

## 2007 FIRST AMENDMENT AWARD

### **The Columbus Dispatch**

"The ABCs of Betrayal"

"The ABCs of Betrayal" uncovered information that is of concern to any parent in Ohio who is sending a child to public schools, as well as school administrators who couldn't access information when making new hires. The series also had an immediate impact: new laws with sharp teeth made its way to the governor's desk in record time.

Although there were several strong First Amendment entries submitted, only one has changed Ohio law and directly impacted every parent with a child enrolled in public schools. The Columbus Dispatch spent many months exhaustively researching teachers who had committed various offenses and the efforts of many school administrators to bury their problems. This led to bad teachers getting hired again in other districts, a practice known as "passing the trash." The report was made possible by the dogged determination of reporters and editors who overcame public officials who lied about the existence of a database and stonewalled the newspaper at every turn. The shocking reports led to lightning quick passage of a new law designed to protect children. That's what this award is all about - using the First Amendment to help our readers.

This entry affected the largest audience and was very well- written. It brought about the most significant change for the most people.

In terms of depth and impact The Columbus Dispatch's "The ABCs of Betrayal" is the clear winner. It shows that a newspaper's persistence can overcome seemingly overwhelming obstacles to tell really important stories that other would prefer to keep hidden in the shadows. An excellent package all the way around.