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FEATURED

'Marian' producer, student producers announce public records request

Maya Wilkins | The Journal Gazette

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Meadowe Freeman, a student producer of "Marian, Or the True Tale of Robin Hood," speaks Tuesday at a news conference
Stan Sussina | The Journal Gazette

Producers of the student play that was canceled by Carroll High School administrators announced Tuesday they have filed a public records request, asking to "set the record straight" about why their production was blocked.

After the cancellation, the students independently produced “Marian, Or the True Tale of Robin Hood” on May 20 at the sold-out Fort Wayne outdoor Foellinger Theatre. The play’s GoFundMe raised almost \$85,000 – exceeding the \$50,000 goal.

The formal records request seeks all email messages or attachments sent or received by Superintendent Wayne Barker, Assistant Superintendent Bill Toler, former spokesperson Lizette Downey and Principal Cleve Million about “Marian,” its cancellation and any requests for comment from media members.

Nathan Gotsch, producer for “Marian,” said Tuesday at a news conference that Northwest Allen County Schools provided emails related to the play in response to a public records request from Mark Alesia, investigative and enterprise reporter for the Indianapolis Star.

“We trust that (NACS) will be just as forthcoming with us and look forward to their internal communications resolving once and for all who was actually to blame for the cancellation of ‘Marian,’” Gotsch said.

The Journal Gazette contacted NACS for a comment before the news conference. The district declined to comment because it had no information about a news conference. NACS also declined to comment after informed of the request.

Student producers Meadowe Freeman, Stella Brewer-Vartanian and Kaitlyn Gulley said NACS said student disruptions caused the play’s cancellation.

Freeman said Million told students in February it was canceled because he was worried about community members protesting outside Carroll High School during the show. He did not mention any worries about student disruptions, she said.

“None of us involved with the play witnessed or even heard about any disruptive behavior happening among students due to the play,” Freeman said, “before most of the student body even knew it was happening, much less that some considered it controversial.”

Brewer-Vartanian said district officials changed their story once local media began asking questions.

“Rather than tell the truth about what happened and why they made that decision, they shifted the blame from anti-LGBTQ community to Carroll students,” Brewer-Vartanian said.

On Feb. 27, Barker said the decision to cancel the play was made by the Carroll administration, not by him or the school board.

“The reality of it is that the play was canceled due to the well-being of our students,” he said. “We started to have students on both sides of the issue, and it started to become a divisive play choice for students.”

Brewer-Vartanian said NACS has continually said they canceled the play because of student disruptions. She asked why the district would blame students rather than the adults who were against it.

“Because they did not think we would fight back,” Brewer-Vartanian said. “Because we were ‘just kids.’ But we have shown over the past few months that we are so much more than that.”

Gulley said the statements from NACS have left many – especially the queer student and graduate body – upset and disheartened. Gulley said she feels the Carroll administration is supposed to make students feel safe, but it has done the opposite.

“The NACS administration could have used the controversy surrounding ‘Marian’ as an opportunity to change and make LGBTQ students feel supported,” Gulley said. “Instead, it is choosing to further alienate us, along with so many community members who love and care for us.”

The public records request seeks email communications from Feb. 21 to July 11. The organization also asks for the redaction of student names or personal information to protect privacy.

mwilkins@jg.net

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Maya Wilkins

Reporter