

Protecting Teachers' Privacy Rights
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Teachers' Rights

Because teachers spend so much time with other people's children, it's no surprise that administrators and parents have pushed to gain as much information about their teachers as possible. But do teachers have any privacy rights while they work in public schools, or should they expect every part of their life to become public domain? Unfortunately, it appears that teachers do not have much legal protection of their personal privacy, which is made worse by the fact that many beginning teachers are ignorant about protecting their privacy. If teachers do not guard their personal information vigilantly, they may be setting themselves up for early termination over entirely legal acts.

Even though students have ample privacy protection in the laws, teachers have very little beyond those in the Bill of Rights. According to Ray Spencer, the courts continually have been weighing the needs of schools to protect the values of the community they represent versus the job performance of a teacher (2001, np). Unfortunately, the privacy rights of teachers are usually outweighed by the morals that a community wants to protect even though what the teacher was doing was legal. In other words, "a teacher may be free to be immoral but not legally free to teach while engaging in immoral conduct" (Spencer 2001, np). To make sure teachers are not dangerous to students or their moral character, teachers are required by law to divulge certain personal information that they consider private. In one episode of *Boston Public*, for example, a teacher refused to give his finger prints as required by law. Ultimately the teacher was forced to have his finger prints taken because his right to privacy was overridden by the need to protect students (Taylor 2001, np). And because teachers are employees of the state, all this information that schools collect become part of public domain; anyone who wants a teacher's records can look at it without notifying the teacher for their knowledge or consent (Spencer 2001, np). In light of these limited privacy protections in the law, teachers need to be the ones who protect their own privacy.

Unfortunately, because of ignorance or lack of concern, teachers do not safely guard their privacy. When they first start out, beginning teachers are more concerned about getting their first

position than what information they are divulging (Spencer 2001, np). Therefore it is very easy for administrators and interviewers to gain great insights into the private lives of applicants. This is mainly a problem of neglected teaching at the collegiate level. Although teacher education courses focus a great deal of time and energy into student rights, and they are definitely an important topic to cover, teacher privacy rights are usually overlooked (Spencer 2001, np). Additionally, many beginning teachers are not informed of what private information may be damaging to a professional career. Without this knowledge, it can be difficult for teachers to know what private information may need protection and what information is trivial for administrators to know.

Protecting these privacy rights are important to teachers for two reasons. First of all, teachers who behave in ways that conflict with the norms of the community within which they teach can be terminated, and have been in the past (Spencer 2001, np). To protect their job, teachers need to evaluate the community around them to see if their morals and behaviors directly conflict with people around them, and if it could potentially make people in the community uncomfortable or agitated. Teachers have three choice in these situations: they can move to another community more accepting of their behavior, they can change their behavior to better conform to the community around them, or they can stay in the community and be prepared for some flak from the community and maybe even some colleagues. This is the second reason why teachers need to know about their privacy rights: without ample protection, their ability to teach can be greatly compromised. It is possible that even though some teachers are the best teachers in the world, they can receive derogatory phone calls from parents and other signs of disapproval over simple things such as sexual orientation. It is even possible for parents to dissuade their children from liking a teacher, making the classroom a more hostile environment. Additionally, other teachers that do not approve of a teacher's behavior may take extra effort to complicate the work environment and disrupt one's life. Therefore, it seems clear that teachers need to protect their privacy and educated about what little rights they have so as to protect them future difficulties in their work environment that could include termination.

Works Cited

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