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ACLU says Web filter may violate student rights at Southland high school

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KPCC: Southern California Public Radio
Adolfo Guzman-Lopez

The American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California said Tuesday that a Southland school district is potentially violating students' constitutional rights by blocking access to informational gay and lesbian Web sites.

ACLU attorneys say the Rowland Unified School District in the San Gabriel Valley uses computer software to keep students from seeing the Web sites of groups that include the Gay Straight Alliance Network and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation.

The civil liberties group argues that blocking those sites could potentially harm students who've dealt with bullying or worse because of their sexual orientation. Officials from the school district were not available for comment.

"It is not our intent or desire to discriminate against LGBT-related content and block student access," ?said Rowland Unified Superintendent Maria Ott in a written statement. "M86 Solutions is the company that our LEA (Local Education Agency), the Los Angeles County Office of Education uses. We are in the process of contacting both LACOE and M86 Solutions regarding this matter."

Nogales High School, one of Rowland Unified's two large high schools, has a Gay Straight Alliance club. The ACLU argues that filtering software prevents such a club from accessing the information it needs to carry out its mission.

All districts use filter programs to keep students and adults from Web sites officials consider inappropriate for school use. Some programs include a setting to block "lifestyle" sites, including

gay and lesbian sites that aren't sexual in nature. In recent years the ACLU has successfully convinced school districts in other parts of the country to stop filtering educational gay and lesbian sites. A couple of weeks ago the maker of one such program agreed to remove its lifestyles filter.
http://www.scpr.org/news/2011/05/31/rowland-web/ [1]
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GSA Network 1550 Bryant St., Suite 600, San Francisco, CA 94103 | 415-552-4229 | info@gsanetwork.org
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