

# Teacher refused to use preferred pronouns and was fired, suit says. Now district owes

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Photo from Advocates for Faith & Freedom  
Key takeaways

- California school district settles lawsuit with teacher who was fired over refusal to use students' preferred pronouns, agreeing to pay \$360,000.
- Teacher Jessica Tapia alleged violations of her civil and First Amendment rights, stemming from her refusal to call students by their preferred pronouns.
- Settlement reached after Tapia took medical leave of absence, citing directives that went against her Christian faith, including not informing parents of students' gender identities.

A California school district has settled a lawsuit with a teacher who says she was fired over her religious beliefs after she refused to use students' preferred pronouns, attorneys say.

The [Jurupa Unified School District](#) in Riverside County agreed to pay \$360,000 to Jessica Tapia, her attorneys at Advocates for Faith & Freedom said in a May 14 news release.

The settlement closes a [federal lawsuit Tapia filed](#) last May that alleged the district's decision to fire Tapia violated her civil and First Amendment rights, according to the lawsuit.

The alleged violations in part stemmed from her refusal to call students by their preferred pronouns, along with her concern about not revealing students' gender identities to parents, the lawsuit says.

"Today's settlement serves as a reminder that religious freedom is protected, no matter your career," Julianne Fleischer, one of Tapia's attorneys, said in the release.

While the district approved the settlement Monday, May 13, it "has not admitted any fault or wrongdoing against Ms. Tapia," Jacqueline Paul, a spokesperson for the district, said in an emailed statement to McClatchy News.

"The decision to settle this case was made in conjunction with the District's self-insurance authority and in the best interest of the students, such that the District can continue to dedicate all of its resources and efforts to educate and support its student population regardless of their protected class," Paul said.

### **Termination after social media posts**

Tapia worked at the district since 2014, most recently as a physical education teacher at Jurupa Valley High School, the lawsuit says.

Days before the end of the 2021-2022 school year, the lawsuit says Tapia was put on administrative leave after posts on her personal Instagram account were "brought to the District's attention."

“The District claimed ... Ms. Tapia’s social media posts were racist, offensive, disrespectful, and mocking towards individuals based upon their sexual orientation,” the lawsuit says.

The district went on to accuse Tapia of “proselytizing during P.E. class,” as well as refusing to call students by their preferred pronouns, the suit says.

In late September 2022, the lawsuit says Tapia received a “Notice of Unprofessional Conduct,” wherein the district listed directives she must follow in order to keep her job. Along with using students’ preferred pronouns, this included allowing students to use the bathroom that matches with their gender identity and not discussing the Bible with her students, according to the lawsuit.

Subsequently, the lawsuit says Tapia took a medical leave of absence through December 2022.

“The Directives caused Ms. Tapia to suffer severe mental and emotional anguish because she was torn between agreeing to conditions that caused her to violate her religious beliefs or losing the job she worked her entire life for,” the lawsuit says.