

New Jersey District Agrees To Pay Former Teacher \$110,000 to Settle Suit Claiming Teacher Was Terminated Because Of His Sexual Orientation

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District has agreed to pay Matthew Richards \$110,000, says *New Jersey 101.5*, to settle a suit alleging that Richards was terminated from his teaching position after announcing his sexual orientation. Richards began teaching at the William J. McGinn Elementary School in August 2011 as a replacement for another teacher who was on maternity leave.

When he was first hired, Richards was observed and consistently received positive performance reviews. The suit states: “[t]he District was highly satisfied with Richards’ performance as a replacement teacher and therefore hired him at the end of the 2011-2012 school year as a permanent third grade teacher on tenure track.” It adds that as time passed, the school principal assured the teacher that his job was secure.

However in January of 2014, things began to change. Richards announced plans to marry his gay partner – now his husband. From that point on, the lawsuit states, he faced several problems. Shortly after he announced marriage plans, the suit states, an unnamed parent of one of Richards’ male students “falsely accused Richards to the District of keeping her son after class with him after dismissing the other students, with an innuendo of sexual impropriety.”

The lawsuit claims that the same parent also “spread blatant slurs” about Richards’ sexual orientation to “support her vendetta” against the teacher. The suit states that the district was aware of the actions of the parent who also wrote a lengthy letter to the district seeking to have Richards fired.

In the months that followed, the once positive performance reviews became increasingly negative, the suit states. In March, he received a negative interim report. At the end of the 2013-14 school year he was terminated. “Richards immediately perceived that the interim report was a reaction to his announcement of his intended gay marriage and the vendetta against him

because of his sexual orientation,” the suit claims, adding that Richards feels “there was a pre-planned determination to terminate him as a teacher because of his sexual orientation, with his alleged poor teaching performance to be used as a pretext.”

Although the settlement agreement includes a confidentiality clause to prevent both parties from disclosing the settlement agreement, the court documents are a matter of public record.

Source: New Jersey 101.5, 7/7/16, By Toniann Antonelli

[Editor’s Note: In July 2014, Legal Clips summarized an article in silive.com reporting that a New York City speech therapy teacher had filed suit alleging he was subjected by supervisors to a hostile work environment in which he was mocked and insulted for his sexuality, and was then retaliated against when he filed a complaint. Jeffrey Giove, who is openly gay, sued the city of New York, the city Department of Education, and his former supervisors at the Marsh Avenue Expeditionary Learning School — Jessica Jenkins-Milona, Cara DeAngelo and Judith Labarbera — for alleged harassment and discrimination on the basis of his sexual orientation.]