

It All Started With An iPod

The Foundation of the Zionsville Student Rights Union

I think it necessary, amid the formality that has characterized the birth of the Zionsville Student Rights Union, to record for the sake of history the humble beginnings of this organization that has grown so rapidly into something great:

March 3, 2008 was just another day in Mr. Dave Ferrell's 2nd period US History class. The class was composed of a diverse group of individuals, but that day a simple email memorandum to the staff of ZCHS would unite them to change the face of the student body.

The memo was simple, almost sinisterly so. It called for the unrelenting enforcement of the school's "iPod ban", namely that personal music devices could not be used under any circumstances, except at lunch. Mr. Ferrell read this email to the class, not knowing that his doing so would spark an idea that would develop into the single largest organization of students this school has ever seen. To summarize, the class was outraged by the iPod rule. It was not, I believe, the restriction itself that incited such indignation, but the fact that a rule could simply be set forth with no justification, and worse, with no means of contesting it.

Indignation slowly worked its way to conversation, and I half-jokingly suggested that we unionize, like so many other groups throughout history who have done the same in the face of injustice. The reaction blew me away; the class was genuinely intrigued by the idea. My friend (and current Vice-Chairman) Taylor Campi and I had discussed a hypothetical group like this in the past, but we never imagined the magnitude with which we could practically succeed. Throughout that day, conversation gave way to the signing of our first 68 members, on a piece of notebook paper that was crudely adorned with a title and rough definition of what the new organization might stand to achieve. Little did we know how huge the group was about to become...

I created a forum for the organization on "Facebook", a personal networking site for high school and college students. I invited about sixty people; within 4 hours, we had 150 members; within one week, close to 300; within 2 weeks, close to 350. Before the month was up, one in every four students was a member. The forum lit up with discussion about issues facing students in our school; discussion that transcended the social boundaries that would have traditionally divided and compartmentalized the vast membership.

As requests for issues to be addressed poured in, I quickly realized that this organization would require more than two people to lead. Taylor and I weighed options for expanding the leadership, and decided that a board of directors, consisting of 7-9 individuals who could each bring something unique to the table, would be the best way to make decisions for such a large group. Adapting this theoretical plan was easy; but deciding how to choose these board members was not. Of course, an election by the general membership for each of the nine seats would have been ideal, but organizing a voting system within our goal launch-time of two weeks would have been logistically impossible. Given that the general membership had entrusted leadership to Taylor and myself at the time of their joining, we resolved that it would be reasonable for us to select the board members ourselves, and give the general membership the power to *remove* them.

And so it was. We selected Cory Kirkham, Payahm Mansoori, Kayli Mellencamp, Tim Pagano, Sarah Schiferl, Andrew Walters, and Dillon Wiley to serve as the Union's

first directors, led by myself as Chairman and Taylor as Vice-Chairman.

This Board's first task was to sign into ratification a *Declaration of Purpose*, which I drafted through several revisions. This document was quickly signed and thereby ratified. Next, the Board signed into action two Initiatives for Reform. One called for the dissolution of the iPod ban (as a symbolic gesture, really). Another brought attention to a rumor that members of the administration were reading text messages on confiscated phones; this second Initiative demanded a definitive stop to this practice, if the rumors were indeed true.

After these documents were finalized, they were put together with a chart that detailed the organization's structure, as well as a letter from myself to then Principal of ZCHS, Mr. Chris Willis, which explained the Union in a more informal manner, and stressed that our group should not be misconstrued as an adversarial act of rebellion or insubordination. This collection of papers became the *ZSRU Launch Package*, which was distributed to both Willis and then Superintendent Dr. Scott Robison on March 19, 2008.

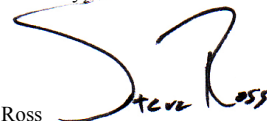
The following Monday, I met with Mr. Willis for the first time. His immediate and genuine acceptance of our organization showed what a visionary educational leader he was. We settled the iPod issue immediately, and moved on to the text message reading issue, where he assured me that he did not condone such activity. Over the course of our next few meetings we finalized an agreed-upon policy for teachers and administrators to follow when confiscating a cell phone.

In those next few meetings we also discussed controversial issues such as the stringency of the Athletic Code of Conduct, and unjust restroom-use restriction policies implemented by some teachers. The Athletic Code represented an outright disagreement between the Union and Administration, and restroom policy reform (as stupid as that sounds) represented a challenge in that it would be difficult to implement school-wide in such a short time frame. These issues will continue to be addressed in the future.

And so the school year ended in harmony between the student body and the administration, hopefully a sign of many years to follow. As I write this, the Board and myself are in the process of finalizing Bylaws that will, hopefully, guide ZSRU leaders of the future in retaining the principles of the organization after the founders have gone.

It is my sincere hope that this Union will perpetuate itself throughout the history of this school, and some day I will be able to return and say that I was a part of forming such a revolutionary organization.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Ross
Founder
Zionsville Student Rights Union