why he believes school administrators have taken such bold actions against *The Playwickian* staff.

Student editors were directed by Neshaminy High School Principal Robert McGee to publish an article with the term Redskin, after the student author and then-co-managing editor, Jessica McClelland, filed and won an appeal of the editors' decision to redact the word.

Cho said the editorial board's decision not to publish the word Redskin, which is also the school's mascot, in the article was based on an 8-1 majority vote and in accordance with a 2013 policy established by the newspaper.

The Playwickian received national attention when its editorial board [decided not to publish](#) the word Redskin in 2013, after deciding it was a racial slur against

Native Americans. Other newspapers have also stopped using the word.

Even the Eastern District of Virginia came to the same conclusion in *Pro-Football, Inc. v. Blackhorse*, where a federal judge ordered the cancellation of the Washington Redskins' trademark registrations. The court observed that "To Native Americans, 'redskin' is as offensive as ... 'wetback' [is to Mexicans] ..."

Most Neshaminy students, however, are either not opposed or don't have an opinion on the school's mascot name, said Cho, citing the school's large student population and football culture as reasons why.

"People talk about tradition, but they don't talk about [the] history" behind the tradition, he said.

The article at the center of *The Playwickian's* latest controversy was about Neshaminy's annual Mr. Redskin competition, considered for publication in the newspaper's May online-only edition, a month after the event. Some of the newspaper's editors did not want it published for that reason.

Eishna Ranganathan, former *Playwickian* co-managing and co-news editor, said the newspaper's May edition is online only because the staff takes that month to prepare for its June graduation print issue.

In mid-April, the majority of *The Playwickian's* editors did decide to publish the article with the word Redskin redacted, printing it as "R-----," in accordance with its editorial policy -- and the Associated Press stylebook's guidelines for redacting obscenities and profanities.

That same day the article was removed from the website and editors' administrator privileges were revoked by school administrators, Cho said.

Principal McGee likely found out about the article's publication so quickly because he receives automated emails whenever content is published to *The Playwickian's* website, per the school's policy of prior review, said Ranganathan, a recent Neshaminy graduate.

Administration later uploaded the article to the newspaper's website with the word Redskin intact, Cho said.

This move is in violation with the district's own publications policy, known as Policy 600, which gives student editors the right to redact the word Redskin or not publish stories that use it. Their decisions can be appealed, as was the case for the Mr. Redskin article, and the principal has to review all of the newspaper's content before it is published in print or online.

Policy 600 was [revised in 2014](#) after *The Playwickian* editorial board voted 14-7 the previous year to ban the word Redskin from its pages.

The policy now dictates that "no student shall be disciplined for editing or editorial decisions, including the deletion of the word 'Redskin' from any

article or editorial or for objecting to its use in any advertisement.”

Cho and his legal team are requesting that school administrators publish the article with the word Redskin redacted and restore Cho’s administrator privileges on *The Playwickian’s* website.

The Playwickian staff has been feeling the blowback of their decision to ban the word Redskin since the beginning, said Ranganathan, who was a freshman at Neshaminy in 2013.

For the past two years, *The Playwickian’s* [budget has been cut](#), she said. Last academic year the newspaper operated on a slim \$2,000, an amount the editors unsuccessfully sought to double through the crowdfunding site [Indiegogo](#). And Cho expects funds to be cut in half again soon.

Administration told the newspaper’s staff that they cut its budget in an effort to digitize the publication, Ranganathan said. Then they cut web access, she added.

“I would say the ball is in the administrator’s court now,” Ranganathan said.

For more context on *The Playwickian* prior review issue, see SPLC's [Case File](#).

Jordan Gass-Poore' is a contributor to SPLC. Questions and comments can be directed [here](#).

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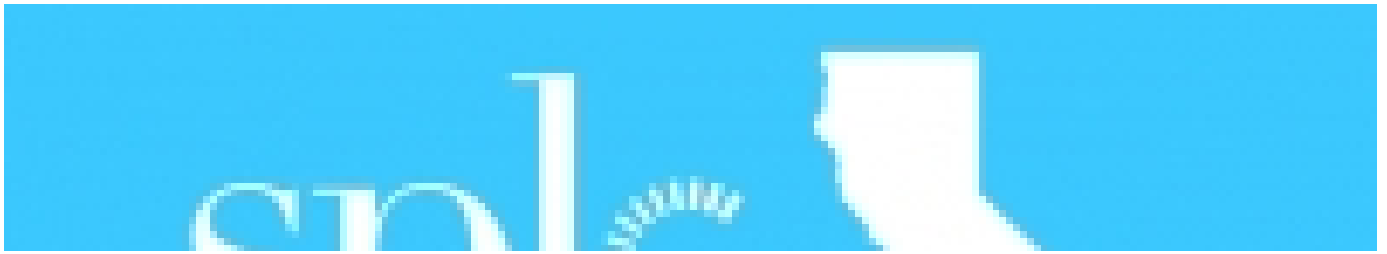
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farmertom2 · 4 days ago

The school administration will never, ever, win. That they won't just let this go makes them seem petty and foolish and not worthy of the respect they think they deserve. I see the day when the kids simply take their paper and walk off campus with it. They can publish it online--on their own website, and they can print it-- on their own dime (thank you, advertisers!) and distribute it--by law-- on school grounds, unfettered by any prior approval-- or post approval. It's nice that they have tried to work with the administration, but incidents like this point to the ultimate solution: going off campus completely.

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