

## Learning Lessons at ICSD

**A**DMINISTRATORS in the Ithaca City School District (ICSD), who have taken a stance against free speech and forced censorship rulings on the Ithaca High School newspaper, learned last week that they would face a lawsuit brought forth by the student editors of the recently-restored *Tattler*.

We are disappointed that this issue had to go as far as a lawsuit, and we can only hope that ICSD administrators will learn a few lessons from this.

Lesson One: The community and school district cannot teach students to be independent thinkers and then expect them to blindly follow any direction given by authority figures.

The students essentially fought the law and won by managing to take their newspaper underground for three months before having *The Tattler* publishing rights returned to them with the appointment of a new adviser. Yet, the administrators still refuse to acknowledge the basic constitutional rights of student reporters and newspaper editors.

They are your students, yes. However, these students have proven — again and again — that they are journalists who care deeply for their newspaper and about ensuring *The Tattler's* longevity within the school district.

Lesson Two: The students are not afraid to stand up for what they know is right, and the community is not afraid to back them.

Having garnered enough support to secure a well-known local attorney pro bono, the students obviously struck a cord in the community. Is it really that hard for those in positions of power to back down and admit to a poor judgement call? Apparently so, of the district would not now have to waste taxpayer dollars by fighting this out in a court of law.

Finally, Lesson Three: Free speech, like it or not, is a constitutional right. As the students' attorney battles the district's legal team regarding the intricacies of the First and Fourteenth Amendments (the two that the students say have been violated), one thing is clear to us: You may not like what is written, but they have a right to print it nonetheless.

Students will make mistakes — it's part of growing. But part of growing is also learning from those mistakes. Again, we reiterate our original viewpoint on this topic: The students learn nothing by being shut down and shut up. Advise them, lead them and allow them to express themselves. That is way they will learn and that is the way the district will improve itself. ■