Kan. teen rethinking apology letter to Brownback
By Associated Press
November 27, 2011

WICHITA, Kan. — A Kansas teenager who got into hot water last week over a disparaging tweet about Gov. Sam Brownback said she has received so much support from around the country that now she's leaning toward rejecting her high school principal's demand that she apologize to the governor in writing.

Since word of her tweet and the reaction by Brownback's office and her school was reported in the media, people from across the U.S. have reached out to Emma Sullivan — mostly to encourage her to stand her ground, The Wichita Eagle (http://bit.ly/vzuKm9 ) reported.

"I knew it would cause some uproar, but I definitely didn't think it would get to a national level or that I would have so many people tweeting at me," she told the newspaper Friday.

Before the incident, Sullivan had 61 followers, but by Friday she had more than 1,400.

The Shawnee Mission East senior was taking part in a Kansas Youth in Government program in Topeka when she sent out a tweet from the back of a crowd of students listening to Brownback's greeting. "Just made mean comments at gov. brownback and told him he sucked, in person (hash)heblowsalot."

She actually made no such comment and described the tweet as "joking around."

Brownback's office, which monitors social media for postings containing the governor's name, saw Sullivan's post and contacted the Youth in Government program. Soon, she was in the principal's office for an hourlong scolding and a demand she send Brownback an apology letter.

The principal, who later called the situation a "disciplinary issue" that was not a public matter, even suggested talking points for the letter she was supposed to write.

Many have urged the 18-year-old to not write the letter, suggesting instead that Brownback or his representatives need to apologize to Sullivan for reporting her to school officials.

"I'm really glad most people have been supportive of me, regardless of their political views," she said. "They're standing up for the fact that it's my ... right to express myself."

Brownback's office did not return calls or emails from the newspaper on Friday. A message that The Associated Press left at the after-hours number for the governor's communications office Saturday was not immediately returned.

Some said the incident has become an example of Internet monitoring gone bad.
"People talking about you on social media is inevitable, and the young woman has an absolute right to do that," said David Kamerer, who teaches public relations and new media at Loyola University in Chicago. "And Brownback has an absolute right to monitor what people are saying about him.

"But I would say it was a mistake to call her out, and that it would be long forgotten had he not done that."

John Stanford, a Democratic strategist and political consultant in Austin, Texas, questioned the governor's use of staff time and state resources to report the teen's tweet.

"It's a misuse of government property and time to intimidate an 18-year-old girl," he said.

Sullivan, who plans to study psychology next year at the University of Arkansas, said Friday she is "leaning toward" not writing the apology letter that's due to the principal by Monday.

"The part I'm most nervous about is going back to school and facing him," she said. "After learning more and kind of talking to people about it and seeing how much support I have, that definitely helps."