

Parents oppose Philly school webcam spying lawsuit

March 19 2010, By JOANN LOVIGLIO , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Some suburban Philadelphia parents are seeking to halt a potential class-action lawsuit accusing their school district of using cameras in school-issued laptops to spy on students at home.

Three sets of parents of students at Lower Merion and Harriton high schools filed documents in federal court Thursday asking for permission to intervene in the case.

The family of 15-year-old Harriton [High School](#) student Blake Robbins is seeking class-action status for a lawsuit accusing the Lower Merion School District of photographing him in his bedroom. The district has said it activated the cameras only to locate missing laptops.

Parents who object to the lawsuit say they are angry about the webcams but are concerned about the financial impact of a class-action settlement. Nearly 500 district [parents](#) have signed a petition opposing the class-action suit.

"We see no benefit to the school district or to the students if a large damage award is gained by the plaintiffs," said Larry Silver, one of several attorneys for the anti-lawsuit group. He also has a child in the wealthy school district on Philadelphia's Main Line.

"We want a positive resolution to this matter," he said. "We want them to get back to their educational mission."

In their complaint submitted in U.S. District Court in Philadelphia, they requested hiring an independent public advocate, permanently banning [laptop webcam](#) use by the district and implementing new regulations on the proper use of technologies.

The district remotely activated 42 webcams over 14 months, successfully locating 18 missing computers. School officials have declined to describe the resulting photographs, and the district has halted the practice amid the lawsuit and resulting state and federal criminal probes.

In the civil suit filed in February, Robbins said a school official approached him and warned that, based on webcam photos, he was suspected of selling drugs. Robbins denies the allegation.

Mark Haltzmann, attorney for Robbins, did not immediately return a call seeking comment. He has 14 days to respond to the parents' complaint.

More information:

Lower Merion School District: <http://www.lmsd.org>

Parents group: <http://www.lmsdparents.org>

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