

# LA teacher suspected of molesting 20 children

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A fourth-grade teacher who worked for nearly forty years in the Los Angeles Unified School District has been arrested on suspicion of sexually abusing 20 students, a year after another veteran teacher accused of molesting nearly two dozen students brought national attention to the district and the problem of classroom sex abuse.

After a 10-month investigation, eight felony counts of continual sexual abuse and seven counts of lewd acts upon a child were filed Wednesday against Robert Pimentel of Newport Beach for abuse that allegedly took place at George De La Torre Jr. Elementary in the Wilmington area, Officer Christopher No told The Asso-

ciated Press.

In addition to the 15 felonies, misdemeanor charges are expected for the remaining incidents, No said. Pimentel's bail has been set at \$12 million, and an arraignment date hasn't been set.

Police and school officials also said Pimentel is also suspected of the sexual abuse of one adult, but did not say what role if any that person had at the school.

Pimentel, 57, left his fourth-grade teaching position last March when allegations arose from several girls who told their parents he inappropriately touched them during school and police opened an investigation.

District officials immediately removed him from campus and parents and state credentialing authorities were informed, school

district spokesman Daryl Strickland said. Parents and guardians will be told of the arrest by letter and phone, he said.

Before the official dismissal process with the Board of Education could begin, Pimentel, who had worked for the district since 1974, retired.

"Can you go back and fire someone who's already retired? No, you can't," LAUSD Superintendent John Deasy told the Los Angeles Times.

Deasy said the school's principal was also immediately removed because the superintendent was "dissatisfied" with how the incident was handled.

Court records obtained by the Times show the allegations covered a period between Sept. 2011 to March 2012.



## **L.A. Unified leaders sued over teacher sex abuse**

By **CHRISTINA HOAG**  
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The current Los Angeles schools superintendent and five of his predecessors were sued Tuesday on grounds that they systematically covered up complaints about teacher sex abuse of students over the past two decades.

Attorney Brian Claypool said he filed the suit on behalf of the 12 children and 19 parents he is representing in another lawsuit stemming from the 2012 case of a former third-grade teacher facing charges for allegedly feeding students his body fluids over five years. Principals as far back as 1992 had received complaints about the teacher, Mark Berndt, but no action had been taken against him.

Since that case at Miramonte Elementary School was made public a year ago, more cases of alleged teacher sex abuse and administrator inaction have surfaced in the district, including last week's arrest of a former elementary teacher on charges of molesting 12 students and the removal of a principal who failed to act on complaints about him since 2004.

"This is not negligence," Claypool said. "This is an intentional, calculated plan to quash complaints. We're now attacking 20 years of custom and practice."

Claypool likened what he called the district's culture of concealing complaints about pedophile teachers to the Roman Catholic Church's cover-up of pedophile priests.

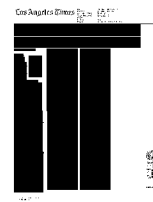
District General Counsel David Holmquist said in a statement that student safety is a top priority for the nation's second largest school district.

Since the Miramonte case, the district has extensively reviewed and overhauled its reporting policies and procedures, strengthened its system for reporting teacher misconduct to state credentialing authorities and instituted a parental notification system when a teacher is being investigated, among other efforts, Holmquist said.

Claypool noted that after Miramonte, Superintendent John Deasy ordered principals to comb through four decades of personnel files to find any unaddressed complaints of improper conduct, but principals previously were told not to put such complaints in personnel files, according to a memo from the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles.

"There's a culture in place. These administrators were trained not to report abuse," he said.

He also added that many of the teacher sex abuse cases have surfaced in schools located in poor, minority neighborhoods.



# Let's do more to protect kids

The needs of adults and institutions too often trump those of children in their care. That could change if we all took it more personally.

## SANDY BANKS

In middle school, my daughter had a friend who'd spent most of her life in foster care. During the next few years, the girl would pass through almost a dozen foster families, group homes and probation camps.

She had a habit of running away when she felt mistreated or ignored. She'd call us, and I'd drive over to pick her up from some street corner or bus stop. I'd bring her home, mother her for a few days, then talk her into returning to the system that she hated.

"You'll be fine," I remember promising her one night as we pulled up in front of the North Hills residential center that would be her new home. It wasn't a bad place. I'd visited it. Nice staff, good classes, clean dorms.

She stared out my car window at the fenced-in complex, then asked, a challenge in her voice, "Would you want Danielle to live here?"

Danielle is my daughter. And *no*, I would not.

I couldn't bring myself to say that, but the silence spoke for me. She shouldered her backpack, brushed off my hug and slammed the car door.

I felt guilty, and wished I'd lied. But she would have seen through it. The truth had already played out in her life: What we are willing to accept for children like



her would not be considered good enough for your child, or mine.

I've thought about that a lot these past few weeks, as I waded through a cascade of news about children harmed by exploitative adults and imperfect institutions.

It hurt to read about the foster kids handed over to an abusive woman who they say tortured them, the dozen students deputies say were abused by a teacher with a history of sexual misconduct complaints, and the priest accused of molestation who was protected by the Los Angeles Archdiocese and then employed to work with families by the Los Angeles Unified School District.

And I can't help but wonder if these cases would have turned out differently if someone had asked the grown-ups in charge what my daughter's friend asked me.

The sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church just keeps getting uglier. Not only were alleged molester priests propped up by church leaders, but one was hired by the Los Angeles Unified School District to do "community outreach." District officials knew that defrocked priest Joseph Pina had been accused of sexually abusing a 14-year-old girl, but kept him on the payroll for 10 years.

Is the school district really so hard up for employees that it's willing to hire as a community organizer a priest who fell in love with an eighth-grade girl when he saw her in a Snow White costume?

Meanwhile, a Los Angeles elementary school teacher was jailed last month, charged with sexually abusing 12 little girls, most of them in his classroom. The children told their parents, who contacted the LAPD. Investigating detectives believe there are more than 20 victims.

The teacher, Robert Pimentel, had been accused of "inappropriately touching" children multiple times over the past 10 years. But his principal apparently turned a blind eye to complaints. She never reported them to authorities, as required by child abuse laws, and retired — her pension intact — before she could be fired.

Then there's the Palm-dale woman charged last month with torturing 7- and 8-year-old siblings she'd cared for as a foster parent. Ingrid Brewer had been encouraged by social workers to adopt the children, though warning signs were clear.

She'd been accused of mistreating eight children, and injuring some, during five years as a foster mother. Social workers noted that the siblings seemed wary and Brewer seemed unable to bond with them or handle their behavior problems.

But the adoption was approved, Brewer kept getting her monthly checks and social workers closed their file. No one, it seems, bothered to ask the children what they thought about it.

Until last month, when the kids ran away and were discovered hiding under a blanket on cold pavement, a few blocks from Brewer's

home. The siblings told sheriff's deputies they been locked in their rooms, bound with zip ties, deprived of food, and punished with a hammer and electrical cords.

I know we won't ever rid society of predators and perverts. There will always be abusive parents, warped teachers and callous bureaucrats.

I understand that there aren't enough foster homes that social workers are grievously overworked and unsupported. I know union rules protect teachers' rights, and snapping a fifth-grader's bra strap might not be considered a firing offense. I get that "innocent until proven

guilty" can be taken to mean that it's OK to hire an admitted molester as long as he wasn't charged or convicted.

But none of that is any excuse for putting children in harm's way with irresponsible choices.

The social workers, church leaders, school principal and district officials may have been following rules designed to serve adults and guard institutions, but they should have tuned in to more basic instincts and protected vulnerable children.

We want to clear case-loads, sell school building programs, protect a campus from embarrassment or a church from scandal. So the children's needs get lost in the process; they're an abstract concept.

Now we read the newspaper stories and shake our heads. The incompetence, the carelessness ... What were those people thinking?

When you imagine your child at the center of the choice, the stakes rise and the questions change.

If the social workers had taken those kids to the park and asked what they thought of their new mom, if the principal had asked little girls privately if their teacher had ever touched them, if archdiocese officials had actually talked to young victims and stopped protecting grown-ups...

If they'd embraced those children as their own, their feelings might have led them to a very different outcome.

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