

7th Grade

2nd Place

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Teacher: Mrs. Himmel

Q: Suppose a student creates a Facebook group to insult a teacher. Should a principal be allowed to suspend a student for disrespecting a teacher online?

The principal's face turns grim, "Suspension!" he cries. You are suspended from school for disrespecting a teacher outside of school, and off of school grounds. Why are you suspended, though? You were on Facebook, and your actions were legal, never dangerous. But you are forced out of school, left to wonder why? Does your principal have the right to take these actions? I believe a principal should not be allowed to suspend a student for disrespecting a teacher online.

The rights to act and believe as we choose are promised us, the people of the United States, through the core democratic value of liberty. We are allowed to express our beliefs in public if we choose. As a citizen of the United States, I too, am guaranteed these same rights. Why is it disallowed for students to freely express their opinion on a teacher on Facebook? Many people express their opinions on many topics. Why not teachers? Whether disrespectful or not, we are assured the right to do so not only through liberty but also through the First Amendment.

The First Amendment states "Congress shall make no law...or abridging the freedom of speech, ...". A student had commented on Facebook about a teacher she disliked. Suspending the student takes away my freedom of speech. These freedoms are not taken from me when I enter a school or because I am a student.

In 2005, a high school student had created a fake profile on MySpace of his school's principal and was suspended for 10 days. The student sued the school for taking away his First Amendment rights. In 2007, a federal district court ruled in the student's favor over the principal's. Judge Terrence McVerry wrote, "The mere fact that the Internet may be accessed at school does not authorize the school officials to become censors of the World Wide Web." This means that even though you are able to reach the Internet at school, school officials cannot control what is put on and off the World Wide Web.

Tinker v. Des Moines Sch. Dist., 393 U.S. 503 (1969) was a historical Supreme Court case. Three students were suspended from school for wearing black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War. The school board argued that they feared interruption from the armband protest; however, this fear cannot affect our First Amendment rights. The students' actions were not disruptive or interfering with the education of other students. No threat, riot, disorder or violation of rights was involved.

The education of a student should never be restricted for a legal action taken outside of school by a principal. Frank LoMonte of the Student Press Law Center in Arlington, Virginia, states "When students misbehave off campus, there are ample remedies in the real world legal system. If the speech is threatening, there are police for that. If it is libelous, there are courts for that. And if it's short of both of these things, there are phone calls to parents."