

# Editorial Writing

2013 KSPA REGIONAL CONTEST

## Assignment

You are to write a 200-word editorial on the controversy outlined in the story and photo below, which are running in the next edition of the Ad Astra Star, your paper.

The writer should determine the Star's official opinion on the controversy and outline an effective argument in favor of its opinion. Students may write in pencil or pen. Students may use dictionary, thesaurus, and AP Stylebooks. The use of personal listening devices, recording devices, cell phones or computers is prohibited.

## Story

Two Kansas legislators have introduced a bill that would allow for legal action against students and parents who harass school employees online.

The language in the bill is an almost a word-for-word copy of legislation that was introduced and passed last year in North Carolina. The proposed Lemmon statute does not criminalize the harassment, unlike the North Carolina bill.

"It should look like North Carolina's law because we used theirs as kind of the baseline," said Rep. Jack Lemmon (R-Aspera), who is a co-sponsor of the bill.

The bill prohibits creating fake profiles of school employees, posting (or encouraging others to post) "private, personal, or sexual information" about school employees, posting "real or doctored" photos of school employees, tampering with data on a school employee's computer, or continual communication with a school employee.

Violations could lead to court-ordered injunctions to cease the harassment and fines of up to \$1,000. In addition, if a court finds that the school employee has been "intimidated or tormented," the

## Description

You are a member of Ad Astra High School's newspaper staff. Your editor has assigned you to write an editorial using the information provided.

## School Info

Name: Ad Astra High School  
Location: Aspera, Kansas  
Mascot: Box Turtles  
Enrollment: 850 (grades 9-12)  
School Colors: Green & Gold  
Yearbook: The Honeybee  
Newspaper: The Star

## Contest Info

This is a carry-in contest.

Please attach your assigned contest number in the upper right-hand corner on the back of your photo.

Do not put your name on the entry. If you do, your entry will be disqualified.

Students are not to request help or advice from anyone other than the KSPA Executive Director. All work must be that of the contestant.



principal of the school where the school employee is employed must be notified of the decision.

Unlike the North Carolina statute, it's not only students who would be subject to this law, but former students and parents as well.

"We just tried to broaden it out," Lemmon said, "to those who have potentially the most interaction with the school employee."

Lemmon said that he first learned about the North Carolina law from a story in The Washington Post and thought it addressed the strain that he feels social networking has placed on teachers.

"Clearly one of the places that this is having the most impact is on Facebook and Instagram," said Lemmon. "To be an effective teacher, you have to have your credibility intact. The intent is to protect teachers from those types of situations."

Lemmon said that he's gotten positive support from other legislators already, however he still feels that there may be a few kinks to work out.

"The initial reaction has been very very favorable," Lemmon said. "We're at the very beginning of the legislative process, so we'll see where it goes. We need to make sure that we aren't infringing on

First Amendment rights. We need to ensure that we do things the right way."

The American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina opposed the version passed last year in North Carolina. Among the group's concerns was the lack of a clear definition for what it means to "torment" or "intimidate" a school employee. Neither is defined in the proposed Kansas bill.

The proposed legislation isn't supported by the state's school board association. Lee Remick, the executive director of the Kansas School Board Association, said he thinks that the language in the bill could be problematic. He said that baseless claims could perhaps lead to defamation suits against schools.

"I think we are getting into an arena that is a behavioral issue," Remick said. "It's sort of like that adage 'in the eye of the beholder.' It's hard for schools to handle the concept of bullying. I think it will be tough for them to handle whether someone is being 'tormented' or not will be tough for them to handle whether someone is being 'tormented' or not."