

March 8, 2024

Journalism Education Association
014 Kedzie Hall
828 Mid-Campus Drive S
Manhattan, KS 66506-1505

Dear Journalist of the Year judges:

I have been a publication adviser for a long time, 30-something years. My former editors have gone on to become professional reporters, broadcast producers, city councilmen and presidential staff members. I have been very fortunate to work with students who have set a high bar for themselves and for those around them, including their teachers.

I think Alice Scott tops them all. She's the kind of student, the kind of editor in chief, the kind of person, who doesn't need a teacher to motivate her to seek excellence and improvement or to set her agenda for how to achieve those things. She envisions amazing things and accomplishes them on her own.

Thinking about the lost list of examples of Alice's self-driven moments of personal growth fills me with pride and frankly awe. When she was a freshman, she not only created national-award-winning broadcast packages, but she created a master class on broadcast journalism and taught it to her peers, peers, mind you, who were all at least a full school year older than her, because she wanted to build a stronger broadcast component for our program. None of the rest of us on staff had prior experience in broadcast journalism. The result? Over the next year or so, three or four staff members made their first broadcast packages in partnership with Alice, and they and our entire program took a step forward.

Alice is constantly looking for ways to make those collective forward steps. Just maintaining a quality journalism program isn't enough for her. She wants it to be better tomorrow than it is today. So as a sophomore online managing editor, she didn't stand pat with the process that had earned us the NSPA Pacemaker Award in three of the previous four years. She scoured the Internet looking at what other websites were doing well and even set up a virtual critique session with legendary Kirkwood High School adviser Mitch Eden. We won our fair share of awards that year; most notably, Alice was named National Broadcast Journalist of the Year for her body of broadcast work created for our website. The award, however, wasn't central to her work or to her thinking. She was trying to make our process and our product better. Pursuing that approach and setting that objective inspired her peers to match her commitment and take another step forward. I know this is true because that's what happened to me.

As a junior, Alice became co-editor in chief of the whole program, only the second time in my career that a rising 11th-grader impressed me so much that I put them in charge. It was the right call. We kept doing well, the things we had been doing well, but Alice wasn't going to settle for that. Knowing that printing costs had increased and that our revenue stream hadn't, she imagined a PBS-style fundraiser that encouraged the community to support the program. She dubbed it the "I heart MacJ" campaign, and she orchestrated a multi-platform fundraiser that showed her facility as a marketer, a manager and motivator. She set a goal of \$10,000 and thanks to her dogged determination, that's exactly what we raised. And with that money, we took another step forward (Aside: She is spearheading the sequel to that fundraiser this month).

Page one of two

When that successful project was over and Alice had taken us to a better financial place, she could have rested. After all she had plenty on her plate, managing a staff that creates an online newspaper, a print newspaper and a robust social media account. But managing a staff isn't enough for Alice; she's always looking for the next growth opportunity. She found it in National Student Press Freedom Week, and the grassroots initiative to realize New Voices legislation in Texas, which would restore First Amendment rights to student journalists. To commemorate Student Press Freedom Week, Alice approached our principal and our social studies department chair about creating a schoolwide curriculum that would teach all history students about Supreme Court precedents involving student free speech, the concepts of prior review, prior restraint and self-censorship, and the New Voices initiative, which has led to 17 states (but not Texas) passing laws to protect student press rights. I watched Alice's program grow from an idea to a fully realized, campus-wide initiative. I say watched because that's what I did. Nothing. She got the school leadership on board, she wrote the curriculum, she recruited other staff members to teach the curriculum. She got the principal and the yearbook editor to sign the New Voices pledge. It was incredible to observe.

When her junior year ended and her term as an EIC extended into her senior year, Alice kept exploring ways to encourage individual and collective growth. She wanted the staff to have a greater sense of togetherness, so she pushed for returning and rising editors to commit to a summer workshop, something we have not done in the past, and when she succeeded in getting a large group to attend a summer workshop, she supplemented the camp activities with bonding activities (staff T-shirts, shared meals with focus questions to check on how everyone was doing). I didn't do a thing to make this happen. I just watched and appreciated my good fortune in having Alice as my student.

A week before school started, Alice and her fellow editors had one more surprise for me, a completely developed draft of a staff manual, something we desperately needed and did not have. Over the summer, she was the prime mover in a project to draft one, and it's really, really good. She solicited other staff manuals to emulate, and she and her peers put a lot of thought in what our staff manual needed to be. After several rounds of editing passes and revisions, we distributed the manual to our staff and are using it to determine our best practices as we should have been doing all along. And finally with a staff manual to guide us in our daily processes, we took a huge step forward.

Her senior year has been a continuation of her stellar career. She has explored photography and live game sports coverage, becoming an anchor of that component of our program, something she had not done before this year. At the November fall NSPA convention, Alice enjoyed the single most incredible awards performance I have ever witnessed from one of my students, both individually and as the primary leader of our staff. It's now March, and Alice has basically two more months left in her high school career. I have no idea what she has in store for us, but I can confidently predict it will be something essential and helpful and incredible. Just like Alice. You might find a better candidate than Alice Scott to represent JEA as its 2024 Journalist of the Year, but I highly doubt it. To say she is a worthy choice to fulfill that role is an understatement. She is an investment that JEA would be wise to make. I recommend her wholeheartedly and with the greatest possible level of enthusiasm.

Sincerely,

Dave Winter
McCallum Journalism
adviser