



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on August 23, 2011

## Florida Teacher Suspended for Facebook Comment Opposing “Gay” Marriage

A 2010 “Teacher of the Year” in Mount Dora, Florida has been suspended for comments he made on his Facebook page that were critical of homosexual marriage. Jerry Buell (pictured at left), who has taught social studies and history in the Lake County school District for two decades and has, by the district’s own admission, a spotless record, was removed from his teaching duties while officials investigate allegations that his comments were biased against homosexuals.



Buell told [FOX News](#) that he was stunned by the allegations against him. “It was my own personal comment on my own personal time on my own personal computer in my own personal house, exercising what I believed as a social studies teacher to be my First Amendment rights,” he said.

But Chris Patton, a spokesman for the district said school officials “took the allegations seriously. All teachers are bound by a code of special ethics [and] this is a code ethics violation investigation.” Patton told the [Orlando Sentinel](#) that Facebook “is a minefield. People think they’re free to say what they want to, but in some aspects it can come back to haunt you.

According to the *Sentinel*, the district’s guidelines “warn teachers if they ‘feel angry or passionate about a subject, it may not be the time to share your thoughts in a post’ and to ‘delay posting until you are calm and clearheaded.’ ”

Nonetheless, the district said in a statement on its website, contrary to “some media reports and public comments received by the District, no disciplinary action has been taken in this case; however, while the investigation continues this teacher has been temporarily reassigned to a non-student contact position. Temporarily reassigning staff until an investigation for a code of ethics violation is completed is a common practice by Lake County Schools.”

According to the [Florida Baptist Witness](#), in a July 25 Facebook posting, Buell wrote: “I’m watching the news, eating dinner when the story about New York okaying same-sex unions came on and I almost threw up. And now they showed two guys kissing after their announcement. If they want to call it a union, go ahead. But don’t insult a man and woman’s marriage by throwing it in the same cesspool of whatever. God will not be mocked. When did this sin become acceptable?”

About three minutes later, reported FOX News, Buell followed up with: “By the way, if one doesn’t like the most recently posted opinion based on biblical principles and God’s laws, then go ahead and unfriend me. I’ll miss you like I miss my kidney stone from 1994. And I will never accept it because God



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will never accept it. Romans chapter one.”

Buell emphasized to the *Sentinel* that his comments were not made “out of hatred,” but were “about the way I interpret things.” He added that all students are equal in his eyes. “I’ve had kids that I’ve known that have been homosexuals,” he said. “They know that I don’t hate them. I love them.”

On his school district staff web page (which has since been deleted), Buell made no attempt to hide his Christian faith. “First and foremost, I am a man of God,” he wrote. “I try to teach and lead my students as if Lake Co. Schools had hired Jesus Christ himself. That doesn’t mean I give a sermon and serve communion each day.... [W]hat it means is I try my very best to teach and serve and minister to my students as a teacher led by and connected to the Creator of the Universe.”

Predictably, the *Sentinel* had no trouble collecting representative quotes from students and homosexual activists who insisted that they were disturbed by Buell’s opinions. One former student called Buell’s Facebook statements “hateful language” that is “dangerous not only to gay students, but also to anti-gay students.” And Michael Slaymaker of the pro-homosexual Orlando Youth Alliance, hoped that “a teacher would be there to help ... and not hurt” students who fear they might be “gay.”

Buell’s supporters have come to his defense however, using, ironically, Facebook, to demand that the district reinstate the award-winning teacher. As reported in [another Sentinel story](#), “James Danforth, one of Buell’s former students, formed a group after reading about the teacher’s suspension.” While conceding that the way Buell expressed himself about homosexual marriage may have crossed the line, “it’s not worth his job.”

According to the *Sentinel*, Danforth, whose pro-Buell Facebook page has garnered hundreds of participants, “believes homosexual students in [Buell’s] class would have nothing to worry about. ‘They might feel uncomfortable just because of the story, but if they get to know Mr. Buell then they’ll find there’s nothing to worry about,’ he said.”

Another supporter posted that “I have known Mr. Buell for a long time and I know the type of person he is. He is a great teacher and the school board would be losing one of their BEST teachers in the district if they lose him. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions. Not everyone will agree and that is when you make people mad. But who cares? What happened to freedom of speech? He wasn’t threatening anyone or making hateful comments. He was speaking his beliefs. We love you Mr. Buell!”

Meanwhile [Liberty Counsel](#), a conservative legal advocacy group, is representing Buell in the case and has demanded that he be reinstated immediately and that the district apologize for violating his First Amendment guarantees. “Public school teachers are not constitutional orphans,” said Harry Mihet, an attorney with Liberty Counsel. “They, like all Americans, enjoy the freedom to engage in discourse about matters of public concern.”

Mihet charged that Buell “is being investigated and punished for communicating his mainstream objection to homosexual marriage, an objection shared by a large majority of his fellow Floridians who have outlawed homosexual marriage through a constitutional amendment.” He added that if the First Amendment “does not protect Mr. Buell’s right to voice his personal opinion, on his personal time, from his personal computer, on his personal Facebook page, then the First Amendment means nothing.”

As reported by [LifeSite News](#), Buell’s predicament is not new to those who have dared to express their opposition to homosexual marriage. “Last summer a Catholic professor was fired from the University of Illinois for sending an email to students in a course on Catholic doctrine, explaining how homosexual activity is contrary to the natural moral law.”



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And more recently, reported LifeSite, “Canadian television sportscaster Damian Goddard was fired for Tweeting his support of Burlington hockey agent Todd Reynolds, who created a stir when he criticized New York Rangers hockey star Sean Avery for shooting a TV ad backing gay ‘marriage.’ ” Goddard lost his job for tweeting that “I completely and wholeheartedly support Todd Reynolds and his support for the traditional and TRUE meaning of marriage.”

*Photo: Jerry Buell*



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