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Mounds View high school newspapers face review

Mounds View district officials cited concerns about errors, potential printing of private data.

By **NORMAN DRAPER**, Star Tribune

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The two student newspapers in the Mounds View School District will have one more stop along the road to publication -- the principal's office.

District officials, concerned about errors and the public airing of private student data, have decided that the Irondale High School Eye and the Mounds View High School Viewer must be submitted to those schools' principals before going to press. Mounds View administrators contend that each school's principal acts as a publisher of the student paper and, therefore, has a right to review the contents before publication.

John Ward, Mounds View schools director of human resources and operations, said the move to review the papers has been building for a while.

"We've had staff come to the [Mounds View High] principal and me with concerns about inaccuracies in the stories," Ward said. "They haven't been major but the principal noticed and I noticed." The final straw came two week ago, he said, when the Mounds View principal, Julie Wikelius, discovered that the Viewer was about to publish student information considered legally private.

"It was a story that contained private discipline data," Ward said. "They interviewed kids who had been disciplined for an incident at the school. The principal hadn't seen it in advance, and on the day the papers were scheduled for delivery [from the printer], she found out there was private data in there."

At that point, Ward said, school officials scrambled to get permission to publish the data from the students who had been disciplined and their parents, then allowed the paper to be distributed. It was then, Ward said, district officials decided they had to demand principal review.

Mixed reaction

The decision didn't sit well with some of the student journalists.

"The student editors are not pleased," Ward

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said.

"I think that if the principal is not happy about something you've written about, she could delay our going to print, and we're already on a tight schedule," said Christina Xia, the Viewer's editor-in-chief. "I just feel if they have kind of already taken the step of prior review, they might impose prior restraint [to prevent an article from being published]."

Mounds View social studies teacher Martha Rush, who is faculty adviser to the Viewer, isn't pleased either.

"To me it's frustrating," she said. "The Viewer has been published without prior review for at least the 11 years that I've been running it, and the kids have done a really good job with me as an adviser, not a controller. I feel like their voice would be much restricted under this." Rush said her concern is that the principal review could be expanded to work as a censorship tool.

"I think they're reacting because they're unhappy about a story that we ran," she said. "To me, the implication is that 'if we don't like another story, we'll make sure it doesn't run.'"

At Irondale, in New Brighton, student paper faculty adviser Diana Lowry said she and her students are OK with the added layer of review.

"It really doesn't affect the way we operate at Irondale too much," she said. "My students have a good grasp of the fact that they are in high school, and it is a school paper, and the principal is the publisher of the paper. That's a good way to teach them about the business of a newspaper, too. Whoever is the publisher has the right to say, 'No, we're not going to run this,' or 'Yeah, we're going to kill this story,' whether the writer likes it or not."

But killing a story is not what the district has in mind, Ward said. He said he couldn't think of a topic that students would not be allowed to print.

"I think controversial articles are provocative and can lead to a lot of good dialogue," he said. "But if you're going to have information in them, it should be factual and balanced."

He said the principal would likely sit down with the paper's faculty adviser and discuss any article that raised questions of accuracy or balance.

The staff of the Viewer said in a statement it

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would not publish further issues until the dispute is resolved.

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