



THE SCHOOL BOARD OF BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

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October 28, 2018

To Whom it May Concern:

Rebecca Schneid is the most extraordinary and exceptional student that I have ever had the pleasure to teach. She is intelligent, articulate, conscientious, and so much more than her already very impressive resume. She is the epitome of grace under pressure, guided by her strong moral compass and her desire for social justice.

I have known Rebecca for three years in my capacity as a teacher and adviser of *The Eagle Eye* newsmagazine at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. At MSD, our newspaper course is an honors level academic elective, which requires after school time to complete newspaper-related assignments. The school newsmagazine is a national award-winning program recognized for its journalism excellence. Last year, our program received a Pacemaker Award from the National Scholastic Press Association and a Gold Crown Award from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association for our 2016-2017 school year coverage. These awards place *The Eagle Eye* in the top one percent of school newspapers in the nation. We have been nominated again for both awards for our 2017-2018 school year coverage.

Rebecca has been Co-Editor-in-Chief of the *The Eagle Eye* for two years, and has thrived in the newsroom environment since joining the staff as a sophomore. She is a versatile and tenacious reporter. She can write a news story, an editorial or an in-depth feature story. Rebecca is a dynamic storyteller with a passion for unearthing and sharing compelling stories that resonate with our school community. Her stories are well written and impactful; they showcase her strong voice and writing ability.

She is also highly skilled at conducting independent research and analysis for her stories, as well as building relationships and obtaining sources for interviews. Rebecca has interviewed politicians and celebrities; she is willing to contact any source. Rebecca has a diverse collection of stories that have been published, and she is not afraid to tackle controversial or sensitive stories.

In addition to her writing abilities, Rebecca is a talented photojournalist and layout designer. She is true journalist – adaptable and willing to learn any storytelling format.

Rebecca’s passion for journalism comes through in her work and in her leadership of our newsmagazine. She is always willing to help staffers and other editors. She leads by example, submitting high quality work to meet deadlines. She has a strong voice in editorial decisions that helps to guide the direction of both our print publication and our online news website.

On February 14, 2018 our school community endured one of the worst school shootings in American history. In the wake of terrible tragedy, Rebecca demonstrated strength, courage, integrity, and compassion. She threw herself into our new coverage and was a guiding force behind our memorial issue and our subsequent activism issue. She challenged our staff to capture the essence of those we lost in heartfelt profiles that demonstrated who each person was, and what their loss meant to their family, friends, and the community at large. Then she led by example, writing two of them herself. It was truly the most difficult thing our staff has ever done. She co-wrote our editorial board’s “manifesto,” a ten-point plan aimed at curbing gun violence in America. The piece was published in *The Eagle Eye*’s activism issue and on *The Guardian*’s website.

Other examples of Rebecca’s work have appeared in professional publications. She reported from The March For Our Lives event in Washington, D.C. as a guest correspondent of *The Guardian*. Her reporting from the event was featured on *The Guardian*’s live blog. In addition, Rebecca’s editorial, “We Parkland students made history. And we aren’t going anywhere,” was published on *The Guardian*’s website. She also had an article published on *Elle Magazine*’s website. Last June, Rebecca was the first ever recipient of The Society of Professional Journalist’s High School Journalist of the Year.

Our state press association, FSPA, awarded Rebecca’s feature story about rape culture both an All-Florida award and a Best of the Best designation. Each year, our local newspaper, *The Sun-Sentinel*, recognizes outstanding work from high school journalists in their annual High School Journalism Awards. Rebecca won first place for Best Feature Writer in 2018. She competed against nominated feature writers from 37 high schools in Broward County.

Rebecca is a passionate activist and advocate for social justice. This is clearly demonstrated in the type of stories that Rebecca usually tackles in newspaper, but is also present in her other activities. Rebecca has been a member of Congressman Deutch’s Congressional Youth Cabinet for the last two

years. As a member of the cabinet, Rebecca participates in student-led discussions to find solutions to issues and problems facing the United States. She has also been a member of the school's Politics Club for three years and is currently the club's treasurer. Following the shooting at our school, Rebecca participated in interviews with various news outlets, went to Tallahassee to speak with politicians, and wrote articles - all as an impassioned student demanding change and safer schools for the children of America.

Rebecca was a key contributor to a book written by our staff and the school's TV production program, which was published the month by Random House. She wrote five essays about journalism and activism. Several of her photographs were published in the book as well. Rebecca was a contributing researcher to a study published in the *American Journal of Medicine*, entitled "A Tale of Two Cities." The study examined and compared homicide rates in New York City and Baltimore. Her participation in these two projects demonstrates her writing and research abilities, but also her ongoing commitment to social justice, journalism, and activism.

When Rebecca graduates this year, she hopes to pursue a degree in Journalism or Communications at a four-year university. Her intelligence, passion, engagement, drive, and integrity are all going to lead her to be successful both in college and beyond. She could be the future editor of *The Washington Post*, a congresswoman, or a neurosurgeon saving lives. Regardless, she will help shape and change the future of our society for the better.

In my 15-year teaching career, I have never encountered a student of Rebecca's talent, character, and sincerity. Her absence from my classroom next year will leave a void that will be felt by our entire staff.

Please feel free to contact me for more information about Rebecca and her journalistic achievements.

Sincerely,

Melissa Falkowski
The Eagle Eye Newsmagazine Adviser
Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School