

2025 IJEА NEWSPAPER & DIGITAL NEWS MEDIA CONTEST

DIVISION 3 INDIVIDUAL WINNERS — Enrollment 1,400 to 2,199

BEST ADVERTISEMENT

Place Name: First Place
Contestant Name: Prospect High School
Entry Title: Young Life
Entry Credit: Alyssa Kowols
Judge Comment: Excellent layout, good use of photos. All of the essential information is here. Nicely done!

Competition Comment: See judge comment.

BEST ALTERNATIVE STORYTELLING

Place Name: First Place
Contestant Name: Prospect High School
Entry Title: Movie Buff Picks and Predicts the 97th Academy Awards
Entry Credit: Lucas DeLuca
Judge Comment: Really solid design, well done.

Place Name: Second Place
Contestant Name: West Chicago High School
Entry Title: wtw WEGO? Oct. 10, 2024
Entry Credit: Mariah Varnado, Ja'Nyah Villa, Romeo Alfaro, Eli Sampson
Judge Comment: A great collaborative effort.

Place Name: Third Place
Contestant Name: Washington Community High School
Entry Title: What is your favorite thing about WCHS?
Entry Credit: Annabelle Hiel
Judge Comment: It really pops!

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST AUDIO JOURNALISM**Place Name:** First Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** The urban legends of Mount Prospect**Entry Credit:** Dylan Maye**Judge Comment:** Compelling content, strong audio, solid delivery. (Work on script and delivery so you don't sound like you're reading. Contractions help a lot!)**Place Name:** Second Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** Love that lasts**Entry Credit:** Leanna Kewarkis**Judge Comment:** Solid scripting and audio. (Work on script and delivery so you don't sound like you're reading. Contractions help a lot!)**Competition Comment:** Two strong entries!**BEST CENTERSPREAD STORY PACKAGE****Place Name:** First Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** Honoring women's history month**Entry Credit:** Sarah George, Stella Palm**Judge Comment:** This is local coverage at its best, with a good mix of photos and sharp design. You provide information readers need and can't get elsewhere.**Place Name:** Second Place**Contestant Name:** Maine West High School**Entry Title:** Breaking the Cycle: the impact of difficult parent relationships**Entry Credit:** Taryn McGannon, Giuseppe Bruno**Judge Comment:** Local coverage makes the best use of a spread. Pullouts help offset the lack of photos. Get verbs in headlines, which should cover the columns.**Place Name:** Third Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** Destigmatizing mental health**Entry Credit:** Xander Adkins, Alyssa Kowols**Judge Comment:** Appealing design and local coverage makes a winning spread. Central art grabs readers. Beware of alliteration in headlines.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: Diddy's Crimes Send Warnings to All

Entry Credit: Max Siuchta, Elizabeth Stettner, Cris Lawpattanapong

Judge Comment: The topic likely interests some readers,, though they also get coverage elsewhere. This subject is a challenge to localize

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Washington Community High School

Entry Title: Homecoming Highlights

Entry Credit: Rebekah Neussl, Annabelle Hiel

Judge Comment: The mix of photos is good. This might have been best entered in photo stories.

Competition Comment: Local coverage with good reporting works best in a spread. The entries showed much work to give readers information that they can't get elsewhere. Keep the basics in mind . . . verbs in headlines that cover the copy . . . short paragraphs to make copy look easy to read.

BEST EDITORIAL CARTOON

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Brainstorm

Entry Credit: Andrealou Lagueras

Judge Comment: Nicely done. Cartoon offers a subtle but effective point of view.

Competition Comment: Aside from the winning entry, all others did not meet the criteria for an editorial cartoon, that being, as stated, "A cartoon that expresses an opinion about a subject of relevance to the publication's audience" and that an editorial cartoon "should not simply be an illustration that goes along with a news or feature article."

BEST FEATURE STORY

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: Fine arts enrollment rebounds after pandemic disruptions

Entry Credit: Wil Cooper, Lilyana Bonilla

Judge Comment: I really like this story. It looks at the arts in your school in terms of involvement, and showcases the drive of the teachers to make changes. Good statistics

and background to support the story, and good interviews with your sources. Looked at all the angles. Nice lead. Would have been nice to come back to that at the end...sights and sounds today. Nice job.

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Disruptive Empathy

Entry Credit: Peter Radosh

Judge Comment: Excellent interview with Mr. Camardella to shed light on the complex situation. Good opening and closing with the student to frame the piece. And good background and explanation

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: The great divide

Entry Credit: Amanda Feinberg

Judge Comment: Excellent news feature. It's your school figuring out how to navigate this strange political time. Good interviews with administration and teachers, and good background and explanation. Anchors the spread well.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: Beauty at a cost

Entry Credit: Irene Han

Judge Comment: Some of this reads like a report, especially the third graph, which is really long and intense. Separate out the quotes into their own paragraphs. Good blend of local sources and expertise. Nice opening and great information. Nicely done.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: West Chicago residents protest ICE amid rumors, misinformation

Entry Credit: Sami Moesch, Leo Mendoza

Judge Comment: What a scary time for your students and the community. This is really a news story but you have added a few feature writing techniques, especially in the opening and in breaking into sections. Good structure and sourcing to get to the heart of the protections, etc.

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST FRONT-PAGE DESIGN

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: The great divide

Entry Credit: Amanda Feinberg

Judge Comment: Overall, very impactful display and great design! Front page is somewhat text-heavy, so would consider adding secondary but alike stories or visuals to create a package. This also helps push readers through the entire paper. Recommending looking at front covers from Election Day coverage for examples and inspiration. Overall, great cover!

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Disruptive Empathy

Entry Credit: Peter Radosh

Judge Comment: Cover follows universal page design principles nicely. Would consider intention behind certain choices, such as the text shape and size of the sub-deck. Also consider headline hierarchy as both stories are competing for attention being about the same size at the same height on the page. Also consider the accessibility element as white text against a transparent box can make the article difficult to read. Recommending finding other ways to provide contrast, such as applying a gradient instead.

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Washington Community High School

Entry Title: Nov. 4, 2024

Entry Credit: Annabelle Hiel, Madeline Bishop, Hannah Meyers

Judge Comment: Design applies good overall design principles to page. Would consider enlarging photos, if possible, to have an even more dominant visual. This also forces story text to jump, which pushes readers to continue reading as both front-page stories end on the front page. Also consider combining alike stories in one package. Recommending to look at front covers from Election Day for example and inspiration! Overall, designer applies principles well. Also consider positioning of candidates above masthead, as tops of heads are cut off.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: Masquerade Brigade

Entry Credit: Trino Chavez

Judge Comment: Overall, good design! Elements provide great visual interest and contrast. Advising to check aliasing on masthead for fuzziness. Also consider removing white border to give a little more breathing room on busy visuals or provide some sort of contrast inside and outside the border.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Washington Community High School

Entry Title: Oct. 4, 2024

Entry Credit: Annabelle Hiel, Madeline Bishop, Hannah Meyers

Judge Comment: Design applies principles well to page. Would consider sizing up visuals and designing on a 5-column grid to allow for bigger visuals and headlines, which would

help text jump, forcing readers to continue reading the edition. Would also try to avoid visuals of people where readers cannot see their faces. To help eat up some space, would also consider teasers and an index of some kind under the masthead or at the bottom of the page. Also consider bold bylines to ensure authors are receiving credit by readers.

Competition Comment: "Finding What Heals Us" entry: Overall, this is a good design, but for graphic-heavy covers, would consider keeping all elements the same aesthetic or style because that can actually be distracting for readers.

BEST HEADLINE

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: Bows, blush, and Baroque: Inside the coquette aesthetic taking over Gen Z fashion

Entry Credit: Cris Correa

Judge Comment: This is a very target audience-oriented headline. Knowing the audience and how to write to the audience is crucial to generating interest in media where attention is hard to gain.

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: Navigating the Future, Now

Entry Credit: Joseph Murphy

Judge Comment: The contrast between "future" and "now," emphasized by the separation of the two words by a comma, is a nice juxtaposition. The traditionalist in me would still like to see a subject to pair with the verb "navigating."

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: Breaking the Cycle: the impact of difficult parent relationships

Entry Credit: Taryn McGannon, Giuseppe Bruno

Judge Comment: The use of one headline to encompass a series of stories on the same spread is difficult. By itself, the headline doesn't offer much that is meaningful (the main headline uses a verb with no subject; the subhead uses the vague "impact," which could mean so many different things), but looking at the holistic view of the page, it works well enough as a broad brush for the full scope of the content.

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST HUMOROUS COMMENTARY**Place Name:** First Place**Contestant Name:** Washington Community High School**Entry Title:** TikTok ban broke hearts, lives**Entry Credit:** Annabelle Hiel**Judge Comment:** Excellent piece of satire! The piece is humorous, imaginative, and well written. The article exposes a ridiculous aspect of society through irony and exaggeration, just as satire is supposed to! Loved the ending, with the "voice of reason" from Maple Leife. I laughed out loud a few times. Keep writing!**Place Name:** Second Place**Contestant Name:** Washington Community High School**Entry Title:** Augustine Awarded First in Multitasking**Entry Credit:** Maddie James, Crista Baker**Judge Comment:** Nice satirical piece with some interesting observations about society's obsession with productivity. The "quotes" were well-chosen. Well written and punchy. The writers demonstrated a good grasp of satire and humor. It made me laugh out loud. Keep writing!**Place Name:** Third Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** Over 100 years later, Mozart drops music before Frank Ocean (and others)**Entry Credit:** Xander Adkins**Judge Comment:** Creative angle and well written. The juxtaposition of Mozart and Frank Ocean's musical worlds, along with the writer's critique of reasons why Mozart hasn't been dropping music for the past 200 years made this piece work well.**Place Name:** Honorable Mention**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** Why Spotify Wrapped determines your value as a human being**Entry Credit:** Xander Adkins**Judge Comment:** Nicely written.**Place Name:** Honorable Mention**Contestant Name:** West Chicago High School**Entry Title:** [OPINION] Valentine's Day is a capitalist scam, but buying gifts for love is not**Entry Credit:** Jonathan Saucedo**Judge Comment:** Nicely written and researched.**Competition Comment:** See judge comments.

BEST ILLUSTRATION**Place Name:** First Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** Disruptive Empathy**Entry Credit:** Sage Gilliland**Judge Comment:** Impressive art and strong layout adds to the illustration.**Place Name:** Second Place**Contestant Name:** Washington Community High School**Entry Title:** Screeching Cicadas**Entry Credit:** Emily Goltz**Judge Comment:** Strong visual, which needs no further explanation; the facial expression and swarm reminds the readers of the experience.**Place Name:** Third Place**Contestant Name:** Maine West High School**Entry Title:** Finding what heals us**Entry Credit:** Noah Abero**Judge Comment:** Strong dominant image that keeps the attention until leading down to the bottle and making the point clear.**Place Name:** Honorable Mention**Contestant Name:** Maine West High School**Entry Title:** Manifest Injustice**Entry Credit:** Noah Abero**Judge Comment:** Image holds a great amount of detail and offers the message while holding the readers's attention.**Place Name:** Honorable Mention**Contestant Name:** McHenry High School**Entry Title:** Anticipation time**Entry Credit:** Beth Brackmann**Judge Comment:** Beautiful art and choice of color adds to the message.**Competition Comment:** Lots of strong entries in this category. Illustrations are definitely drawing the reader's attention to the art. Some impressive art shows off a great deal of effort on the illustrations. Careful decision making on how to best place the art in the layout is also shown. Some illustrations would be clearer by adding wording; blending in the wording artistically would add to the power of the illustration.

BEST IN-DEPTH NEWS STORY

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Addressing reality of violence

Entry Credit: Peter Radosh

Judge Comment: Very insightful and informative on a difficult topic. I enjoyed the opening scene setting. Variety of quotes added a lot to the story. Free of errors.

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: New orders impact schools

Entry Credit: Amanda Feinberg

Judge Comment: This was an interesting read. A great example of a very personal account of a student's experience and how what happens on a national level matters within our school community too.

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: Masculinity reimaged : A deep dive into modern conceptions

Entry Credit: Romeo Alfaro

Judge Comment: Well researched and great interviews. I really enjoyed the research and interviews that shared a variety of perspectives.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: McHenry High School

Entry Title: Am I going to use today?

Entry Credit: Ethan Rassmussen

Judge Comment: Well done. It was informative, engaging and easy to follow along. Free of errors. Interview subject had good insight and narrative.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: A Too Easy Education?

Entry Credit: Max Siuchta, Elizabeth Stettner, Kara Lindenmuth, Eric Pabian

Judge Comment: Very informative write up of a controversial move made by the district. Sources added valuable insight.

Competition Comment: Very competitive field of work here. I hope all students are proud of their submission. I really enjoyed seeing the strength in writing and interviewing among all submissions. Presentation of work is also very creative.

BEST INFOGRAPHIC**Place Name:** First Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** Consumption inflated by media**Entry Credit:** Jocelyn Farina**Judge Comment:** Nice job! I like the quality of the illustrations and using a stack of money instead of a standard bar in the graph.**Place Name:** Second Place**Contestant Name:** Maine West High School**Entry Title:** Behind the Label: The Truth about Healthy Foods**Entry Credit:** Taryn McGannon**Judge Comment:** Good job! Nice summary of the things to look for on a nutrition label. Good accompaniment to the article**Place Name:** Third Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** Emilia Perez by the numbers**Entry Credit:** Sienna DeMonte, Lucas DeLuca**Judge Comment:** Nice job! The Oscar illustration is nicely executed. The letter spacing on the double-digit numbers could be tightened up a bit (less space between the 1+3, 7+3, 1+8).**Place Name:** Honorable Mention**Contestant Name:** Washington Community High School**Entry Title:** Presidential nominees present positions on key issues**Entry Credit:** Landon Colton**Judge Comment:** Well-done and executed. This is a good accompaniment to the article. Perhaps a bit wordy and I would have liked to see the use of icons for "Economy", "Safety", etc**Competition Comment:** See judge comments.**BEST MULTIMEDIA STORY PACKAGE****Place Name:** First Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** Boys' Basketball win crosstown game over Hersey, 56-41**Entry Credit:** Peter Radosh, Kenny Munao, Matthew Pulver, Ben Mitchell**Judge Comment:** good balanced reporting--both teams highlights and runs. Nice job. Good variety of video. Nicely done!

Place Name: Second Place
Contestant Name: McHenry High School
Entry Title: A wild ride
Entry Credit: Berenice Santiago
Judge Comment: Good variety of action shots; watch word choice--smooth out writing; nice layout

Place Name: Third Place
Contestant Name: Prospect High School
Entry Title: Prospect defeats Hersey for first time in three years
Entry Credit: Matthew Pulver, Cora Richer, Claire Wynkoop, Kenny Munao, Peter Radosh, Ben Mitchell
Judge Comment: good variety of shots to help tell story

Place Name: Honorable Mention
Contestant Name: West Chicago High School
Entry Title: Flirting with the Chronicle
Entry Credit: Ja'Nyah Villa, Jonathan Saucedo, Pedro Nicoski-Rios, Cris Correa, Alex Garcia, Gavin Dyer, Gabriella Castro, Miley Pegg, Ronyiah Newcombe, Romeo Alfaro, Alexa Cruz, Eros Avila, Alina Procopio, Robert Lee, Vanessa Escobar, Lilyana Bonilla, Camila Terrazas, Andrea Garcia
Judge Comment: good layout, nice story idea

Place Name: Honorable Mention
Contestant Name: West Chicago High School
Entry Title: WCHS Class of 2024
Entry Credit: Fernando Calvillo-Morales, Michael Birdsell, Oscar Munoz-Granados, Miley Pegg, Sami Moesch, Aly Dusing, Ja'Nyah Villa, Sasha Baumgartner, Ryley Salazar, Karidja Monjolo, Brandon Heath, Fernando Arroyo-Garcia, Alexa Morales, Alyssa Apostoli, Jayden Lang, Shee Nay Paw, Affaan Aleem, Drew Zeman, Yace Morejon, Michael Angeles
Judge Comment: good reflective piece

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST NEWS OR FEATURE PHOTO

Place Name: First Place
Contestant Name: West Chicago High School
Entry Title: Lack of seating, protests, mark last day of DNC
Entry Credit: Sebastian Alarcon
Judge Comment: Great, sharp, tight shot capturing the intensity of the issue.

<p>Place Name: Second Place Contestant Name: Prospect High School Entry Title: Kids carrying crowns Entry Credit: Tessa Trylovich Judge Comment: Good shot capturing the enthusiasm of the moment.</p>
<p>Place Name: Third Place Contestant Name: Prospect High School Entry Title: Performance Entry Credit: Claire Wynkoop Judge Comment: Excellent action shot!</p>
<p>Place Name: Honorable Mention Contestant Name: West Chicago High School Entry Title: D33 Ballet Folklorico celebrates 10 years with performances in Warrenville, Glen Ellyn Entry Credit: Alex Rocha Judge Comment: Interesting framing/composition.</p>
<p>Place Name: Honorable Mention Contestant Name: Washington Community High School Entry Title: THE BATMAN Entry Credit: Carter Heffta Judge Comment: The inset is everything! Fun!!</p>
<p>Competition Comment: See judge comments.</p>

BEST NEWS STORY

<p>Place Name: First Place Contestant Name: Maine West High School Entry Title: The Last Dance? Entry Credit: Eric Pabian Judge Comment: Good solid news story of high local relevance. Good use of quotes from students as well as data and polling information. Avoid words like "drastically" when reporting data -- let the numbers speak for themselves. Nice job!</p>
<p>Place Name: Second Place Contestant Name: Prospect High School Entry Title: Realigning rivalries in new MSL Entry Credit: Peter Radosh Judge Comment: Good solid news story with clear local relevance. Good use of quotes, though it would have been stronger with input from more students rather than relying so</p>

extensively on one individual. Try to directly source information rather than from other newspapers. Generally you shouldn't lead with a date, but here it serves to establish context. Nice job!

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: Hopes for e-learning day left out in the cold

Entry Credit: Andrew Cortez

Judge Comment: Good solid story with clear local relevance. Great use of quotes and details. I would have liked a clearer explanation of the "why" -- maybe reaching out directly to the superintendent? Nice job!

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Washington Community High School

Entry Title: Summer construction gives school 'face lift'

Entry Credit: Rebekah Neussl

Judge Comment: Good solid local story that explains something that impacts students. Great details and quotes but watch your usage on 1st ref/2nd ref.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: OSB program builds community

Entry Credit: Meg Imherr

Judge Comment: Nicely written story that leans toward the feature side. Good use of quotes, including students and admin. Try to limit use of "According to" attribution vs. leading with the point. Well organized, good details.

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST OVERALL DESIGN

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: Washington Community High School

Entry Title: Oct. 4, 2024

Entry Credit: The Advocate Staff

Judge Comment: Modular design achieved. Most pages feature a dominant image. Type is generally clear and easy to read. Liberal white space in gutters and margins.

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Issue #4

Entry Credit: KnightMedia Staff

Judge Comment: Liberal use of screens and other graphics maintain visual interest on

every page. Copy is generally clear and easy to read. Consider layering type over "neutral" images to maintain readability.

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: Masquerade Brigade

Entry Credit: Taryn McGannon, Joey Bruno, Caiden Claussen, Om Patel, Irene Han, Emily Wojnicki, Kara Lindenmuth, Eric Pabian, Arya Thomas, Max Siuchta, Kayla Garcia, Odom Mom, Yarden Amir, Jake Mensching, Joseph Murphy, Maddie Rowland, Noah Abero

Judge Comment: Paper manages to do a lot with a little. Continue using screens and incorporating other graphics to maintain visual interest.

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST PERSONALITY PROFILE

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Paving future of girls' athletics

Entry Credit: Amanda Feinberg

Judge Comment: Great story with a strong lead. It's also timely and important. The anecdote about the sign is amusing and affecting simultaneously.

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: Washington Community High School

Entry Title: Walcott shares fascinating experiences

Entry Credit: Tristan Bailey

Judge Comment: Good piece with a strong sense of how to tell an engaging story. The subject is attractive to students and will help them to think about the power of their own lives. The opening could be more quickly anecdotal, though the story it eventually tells is compelling.

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: Humans of WEGO: From equations to keepsakes: Aaron Hayes frames a legacy

Entry Credit: Logan Reed

Judge Comment: Good story with strong anecdotes about an attractive subject. The anecdotal portion of the lead could come before the more general and informational part. That small change would help draw in readers.

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST PHOTO GALLERY OR PHOTO SLIDESHOW

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: [PHOTO ESSAY] Seniors celebrate final day of high school

Entry Credit: Sami Moesch, Aly Dusing, Ja'Nyah Villa

Judge Comment: Loved the story that the photos told! Great use of different angles and perspectives.

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: The Prospect Varsity Cheer Team at Sectionals

Entry Credit: Tessa Trylovich

Judge Comment: Great action shots! This could have been even better with a few shots taken after the routine — specifically, shots of the team waiting to hear the results and shots of the team celebrating after they found out they were going to state.

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: [PHOTO ESSAY] Play by play, brick by brick

Entry Credit: Miley Pegg

Judge Comment: Powerful images! The photos really do a great job of capturing the emotion felt by the team before, during and after the game.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: McHenry High School

Entry Title: McHenry lights the night during holiday event

Entry Credit: Afton Ingrassia

Judge Comment: Nice variety of images. Great job of giving us a sense of the community.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Boys basketball beats Buffalo Grove

Entry Credit: Claire Wynkoop

Judge Comment: Very impressive action shots! But as a whole, the gallery doesn't really tell us the story of the game. There's no real narrative arc.

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST PHOTO STORY

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: Washington Community High School

Entry Title: Assembly activities engage enthusiastic crowd

Entry Credit: Siya Iyer, Amelia Vincent

Judge Comment: Nice grouping of assembly photos with informative head and appropriate level of detail in captions. To improve: Try to move away from the staid layout of a rectangular box; good work making one photo dominant in the grouping.

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Prospect Gives Back

Entry Credit: Alyssa Kowols, Sienna DeMonte, Cora Richer

Judge Comment: Good work providing a variety of photos on community activities. To improve: establish one photo as the dominant one of the group -- as such, it should be at least twice the size of the next-largest photo.

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Fabulous Las Vegas Knights

Entry Credit: Tessa Trylovich, Alyssa Kowols, Cora Richer

Judge Comment: Good array of photos, but the layout creates a checkerboard effect that distracts from the visual appeal. To improve: establish one photo (ideally, the one with the most visual appeal) as the dominant one of the group -- as such, it should be at least twice the size of the next-largest photo.

Competition Comment: Page designers should treat photo stories with the same care they use in regular layouts: Be sure to establish a center of visual interest -- usually a dominant photo that is significantly larger than next-largest photo because it is the most interesting photo. Don't get trapped into the mindset that you need to use as many photos as possible; that leads to pages that appear to be mostly a collection of stacked photos of nearly the same size.

BEST REVIEW

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: "Gladiator II" Review: Not just a movie — a holiday lesson

Entry Credit: Peter Radosh

Judge Comment: An engagingly written film analysis that does a fine job of connecting the work to the sociopolitical period during which it was released.

Place Name: Second Place
Contestant Name: Prospect High School
Entry Title: Movie Buff Picks and Predicts the 97th Academy Awards
Entry Credit: Lucas DeLuca
Judge Comment: An impassioned, effortlessly readable and highly entertaining look at the recent Oscar nominees. The sort of writing I would personally read purely for pleasure.

Place Name: Third Place
Contestant Name: Washington Community High School
Entry Title: Dancers, 'disses,' and double meaning in Super Bowl halftime show
Entry Credit: Maggie Lawson
Judge Comment: An intelligent and illuminating analysis of Kendrick Lamar's uncommonly artistic Super Bowl halftime show.

Place Name: Honorable Mention
Contestant Name: West Chicago High School
Entry Title: "Suzume": A visual and emotional triumph in storytelling
Entry Credit: Diego Villafuerte
Judge Comment: This review effectively conveys both the strengths and weaknesses that the writer found in Makota Shinkai's film.

Place Name: Honorable Mention
Contestant Name: West Chicago High School
Entry Title: A five-star return to the world of button eyes
Entry Credit: Sam Suarez
Judge Comment: An enticing look at the stop-motion masterwork with an opening paragraph that serves as a great hook.

Competition Comment: This group of submissions were most impressive in how the personal and insightful voices of the writers came through in their analyses.

BEST SERIOUS COMMENTARY

Place Name: First Place
Contestant Name: McHenry High School
Entry Title: Opinion | Tragedy, not trend
Entry Credit: Gabe Santos
Judge Comment: Excellent explanation of a concept that many people may not be familiar with, at least by name — performative activism. Quotes, supporting material and excellent organization keep readers engaged. Tone is conversational yet serious.

Place Name: Second Place
Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: [OPINION] Time flies, literature dies

Entry Credit: Gabriella Castro

Judge Comment: This piece does a great job of presenting potential solutions as well as the problems — it's not just a complaint screed. Great transitions, good supporting quotes. Could have loosened up the language to be more conversational; the lead alone contains at least half a dozen snooze-inducing words.

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Car dependency drives us to disaster

Entry Credit: Sage Gilliland

Judge Comment: Despite the near-flippant and snarky style, this still works as an engaging take on a serious problem. The storytelling lead points the column in a good direction, but it needed some details and numbers off of which to bounce the snark. To support "sickeningly wide" and "pathetic afterthought," do some research on infrastructure to put those opinions into sharper focus.

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST SINGLE-PAGE STORY PACKAGE

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Alumna Legacy sparks inspiration

Entry Credit: Molly Mundt

Judge Comment: Very nice look into a great person. Good graphics to accompany the story. I felt like I got to know the woman a bit.

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Freed or felons?

Entry Credit: Sarah George

Judge Comment: Very good story. Graphics were good. I like the glasses graphic- just not sure if it should be at the top of the story. Overall, very good work.

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: Quirks of Family Remedies

Entry Credit: Max Siuchta

Judge Comment: Very thorough piece. A great look into different cultures.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: Eye of the Beholder: Fine arts preps for annual extravaganza
Entry Credit: Arya Thomas, Maddie Rowland
Judge Comment: A very well-written look into art and music, which can be hard to do.

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST SPORTS COMMENTARY

Place Name: First Place
Contestant Name: Maine West High School
Entry Title: A city of struggles
Entry Credit: Jake Mensching
Judge Comment: A well-written commentary using facts and observations to bolster the writer's opinion.

Place Name: Second Place
Contestant Name: Prospect High School
Entry Title: Knights and Huskies face off for Round 1 of playoffs
Entry Credit: Kenny Munao
Judge Comment: A nice piece capturing the issues at play before the big rivalry game.

Place Name: Third Place
Contestant Name: Maine West High School
Entry Title: A new dawn with Caleb Williams
Entry Credit: Fabian Uribe
Judge Comment: A nice optimistic commentary about the Bears' new quarterback with observations on what needs to happen to ensure his success.

Place Name: Honorable Mention
Contestant Name: West Chicago High School
Entry Title: Top 5 most clutch moments in NFL history
Entry Credit: Carlos Allen
Judge Comment: A fun commentary that is sure to spark debate among pro football fans.

Place Name: Honorable Mention
Contestant Name: McHenry High School
Entry Title: Opinion | Pro athletes deserve stronger consequences for their bad behavior
Entry Credit: Hunter Blake
Judge Comment: This is a good commentary on a serious topic that could have used some statistics to back up the writer's point of view.

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST SPORTS FEATURE STORY**Place Name:** First Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** From novice to state contender**Entry Credit:** Matthew Pulver**Judge Comment:** Solid feature about an improbable personal success story. Good writing and strong quotes bring main subject and other sources to life. Very strong ending -- the coach's quote -- wraps it up nicely.**Place Name:** Second Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** Cheer with love and dedication**Entry Credit:** Claire Wynkoop**Judge Comment:** Interesting description of the relationship between sideline cheer and competitive cheer as explained by the participants. Good use of sources and strong quotes.**Place Name:** Third Place**Contestant Name:** West Chicago High School**Entry Title:** Does skipping high school sports improve athletes' chance of playing D1?**Entry Credit:** Sami Moesch**Judge Comment:** Thorough look at the pros and cons of playing on high school teams versus elite outside clubs, looking at several popular sports. Good quotes from a range of sources. Good use of statistics to support the narrative.**Place Name:** Honorable Mention**Contestant Name:** McHenry High School**Entry Title:** Torn from the turf**Entry Credit:** Aubrey Butler**Judge Comment:** Thorough discussion of the plight of transgender athletes in a turbulent socio-political time. Strong quotes from (unnamed) trans athletes interviewed. I wanted to see more of the human interest element higher in the story.**Competition Comment:** See judge comments.**BEST SPORTS NEWS STORY****Place Name:** First Place**Contestant Name:** Prospect High School**Entry Title:** History books rewritten**Entry Credit:** Matthew Pulver**Judge Comment:** Great, vivid and interactive lede that engages the reader. Nice job giving

a rundown of why the Knights “rewrote the history books” as the headline states. Tightening up the last few paragraphs would help keep the focus on the significance of the team making history throughout the tournament.

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: McHenry High School

Entry Title: Shot clocks to be used in basketball games starting next school year

Entry Credit: Ffion Curtain

Judge Comment: Very informative article that offers plenty of insights into how incorporating a shot clock will change basketball at a high school level. It might be worth mentioning earlier in the story that the shot clock will be 35 seconds.

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: Kulesza and Young make school history

Entry Credit: Jake Mensching

Judge Comment: Short but compelling lede, nice job on highlighting the significance of the records while showing that not everything went smoothly for Kuleza and Young. Wrapping the article up by tying back to the significance of making school history helps underline how impressive the accomplishment is despite the challenges faced by both students.

Competition Comment: Every article had components that were either strong in imagery or very informative. Also a nice job with providing important context and insights to help highlight the importance of each story.

BEST SPORTS PHOTO

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: McHenry High School

Entry Title: Bright lights and long nights

Entry Credit: Rose Wenckebach

Judge Comment: Great framing! Brings the viewer right into the action.

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: Girls' basketball at sectionals

Entry Credit: Claire Wynkoop

Judge Comment: Perfect tip off shot! Well-done!!

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Washington Community High School

Entry Title: Strike!

<p>Entry Credit: Nora Nabhan</p> <p>Judge Comment: Really great frozen moment capturing the intensity, form, and athleticism of the pitcher.</p>
<p>Place Name: Honorable Mention</p> <p>Contestant Name: West Chicago High School</p> <p>Entry Title: THE AGONY OF DEFEAT (featured photo in "[PHOTO ESSAY] Play by play, brick by brick")</p> <p>Entry Credit: Miley Pegg</p> <p>Judge Comment: Powerful moment that sometimes doesn't get photographed/seen.</p>
<p>Place Name: Honorable Mention</p> <p>Contestant Name: West Chicago High School</p> <p>Entry Title: Huddle Before the Race (fourth photo in "[PHOTO ESSAY] Cross country Senior Night/Day ends in team bonding, success")</p> <p>Entry Credit: Gabriella Castro</p> <p>Judge Comment: Nice composition depicting teamwork and connectedness.</p>
<p>Competition Comment: See judge comments.</p>

BEST STAFF EDITORIAL

<p>Place Name: First Place</p> <p>Contestant Name: Maine West High School</p> <p>Entry Title: Senior advisories and policies need post-high school focus</p> <p>Entry Credit: Odom Mom</p> <p>Judge Comment: Awesome job here! Congratulations on a clear and concise first-place winner that details issues students at your school are facing. Great work raising your voice for awareness!</p>
<p>Place Name: Second Place</p> <p>Contestant Name: West Chicago High School</p> <p>Entry Title: [EDITORIAL] Student athletes should be given opportunity to provide feedback on coaches</p> <p>Entry Credit: Jonathan Saucedo, Zach Wiegele, Ana Hurtado</p> <p>Judge Comment: This is great work! I haven't seen an editorial on this before and never thought of it that way before I read your strong reasoning behind it. Great job using your voice to inform others on this important topic.</p>
<p>Place Name: Third Place</p> <p>Contestant Name: Prospect High School</p> <p>Entry Title: Rejection or redirection?</p> <p>Entry Credit: Sydney Strimling</p>

Judge Comment: Very good work here! I appreciate how you raised up an issue that only students at your school have the power to do. This is highly specific and has all the makings of a very strong editorial.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Washington Community High School

Entry Title: Uniting Students and Student Council

Entry Credit: WCHS Editorial Board

Judge Comment: Nice work here! I appreciate how you were able to be specific to your school and make actionable suggestions.

Place Name: Honorable Mention

Contestant Name: Maine West High School

Entry Title: Stripped Of Spirit

Entry Credit: Kayla Garcia

Judge Comment: Great job here! This is a very strong editorial that speaks directly to issues that impact students.

Competition Comment: Thank you all for submitting such great work! It's always tough to rank these when there are so many great entries, but I hope your teams can be proud of all your work.

BEST USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: Wildcat Chronicle (Instagram)

Entry Credit: Wildcat Chronicle Staff

Judge Comment: None

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: McHenry High School

Entry Title: @McHenryMessengr (Instagram)

Entry Credit: Kaylie Szczepanik, Berenice Santiago

Judge Comment: None

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: KnightMedia TikTok

Entry Credit: Abby Damasky

Judge Comment: None

Place Name: Honorable Mention
Contestant Name: Prospect High School
Entry Title: Knightmedia Instagram
Entry Credit: Abby Damasky
Judge Comment: None

Competition Comment: Overall winning accounts have consistent graphics, post often, and engage with the audience.

BEST VIDEO STORY

Place Name: First Place
Contestant Name: Prospect High School
Entry Title: Orchesis builds bonds preparing “Ignite”
Entry Credit: Leanna Kewarkis
Judge Comment: Excellent behind-the-scenes look at the Orchesis production. My only concern is the length. This video would have been much stronger if it had been cut down to three minutes. The current length of 5:08 is just too much. Better to leave viewers wanting more than looking at their watches.

Place Name: Second Place
Contestant Name: West Chicago High School
Entry Title: Illinois Vintage Fest and the rapid growth of “vintage” attire
Entry Credit: Sebastian Alarcon
Judge Comment: The colorful characters who make up the vintage world really help this video stand out from the crowd. Great job with the soundbites and b-roll! Strong narration. Well done!

Place Name: Third Place
Contestant Name: West Chicago High School
Entry Title: Revitalizing West Chicago: Local businesses lead way in changing economy
Entry Credit: Ana Hurtado, Romina Pietanza, Antwan Angeles
Judge Comment: Important subject, and I applaud the staff for taking this on as a video. But as far as I can tell, the video itself — unlike the accompanying article — doesn’t mention anything about West Chicago’s Downtown Investment Program. Without those specifics, the video comes off as a Chamber of Commerce promotional piece. Nothing wrong with that per se, but the video could have been much more.

Place Name: Honorable Mention
Contestant Name: Prospect High School
Entry Title: Discover Lumi Shoppe + Studio: Proudly Woman-Owned
Entry Credit: Kenny Munao, Konstanty Romanowski
Judge Comment: Solid, well-produced video profile of a local business. Good mix of

soundbites and b-roll. Strong narration. The outro appears to be missing its visual element, resulting in an abrupt ending. But overall, this is good work.

Competition Comment: See judge comments.

BEST WEBSITE

Place Name: First Place

Contestant Name: West Chicago High School

Entry Title: Wildcat Chronicle

Entry Credit: Romeo Alfaro, Gabriella Castro, Aly Dusing, Ruby Guerrero, Ana Hurtado, Damian Lopez, Leo Mendez, Sami Moesch, Miley Pegg, Jonathan Saucedo, Sam Suarez, Mariah Varnado, Ja'Nyah Villa

Judge Comment: Appealing header & layout with the Latest Stories ticker and well placed social media links. Organized navigation. Current content with nice visuals. Good organization with thoughtful homepage/landing page layouts. Comment section with likes and engagement. Great use of quotes & in-article photos, tagging, and internal/external linking. All great for SEO. Good use of story layout options; featured articles with long-form layout & large format images. Each section has it's own style while still maintaining a theme. Nice way to personalize the interactive multimedia section. Great interactivity throughout the site with polls, quizzes, commenting, likes, playlists, vlogs, etc. Images all seem well optimized and include title, credit/source, caption, and alt text. Responsive mobile design. All elements are here. Well done, Wildcats!

Place Name: Second Place

Contestant Name: McHenry High School

Entry Title: The McHenry Messenger

Entry Credit: Lily Adams, Ffion Curtain, Rose Wenckebach

Judge Comment: Content is current and organized. Great homepage layout. Consistent category layout with nice use of right rail with multimedia & trending stories. I like the social media links in the header; consider re-arranging position on the header. Creative visuals for articles stand out. Nice galleries & multimedia section layout is good. Stories have tagging, but need more internal & external links. Nice staff profiles & bios. Consider adding a footer with About & Contact links. Responsive mobile design. Nice to see interactive puzzles & editorial cartoons. Great job!

Place Name: Third Place

Contestant Name: Prospect High School

Entry Title: ProspectorNow.com

Entry Credit: Claire Wynkoop, Alyssa Kowols

Judge Comment: Appealing header with date & social icons. Interactive navigation drop down content. Above nav ticker soliciting audience engagement is informative, as well as the breaking news spot. Consider using the ticker for breaking news and the top right

space for a call to action for audience engagement depending on which one is subject to change more frequently. Sports scores and graduation countdown is a good way to break up content. Nice story page layout options. Consider only using the long-form format for "featured" articles and a lower key template for regular news articles that include a right rail for quick access content. Need more attention to image optimization & credit attribution. Responsive mobile design. Good job!

Competition Comment: See judge comments.