

Public School Students At Risk From Employee Misconduct

Education expert explains importance of setting boundaries -- by parents, students, school administrators and society.

([PRWeb](#)) March 28, 2006 -- On March 21 in Tampa, FL, charges were dropped against a former middle school teacher in the second of two prosecutions stemming from her admitted sexual relationship with a 14-year-old male student. The teacher is currently serving three years house arrest and seven years probation after pleading guilty to two counts of lewd and lascivious battery.

"A power imbalance exists between the school employee and the student, regardless of ages," says education expert and school liability consultant Edward F. Dragan. "Too often, that vulnerability is exploited, with traumatic results to everyone involved. Parents, school districts and students have equal responsibility in preventing sexual harassment on campus."

In a survey of 2,064 public school students (8th through 11th grade), conducted by Harris Interactive for the American Association of University Women, 76% of respondents reported having experienced nonphysical sexual harassment at school. For 58% of respondents, this misconduct took physical form. Of those who had been harassed, over one third (35%) reported that their first instance occurred in elementary school.

While most harassment in schools continues to take place between students, the 2001 survey found that 7% of public school students - almost equally divided between boys and girls - are likely to be the victim of physical sexual misconduct by an adult school employee.

Setting boundaries, says Dr. Dragan, author of the text, *Legal and Practice Standards for Teachers (2007)*, is the key to avoiding student harm, costly litigation and even criminal charges arising from sexual misconduct at school.

"At school, the relationship between student and staff member is defined by vital boundaries, put into place by the expectations of parents, school administrators and our society at large.

"Well-considered sexual harassment policies, as well as vigilance in enforcing them, help ensure that parental trust isn't misplaced - and that the student's own best interests always remain the highest priority in public education."

ABOUT:

Edward F. Dragan, Ed.D. is the founder of Education Management Consulting, LLC, providing consultation and expert witness services to school administrators and attorneys on education-related issues including school management, safety in schools, education lawsuits and school risk assessments. His book, *Legal and Practice Standards for Teachers*, is scheduled for publication in 2007.

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