

Statement of Joel Paramo

Joel Paramo, 18, is the chief editor of East Bakersfield High School's student newspaper, The Kernal. It's his fourth year on the newspaper staff, last year he served as the sports editor. He will be attending Bakersfield College in the fall.

I'm Joel Paramo and I'm the editor-in-chief of *The Kernal*.

The Kernal staff, along with the gay students we interviewed, lost our voices when the administration censored the articles. I know these articles would increase tolerance and awareness of gay people by presenting people's attitudes about homosexuality in a well-researched, honest, and fair way.

We have tried to handle this situation in the most responsible way possible. In choosing who to interview, we interviewed students who were already open about their sexual orientation on campus, we got their consent and we even got written consent from the parents of those under 18.

I am really surprised and disappointed by our principal's decision to censor us.

There are some negative attitudes against gay people on campus. But that is exactly why we chose to focus on sexual orientation in the paper: so that the issues could be talked about in the open, not stuffed back into the closet. Rather than censoring the articles, the administration should be conducting student trainings, student assemblies, and other educational efforts on campus or within the community that deal directly and openly with anti-gay attitudes. The school should also publicly support the formation of a gay-straight alliance club.

I wish that we didn't need to file a lawsuit against the school to exercise our free speech rights. Until now, *The Kernal* has had a great relationship with the administration. Because of that relationship, as the representative of the paper, I have tried very hard to work with the East High administration to address their concerns.

I am proud of *The Kernal's* work. A lot of hard work has gone into articles to present these issues in a well-balanced and fair way. It would be terrible if the articles couldn't be published by the end of this academic year, because we would lose the opportunity to inform this year's seniors of issues that impact them directly.

Statement of Janet Rangel

Janet Rangel is a senior at East High and very active in softball and drama. She will be attending Bakersfield College in the fall and was interviewed with her mother for one of the articles.

My name is Janet Rangel and I am a senior at East Bakersfield High. I am openly lesbian at my school and my mother and I were interviewed to be part of an article for *The Kernal* about students' experiences coming out to their parents and about parents' reactions to their kids telling them that they are gay.

I was really upset when I found out that the school censored the stories because I wanted the articles to be printed. We shouldn't have to hide who we are.

I also think it would be a better learning experience for people - not just those who are gay, but also those who are against being gay - to understand what it's like from my perspective. After my mother and I were interviewed, I was really excited waiting for these articles so people could understand where we're coming from.

I've known I was gay since I was in third grade. But it took a lot for me to come out. It takes a lot to say that that's who you are. This school year is my first year coming out completely to all my friends. I decided that this is who I am and I'm not going to hide it anymore. My friends at school were really supportive and most of them said they already knew anyway, even before I told them.

When the principal said the articles on sexual orientation could not be published in *The Kernal*, I felt like I was in the closet again, hiding. I don't want that. It's not ok. I want to be out. I'm out for a reason. I want people to learn from me and not treat me differently just because I'm gay. The principal shouldn't tell me what I should keep to myself and hide from other people. I went two steps ahead when I came out and now he's pushing me back. And I worry that other students who were maybe thinking about coming out probably won't now.

I feel safe at school and in Bakersfield in general. Bakersfield is a big city and at other high schools in the city we have gay people, too, so it's just no big deal to be who I am here.

I was hoping that the newspaper articles talking about being gay would have helped people understand.

Statement of Maria Krauter

Maria Krauter, 17, is the Focus Editor of the East Bakersfield High School newspaper. She is an award winning student journalist and an excellent feature writer. She oversees the section of the paper that was censored.

I am a junior at East Bakersfield High School and I am the editor of the Focus section of our school newspaper, *The Kernal*. I worked on the paper last year and will be on the editorial board again next year. I think I might want to be a journalist after college. My journalism advisor has taught us to adhere to very high standards and I know that our staff does.

Like always when we started planning for the issue, I prepared a list of possible focus topics to present to the editorial board. We discussed different topics by looking at their newsworthiness, timeliness, and relevance to East High students, first with the editorial board and then with whole staff and our advisor.

We almost decided not to write about sexual orientation because it seemed too controversial, but in the end we all decided it was a really important issue that students needed to discuss openly. I thought *The Kernal* could present a well-balanced and in-depth report of the issue. No one expressed concern that the articles would cause violence or harassment.

We thought the articles would give students a personal connection to gay students and open up a dialogue that hadn't existed before. So I assigned five different stories.

We discussed the way that religion, relationships, and research all factor into the way people feel toward the subject. We started by thinking about the most common questions that people have about homosexuality. What does the Bible say? What do people with gay family and friends experience? What makes people gay? We wanted the Focus section to answer these questions as thoroughly and with as much sensitivity as possible.

It was always our plan to publish the names and photographs of the gay students interviewed because the students are already "out" at school and we thought this would allow readers to connect with the students much better. We even decided to get permission from our sources' parents. But during the last night before we printed the issue, the principal told us not to publish the articles at all.

I am concerned for the well being of all of my classmates and I'm glad the administration is too, but I don't think the articles will cause harm to them. Some students might be ignorant about gay people and say stupid things about them, but students at my school are generally tolerant and a lot are accepting of gay people.

I am proud of my class's work on the Focus section on gay students. I know it's controversial, but it's something that we have to talk about in the open and not shy away from. If the articles aren't published by the end of this school year, as a member of *The Kernal* staff, I will continue to fight for the right to get them published.

Statement of Rudy Cachu

Rudy Cachu is a junior at East High. He is active at school and would like to become a professional hair stylist after graduation.

I am a junior at East Bakersfield High School. Since the beginning of the school year I have been openly gay at my school and I was interviewed for an article about gay students at our school.

I want the articles to come out in *The Kernal*. I agreed to be interviewed for the article on sexual orientation because I feel it is important for everyone to get the chance to understand and open their eyes to something they have not had the chance to understand before. The week the articles were to come out we were really excited because finally people were going to hear what we have to say.

The fact that the principal doesn't want the information out there in public is not going to stop me from being open about being gay. This is me. I'm not going to change. I think about the future generations of gay kids who are going to come to this school and I want them to know they can be who they are and it's ok. Newspaper articles talking about kids like me are an important way to make other gay kids feel safe about being who they are at school. I think it's really important to let us have our voice in the articles.

I have never read articles about sexual orientation anywhere - that's part of why it's important to print these articles. For the kids who maybe do have problems with sexual orientation, it's important for them to see that we too have issues that we want to talk about.

I wanted my classmates to see my point of view at school and understand what it's like for me. What I want people to hear is that there are times when you don't feel comfortable and still you can be O.K. I want people who are gay and who are afraid to come out to know that it's O.K. to come out, they'll be fine. I want them to know that we are here at East and we're out and everything's fine.

The principal's decision not to let the Focus articles on sexual orientation be published says to me that my school's administration does not want us to speak our minds or be who we are.