

A CAUTION ABOUT TECHNOLOGY

As reported in the news last week, a high school English teacher in suburban Philadelphia has become an icon by daring to ask in no delicate terms: Why are today's students unmotivated ~ and what's wrong with calling them out?

Thirty-year-old Natalie Munroe was suspended from her job in the middle-class Central Bucks School District for her profanity-laced blog, which has since been taken down. In it, she called her students "disengaged, lazy whiners" and complained that they are "just generally annoying" and "disobedient, disrespectful oafs."

While a lot of people do not have blogs, if you have a computer, there is a good chance that you engage in some form of online social networking--Facebook, Myspace, Twitter.... Nearly 50 percent of the nation's adult population has a profile on either Myspace or Facebook.

Even seemingly innocent or innocuous sharing of the details of your life can be a source of evidence that you were not really sick when you used a sick day, not really suffering from a "workman's comp injury, or engaging in other inappropriate activities. You could be offering your habits and activities to people who do not have your best interests at heart. Postings can become relevant on issues such as your ability to work, your men-

tal status, income or the gathering of witnesses. These days with the abundance of online communities, anybody can find out a wealth of personal information about an individual at no cost and with the ease of a click of the mouse.

Recently, a woman in Canada was on disability leave from her employer for depression. The insurance company cut off her benefits after finding pictures on her Facebook profile of her partying at a birthday celebration and on a holiday. There are several other cases nationwide in which insurance companies have used information obtained online as evidence in trying to prove the claim for benefits was not justified and, in some cases, have pursued criminal fraud charges against the claimant.

Even though you may think what you post on social media sites is private, it may not be. Natalie was careful to make sure she did not mention student names or the school where she worked out, but she still ended up suspended as the district investigates her blog. As technology has increasingly connected the world we live in, it is important to be aware of the impact and effect information shared on the Internet can have on you.

WHY TEACHERS ARE ENRAGED

Thousands of teachers, nurses, firefighters and other public sector workers have camped out at the Wisconsin Capitol, protesting Republican Gov. Scott Walker's efforts to reduce their take-home pay ~ by increasing their contribution to their pension plans and health care benefits ~ and restrict their collective bargaining rights.

Republicans control the state Legislature, and initially it seemed certain that Walker's proposal would pass easily. But then the Democrats in the Legislature went into hiding, leaving that body one vote shy of a quorum. As of this writing, the Legislature was at a standstill as state police searched high and low for the missing lawmakers.

Like other conservative Republican governors, including Chris Christie of New Jersey, John Kasich of Ohio, Mitch Daniels of Indiana and Rick Scott of Florida, the Wisconsin governor wants to sap the power of public employee unions, especially the teachers' union, since public education is the single biggest expenditure for every state.

Public schools in Madison and a dozen other districts in Wisconsin closed as teachers joined the protest. Although Walker claims he was forced to impose cutbacks because the state is broke, teachers noticed that he offered generous tax breaks to businesses that were equivalent to the value of their givebacks.

The uprising in Madison is symptomatic of a simmering rage among the nation's teachers. They have grown angry and demoralized over the past two years as attacks on their profession escalated. The much-publicized film "Waiting for Superman" made the specious claim that "bad teachers" caused low student test scores. A Newsweek cover last year proposed that the key to saving American education was firing bad teachers.

Teachers across the nation reacted with alarm when the leaders of the Central Falls district in Rhode Island threatened to fire the entire staff of the small town's only high school. What got their attention was that Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and President Obama thought this was a fine idea, even though no one at the high school had been evaluated.

The Obama administration's Race to the Top program intensified the demonizing of teachers, because it encouraged states to evaluate teachers in relation to student scores. There are many reasons why students do well or poorly on tests, and teachers felt they were being unfairly blamed when students got low scores, while the crucial role of families and the students themselves was overlooked.

Teachers' despair deepened last August when The Los Angeles Times rated 6,000 teachers in Los Angeles as effective or ineffective, based

WHY TEACHERS ARE ENRAGED, cont.

on their students' test scores, and posted these ratings online. Testing experts warn that such ratings are likely to be both inaccurate and unstable, but the Times stood by its analysis.

Now conservative governors and mayors want to abolish teachers' right to due process, their seniority, and ~ in some states ~ their collective bargaining rights. Right-to-work states do not have higher scores than states with strong unions. Actually, the states with the highest performance on national tests are Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Vermont, and New Hampshire, where teachers belong to unions that bargain collectively for their members.

Unions actively lobby to increase education funding and reduce class size, so conservative governors who want to slash education spending feel the need to reduce their clout. This silences the best organized opposition to education cuts.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

While Wisconsin has national media attention, it's important to know colleagues in Idaho, Indiana and Ohio are facing similar immediate threats. While threats to collective bargaining seem unlikely for us in California, at this time, we are not without our own problems. Our most pressing issue is the state budget.

At the last CTA State Council meeting, council members heard a presentation on taxes and spending in California. According to the state's Legislative Analyst, if the temporary taxes are not extended, K-12 schools and community colleges would face another \$5.2 billion in cuts; CSU and UC schools would be cut an additional \$2 billion. The Legislative Analyst also outlined a few examples of those deeper cuts: eliminate all home-to-school busing, double community college fees and eliminate all sports in community colleges, increase CSU tuition 10% and UC tuition 7%, reduce CSU enrollment by 5%, and reduce the number of CalGrants available to low-income students.

While the tax extensions proposed by Governor Brown are desperately needed to avoid additional cuts to students and schools, California also needs to look for long-term budget solutions. Absent permanent solutions, California state deficits will persist for years. According to the Leg Analyst's office, we will still have a budget shortfall of \$19.4 billion in 2015-2016. That is not due to funding for public schools.

If you track state spending from 2004-2005 to this year, health and human services increased 3.3%, K-14 spending increased 5.7%, corrections spending increased 39.5%, and business/transportation/housing increased 126.3%. Prop. 98 guaranteed a certain percentage of funding for public education and estimates for the current year place that amount to be \$59.1 billion but we will only receive \$49.7 of it in actual funding.

To put our K-12 funding in perspective, California spent \$8,852 per student and with 6.2 million students, that equaled \$54.9 billion, using 2008 averages.

There has recently been a national furor about school reform. One must wonder how it is possible to talk of improving schools while cutting funding, demoralizing teachers, cutting scholarships to college, and increasing class sizes.

The real story in Madison is not just about unions trying to protect their members' hard-won rights. It is about teachers who are fed up with attacks on their profession. A large group of National Board Certified teachers ~ teachers from many states who have passed rigorous examinations by an independent national board ~ is organizing a march on Washington in July. The events in Madison are sure to multiply their numbers.

As the attacks on teachers increase and as layoffs grow, there are likely to be more protests like the one that has mobilized teachers and their allies and immobilized the Wisconsin Legislature.

~Diane Ravitch, www.cnn.com

In comparison, the national average of per pupil spending was \$11,223 or \$69.6 billion. The highest per pupil spending was \$17,114 or \$106.1 billion, two times California's current spending.

Funding for public schools comes from the state's general fund. So where does the money come from? The Leg Analyst's Office estimates for 2011-2012 that 53% of general fund revenues will come from personal income tax, 10.2% from corporate income tax, 30.4% from sales and use tax, and 6.4% from other revenues and loans. Those making less than \$27,800 pay 11.1% of income in taxes while the top 1%, those making more than \$200,000, pay 7.8% of their income in taxes. Corporate income grew over 400% from 2001-2008 compared to 28% for personal income. But as a percentage of the general fund revenue, corporate taxes have decreased. In 1980-1981 corporate tax income was 14.60% and estimates for 2011-12 place it at 10.20%. And additional tax loopholes were provided to big corporations in the 2008 and 2009 budgets, worth \$2 billion annually. This 30% decline means that the cost of funding state services has shifted from corporate to personal income tax payers.

Separate from income taxes are property taxes. Prop 13 limits property tax rates and provides for rates to be reassessed at sale. Big corporations that can use complicated ownership changes to avoid reassessment have avoided paying \$5 billion annually in property taxes.

There is no question that the state is in financial crisis and cannot continue as if all is normal. We must reevaluate how we are funding our government and make it fair and equitable. The fact of the matter is California is a moderate tax state, ranking 15th in taxes and fees compared to other states. The goal is simply to have the adequate amount of per-pupil funding needed to provide all students the opportunity for a quality public education.

~Leslie Littman