

From the Staff

To Dr. Drew Watkins, the PISD School Board and Dr. John Burdett,

The online school newspaper, Eagle Nation Online, started in 2016 and has existed throughout the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years. We represent the student voice of Prosper High School and publish every story in hopes to educate, to inform and to persuade the student body.

On March 23, the staff was informed that Ms. Lori Oglesbee, our adviser and UIL coach to some, will not be recommended to have her contract renewed next year. We were upset to hear this as she has taught us so well and given us skills we may not get from any other adviser, but the staff was also concerned on whether or not we will have an online newspaper next year.

We know that the school has a shortage of journalism teachers right now and that if Ms. Oglesbee leaves, she will be difficult to replace, but either way we feel a school newspaper is vital. This is because a student's voice when found and used to stand up for their beliefs, can not only make the student body more engaged but can change the school for the better. An example of this would be the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida when they took a stand and voiced their opinions after the deadly shooting.

Eagle Nation Online also feels that students should be informed of what is happening at the school, as it is their school, and they should know the whole truth. Information is better than misinformation, and we trust the staff and administrators that we interview to give us this correct information.

In October, one of our staff members published a news story on how the seniors would no longer have a movie day. It was taken down under a directive given to Ms. O from Dr. Burdett, and the reasons were told in two different meetings he had with Ms. O, in November and March. He said that the news story had cast our former principal, Mr. Gregory Wright, in a negative light. The staff felt that if the story had made Mr. Wright look bad at all, it was because of the interview, as the story stated facts only. All of the information in the article came from the interview, which we still have, and the staff had trusted everything told by Dr. Burdett.

We were also told that we should have verified what Dr. Burdett said with the central office. We trusted what Dr. Burdett said to be correct information, as he is our principal, and we considered him a reliable source. Yet, from that point on, we have tried to verify information from several sources.

We chose to publish this news story because we felt that seniors needed to be informed of whether or not they had a movie day. They needed correct information and most seniors were under the impression that there was a movie day, as it was a tradition. Students were even more confused because there was a tweet about the movie day that month from Mr. Kirkland, that had been taken down shortly after. We also felt that seniors should know all of the reasons why there would no longer be a movie day and why the details were released with such late notice, especially because Dr. Burdett said that that there would not be one in the interview.

In February, reporter Haley Stack wrote an opinion piece on the removal of a sophomore reading book, *A Separate Peace*. She wrote this to give her opinion on why the removal of the novel negatively impacts students, as it is a coming-of-age book, which is the theme for sophomores. On March 2, Ms. O was told to have the story taken down because Dr. Burdett said it had numerous grammatical and usage problems as well as inaccuracies. There were two grammatical errors, a missing apostrophe on the word “let’s” and an extra period. Haley also changed the word banned, to removed. Editors Peyton Jefferson, Neha Madhira, and Isabella Abraham take full responsibility for overlooking these mistakes. However, Ms. O was blamed, and the staff was told that they must send every story that is controversial, casts the school in a bad light, or was against “community norms” to Dr. Burdett. Since we did not want to be censored again or have any more restrictions, we sent him every story that was questionable.

We do not think that Eagle Nation Online will need this kind of prior review next year, with or without our current adviser. This is because we feel that everyone makes mistakes and we should be the ones to edit them out so that we learn. When football players make a wrong play, the coaches don’t run out to do the plays for them. When a cast member of a play messes up, the theatre teacher doesn’t say their lines for them. We feel this should be the same way with our paper. The concept here is the same as immersive learning techniques seen in every major subject. Students in other classes are allowed hands-on learning, and we hope to be treated with the same respect.

We also hope that occasionally, we are recognized for the work that we do. We have won 31 awards for the newspaper this year the r alone, with more contest results to come in soon, and most of the staff members are also UIL Journalism competitors as well. Altogether, Ms. O’s kids have won 100 journalism/photojournalism awards this year. The staff has never had Dr. Burdett come down to talk to us, either to congratulate us or discuss any problems he has had with our newspaper, and we have only been sent two emails of congratulations by him after Ms. O sent lists of awards out. The UIL members were also never congratulated after we had won a back-to-back district championship, but rather told the day after that Ms. O may be leaving next year.

Although we know Ms. O’s information about her contract and why she may not come back next year is personnel, we hope that she does stay. She is the reason why almost all of the journalism students at this school have found their voice and learned to use it, and this school may never be able to replace the large skillset she brings to the table. She has been an incredible newspaper adviser, journalism/photojournalism teacher, UIL coach, and all-around mentor. The positive impact that she has had at the school will never be forgotten. She formed a newspaper staff of kids that were almost all minorities or misfits and brought us together to change the school. One of our staff members could barely write a sentence in English last year, and he now writes news stories that are grammatically almost perfect.

That being said, we would like the online newspaper to remain a class next year no matter what happens with our advisor. The students on this staff hope to continue our work and use our voice in an effort to help the rest of the student body for as long as we can.

Thank you for your time,  
the Eagle Nation Online Staff