

Editorials

A little more conversation

The oil well controversy has been marked by conflicting stories and disturbing reports. As parents, students and faculty worry about the possibility of carcinogens on campus, district officials have a responsibility to assuage fears and release pertinent information in a timely, open manner.

The district's Web site has been regularly updated and generally contains useful information and the superintendent's phone messages, while overly evasive and ambiguous, have at least served as some direct contact between the district and concerned parents.

We understand that the pending litigation requires the district to be careful about what it says. We also understand that the district itself is still in the process of searching for answers. That said, the wall of secrecy that seems to go up whenever the news media, especially Beverly student journalists, ask questions and attempt to report the news thoroughly only makes the possibility of lawsuits and carcinogens more threatening.

Also questionable has been the district's apparent unwillingness to let students hear the arguments and evidence of the Masry and Vititoe law firm in an open forum. For example, as soon as Beverly's administration found out that lawyer Ed Masry was scheduled to field student questions at a KBEV press conference, they forced the students to cancel it. Superintendent Gwen Gross justified that censorship, saying that litigation was pending.

However, administrators and superintendents in

California are not allowed to censor student media. While the Supreme Court's 1988 *Hazelwood* decision allowed authorities to censor students, it also let states pass more liberal laws governing student expression. California is one of those states. Our law forbids school principals and advisors from censoring student publications unless material is determined to be libelous, slanderous, obscene, or that which incites students to unlawful acts on school grounds.

As far as we can tell, a Masry press conference would not fall under any of those categories. Similarly, contrary to what the administration sometimes asserts, it does not have the right to read our stories before they are printed.

Last week, we published an editorial thanking the administration for its support. The administration can be supportive, but it needs to understand and respect its limits with regards to censorship.

Highlights and the Norman Newservice are both award-winning student media publications. The district and the administration need to have more faith in our ability to objectively and thoroughly cover the complex oil well issue. They also need to have faith in the ability of the Beverly Hills community to make intelligent decisions when they are given all the necessary information.

However, student media can only report and the community can only make informed decisions if the district makes a more concerted effort to keep the channels of communication open.



The Tower of Hope
You Don't Get
Cancer