

Horry County Schools Bans TV News



EDUCATION

‘Accused of indoctrination’: Horry Schools teachers banned from using TV news in class

Is the use of CNN in the classroom a needed tool to teach media literacy or just an opportunity to push specific political beliefs on students?

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(NOTE: After this original story was published, the district responded claiming no such directive was issued, despite evidence to the contrary. I have pasted the UPDATE version after this original.)

Horry County Schools teachers have been ordered to stop using video clips from CNN and other television news stations in their curriculum, a decision seemingly tied to parent concerns about political indoctrination.

The apparent change was passed along through a chain of emails among teachers and administrators toward the end of last school year that The Sun News recently acquired via Freedom of Information request.

In late May, Whittemore Park Middle School Principal Quintina Livingston sent an email to social studies teachers advising them that the use of CNN 10 is not approved for daily use in the classroom and should only be used to directly support content within the curriculum.

CNN 10 is a daily 10-minute news show geared toward students that seeks to “identify stories of international significance and clearly describe why they’re making news, who is affected, and how the events fit into a complex, international society,” according to [CNN’s website](#).

That email was forwarded to the district’s incoming social studies learning specialist for middle and high schools, who responded that he heard this was a response to parents complaining about their kids watching “fake news CNN.”

“I had one in my class last year that was convinced I was trying to brainwash him until we watched one and he realized it wasn’t really even structured the same as the actual network,” he wrote.

A few days later, Academy for Academics and Technology Principal Jayson Powers emailed his staff under the subject line “News Clips and Captive Audience Concepts.” Noting he was just passing along information that was shared with him, Powers told teachers they were no longer allowed to use news clips from any news station, including CNN and Fox News.

“The general public/parent perception is that any time we use any of those it can be an opportunity to indoctrinate our students (captive audience) towards one political party or another,” he wrote.

That message was forwarded to the district's then-social studies learning specialist for middle and high schools, who responded that it was a "sad day for educators that what we do is considered an opportunity for indoctrination," admitting that some teachers had been inappropriately using CNN 10, but it's an oft-used and needed resource for high school current events courses.

"The HS folks are VERY upset by this change," she wrote. "They know it is political and feel they are being accused of indoctrination."

HCS spokeswoman Lisa Bourcier, responding to questions about who initiated the directive and why, said she'd seek answers from Learning Services, but no answers were provided prior to publication.

Ken Richardson, school board chairman, told The Sun News he was unaware of the ban.

IDENTIFYING MEDIA BIAS

Frank Baker, a longtime media educator and Columbia-area media literacy consultant, told The Sun News he felt this is a definite step in the wrong direction in a state where students have already shown an inability to identify media bias.

[Data compiled from the SC Ready tests](#) during the past few years have shown a "weakness in the students' abilities to gather information from a variety of sources and evaluate those sources for perspective, validity and bias, according to the 2019 report.

Baker has been pushing for state legislators to pass a media literacy bill that would require the integration of critical thinking and media literacy skills in public schools; 14 other states have already passed similar legislation.

He likened Horry Schools' decision to restrict the use of TV

news clips to banning books and noted that robs students of a golden opportunity to learn how to identify bias and understand current events.

“We know young people are getting their news from social media, which might be fine except they don’t always know where that news originated, and if they can’t identify bias, that’s problematic,” Baker said. “Misinformation in our world is rampant, and social media can’t police content quickly enough.”

Molly Spearman, S.C. Superintendent of Education, recently [referenced such issues with regard to COVID-19](#), advising residents to listen to their doctors and medical professionals when it comes to masking and vaccinations instead of what they read on social media.

HCS had brought Baker in as a media literacy consultant for professional development for numerous years, and he was initially invited to do so again ahead of this school year, but he told The Sun News that invitation was withdrawn shortly before he was scheduled to visit.

REVISION

UPDATE: This story has been updated to reflect a response from the district that contradicts the idea that news clips were banned, despite emails indicating that they were.

Horry County Schools teachers appeared to have been ordered to stop using video clips from CNN and other television news stations in their curriculum, a decision seemingly tied to parent concerns about political indoctrination.

The apparent change – which is now being denied by the district – was passed along through a chain of emails among teachers and administrators toward the end of last school year that The Sun News recently acquired via Freedom of Information request.

In late May, Whittemore Park Middle School Principal Quintina Livingston sent an email to social studies teachers advising them that the use of CNN 10 is not approved for daily use in the classroom and should only be used to directly support content within the curriculum.

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it's an oft-used and needed resource for high school current events courses.

"The HS folks are VERY upset by this change," she wrote. "They know it is political and feel they are being accused of indoctrination."

HCS spokeswoman Lisa Bourcier, passing along information from the district's Learning Services department, told The Sun News that the district did not issue a directive restricting the use of any media outlets, including CNN 10, but just reminded staff that the use of CNN 10 or other news programs "should directly align to the state instructional standards and support the curriculum."

She added that they will work with their staff to clarify the actual directive.

Ken Richardson, school board chairman, told The Sun News he was unaware of any ban.

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Note: The Sun News initially published this story Friday morning without response from the district after sending questions on Tuesday. The district provided its response about 2:30 p.m. Friday.