

Vance reversed on same-sex 'marriage' video

Board rules students may show it

By Karyn Spellman
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A student-produced cable television program on same-sex "marriages" will be shown within the next few weeks in Montgomery County, months after the schools superintendent declared the program inappropriate because it includes a heated discussion about God.

"There were times when we were skeptical, frustrated and worn out and thought, 'This is never going to happen,'" said Emily Beckman, a senior at Montgomery Blair High School and public relations manager for the Silver Spring school's television station, WBNC.

"But we never gave up hope," she said.

The Montgomery County

school board voted 5-3 Wednesday to overrule Superintendent Paul L. Vance's decision to forbid the program from being shown.

Mr. Vance and school board members did not return phone calls yesterday seeking comment on the vote.

The show, "Shades of Grey," features a panel of guests who tackle controversial issues.

"It's a great First Amendment victory for my kids. They feel like that their work had some merit to it and we're very happy that the school board has decided to let it run and protect their rights," said Chris Lloyd, Blair's senior media instructor and manager of its television station.

No date has been scheduled for the show; it originally was set for Oct. 15.

Mr. Vance had upheld a ban on



Paul L. Vance

the show enforced by a former principal appointed to review it.

Nancy H. Powell, a former high school principal, had cited poor production as the reason to

hold the show.

But an e-mail message from the system's television station manager, Barbara Wood, to students said she "felt the gentleman who was a guest on the show brought up the issue of religion and God in a very heated and controversial manner. . . . It would be inappropriate to air the program for that reason alone."

In the exchange, one guest told another that, "My God sanctifies same-sex 'marriage' even if your God does not."

The second panelist then responded, "So, your religious beliefs would say it's a good thing and our religious beliefs would not. Why does your view get to trump ours?"

While giving the show the go-ahead, the school board decided to prohibit any shows from airing live on the school system's station until it decides on a policy governing content, technical stan-

dards, format and presentation style.

A commission is working on the policy and may speed up its pace in light of the school board's decision, said Mr. Lloyd, who is on the commission.

Ironically, the show in question was supposed to air live, but was taped after station engineers discovered another show had been scheduled for the same time slot. Under standard procedures, managers sent the tape to school officials for review.

The county's student handbook says school officials can ban only material that is obscene, libelous or threatens the health of others.

The handbook says those restrictions, which appear under a section titled "Freedom of Inquiry and Expression," cannot be used "to prevent responsible discussion" about controversial issues such as drug use.