

## SUSPENDED AND AT RISK OF LOSING HER JOB TEACHER SUES DISTRICT



A teacher's habit about posting perceived student behavior on her blog had led to her being suspended from her job last year. Amidst other things she had called her students "disengaged, lazy whiners," "Seems smarter than she actually is," "Has no business being in Honors," and "A complete and utter jerk in all ways." One blog, that many in the Central Bucks community found particularly offensive and upsetting, after students posted it on social media sites, said, "I don't care if you lick windows, take the special bus or occasionally pee on yourself ... you hang in there sunshine. You're friggin' special." Students posted the blog on February 8, 2011. A day later, after protests and condemnation from outraged parents, who called the school to express "shock, outrage, disappointment, disgust, anger," administrators suspended Munroe with pay. She went on maternity leave a few weeks later. Natalie Munroe, the Central Bucks East High School English teacher has filed a First Amendment law suit against the Central Bucks School District, Superintendent N. Robert Laws and CB East principal Abram Lucabaugh. In her suit she has alleged that the superintendent and her principal violated her free-speech rights by "harassing and retaliating against her" over the blog. Following her suspension, she returned to the classroom, but claims that ever since she had to suffer, "ridiculous and overly critical evaluations." Apprehensive that she could be fired, Munroe decided to file the case. Her attorney, Steve Rovner, says the district has notified his client of its plans to fire her. He said that he would attempt to stop it through legal action. He filed the suit in federal court in Philadelphia on Friday. The lawsuit claims that the CB East principal Abram Lucabaugh was very appreciative of Munroe's abilities and gave her "excellent" performance evaluations and references. The lawsuit further claims that Lucabaugh actually told her that she was a "consummate educator with a sparkling future." However, when they discovered her blog, their attitude towards her changed. Munroe attributes the change in the behavior was owing to the blog. She said that they had infringed on her right to free speech by "harassing and retaliating against her." One of the methods of harassment was to randomly and unexpectedly assess her teaching, during which they subjected her teaching to "ridiculous and overly critical evaluations." Laws and Lucabaugh "continuously created a harassing and hostile work environment for Munroe, undermining her ability to teach," the law suit says. The School board is scheduled to meet on Tuesday and it is widely accepted that it will vote in favor of terminating Munroe's employment. Munroe claims she was "set up." Through the lawsuit Munroe is seeking the restoration of her employment with the school district, full benefits retroactive to the date of her termination and unspecified "punitive damages" against Laws and Lucabaugh. The Central Bucks School District solicitor Jeff Garton declined to comment saying that he was yet to see the complaint. Central Bucks hired Munroe, 31, of Warminster, in 2006 to teach English at CB East. She earned \$54,500 in the 2011-12 school year. Before things soured, Munroe had given her a reference letter, when she had applied for master's program in 2008, calling her a woman of "utmost integrity, character and intelligence." Natalie's blog that landed her in trouble was called "Where are we going & why are we in this handbasket?" It had around 80 posts, not all about students. The blogs were mostly about recipes, family and her favorite movies, but she also blogged, rather carelessly and insensitively about her students. Moreover, her blogs about them contained profanity. Munroe said her students "curse, discuss drugs, talk back, argue for grades, complain about everything, fancy themselves entitled to whatever they desire and are just generally annoying." Even though there has been widespread condemnation from the teaching community, a commenter has written, "While Munroe's blogging can be considered incredibly stupid at best and harmful at worst, she actually raises some good points. Many students there do feel entitled to good grades and instead of working harder when they receive a bad score, they find a way to blame the teachers." Be careful what you post on the Internet," Natalie Munroe always admonished her students. Failing to follow what she preached has landed her in hot soup.

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