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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **High school students to rally at Capitol on Constitution Day**

A nation-wide survey by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation last year showed that more than half of all high school students had not heard about Constitution Day, a day mandated in 2004 by federal law to be the day the Constitution is taught in schools.

A state-wide organization is attempting to change that, at least in Michigan.

The Michigan Interscholastic Press Association, an organization that promotes excellence in scholastic journalism, is planning a symposium on Constitution Day, Sept. 17, from 4 to 6 p.m., on the Capitol steps in Lansing to bring the First Amendment, and particularly freedom of press and speech, to the forefront.

“Students are often denied these freedoms in school settings,” said Cheryl Pell, executive director of MIPA, which is headquartered at the School of Journalism at Michigan State University. “We want to celebrate student voice and show how vitally important their input is to the preservation of the freedoms we enjoy — and often take for granted — in our democratic society.”

Headlining the event is Mary Beth Tinker, a plaintiff in the landmark 1969 Supreme Court decision, *Tinker v. Des Moines*, which ruled that students do not “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” Tinker and three other students, including her brother John, were suspended in 1965 when they wore black armbands to school protesting the Vietnam war and refused to take them off.

Also speaking will be Katy Dean, plaintiff in the *Dean vs. Utica School District*, a 2004 U.S. District Court decision that said student journalists must be allowed to publish viewpoints contrary to those held by school authorities.

Winners of an essay contest last spring on “Why My Voice Matters” will read their essays. Viviana Arcia, Everett (Lansing) High School, won first place; Bethany Davis, Mason High School, won second place; Alice E. Perrault, East Jordan High School, won third place; and Nor’risha Lawson, Southeastern (Detroit) High School of Technology, won fourth place.

A panel led by Warren Watson, executive director of J-Ideas, an organization that promotes civic awareness in schools, will explore the value of students exerting their First Amendment rights in their student media. Panel members include Sen. Michael Switalski, who introduced a bill in the senate to protect student media against administrative censorship; Jeremy Steele, a regional director on the board of the Society of Professional Journalists; Carol Koenig, president of the Lansing/Jackson area ACLU; Mike McConnell, Mason High School senior and editor of the student newspaper, *The Profile*; and Mary Beth Tinker.

Event chair Rod Satterthwaite, media adviser at Dexter High School, said all students are invited to participate in the after-school event.

“This will be an exciting gathering, one we hope will encourage students to learn more about their rights as citizens and to become more actively engaged in using and protecting those rights,” Satterthwaite said.

The Laingsburg High School Jazz Band, under the direction of Mark Wells, will provide music during the event.

To register for the event, please visit the MIPA Web site at [www.mipa.jrn.msu.edu](http://www.mipa.jrn.msu.edu).

Event sponsors include the School of Journalism at MSU and the Mid-Michigan and Detroit chapters of the Society of Professional Journalists.

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