

METRO

Ex-teacher harassed, ousted from Upper East Side middle school for being gay: suit

By [Andrew Denney](#)

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Robert Halkitis
William Farrington

A former social studies teacher at an Upper East Side public middle school was relentlessly hectorated by students and colleagues — and eventually let go — because he is gay and stood up for a bullied student, a new lawsuit alleges.

During his two-year tenure as a full-time teacher at Robert F. Wagner Middle School, Robert Halkitis suffered a campaign of harassment that included vandals scrawling a slur on his bulletin board and a student calling him a “f—ing f—t” in his classroom, alleges a lawsuit filed in Manhattan federal court on Monday.

The torment also included a school clerk suggesting that he was having a sexual relationship with a male colleague on school grounds, court papers say.

Halkitis’s sexual orientation wasn’t the only reason he lost his job — he often stood up for a “non-binary, gender non-conforming student” who was bullied throughout middle school for their gender expression, he alleges.

According to court papers, Halkitis informed school principal Jennifer Rehn-Losquadro — also a defendant in the suit — about the bullying and was told that she would “look into it.” But Halkitis claims that the student’s reports of harassment were not included in the school’s Online Occurrence Reporting System report to the Department of Education.

In June, Halkitis received word that his contract was being discontinued but was not given a reason. This came after Halkitis received ratings of “effective” on his annual teacher assessments for both years of his tenure, he alleges.



Robert F. Wagner Middle School

Angel Chevestt

“I think he was thought of as a really good teacher,” Jillian Weiss, an attorney representing Halkitis in the case, told The Post. “He was standing up for students who were receiving bullying in the classroom and he was receiving no support.”

Since his dismissal, Halkitis has been unable to find work with other districts — and he claims Donalda Chumney, the superintendent for the district that includes Robert F. Wagner, scuttled his chances of getting a new job with another DOE school by having his nomination revoked.

Miranda Barbot, a DOE spokeswoman, said the department will review the suit.

“All staff have a right to a working environment free from discrimination,” she said.

Halkitis is seeking unspecified damages.

It isn’t the first time this year that Robert F. Wagner has come under fire for the way it handles reports of bullying.

In March, the mother of an African-American sixth-grader at the 1,350-student school learned that a white classmate **made a noose from yarn** and draped it around her son’s neck — and that a teacher witnessed the racist incident but did not report it to administrators.

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