

● **VIBRATO REVIEW**  
The Vibrato staff reviews artwork submitted anonymously by the upper school student body. All work is critiqued, analyzed and evaluated. In late February, all literary, photography and art work that was accepted during the school year is evaluated one last time and paired up for publishing.

# Ownership: A Key Ingredient for Success

By Ana Rosenthal

**E**arly last February, I was in my office, frantically working to ensure that one of our many deadlines would make it to press on time that afternoon. Quietly, one of the sophomore newspaper staff members came into my office, stood by my desk for a few seconds and then said to me, "I know this is a long shot, Mrs. Rosenthal, but please hear me out."

I immediately stopped typing and turned to her. She had me hooked at "this is a long shot."

"I think we should publish a guide to the 2016 primaries," she said as soon as she realized that she had my undivided attention. "I know we don't have much





time, but it would be great if we could distribute it before Super Tuesday.”

I quickly reviewed the calendar in my head: that would only give us two or three weeks to bring the staff on board, plan, write, design, layout, publish and distribute. And that did not even include all the other deadlines that the staff was currently working to meet. Knowing that the journalism room is always a busy place—as the incubator of our newspaper, news website, yearbook and literary magazine—she was almost apologetic with her suggestion and knew that we would need to do a lot of work in a very short amount of time.

“I think that is a great idea,” I told her. I did not know how we would make it happen, but somehow I knew we would make it happen. I am certain she was surprised at how little work it took to convince me.

This energy is precisely what keeps me going: enthusiastic students who think creatively and want to go the extra mile – enthusiastic students who crave and enjoy a challenge.

In my many years of teaching, I have learned that the more freedom you give a journalism student, in terms of content and creativity, the more



they will own the publication. For a student publication to succeed, ownership is an essential ingredient, if not the most important one.

Our news website, [hockadayfourcast.org](http://hockadayfourcast.org), started in a similar manner approximately seven years ago. I always knew building a website was an important and necessary step to



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take in order to mirror industry and mass communications standards. However, I also knew that starting a website without student interest would be an exercise in futility. To my delight, a student came into my office and suggested starting one. I respected her initiative and immediately agreed.

Building our website has been a long process, one riddled with challenges and honest mistakes. The first website was basic and plain, designed using a MacBook and consisting simply of stories and photographs. We did not know about WordPress at the time, so updating the website was a huge job where we had to manipulate every single text box and image in order to make room for new ones. We spent hours updating the website every month. Yes, we updated the website once a month—and we felt so proud of it.

Luckily, my students got savvier. They learned how to use WordPress

**● VIBRATO PROOFS**  
A group of Vibrato staff members review the recently received printer's proofs. The students check for colors, photo quality and proofread one last time.

and edit templates, how to shoot and edit video, how to blog and create polls. They also learned that a website does not happen overnight, and that the learning never stops.

As their adviser, I work with them, guide them, and make sure the content is appropriate and of the highest quality before each story is uploaded, never forgetting it is their publication, and a student one at that.

But the day I realized that my students truly felt ownership of the website was on Saturday morning, Nov. 14. I, like millions around the world, woke up to more news stories detailing the horrific Paris attacks that occurred the previous night. I was at the Orlando airport early that morning, with a colleague and a group of students, waiting for our return flight home from the JEA/NSPA fall conference. After visiting several news sites, I went to [hockadayfourcast.org](http://hockadayfourcast.org) to review some of the stories my students had saved as drafts. A rather large [image of the Eiffel Tower](#) was the first thing that appeared on our site. At 2 a.m., without thinking twice, the assistant web editor had posted a graphic of the classic

French icon, along with an editorial. She did not ask for my permission, consultation, or review—she simply posted it. I was impressed by her boldness and touched by her story. And of course, I felt great pride.

Deep inside, I knew this was exactly what was supposed to happen. My student felt ownership of the publication.

These are the moments when you realize that your students are truly engaged and have indeed learned from all your instruction, direction, and guidance. They now get it: there is a platform in front of them, and if they use it wisely, they will shine.

The sophomore student who suggested we produce the guide to the 2016 primaries also got it; she took ownership of the newspaper and used it as platform to shine. Not only did she shine, but she radiated.

Out of 29 newspaper staff members, 15 decided to volunteer and work on the elections special issue. The final product featured information about the candidates, facts about issues, the election process, voting information, editorials and poll results that had been conducted at school. The glossy magazine was elegantly designed and looked and felt like a professional publication.

The best compliment came from the school's headmistress, Liza Lee, in an email to me the day after the issue was distributed. "This is wonderful!" she wrote. "Please tell everyone involved that it's a spectacular achievement. Do you have an extra copy? We were at a dinner party last night and one of the guests persuaded me to give him mine."

Everyone wanted to own a copy of my students' publication. And that felt great.

