



FIRE

Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

April 22, 2026

Justin J. Knight
Perry Law Firm
233 South 13th Street
Suite 1400
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508

Sent via U.S. Mail and Electronic Mail (jknight@perrylawfirm.com)

Dear Mr. Knight:

FIRE appreciates the response to our April 7 letter, but we were disappointed that you declined to respond to our substantive concerns. Aidan McClaren and Gretna East Media should have been able to publish McClaren's editorial cartoon in the format he elected without editorial interference by administrators—unspecified “alternative avenues” of publication cannot suffice. We again strongly urge Gretna Public Schools to grant Nicholas Mitchell's appeal of GEHS's censorial acts and adopt a clear student media policy safeguarding the school district's and students' interests.¹

Your April 15 response disagreed with the conclusions of our letter and noted that “Gretna administration provided alternative avenues for the publication of the cartoon at issue.”² This appears to refer to administrators' requirement that, to republish the cartoon after the school took it down, McClaren would need to “publish a cartoon that argues the opposite direction” or “explain the cartoon for the audience,” which, as McClaren noted, “defeats the point of an editorial cartoon.”³ Demanding that a student publication alter the content and viewpoint of its expression is not a meaningful alternative. And it does nothing to address the key problem: GEHS administrators editorially interfered with a student publication that operates as a forum for student expression. Neither *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*⁴ nor *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*⁵ authorizes school administrators to condition

¹ FIRE again echoes Nicholas Mitchell's and the Student Press Law Center's calls for the school board to adopt SPLC's model policy, which you can find enclosed in this letter.

² Letter from Justin J. Knight, attorney, to Marie McMullan, student press counsel (Apr. 15, 2026) (enclosed).

³ Macy Byars, *Gretna East admins pulled a student journalist's cartoon about ICE. Now, students are looking to change district policy*, NEB. PUB. MEDIA (Apr. 2, 2026, 5:10 PM), <https://nebraskapublicmedia.org/en/news/news-articles/gretna-east-admins-pulled-a-student-journalists-cartoon-about-ice-now-students-are-looking-to-change-district-policy/>.

⁴ 484 U.S. 260 (1988).

⁵ 393 U.S. 503 (1969).

publication on changing or diluting a student’s message in this manner. Accordingly, the district must grant Nicholas Mitchell’s March 30 appeal.⁶

In fact, the school’s ultimatum that the cartoon could be published only with either a pro-ICE cartoon or a detailed explanation confirms that administrators’ objections were motivated by the cartoon’s viewpoint. It appears the administration has not required other content—even politically charged content—to sit beside an explanation or rebuttal.⁷ If that were the case, *The Wingspan* would have been required to publish another editorial arguing *for* biased media alongside “Why news media must stay neutral,”⁸ or another opinion piece arguing *for* the U.S. to seize Greenland to accompany “Greenland seizure would destroy alliance that built US power.”⁹ Moreover, the school’s suggestion that the cartoon was publishable with additional context demonstrates it did not see the content itself as inherently disruptive. This tacit admission further undermines the administrators’ efforts to justify their censorship.

Actions like GEHS’s result in censorship of student speech and administrative headaches—and can be easily rectified by adopting a formal, rights-affirming media policy that adequately protects student journalists’ rights. We understand the board has the power to implement such a policy, and we urge it to do so. We request a substantive response confirming Gretna Public Schools will grant Nicholas Mitchell’s appeal of GEHS’s censorial acts no later than the close of business on May 7, 2026.

Sincerely,



Marie McMullan
Student Press Counsel, Campus Rights Advocacy

Encl.

⁶ Nicholas Mitchell, *Formal Appeal: Censorship of Student Media at Gretna East High School* (Mar. 30, 2026), https://splc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Nebraska-Gretna-East-HS-formal_appeal-March-2026.pdf.

⁷ *Id.* at 1. To be clear, FIRE does not believe that other pieces *need* additional context to be published at all, either. But leaving some political content untouched while making censorial demands about McClaren’s drawing reeks of unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination.

⁸ Aidan McClaren, *Why news media must stay neutral*, WINGSPAN (Nov. 5, 2024), <https://gretnaeastmedia.com/4228/opinion/editorial/why-news-media-must-stay-neutral/>.

⁹ Nicholas Mitchell, *Greenland seizure would destroy alliance that built US power*, WINGSPAN (Jan. 22, 2026), <https://gretnaeastmedia.com/6910/opinion/column/greenland-seizure-would-destroy-alliance-that-built-us-power/>.