

# Parents voice concern with Channel One

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## SPRINGDALE

Some Springdale parents are the latest to voice their concern with the content of Channel One, a fast-paced daily newscast that is broadcast in 12,000 of the nation's middle, junior high and high schools — including Springdale.

A small group of concerned parents gathered at the Jones Center for Families on Thursday night to discuss the use of Channel One in Springdale public schools. Several of those in attendance plan to address the Springdale School Board with their concerns at the board's July 13 meeting.

Channel One is beamed daily via satellite to subscriber schools across the country, including Fayetteville, Springdale and Rogers. The broadcast touches on current events as well as celebrity news.

Founded in 1990 by entrepreneur Chris Whittle and now owned by Primedia Inc., the network offers public and private schools a deal: It provides each school a satellite dish, two videocassette recorders and a television

for each classroom as long as the school district agrees to air the network's program to 80 percent of its students on 90 percent of school days. The 12-minute program includes two minutes of ads.

Springdale signed a contract with Whittle's company in 1991, within one year of the program's establishment.

At issue are the commercials aired between bits of news during the daily airing. The content of some of the commercials has been found by some to be unfit for young students to watch, the promotion of violent movies. Also what some have called obscene music — such as Marilyn Manson — is played between news segments.

Several legislators, as well as organizations like the National Education Association and the National Parent Teacher Association have spoken out against the use of Channel One in schools.

Brian Adams, one of the organizers of Thursday's meeting, said he has already spoken to some Springdale School Board

members privately about Channel One. He said he hopes to share information with the board and seek an end to Channel One.

Addressing the group Thursday was Jim Metrock, president of Obligation Inc., a children's advocacy group based in Alabama. Metrock has studied the ongoing conflict surrounding Channel One and become a spokesman against its use in schools.

Channel One, he said, is the commercial exploitation of the students forced to watch it as part of their school day. The New York-based company, Primedia, charges as much for advertising as prime-time television, Metrock said, "but Channel One has a captive audience for commercials."

And, he said, because the broadcast — commercials included — is shown as part of required viewing in the schools, the school districts that subscribe to Channel One are also endorsing the products advertised on the program.

The equipment given to districts by Channel One is what lures districts in to the seemingly cost-free deal, Metrock said. The TVs and VCRs can be used by the schools for any purpose as long as

they broadcast the daily show.

"They prey on the poorer districts that need the equipment," he said.

But, he said, the cost is too high. Adding up the daily 12-minute broadcasts, Metrock figured that the equivalent of one week of time is spent watching Channel One by each student each year. That time, he said, should be used for learning.

"Channel One is different (than TV viewing at home) because it's in the classroom. It's in the required curriculum," Metrock said.

"Commercial television is being force-fed to our kids," Adams said.

Metrock said that Channel One, though it operates under the guise of educational programming, was never meant to be educational. It was designed and started in 1990 by an advertising executive.

"It is inappropriate for young, Christian men and women," Adams said.

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