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## Camdenton Addresses Internet Policy in Light of ACLU Federal Lawsuit

The Camdenton School Board held its second special meeting in as many weeks to add language to its internet use policy in light of a federal lawsuit filed against the district by the ACLU.

September 07, 2011 | Joanna Small and Joel Girdner | Reporter and Photographer

CAMDENTON, Mo. —

An Ozarks school district doing battle with the American Civil Liberties Union says it will file a motion to dismiss a federal lawsuit.

This is a story we were the first to tell you about last week.

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It's important first to review what happened in August before explaining what happened Wednesday night.

The ACLU filed suit against the Camdenton School District claiming its computer system blocks lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender informational websites but allows access to sites that condemn homosexuality.

The district says it all comes down to proper procedure.

"It shouldn't even be a part of education," say a group of parents waiting for the start of the second special meeting of the Camdenton School Board in as many weeks.

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"I was an educator for 30 years," says camdenton resident Sara Reiter.

"When I was in high school I found myself on my own time, not on school time," the group argues.

"I've had students in school not sure what their orientation was and a little bit of access to accurate information might have helped them discover who they are," Reiter counters.

The arguments on both sides were impassioned but fell on deaf ears Wednesday night.

"The ACLU is not a topic on our agenda Wednesday- just this policy."

"This policy" outlines how to petition the Camdenton School District to unblock a blocked site, and block an unblocked site.

"We're not changing practices. These are some of the same practices we've had in place for seven years," explains Camdenton Superintendent Tim Hadfield.

But never written down in entirety, until Wednesday.

The Camdenton School Board won't discuss-- publicly-- the ACLU lawsuit that claims its internet filter blocks some homosexual support websites.

The district's attorney tells us-- privately-- the ACLU didn't follow procedure.

"We wrote to them and they refused to change how they do business," Tony Richert, attorney for the ACLU of eastern Missouri based out of St. Louis told us last week.



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Tom Mickes says a letter isn't enough.

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"We said we have a procedure, we'll take a look at them," says Mickes.

Mickes claims the district unblocked some of the sites in question using the procedure just put in print.

But the suit still stands, and parents are wondering when they'll be heard.

"A community forum, community meeting- there needs to be a community debate," they tell us.

Right now, though, all the decisions about the lawsuit are made in executive or closed session.

Mickes tells us the district will file a response to the ACLU's request for a preliminary injunction and a motion to dismiss the suit either Thursday or Friday.

His St. Louis County based firm represents about 300 school districts in Missouri and Illinois, and he's won against the ACLU in federal court before.

The ACLU brief against Camdenton cites a 1982 US Supreme Court decision.

Nearly 30 years ago the majority held that the first amendment puts limits on a local school board's authority to remove books from the school libraries.

Camdenton is the only district facing a lawsuit - but they're not alone. We found a map on the ACLU website; it shows all the other states that have been targeted by the group.

[Click here to view the map.](#)

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