

More victims come forward in case against La Center school district

Former students claim to have been sexually assaulted in the early 1980s.

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Editor

Four more former La Center students have joined a lawsuit filed last September in Clark County Superior Court against the La Center School District for sexual abuse they allegedly suffered as second-graders at the hands of their teacher in the early 1980s.

The lawsuit was originally filed on Sept. 10, 2010 by two former students, one man and one woman, who claim they were sexually abused by their second-grade teacher, Robert David Ryan, during the 1982-83 school year while they attended Mary Barielson Elementary School. The two were not named in the complaint, which contends that the La Center School District was negligent in its supervision of Ryan.

The suit claims that Ryan would routinely fondle students under the pretext of having them sit on his lap, or sit next to him, while he gave instruction, according to the lawyers for the victims, Vancouver attorney Michael Beaty and Portland attorney Kelly Clark, who are handling the case.

The second grade teacher had worked for the school district for about 10 years prior to his arrest. He was charged with the sexual abuse of 14 of his students between the ages of seven and nine years old. The teacher pleaded guilty to two counts of "Indecent Liberties" on June 2, 1983 and was sentenced to 10 years in prison and an additional 10 years of probation.

According to court records, the teacher later admitted to abusing about 25 students and that he had not "expressed any guilt or remorse for his actions." Ryan's last known address was in Missouri.

"We know that he abused at least two dozen children," said Beaty, a Vancouver trial attorney who has previously represented hundreds of personal in-



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jury victims, "so it is not at all surprising that other victims are now coming forward."

"Ryan was one of the more audacious pedophiles I have seen in a while," said Clark, who over the last 15 years has represented over 300 victims of child sexual abuse in cases against the Catholic Church, the Boy Scouts, and other institutions. "That he was doing all this right under the nose of the administration clearly indicates that the District was not paying attention to the rumors and warning signs."

Under Washington law, a lawsuit does not state the amount of money sought, and the suit says only that the plaintiffs "seek damages in an amount to be proven at trial." According to Beaty, the case should come to trial in about a year.

In a response to the original filing of the lawsuit, La Center Superintendent Mark Mansell reported that Ryan has not taught at the district since 1983. Mansell has been at La Center since 2005.

"In 1983, the Superintendent received a report that a teacher had engaged in inappropriate conduct with a student," Mansell said in the response. "The Superintendent instantly acted on this report and called law enforcement. The principal also personally monitored the accused teacher to ensure the stu-

dents' safety, while waiting for law enforcement to respond.

"The detectives arrested the teacher within 24 hours of the initial report. In addition to the report to law enforcement, the District also placed the teacher on administrative leave, while the investigation was pending. The Superintendent and Board Members worked with law enforcement and personally met with detectives to ensure the students' safety and the swift prosecution of the former teacher. The District's report to law enforcement and cooperation with detectives led to the former teacher pleading guilty to two counts of indecent liberties in 1983 and serving substantial jail time."

Mansell went on to point out that "the Superintendent immediately reported the allegations about the former teacher to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in Olympia. The District formally requested that the former teacher's teaching certificate be revoked. The former teacher's teaching certificate was permanently revoked and he never returned to La Center Schools."

The District provided students with training by law enforcement officers regarding appropriate personal boundaries and maintaining individual safety.

"The District takes its students' safety very seriously and is committed to preventing and responding to abuse," Mansell said. "The District is currently investigating these complaints of about thirty years ago and contacting the appropriate insurance carriers who provided coverage during this period of time."

