

The Hummel Report: Bullying in Warwick's Norwood Elementary



For half a century Norwood Elementary has been a fixture for families in the northern end of Warwick. And it's where Jessica Moone has spent countless hours over the past eight years volunteering while her two daughters went through the school: vice president of the PTA, room parent — you name it, she did it.

All of that changed for Guy and Jessica Moone at the end of March when their younger daughter came home from her 4th-grade class with something to tell her parents.

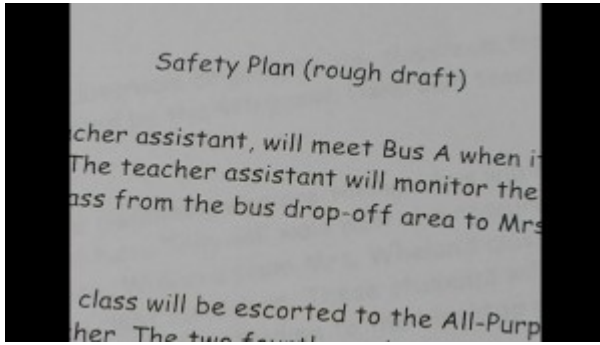
The Moones say a boy with special needs grabbed their daughter's buttocks and also made sexually explicit comments to her. And it wasn't the first time. Jessica recalled a conversation she had two years ago. "In second grade, the teacher asked me if she could speak to me, because the lunch aid heard that particular student saying to my daughter: 'Do you know what a penis is? Would you like to see my penis?'"



Jessica Moone says the boy and her daughter were in different classes last year without incident, but problems began again this past academic year. She says she heard about the latest incident from their daughter, and immediately contacted the principal, John Gannon.

"The only information he would be able to give me over the phone was that she was touched," she said. "He wouldn't be able to say where, he wouldn't be able to say by who. He wouldn't be able to say anything except she was touched at recess and I have a report of it."

State law protects the confidentiality of students and requires the public school system to educate all students regardless of their special needs. And that means there were many answers we could not get from the School Department about the Moones' situation.



We do know that after the March 31 incident, Principal Gannon drafted a detailed safety plan to keep the two students apart after a meeting at the school the next day that included Lynn Dambruch, the director of elementary education for the department.

Guy Moone: Miss Dambruch assured us there'll be severe consequences; she went on about punishments and we talked about the other children who were involved, who had been involved months prior.

The Moones say even with the safety plan there was another incident at a school assembly.

That's when Guy Moone went into action by going to Kent County Family Court to take out a temporary restraining order against the boy and calling Principal Gannon, Superintendent Philip Thornton and Lynn Dambruch, head of elementary education for the district.

Guy Moone: They apologized. They tell me they have daughters. It's pretty much all I got.



Jessica Moone: They'll speak to the teachers to make sure it doesn't happen again. But at that point it was too late, she didn't want to go back to school anymore. She was scared to death to go back to school.

So the Moones, after eight years invested in Norwood, asked for a transfer to Holliman Elementary, a mile away on the other side of Post Road. The department immediately granted the request. Superintendent Thornton tells *The Hummel Report* that while he personally did not conduct the investigation, which includes a statement from the Moones' daughter and others at Norwood Elementary, he agrees with and supports Dambruch's findings. And that he couldn't give us any more details.

The Moones say even if you take the special needs and sexual aspect of the incidents out of consideration, the behavior is clearly bullying.

"My daughter is afraid to go to school. How much more bullying can it get?" Jessica Moone said. "Intimidation is part of bullying and she was absolutely intimidated. She was afraid of what else may have happened to her."

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