



9-Year-Old Is Charged in Sex Assault at a School

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STAMFORD, Conn., April 16 - The principal of Roxbury Elementary School sat in her office in tears today, the day after the news broke that one of her students, a 9-year-old boy, had been arrested and charged with sexually assaulting a 7-year-old girl in a school bathroom last month.

The principal, Gail Flaster, alternately wiped her eyes and fielded calls from parents, who were incredulous and angry that such an incident could happen at the school, a cheery brick building that their children consider a second home.

"It's overwhelming," said Ms. Flaster, sitting in her tiny office at the school, where paper-plate flowers were stapled to bulletin boards and posters reminded the children that they were special. "For one thing, we emphasize safety here, and teach the children ways to be safe. But bad things happen in good places."

Details of the attack are sketchy. Because children are involved, the case file is sealed. The Stamford police would say only that a juvenile was arrested Tuesday and presented to juvenile authorities. The boy is being represented by a public defender, said a lawyer familiar with the case. Many calls to the juvenile public defender's office were not returned.

Ms. Flaster said only that sometime in late March, a 7-year-old "went alone to a school bathroom and didn't lock the door behind her." The Police Department issued a terse news release on Tuesday, saying it was investigating a delicate case, involving a juvenile, that occurred inside a Stamford school.

"As soon as our office was notified, this investigation started," said the assistant police chief, Richard Priolo. "I can't comment on anything else."

News accounts of the incident were reported on television Tuesday night and in *The Advocate*, a Stamford newspaper, this morning.

On the streets surrounding the school, where the homes range from modest capes and ranches to sprawling estates, the news hovered like a storm cloud over the balmy spring day. People raking their yards, pushing baby carriages or walking dogs stopped today to express their shock that such an incident could happen at Roxbury, which they described as one of the most desirable of the city's public schools.

"It's a wonderful place, there's no doubt about it," said a 38-year-old father who lives a few blocks away. "The issue is, why weren't we notified? I have a 6-year-old daughter there, and I had to learn about it on the news."

Ms. Flaster, the principal, said she learned of the incident in late March, but because of the confidentiality required by law in juvenile matters, she could not notify parents.

"I can say we immediately notified the proper authorities and appropriate action was taken to ensure the safety of the students," she said. Neither she nor the schools superintendent, Anthony L. Mazzullo, would say whether the 9-year-old was still enrolled at Roxbury.

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“It’s very upsetting,” said Carol Rende, whose twin daughters are in kindergarten there. “Why did I have to read about this in the paper this morning? There are a lot of unanswered questions.”

Ms. Rende and other parents were less concerned about the details of the incident than about their children’s safety and the school’s policies for children venturing alone to bathrooms.

“Was it a coed bathroom?” Ms. Rende asked. “Is it locked? I’m wondering whether this child was expelled and I’d like to know where he’s from. Is he from the neighborhood or is he bused in?”

Bathroom visits at Roxbury are scheduled and involve the entire class, which is escorted by a teacher and lined up outside separate, one-stall facilities for boys and girls. A child who needs to go to the bathroom at other times is given a key and allowed to walk alone.

Ms. Flaster has met with parents of both children and offered counseling to their families. Schools in Stamford are closed this week for spring vacation. Ms. Flaster has scheduled a parents’ meeting at 9 a.m. on Monday, the day schools reopen.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/17/nyregion/17KIDS.html?ex=1051593512&ei=1&en=aedd92a74b7bdadf>