Savvy administrators support strong scholastic journalism programs and student news media because they value the powerfully unique educational opportunities such programs afford school communities. Administrators, media advisers and student journalists have common ground to develop educationally sound, ethical and legal working relationships.

“I have always believed in the importance of student control over editorial content and have never believed in prior administrative review or administrative control over final content of the newspaper,” Mountlake Terrace (Wash.) H.S. principal Greg Schwab said. “I often wonder what we are teaching our students if we are encouraging them toward emerging adulthood and yet we do not give them the freedom to grow and encouragement to deal with issues in an open manner.”

According to recent research by Jack Dvorak published by the Newspaper Association of America Foundation, “High school journalism students earn higher grade point averages, score better on the ACT college entrance examination and demonstrate better writing and grammar skills in college, compared with students who do not have those journalism experiences.”

There are no better curricular and co-curricular environments to nurture critical skills than journalism classes and student news media.

Administrators, student media advisers and student journalists can certainly agree that students share the rights guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights — particularly the First Amendment. We want our students to responsibly apply these rights. We can agree high school presents a unique, keystone opportunity for students to practice and prepare for the day they become active adults in our communities.

Without an informed and educated citizenry, we are far less able to participate in, protect and defend American ideals. Without an active, robust exchange of information, opinions and ideas, American civic life is seriously diluted and diminished. Responsible journalism plays a critical role to maintain and further our democratic heritage. It is essential that journalism courses be offered in our schools.

Journalism educators and media advisers don’t want to teach about journalism. They want their students to practice it. Real journalism is sometimes messy and sometimes controversial. Sometimes it’s inspirational and sometimes it’s heartbreaking. Almost always it’s highly educational. It’s not our job to tell students what to think or what to publish. Working together, administrators, advisers and student journalists can create an authentic learning environment, a mutually respectful working relationship and a productive, educational manner.

For example, no principal would ever hire an unqualified math teacher or a basketball coach who doesn’t know the game.

To that end, we need excellent, well-trained advisers to work with our student journalists. We can work together to ensure student media advisers have professional development opportunities, supported by a peer network of journalism advisers.