Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier – 1987

The journalism class at Hazelwood East High School wrote articles and put them together for the school paper. They gave the newspaper to their teacher, Howard Emerson. Mr. Emerson showed the newspaper to the principal. He asked the principal if it was okay to make copies and hand them out to students at the school.

Principal Reynolds did not like what he read. First, there was an article about pregnant students. It described the students, but it did not give their names. Principal Reynolds was afraid that students would be able to figure out who the pregnant students were.

There was another article that Principal Reynolds did not like. This one talked about divorce. In it, one student said things about her father. For example, she said that her father went out too much. She also said that her father didn't spend enough time with his family. The father did not get a chance to tell his side of the story. Principal Reynolds thought this was unfair.

Principal Reynolds thought the paper needed to be changed. But it was almost the end of the school year. He was afraid that it would take the class a long time to change it. If it took too long, the school year would be over and the other students would not get the paper. So he told Mr. Emerson to remove the pages that had the articles about pregnancy and divorce. He said to make copies of the rest of the paper.

The students were very angry. They had spent a lot of time writing the articles. They could have fixed them if Principal Reynolds had given them a chance. Instead, he deleted two pages that also contained other articles. They felt that this was a violation of their First Amendment rights. They went to the U.S. District Court. The court did not agree with them. It said that school officials may limit students' speech in the school newspaper if their decision has "a substantial and reasonable basis." In other words, if he has a good reason, it is okay for a principal to limit students' speech.

The students appealed the decision. The Court of Appeals reversed the decision of the U.S. District Court. This court said that the school paper was a "public forum," or place where students could express their views. The judges said that the school could not censor the paper except "to avoid . . . substantial interference with school work or discipline . . . or the rights of others." They did not think that the articles about pregnancy would have interfered with schoolwork. They thought the articles should have been printed.

The school appealed the decision of the Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court of the United States thought that this was an important case. It dealt with the rights of students. It agreed to hear arguments from both sides.

Source: <http://www.streetlaw.org/en/Page/646/Background_Summary__Questions_>

**Guiding Questions:**

1. In the article about the pregnant students, what was Principal Reynolds worried about?
2. What did Principal Reynolds say was wrong with the article about divorce?
3. What did Principal Reynolds do to fix the problem? Did he have any other choices?
4. What rights did the students say had been violated?
5. Do you think a principal should be allowed to limit what is said in a school newspaper? Why or why not?