Mount Pleasant radio ramping up the tempo

NPR outlet deal enriches learning

By Matthew Albright
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A group of Mount Pleasant High School students huddled in the school’s radio newsroom Friday to figure out what the news would be.

“Who are people talking about?” asked their teacher, Paul Wishengrad.

“What’s in the public consciousness right now?”

Students pitched a number of stories - classmates were talking about “the new 300 movie,” and it looked like tempestuous weather was finally on the way this weekend.

But one thing they were going to be sure to talk about on air - their radio station, WMPH, is getting an overhaul.

Starting this week, WMPH listeners will hear the flagship National Public Radio programs “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered,” in addition to the music the student-run station already plays.

It’s part of Delaware Public Media, a new partnership between the Brandywine School District and Delaware First Media, which operates WIDC.

Professional radio journalists will start visiting the school studio to file stories, giving students a chance to watch them work. Advanced students will get internships at local stations.

“Our goal is for them to be able to go into a station and know what they’re doing, or to go into a college class and be able to say ‘I can handle this’.”

The school also has created “Generation Voice,” an online platform that will allow students to get experience in writing for websites and creating online videos. Starting with that site, the district hopes to involve students at its other two high schools.

WMPH has existed in some form since the 1960s, though it has sometimes gone off air as student interest waned. Until recently, the station was an after-school club, something students chose to do for fun.

That’s changing. The partnership with WIDC is the latest in a push over the last few years to turn the station into a career preparation program and a serious academic endeavor.

Wishengrad, who worked in radio stations for more than 25 years, sees himself first and foremost as a teacher. He’s been taking night classes over the past two years to earn his teaching qualifications, and his classes blend hands-on studio work with lectures, reading and writing assignments.

Students spend Monday through Thursday mostly in class or practicing in the studio. “On-air Fridays” give students a chance to go live or record segments for the coming weekend.

“It’s pretty cool to have your own voice out there where everyone can hear it,” said junior Teddy Parker. “You get a little nervous when you realize everybody’s listening to you, but I think it’s pretty cool more than anything else.”

Micheline Boudreau, president of Delaware First Media, said the partnership fits the educational mission of public radio perfectly.

“Obviously, some kids we hope to inspire to be journalists,” she said. “But for most of them, we hope to create an excitement for how they express themselves. We want them to learn how to present their ideas in a way that excites people and is compelling to people.”

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