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## Mounds View High newspaper in 'prior review' battle

Students resist principal's request to pre-approve stories

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Student journalists at Mounds View High School want to stop publishing their school newspaper rather than allow school administrators to review stories before they go to print.

"I would like to keep our newspaper a real newspaper, not a newsletter for the district," said Christina Xia, 18, editor-in-chief of the school's student newspaper, the Viewer.

The Mounds View school district is requiring principals at its high schools, Mounds View and Irondale, to have prior review of stories before school newspapers publish them.

A controversial story published this month at Mounds View triggered the change.

The newspaper story reported on two students who were suspended for posting a photo on Facebook of their teacher, without her knowing, while a student struck a sexually suggestive pose behind her.

The disciplined students and their parents signed waivers so the teens could be named in the story.

But school administrators still worried about the legal ramifications of the story naming the teens. The district's attorney suggested principals use prior review to prevent the newspapers from violating the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, a law that prohibits schools from releasing private student data without having prior consent.

"My concern was for data privacy," Mounds View Principal Julie Wikelius said.

However, state and federal data privacy laws do not apply to school newspapers, said Adam Goldstein, attorney at the Student Press Law Center in Arlington, Va. Those laws are meant to regulate school and public officials — not students, he said.

Prior review of student newspapers creates censorship, Goldstein added.

"The problem is prior review ends up being an invitation to prior restraint," he said. "The administrator picks up the red pen and starts killing stories before they're printed."

A prior review requirement has always been in place at Mounds View, Wikelius said, but she acknowledged the rule had never been enforced and others might not have known it existed.

Wikelius said the controversial story was the first time she asked the paper to pull an item in 10 years. The story had already gone to print, however.

Martha Rush, the newspaper adviser at Mounds View, said she occasionally tells the principal about controversial stories but has never submitted a story for review.

Rush said she never knew the paper had a prior

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review rule.

"I'm opposed to having a policy of prior review," she said. "I believe very strongly in a student-run newspaper. I believe that if students have made mistakes in reporting a story, they should be called on that, and they should correct them just like any professional newspaper would. I'm fearful that this could lead to reducing or stifling student speech."

Wikelius also said she had concerns with inaccuracies and biases in the story.

When asked to give an example, Wikelius said she did not have the article in front of her. "There's some disagreements on whether or not they're accurate at this point," she said.

School administrators complained that the story stated "many students" were required to talk to teachers or administrators after commenting on the Facebook post, Rush said. The image generated more than 40 comments from students.

The newspaper's staff confirmed that administrators questioned at least six students.

"We're trying to find the exact number," Xia said. "This is a very, very relevant story. We did interview carefully when writing it because it was such an important topic."

Student reporter Ben Northrop, 16, interviewed the principal, the disciplined teens and other students who talked about the consequences of posting information online.

Northrop, who would like to be a professional journalist someday, said the story showed him how the school newspaper can affect students and

inform them on important issues.

"It's the first article I've taken on that I actually feel like it's not just for the school," he said. "It actually felt like I was doing real work. It really mattered."

To prevent prior review, Xia has contacted the Student Press Law Center and plans to seek legal assistance. But she would prefer to resolve the issue with the school.

The school does not want to use prior review as censorship, Wikelius said.

"It's my intention to work with the students, and work with the adviser, to see how we can resolve this so publication can continue," Wikelius said. "We just need to have some dialogues and some more shared understandings than currently exist right now."

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