

**STATE OF MICHIGAN LAW DAY 2007 ESSAY CONTEST  
"LIBERTY UNDER LAW: EMPOWERING YOUTH, ASSURING DEMOCRACY"**

**Ashley R. Sokolowski ~ Third Place ~ Sixth Grade**

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***Reasonable Searches: Suppose a parent reports that a student was showing off a hunting rifle in the school parking lot. Should a principal have the right to conduct a search of a student's backpack?***

Suppose you sit next to a student who is a bully. He always gets in fights with the teacher, has a criminal record, and has brought weapons to school in the past. Further suppose a parent or adult reports that this same student was showing off a hunting rifle in the school parking lot. Do you think that the principal has a right to search the student's backpack? I think the principal has every right to search the student's backpack. At the recent school shooting in Paradise, Pennsylvania, on October 3, 2006, five girls died. This shows we can never be too careful with our schools.

The Fourth Amendment states that you cannot have searches and seizures without a good reason. If a student brought a hunting rifle to school the search would be reasonable because weapons are illegal on school property.

In the court case New Jersey v. T.L.O., 469 U.S. 325(1985) the vice principal searched the purse of a student because she was suspected of smoking in the girl's restroom. While searching the purse the vice principal found cigarettes along with drug items. The U.S. Supreme Court felt the search was reasonable because drugs are illegal on school property, and the principal had a reasonable suspicion that she had been smoking. This relates to a principal searching a student's backpack because it is illegal to have weapons on school property. If the principal had a justifiable reason, he should be able to search the student's backpack.

Rule of Law relates to a principal searching a backpack. It states that people must obey the law. If a student brings a weapon to school it is illegal. Then it is up to the principal to search the backpack. Common good requires that individual citizens have the commitment and motivation to work together for the greater benefit of all. If a principal suspects a student has a weapon, it would be for the greater benefit of all students for him to search that student's backpack. There would be less of a chance for anyone to get hurt, and the school would be safer.

A gun in school could hurt or possibly could kill someone. That is why I feel that the principal has every right to search students' backpacks when he feels that the student could harm others.