

## **Creating Opportunities for Students in U.S. Schools Without Journalism Programs**

There are more than 33,000 public high schools in the United States, and at least 5,000 more private and charter high schools. JEA touches fewer than 10 percent of those schools.

At the same time, the daily circulation of American newspapers has dropped by two thirds in the last 50 years, from more than 60 million in 1972 to 20 million in 2022. With that drop in circulation has come a precipitous loss of journalism jobs and – more significantly – a loss in coverage.

Consider the Sacramento Bee as just one example. In the early 2000s, the newspaper employed more than 200 journalists – reporters, editors, photographers and designers – in its newsroom. Today, that number has dropped into the mid-30s. In its heyday, multiple Bee reporters offered robust coverage of K-12 and higher education in the region. Today, after the only reporter fully focused on education left for graduate school, the Bee has turned education into a general assignment category with reporters covering all the schools, colleges and universities in the region on an as-needed basis.

The California Scholastic Journalism Initiative has been working to fill this gap by training high school students to cover their schools and districts, and then publishing their efforts on the [SacSchoolBeat.org](https://www.sacschoolbeat.org) website.

CSJI selects underrepresented students from underserved schools in the Sacramento region – a significant percentage of the students represent ethnic and racial minorities, and they attend schools that in most cases have no existing journalism programs.

The students get a week of training in the summer. For the first two years, that training was virtual because of the pandemic. In July 2023, the training for 20-plus students was hosted at the CalMatters offices in downtown Sacramento.

Students then report and write stories about their schools and districts. They work with a writing coach (a retired high school journalism adviser) and have their stories copy edited by a retired professional journalist. Their work eventually appears on the [SacSchoolBeat.org](https://www.sacschoolbeat.org) website and can be republished by local publications at no cost (with appropriate credit).

The cohort meets virtually once a month for check-ins, updates and to hear from journalism professionals and other speakers.

The grant-funded Sacramento program is in its third year, and a program that previously operated in Contra Costa County has recently been resurrected.

This is a concept that can work anywhere, and this proposal asks JEA and its active and retired teachers to potentially play a significant role.

The proposal:

- This is a long-term effort similar to the student press rights initiative that is moving forward state by state.
- The focus should be on diverse students, especially low-income urban and rural students. These are the students most underrepresented in journalism programs and JEA.
- Adapt the model used in California to put together journalism collaboratives with funders, professional organizations (e.g., Cal Matters, EdSource), retired teachers and retired professional journalists to teach underrepresented students to report on their schools and/or communities. JEA or outside funds would go to support the recruiting and training of these participants, as well as travel and other administrative expenses. (Details below.)
- Create a new program – an offshoot of the existing mentor program, or a new effort altogether – that recruits retired and active JEA members to establish connections with students from schools with no newspaper journalism programs on campus, or with struggling yearbook programs.
- Teachers would work as writing coaches/advisers with students, helping them as they report and write stories about their schools and districts. In CSJI's Sacramento program, approximately 20 students participate, and they each report and write one story a month. The students are selected via an application process; applications are circulated to guidance counselors throughout the county. Each writing coach – who receives a stipend – works with 10 or so students.
- In a pilot program, at least four advisers would work with up to 20 students. After introductory training to be held virtually, student participants would produce five (or more) stories in an academic year. In addition to their work with their adviser/coach, students would participate in regular “staff meetings” held virtually that would include additional instruction and guest speakers.
- Student stories would then be published on a site housed under the JEA web umbrella and in collaboration with JEA Digital Media.
- There is not a single model. One active or retired teacher or journalism professional could work with a single student, or with outside financial support, a larger funded program with dozens of students, paid staff and stipends for students could be developed, and collaborations with local professional, community college, university or nonprofit journalism entities could be created.
- Initially, a JEA pilot would focus on a small group of teachers and students in a one-year program.
- Everything is local, no one size fits all. For example, journalism in Texas is already part of a statewide extracurricular entity which should make it easier to set up and support programs.
- Steve O'Donoghue and Karl Grubaugh would serve as the pilot co-directors and would train the adviser/coaches. The CSJI Sacramento training week for students is tentatively scheduled for the week of July 15 at CalMatters in downtown Sacramento – with funding,

adviser/coach volunteers could attend for a portion of the week and be trained concurrently with students. Or, adviser/coaches could attend a separate training.

- Adviser/coaches have made a career of working with student journalists, and so the focus of the training would instead be on student recruiting as well as the electronic tools – Gmail, Google docs, etc. – necessary to allow students to participate without physically being in a classroom.

#### Goals:

- Give more journalism opportunities to more students, and create oases in the middle of American news deserts that will help hold local schools and districts accountable.
- JEA, as a potential partner, has an opportunity to see an exponential increase in its influence and membership.
- Help build a national pipeline to feed students into college and university programs, which feed into professional opportunities.
- Reestablish journalism in schools now lacking programs and recruit diverse retired journalists and teachers from those schools and regions.
- Partner with professional journalism organizations to recruit a more diverse group of future advisers. Among the possible partnerships that could be pursued:
  - a. Maynard Institute
  - b. Asian American Journalists Association
  - c. National Association of Black Journalists
  - d. Journalism and Women Symposium
  - e. International Women's Media Foundation
  - f. NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ+ Journalists
  - g. National Center on Disability and Journalism
  - h. National Association of Hispanic Journalists
- Partner with other interested groups to build a support network of programs state by state that eventually covers most of the country. For example, the CSJI program in Sacramento has received funding from the McClatchy Foundation as well as the cooperation and support of CalMatters, and in Contra Costa County, the Leshner Foundation was a long-time financial supporter.
- In a pilot program, recruit at least four advisers and up to 20 students per adviser to participate in the first year. Students would apply via an electronic form available on the JEA and state JEA websites and also circulated by volunteer advisers to guidance counselors in their regions.
- Students who are selected would be asked to participate in a virtual summer training and then produce five stories – with the assistance of their adviser/coach – in an academic year. In addition to their work with their adviser/coach, students would be expected to participate in virtual “staff meetings” that would include additional instruction and guest speakers.

#### The asks:

- Support for a pilot program to start in California (or the west ... or nationally).

- Promotion of the pilot program as part of a recruiting effort to bring in retired and current journalism educators as pilot coach/advisers – on national and state JEA websites, press releases, listserv, social media, word of mouth, etc.
- A website for student stories to be housed within the JEA.org website
- JEA memberships (as needed for adviser/coaches)
- Administrative support from the national JEA office.
- Financial support (from JEA or outside partners):
  - Two \$2,500 stipends for directors to conduct summer trainings and for ongoing mentoring with adviser/coaches. **CalMatters has agreed (as of 2/27/24) to provide \$5,000 to fund these stipends.**
  - \$8,000 for three-day summer training in Sacramento for adviser/coaches
    - Flights – \$4,000
    - Hotel – \$2,000
    - Meals – \$1,500
    - Incidentals (ground transportation, etc.) – \$500
    - No site expense (CalMatters officials will allow the use of their facility)
  - If JEA funding is unavailable for this budget year, the pilot trainings for advisers can be conducted virtually.

A possible timeline:

- Early April: JEA board approval
- Early April through mid-June: Student and adviser recruiting via national and state JEA websites, listserv, press release, social media, word of mouth, etc.
- April 15: Electronic application (Google form) available
- June 15: Electronic applications due
- June 15-July 1: Applications scored/assessed
  - Process and personnel TBA
- July 1: Pilot participants selected
- July: Training for students and advisers to be held virtually and/or in Sacramento, specific dates TBD
- Aug. 15: Students begin reporting/writing stories in consultation with adviser/coaches
- Sept. 1: JEA sub-website as platform for student stories goes live
- Sept. 15: Student stories begin to be published
- Ongoing: Virtual staff meetings for adviser/coaches (once a month or as needed) and for students (once a month)

Respectfully,

Steve O'Donoghue and Karl Grubaugh