

Case 10: Earning Real Paper

Until last year, you were a math teacher at a Michigan public school. Because of budget cuts, you were laid off. You took a job at a “virtual school,” resulting in a fifty percent pay cut. Your new position also requires spending two hours each weeknight online in case a student needs to reach you.

You often find it difficult to connect with students, but you have formed a relationship with Luis. Luis is a friendly student who emails you often. He struggles with math, and he has shared his frustrations about how his older sister gets excellent math grades at her traditional public school. He also has divulged some of his frustrations with his home life, hinting that his father is in jail and his mother a drug abuser.

Eager to connect with students, you always reply to his emails, offering advice and friendly encouragement. You also accept his Facebook friend request. Luis gives you his number and the two of you text, mostly about math homework.

In October, you give an assessment designed to measure student progress. Luis performs very poorly. The next day is the chapter test. To your surprise, Luis scores 100%. Over the next two weeks, Luis’ grades are all above 95%. Around the same time, Luis posts an odd Facebook status, saying “school is for punks” and he is “earning real paper.”

Luis’ grades continue to be in the “A” range. He has stopped emailing you. You believe his sister is taking his tests for him. From some Facebook posts, you suspect that he is involved in a gang and that his mother has disappeared from the home.

Study questions:

1. What is your responsibility to Luis? Do you try to contact his home? Do you contact your supervisor? Protective Services? The police?
2. Should teachers engage with their students on social media? Is it ever appropriate for a teacher to text or become Facebook friends with students?
3. What is your duty to your school? Is it up to you to prove that enrolled students are turning in their own work rather than getting other people to do the work for them?

4. How might a large pay cut affect a person's sense of professional obligation? Should this consideration be taken into account when employers are deciding whether to save money by cutting wages?

Author: [Patti Smith](#) is a former lawyer and a special education teacher. She has been a public speaker her whole adult life--in debate, in moot court, as a storyteller and has recently begun dabbling in improv. Last year, Patti's first (and hopefully not last) book was published by Arcadia Publishers, [Images of America: Downtown Ann Arbor](#). She has also finished a young adult series about three kids who live in Detroit. Patti is on the board of [A2Geeks](#), writes for [Concentrate](#) and Mittenbrew, works with the [People's Food Co-op](#), and volunteers with [826Michigan](#). Patti lives in Ann Arbor with her husband and their cats. Recently, she finished a young adult book series about three kids who live in Detroit.