



Conservative Mom Goes Head-to-Head with Liberally Biased Teacher

Michele Blood

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A mom went head-to-head with a teacher who had told her son and his classmates last week — during the first week of school — that they were not permitted to use the “biased” Fox News in their schoolwork for a global studies class at Hunterdon Central Regional High School (HCRHS) in Flemington, New Jersey.

The mother, who spoke exclusively with LifeZette on the condition of anonymity, wrapped up a series of meetings with various school officials over the past week. The teacher had originally told students they could only use CNN and its affiliates for news-gathering work. By the end of Thursday’s conversation, the teacher said she agreed to allow them to use Fox News as a resource as well.

In attendance were the student’s mother, the teacher, and the teacher’s supervisor, Social Studies Curriculum Director Rebecca Lucas of HCRHS. Though the mother remained skeptical about some of the teacher’s explanations for the assignment restrictions, the mom said she believes the teacher has “good intentions about her goals for the class.”

From this mother's perspective, the teacher "basically tried to cover it up by claiming she only told them they couldn't use Fox because it's not available to kids who don't have cable access."

The assignment involved researching a current event.

The mother said the teacher insisted the prohibition was due solely to the potential lack of access to Fox News for some kids. But as pointed out by the teacher's own supervisor, students are all issued Chromebooks, through which they can access the internet at school — including sites run by CNN, Fox News, the BBC, and many other news sources.

The teacher did not deny suggesting news sources to the students last week that are all markedly left-leaning, the mom reported.

At one point in the Thursday meeting, the teacher said she wished students would come directly to her if and when these types of issues arise, as the mother told LifeZette. The mom also reported, "The school has allowed an atmosphere to develop where students with more conservative values are made to feel uncomfortable about expressing those views for fear of retaliation in some way ... especially when it comes to grading."

The mom emphasized that she has "no issue with a teacher having different opinions than my child, as long as my child can feel just as safe and free to express *his* opinions as she does hers, and that he is not being limited to liberally slanted news sources."

At this juncture, the teacher has agreed to allow her students to use Fox News as a resource for their current events assignment in her global studies course. The mother does not know whether the teacher is facing any disciplinary actions as a result of this event — and said she (the mom) plans to continue to monitor the situation. She'll be watching, she said, for any bias she detects on the part of other teachers as well. The mother also said she "is not keeping quiet any longer."

Of her son's reaction to the situation, she said, "He's a tough kid."

Her son, a junior honors student at the high school, is "not easily intimidated," she said.

After ***LifeZette broke the now-widely covered story***, the superintendent of HCRHS, Dr. Jeffrey Moore, sent an email to parents detailing the school's response to the situation. The email reads:

Dear Parents/Guardians:

On Thursday, September 7, 2017, we learned about a decision in a classroom to limit students to certain media sources in an assignment. Without any delay, we partnered with parents to understand the needs of our students. We moved swiftly to address their concerns.

The Hunterdon Central Regional High School District is committed to affording students the freedom and respect they need to develop their own opinions. In fact, we have policy that requires us to present all sides of any controversial issue. We recognize the potential for a teacher, as a trusted authority figure, to sway student opinion about such issues without even setting out to do so. We also know that shifts in technology and other recent factors have made it even more difficult for students to glean truth from media. We, like so many other schools, have pledged to equip our students with tools that will help them navigate, grow, and come into their own. Like so many other schools, we reevaluate our efforts to fulfill this pledge as often as we face change — daily, and even more often than that.

As we move forward, we are working with all staff and administrators to ensure that we have consistent approaches to controversial issues in our classrooms. Now, as always, we remain focused on this and all of the other work of educating the children of our community.

In short, the superintendent acknowledged the incident — and indicated the school system was addressing parents' concerns and reiterated the district's position on handling controversial issues in the classroom.

Also on Thursday, upon reviewing ***the original story published on LifeZette***, the Center for Educational Freedom (CEF) shared the piece with its readers. CEF is one of the Cato Institute's several centers and projects that tackle specific subsets of issues, including foreign policy, energy, health care, human rights, and education.

A founding principle of the Cato Center for Educational Freedom is that "parents are best suited to make important decisions regarding the care and education of their children." On the organization's "battle map," it includes schools that pit "educational effectiveness, basic rights, moral values, or individual identities against each other."

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Dr. Neal McCluskey, CEF's director, told LifeZette on Thursday he takes care to avoid adding cases to the battle map unless there are "two clear sides," and notes that adding cases to the battle

map is "not an exact science." A case in which one party denies an incident fully, for example, makes for a less-than-ideal candidate. Upon learning of the email Superintendent Dr. Jeffrey Moore sent to parents acknowledging the issue, Dr. McCluskey said the "chances of [the incident at HCRHS] going on the map are increasing."

Hunterdon, the county in which HCRHS is located, is unusual politically. Despite having a Republican governor, the state of New Jersey, generally speaking, is liberal-leaning (Donald Trump earned less than 42 percent of New Jersey citizens' votes in 2016).

Unlike the majority of counties in the state, however, Hunterdon County is distinctly conservative. The fact that a teacher in a decidedly conservative public school district would choose to curtail students' exposure to conservative-leaning news sources is, to say the least, puzzling.

Regardless, today's vulnerable young people suffer when their exposure to different ideas and ideals is wantonly cut off. The goal of our public educational system is not to confine children to an echo chamber that amplifies the voice of the teacher to whom they happen to be assigned. The goal, at least in part, is to teach students to think for themselves. When we reward them for parroting their teachers' beliefs — we handicap our young citizens and future voters.

For many students, a grade in a course is a reward, one that can mean the difference between acceptance to the college of their choice or not. For those students, if getting an A in a class means telling a teacher exactly what he or she wants to hear — that is what they will do.

High school students' options for directly addressing teacher-created classroom predicaments are limited. Flatly confronting a teacher with blatant bias against conservatives, for example, could backfire — and a student could be left with little recourse. So in many cases, it is up to the parent to intervene.

In the case at HCHRS, at least one parent did precisely that. She took action. When we reach a critical mass of parents doing likewise, that is when we will see true change — change that has been a long time in coming.