1. The correct answer is "B."

In its 1969 Tinker decision, the U.S. Supreme Court recognized that the First Amendment protects students both in and outside of school. The case upheld the First Amendment rights of a 13-year-old junior high school student named Mary Beth Tinker, her older brother John and friend Christopher Eckhardt, to wear a small, black armband to school to protest the Vietnam War, which was then underway. The so-called Tinker standard, which sprang from the Court's decision, balances the First Amendment rights of students against the need of school administrators to make sure students can learn in a safe and reasonably orderly environment. Under the Tinker standard, students have the right to engage in on-campus speech activities free from censorship as long as the speech is not unlawful (obscene, libelous, etc.) and/or would not cause a "material and substantial disruption" to normal school activities.

While the Tinker decision remains the law of the land, its usefulness to many public high school students was lessened in 1988 when the Supreme Court recognized a distinction between non-school-sponsored student expression that occurs in school (like Tinker's armband) and student expression that was sponsored by the school. In that case, Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier, the Court adopted a new, less protective standard for most -- but not all -- student expression that takes place as part of a high school-sponsored activity.

2. The best answer is "D."

Unfortunately, censorship scenarios such as this have become commonplace. The good news is that you don't have to -- and shouldn't -- take such acts of censorship lying down. All of the options mentioned above have been proven successful and can be part of a coordinated plan to contest administrative censorship. In all cases, students can contact the legal staff of the Student Press Law Center who can help analyze your situation and help you plan the most effective response.
3. The best answer is "D."

A publication is legally responsible for everything it publishes, including information provided by sources. Thus in order to protect yourself from a libel claim, you must avoid publishing facts that turn out to be wrong.

While assessing the credibility of your source is important, relying solely on your instincts that Jennifer is telling the truth -- without any other proof of the teacher's wrongdoing -- is extremely risky.

Simply stated, libel is any published communication that is false and that harms a person's reputation. Packed within the simple definition of libel, however, are five elements that a plaintiff (the person who claims he has been libeled) must establish to prove he has been defamed: Publication; Identification; Harm to reputation; Falsity (i.e., the statement is untrue) and Fault. If a plaintiff cannot prove each of these five elements, his claim will fail.

While it is very important to give the teacher an opportunity to respond -- and doing so makes it more likely you will prevail in a libel lawsuit -- it is no guarantee of victory. A judge or jury will probably also want to see that you had other evidence to support your claim before writing a story that could destroy the teacher's career.

For stories like this one, where independently verifying the accusations would be difficult if not impossible, it may be better to focus on the issue rather than the people involved and avoid identification altogether. If the story does not identify the math teacher, he cannot successfully sue the Student Times for libel. Note that effectively and safely disguising an individual's identity must be carefully done and often involves more than simply withholding a person's name or using a pseudonym.

4. The best answer is "D."

Photos, like most other original works of authorship, are protected by copyright law, which places explicit legal limitations on the ability of others to use them without the copyright owner's permission. Therefore, it is always best -- and safest -- to use images with the express consent of the copyright owner.

That said, however, federal copyright law states that an individual other than the copyright owner can use a copyrighted work without permission if the use would be considered a "fair use." The Fair Use Doctrine is, in effect, a
compromise. It represents a balance by lawmakers of the need to encourage scientific and cultural progress by making sure creators can control the works they create against society's need for readily accessible information. Recognizing the inherent conflict in these two goals, fair use strives to find a reasonable middle ground.

Whether or not the use of a copyrighted work by a non-owner would be considered a "fair use" is not always an easy call. There is no black and white rule; each case must be examined on its own. In this case, as long as you are using the scanned cover art image alongside the review of O'Shay's CD, such use would likely qualify as a "fair use." Note, however, that the two uses suggested in options "B" and "C" would probably not be permissible.

5. The best answer is "B."

Your strongest argument in response to your principal's demand is that school administrators -- unless they seek the information through formal legal channels (typically requiring the issuance of a court-ordered subpoena) -- simply lack the authority to force student journalists to reveal confidentially obtained information. Contacting the Student Press Law Center or another legal assistance organization would be wise.

Most importantly, however, this question illustrates the difficult position journalists can find themselves in when using confidential sources. There are serious considerations -- both ethical and legal -- and serious risks. Journalists that make promises must be prepared to keep them. Therefore, the only sure advice is that confidential sources should be rarely and judiciously used.

6. The best answer is "B."

While both the grocery store manager and your principal are acting to prevent you from expressing yourself, the First Amendment only prohibits censorship by government officials (or so-called "state actors.") The principal, an employee at a public school, is a government official and clearly violated the First Amendment by confiscating and destroying your flyers in the manner described. The grocery store manager, however, is a private citizen acting on his own. While you certainly had a right to calmly hand out your flyers from a public sidewalk in front of the grocery and the manager may have broken a few other laws (e.g., criminal theft.), he did not violate the First Amendment. Similarly, student journalists at private schools usually can't count on the First Amendment to protect them from censorship by their private school administrators, who are also not government officials. Fortunately, private school student media may have other avenues of censorship protection available to them beyond the First Amendment.
7. The correct answer is "A."

Every state in the country (and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) has an open records and open meetings law. While the details vary, they all work essentially the same: state, county and local governmental agencies, or "public bodies," are required to provide access to their records and meetings unless the documents or meetings are specifically exempted. (Meetings and records of federal governmental agencies are similarly accessible under a federal open meetings law and the federal Freedom of Information Act.) Most state laws, for example, contain an exemption that allows government officials to withhold records they keep that would reveal an individual's private, medical information -- such as that contained in a student's athletic physical form. On the other hand, budget records that reveal income and expenditures of public agencies -- including salaries paid to public employees -- will almost always be available upon request.

Generally, the meetings and records held by private bodies -- including private schools such as St. Olaf's Private School for Girls -- are not covered under these laws. Note, however, that private schools may be required to provide certain information under laws other than a state open records or open meetings law.

8. The correct answer is "B."

"Publication of Private and Embarrassing Facts" claim recognizes that certain private and intimate details about an individual, even though true, may be "off limits" to the press and public. For example, publishing detailed information about a private person's sexual conduct, medical condition or educational records might result in a "private facts" claim.

"Intrusion" is a claim often based on the act of newsgathering. A reporter can be sued even when the information obtained is never published. It occurs when a journalist gathers information about a person in a place where that person has a reasonable right to expect privacy. Intrusion claims can also result from the improper use of electronic surveillance equipment.

A "False Light" claim can arise anytime you unflatteringly portray -- in words or pictures -- a person as something that he or she is not. A "false light" problem can arise, for example, where a misleading caption is published with a photo (for instance, a caption describes a bystander at an unlawful demonstration as a "participant").

"Misappropriation" is the unauthorized use of a person's name, photograph, likeness, voice or endorsement to promote the sale of a commercial product or
service. (For example, using a photo of your school's star athlete in an ad for a local sporting goods store without her permission.)

9. The best answer is "A."

Subpoenas are serious matters and the law, which varies from state to state, can be pretty complicated. You should contact an experienced media law attorney as soon as possible after receiving a subpoena to discuss your options. Do not ignore it. Do not blindly comply with it. Do not destroy evidence or records.

Journalists take very seriously their obligation to keep the promises they make, and the law can provide some protection, even for student journalists. But legal assistance is key. A journalist would be well advised to investigate their legal rights in this context before making such a promise in the first place.

10. The best answer is "C."

If a statement cannot reasonably be interpreted by readers to be stating express or implied facts, it cannot be libelous. In other words, if a reasonable reader would understand that the material is a joke and not intended as a serious statement, it cannot be the basis for a successful libel claim no matter how distasteful or offensive it might be. In this case, obviously, a reasonable person would understand that the coach didn't actually possess magical X-ray glasses that permitted him to see through clothing, as the caption suggests.

While a prominent disclaimer alerting readers that the material is not intended to be taken seriously can be helpful, it likely will not provide absolute protection. Note also that the staff's intention (e.g., "we meant to be funny") is largely irrelevant.

11. The best answer is "B."

Though the practice is condemned by almost every journalism education group in the country, the First Amendment probably does not prohibit public high school administrators from reviewing student media before publication or from requiring an adviser to do so as long as there is no school policy prohibiting it. However, this practice, typically described as "prior review," means reading only. Once school officials move from simply reading content before it goes to the printer to censoring or requiring changes prior to publication, their act becomes a "prior restraint," something that the First Amendment is much more likely to limit or prevent. By prohibiting the newspaper staff from publishing a story (which he hasn't even seen) or even reporting on the controversial music curriculum proposal, the principal has almost certainly engaged in an illegal prior restraint.
12. The best answer is "B."

Truth is an absolute defense to a libel claim. However, this question is a reminder that knowing (or believing) something is true and proving it true can be two separate things.

While you certainly know the facts are accurate -- you saw Mr. Jones commit the vandalism with your own eyes -- it's less clear that you would be able to convince a court of that were Mr. Jones to deny your charges and sue for libel. If there were no other evidence, it would simply be Mr. Jones' word against yours. While a judge or jury might believe you, they might not. (Perhaps the jury would think you were out to "get" Jones because of the "D" he gave you.)

Of course, no journalist worth his or her salt would simply drop a story like this without exploring every available option. (In this case, for example, you could file a police report -- like any citizen witnessing a crime -- and turn the story over to another reporter and editor, who could report on the resulting criminal investigation.) Sometimes, too, journalists simply determine a story is worth the threat. But you should always carefully weigh the risks and benefits before proceeding.

13. The best answer is "B."

Unlike in libel cases, where truth is a defense, it is not necessary to show that a statement is false to succeed in an invasion of privacy claim.

A news organization will be protected from a private facts privacy claim if it can show that the material published was "newsworthy." Although information about well-known public figures or public officials (which could possibly include this elected student representative) is more likely to be considered newsworthy than information about private individuals, providing the public with information about its exposure to a potentially deadly disease is highly newsworthy and would likely be protected.

The challenge for the reporter here is to determine whether using the name of the student is important enough to the story given the privacy interests involved. If he could show that students knowing who might have exposed them to the illness will give them greater ability to take appropriate precautions than simply knowing that were exposed by someone, the newsworthiness defense would seem to be rock solid.

14. The best answer is "D."
None of the uses that Janet has proposed would appear to violate copyright law. While most creative works -- in almost any fixed format -- can be copyrighted, there are a few key exceptions that student journalists should know about. For example, generally speaking, works created by federal government employees (such as the official White House photographer) cannot be copyrighted and can be used without permission. (Of course, proper credit should still be given for journalistic reasons, although the law does not require it.) In addition, there are certain categories of work that the Copyright Office has determined cannot be copyrighted. For example, slogans, titles, names, words and short phrases, instructions, lists of ingredients and familiar symbols or designs are generally ineligible for copyright because they lack the necessary originality and creativity necessary to distinguish them from the ideas they represent. In this case, the "bare" words "Days of Our Lives" can be used without obtaining anyone's permission. (However, you would not want to include any other reference to the popular soap opera, including the use of the logo or other designed elements from the show.) Finally, copyrights do not last forever. Once a copyright expires, a work falls into the public domain and can be used freely. The duration of a particular work's copyright can vary. Certainly any work by Shakespeare -- now close to four centuries old -- is fair game.

15. The best answer is "A."

Fair Use recognizes that even where a work is copyrighted, there are occasions -- particularly where journalists are engaged in bona fide news reporting, commentary or criticism -- when one can use limited amounts of a copyrighted work without obtaining permission from the copyright owner. Writing a bona fide review or news story about a copyrighted work or illustrating a poll or news survey about the work are fairly classic examples of where a fair use argument may be available. In such cases, as long as the use would not be viewed as a substitute for the original, it would probably qualify as a fair use.

Including a special page in a yearbook that simply includes drawings of your character and quotes from the show would not seem to fall into any of the traditional fair use categories (i.e. news reporting, commentary, etc.). Note that copyright law does provide some breathing room to satire and parodies of copyrighted works, but it does not appear that is the intention in creating what is essentially a fan page. Finally, it is a common misconception that hand drawing or tracing a copyrighted image -- rather than simply using the original (or a scan of it, for example) -- avoids infringing on a work's copyright. In fact, it makes no difference.

16. The best answer is "D."
After the Supreme Court's Hazelwood decision, the first step in any public high school censorship dispute is determining the appropriate legal standard that school officials must meet before their censorship will be permitted under the First Amendment. One size (or legal standard) does not fit all. Indeed, even students working on different publications in the same school district may be entitled to vastly different levels of First Amendment protection depending on their particular circumstances. Applying the appropriate standard can require a careful analysis of the policies and practices relating to an individual student publication. In this case, you simply don't yet have sufficient facts to make such a determination. For example, an extracurricular publication that has a clear policy or a longstanding practice of allowing student editors to determine the publication's content would likely be categorized as a "designated public forum" by a court and protected by what is known the Tinker standard, a legal test that provides significant First Amendment protection from administrative censorship. On the other hand, a publication that is produced as part of a class where a teacher or other school official routinely decides what can or cannot be published would likely be categorized as a "closed forum" and fall under the much less protective Hazelwood standard. Student media frequently include characteristics of both a public and a closed forum, which can make predicting the forum status of a particular publication quite tricky.

A decision by the editor to drop the article may be the easiest solution, but it sets a dangerous precedent. Self-censorship (as opposed to careful editing) is a recipe for poor journalism and encourages further censorship. Publishing controversial material simply for the sake of raising eyebrows and creating a stir is foolhardy. However, backing away from legitimate, newsworthy topics simply to avoid controversy can betray a journalist's obligations to the public he is there to serve.

17. The correct answer is "D."

Since March 1989, works are automatically copyrighted from the moment they are created. For works created after that date, no other formal action -- such as including copyright notice on the work -- is required.

It is also not necessary to register your work in order for it to be protected. While registration -- which requires filling out a form, paying a small fee and sending in copies of your work -- does provide additional protection and may be prudent in this case, a creative work is copyrighted whether it is registered or not.

18. The best answer is "A."

In order to successfully sue for libel, John must show that the Student Times was at fault in publishing the story. At a minimum, this requires that John
show that the newspaper staff did something they should not have done or failed to do something they should have done. At the same time, the newspaper will try and defend itself by showing that its staff acted reasonably in publishing the story -- even if the information later turned out to be false. Answers "B" through "D" are all things that help show the Student Times acted reasonably. (In fact, in many state's -- under what is known as a "Fair Report" privilege -- showing that your reporter fairly and accurately reported what he or she found in the police blotter would be enough to provide you with absolute protection from a successful libel claim.) While simply believing a story is true is not enough to protect you by itself, publishing a story that you believe may be false is always "unreasonable."

"A" is the best answer because the facts that John has a criminal history and that he likes beer posters really have nothing to do with verifying the accuracy of the police report about John.

19. The best answer is "C."

Despite what some school officials seem to believe, Hazelwood does not give school officials an unlimited license to censor. They cannot, for instance, censor an article or editorial simply because they disagree with it. In order to legally censor material from a school-sponsored student publication, school officials must show that they have a reasonable educational justification for their censorship. Such a standard is admittedly quite broad. For example, the Supreme Court indicated that school officials could censor a story that was "poorly written," "ungrammatical," "biased or prejudiced," "inadequately researched," "vulgar or profane" or "unsuitable for immature audiences." Nevertheless, even though Hazelwood gives school officials considerable leeway, courts have struck down as unconstitutional attempts by school officials to censor material where they have found their justifications for doing so "unreasonable." In fact, both "A" and "B" are based on actual court cases where judges determined that school officials had illegally censored high school student media because they failed to meet the Hazelwood standard.

In the post-Hazelwood world, your best legal defense to administrative censorship is to publish material that is well-reported, well-written, fair, accurate and journalistically sound -- which, of course, should be your goal in any case.

20. The best answer is "D."

The Supreme Court's Tinker standard has been around for almost four decades. During that time, lower courts have made clear that it provides formidable protection to student speech. In interpreting Tinker's "disruption" standard, courts have generally required that before they can censor otherwise lawful
student speech, school officials must be able to provide a "reasonable forecast" that the speech would result in a serious, physical disruption to normal school activities. Under Tinker, school officials may not censor student expression merely because it offers harsh criticism of them or of school policies. Neither can they censor speech simply because they disagree with the viewpoint it expresses or because they find the speech offensive. The fact that the speech sparks controversy, heated debate, hurt feelings -- or a general "buzz" at school -- are also insufficient grounds for censoring it.

21. The correct answer is "D."

The federal Communications Decency Act (CDA) grants immunity to Internet providers and users (which most courts have interpreted to include Web site operators) in lawsuits involving content posted by third parties. Recent cases interpreting the CDA have found that even where such Internet service providers do examine and discover defamatory content, they retain their immunity and are under no obligation to remove or retract such statements. At the same time, a "Good Samaritan" provision in the CDA allows for the voluntary screening of "material that the provider or user considers to be obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, excessively violent, harassing, or otherwise objectionable..." While removing such material is okay, it is probably not safe for an ISP to make additions to or rewrite content provided by others. If a court concluded that a Web site or chat room operator was a content provider because it contributed "in part" to information, it is possible that immunity might be lost.

Despite these legal protections, many news organizations treat their Web-based bulletin boards as they would letters to the editor in a print publication: they only allow comments that have been reviewed and approved to be posted and they reject those that contain damaging statements that cannot be verified.

22. The best answer is "A."

The counselor could successfully sue Keisha based on an intrusion invasion of privacy claim. Intrusion, unlike the other three forms of invasion of privacy, concerns itself not with the news or information that is reported but with how the journalist gathers the information in the first place. The idea in an intrusion case is fairly simple: when a person is in a place where he or she has a reasonable right to expect privacy, a reporter must respect that right. On the other hand, when a person is in a public place -- such as in a school parking lot -- there is no reasonable expectation of privacy and they are fair game for journalists. In this case, the counselor was working in his private office, with his door closed. He probably had a reasonable expectation that others would not intrude on his privacy without his permission. Certainly Keisha -- who
snuck past the secretary and secretly opened the counselor's door -- had no such permission.

While "C" is a closer call, two things make it unlikely that the vice principal could bring a successful invasion of privacy claim. First, Keisha took her photo from a public sidewalk and her camera simply recorded the same thing that could be seen from that spot with the naked eye. Had Keisha employed a special telephoto lens or planted a hidden camera to peer deep into the faculty lounge it might be a different story. Second, as with "private fact" claims, "newsworthiness" is also a valid defense in intrusion cases. Here, the administrator is breaking the law -- he is smoking in school -- and has likely therefore forfeited any expectation of privacy he might otherwise have had.

23. The correct answer is "A."

Passed in 1974, FERPA's requirements are two-fold. First, the federal law requires school officials to provide students (or the parents of minor students) with access to their own "educational records" upon request. Second, it generally prohibits school officials -- but not student-edited media, as some believe -- from disclosing student "educational records" to third parties without student (or sometimes, parental) consent.

24. The correct answer is "D."

Tape recording of conversations is largely governed by state laws. In some states, all parties to the conversation with a reporter must consent to the recording, even if they know they are being interviewed for a news story. But in other states, only one party (in this case, Nina, the reporter) need consent to the recording. Although many journalists believe that there is an ethical obligation to let people know when their conversations are being recorded, a reporter is only legally obligated to get permission from those required by their state law.

25. The best answer is "D."

With some exceptions, the federal Privacy Protection Act of 1980 prohibits both federal and state officers and employees -- including public school officials -- that are engaged in a criminal investigation from searching or seizing journalists' "work product" or "documentary materials" even if the officials present a search warrant.

You should not unreasonably interfere or attempt to physically prevent their search, but do inform them in no uncertain terms that you object to any intrusion into your newsroom and believe it is unlawful. If you consent to the search -- either explicitly or implicitly (for example, by opening a file cabinet
or providing a copy of a photo without objection) -- you may lose your right to contest their actions later on. If possible, quietly photograph or videotape the search and carefully document their actions, being sure to make a list of what they take or examine.

Many journalists believe that providing newsgathering material to law enforcement officials -- and perhaps being viewed as their investigatory arm -- can jeopardize the press's role as a neutral observer and put future journalists in a precarious position when attempting to cover the news. At the very least, police in this instance should first be required to interview some of the hundreds of other witnesses to the event that could provide the information they need.

26. The correct answer is "A."

For public high school students, there exist four contexts in which their speech can occur, each of which is entitled to a different level of First Amendment protection from administrative censorship.

(1) Non-school-sponsored student speech that occurs entirely off-campus. This category receives the most First Amendment protection and includes private student Web sites, independently produced publications and student speech in non-school forums (such as a guest column in a local, commercial newspaper). As long as the creation, publication and distribution of the speech occurs entirely off school grounds, students have much the same First Amendment protection as any other private citizen. School officials have little or no authority to censor or punish students for such speech. Of course the student authors and editors of such speech are fully responsible for everything they publish.

(2) Non-school sponsored student speech that occurs on campus. This includes "underground," or independent, student publications (newspapers, zines, etc.) and other material (flyers, petitions) physically distributed on school grounds during or close to regular school hours. While school officials can establish and enforce reasonable rules regarding when, where and how the distribution of such material takes place on campus, they generally have little authority to restrict (or punish for) what is actually published -- as long as the material would not seriously disrupt school and is not otherwise unlawful (libelous, obscene, etc.).

(3) School-sponsored speech that occurs in a "limited" or "designated" public forum. This includes many "official" student publications and other forms of student expressive activity that are sponsored by the school in which students - - by policy or practice -- have largely been allowed to determine the speech's content. The speech may occur either as part of a class or as an extracurricular
activity. Where a student newspaper, for example, is determined to be a "designated public forum," school officials have limited authority to censor (or punish for) its content as long as it would not seriously disrupt normal school activities and is not otherwise unlawful (libelous, obscene, etc.). In a few states and school districts, student media have essentially been declared "designated public forums" by state law or district policy.

(4) School-sponsored speech that occurs in a "non-public forum." This includes "official" student publications and other forms of school-sponsored student expressive activities where school officials control the content. In many cases, the speech will take place as part of classroom instruction. While school officials do not have unlimited authority to censor or control "non-forum" student speech that takes place as part of a school-sponsored activity, the First Amendment generally provides the least protection to such speech.

27. The correct answer is "D."

All of these statements are false.

The Supreme Court has ruled that the news media have the right to publish newsworthy information about minors (including their names and photos) as long as the information is lawfully obtained and truthfully reported. Parental consent, in such cases, is not required. The rule applies equally to online student media.

Also a growing number of courts have said that minors can provide valid consent on their own to what would otherwise be an unwarranted invasion of privacy. These courts -- in agreement with the American Law Institute, a widely respected legal authority -- have found that consent is and should be effective if a minor is "capable of appreciating the nature, extent and probable consequences of the conduct (to which he consents)," even if parental consent is not obtained or expressly refused.

28. The correct answer is "D."

While a number of -- and in some cases, most -- courts have found individuals holding these positions to be public figures or public officials, not all courts have. Predicting the legal status of an individual is a tricky matter that is best left to media law lawyers. Journalists do themselves a favor by erring on the side of caution and always making sure they report and write in a responsible, conscientious, accurate manner no matter who they are writing about.

29. The best answer is "A."
When using names or photos of people in ads for a business, you always need to make sure you can legally use the image and don't commit a misappropriation invasion of privacy. Also called "commercialization," this type of invasion of privacy should rarely present a problem for alert student journalists. Misappropriation is the unauthorized use of a person's name, photograph, likeness, voice or endorsement to promote the sale of a commercial product or service. Having all subjects featured or mentioned in ads or other commercial/promotional material sign a release form giving permission for the use of their photo in this context is the easiest way to avoid misappropriation claims and should be a standard practice.

Remember, using the same photo not in an ad but in a news context would not cause a misappropriation problem.

30. The best answer is "D."

Public school records related to a public school's purchase of new sports equipment would clearly be public information and available under almost any state's open records law. Fortunately, using an open records law is straightforward. First, it usually makes sense to simply -- and politely -- ask for the records. Where that doesn't work (as is apparently the case for Yong), the next step is to file a short written request for the records with the public official that you believe has them. In this case, Yong should request "all records from the last year relating to the purchase of new softball bats." He should cite the state open records, stipulate whether or not he is willing to pay a reasonable fee for copying the records and provide a requested deadline for receipt of the records. He may also want to point out to the principal that the law includes fines or other penalties if the principal refuses to comply. (To make it super easy, Yong might want to use the Student Press Law Center's free, automated, fill-in-the-blank records request letter generator, available on the SPLC Web site.) Only after filing the written request and being denied -- or ignored -- will Yong want to think about filing a lawsuit. There is no need for Yong to drop the story if he believes it is newsworthy. That may be exactly what the principal is hoping for. Journalists have an obligation to their readers to follow through and report the stories that deserve to be reported -- not simply those that are easy to report.