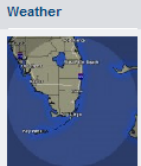


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Jury rejects allegations of teacher attacked at Lake Worth school

School district was accused of negligence after a fight that resulted in injuries

By Susan Spencer-Wendel | The Palm Beach Post
February 9, 2009

WEST PALM BEACH - A jury has rejected a former [Lake Worth](#) Middle School teacher's allegations against the [Palm Beach County](#) School District after she was attacked by a student with extensive psychiatric problems.

Stacy Patrick alleged the district was negligent and then retaliated against her after she spoke out about the assault. Patrick was assigned to a special team monitoring emotionally disabled students.

The jury rejected both of Patrick's claims Jan. 30.

"We are very fortunate in [Palm Beach County](#) to have the level of safety and security we do have," said former Lake Worth Middle School Principal Robert Hatcher. "To have a jury recognize that is very comforting."

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Patrick testified that she had no information about a student who injured her as she tried to break up a student fight he started on his first day at the school in 2002. The boy, according to evidence presented in the case, had threatened to kill fellow students and teachers before.

Jurors heard of injuries to Patrick's neck and knee after the boy grabbed her hair. They did not hear of a miscarriage she suffered right after the incident, though she thinks it was caused by the attack. Patrick's doctor did not directly link the miscarriage to the attack.

Jurors also did not hear that Lake Worth Middle is the same school where teacher Barry Grunow was murdered at a classroom door two years before.

"We believe the School Board has been successful in continuing the cover-up all the way through the trial of this case," said Patrick's attorney, Barry Silver. "The tragedy of Barry Grunow has so much to do with what happened to Stacy Patrick."

Silver said he and Patrick intend to ask for a new trial.

During the testimony, Silver introduced school records of the child, who had just transferred from Lantana Middle School.

According to the documents, he had a considerable psychiatric history, including one involuntary commitment to a mental health center after hitting his sister, prescriptions for many medications and a history of making ominous cartoons depicting killings.

Yet, Patrick said, she was not advised of the extent of his psychiatric problems.

"That type of student should have never even been on our campus," Patrick testified.

Lawyer Eugene K. Pettis, of [Fort Lauderdale](#), defended the school district. Pettis said there was nothing negligent about the student's placement at Lake Worth Middle School, in the designated program for severely emotionally disturbed students.

"There are policies in place in order to protect staff and others from these incidents," Pettis said. "And in this case, the School Board was found to be in line."

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