



# Suit against ex-LAUSD boss tossed

**COURTS:** Sexual harassment claim against Cortines exceeds statute of limitations.

By Barbara Jones  
Staff Writer

A judge has thrown out a sexual-harassment lawsuit filed by a male LAUSD Facilities executive against retired Superintendent Ramon Cortines, saying the statute of limitations for filing a claim had expired, a district spokesman said Saturday.

Superior Court Judge William Fahey had previously indicated he was inclined to grant the district's motion to dismiss the suit in which Scot Graham claimed Cortines had made unwanted sexual advances during a weekend trip in July 2010 to the school chief's vacation cabin in Tulare County.

Graham filed a claim last June 8 alleging that Los Angeles Unified officials invaded his privacy and defamed him when they publicly disclosed his identity as the recipient of a \$250,000 payout to settle the allegations against Cortines. That deal fell apart as a result of the district's disclosure.

Graham subsequently filed a sexual-harassment suit against Cortines, but without filing a required claim first.

Cortines told reporters in

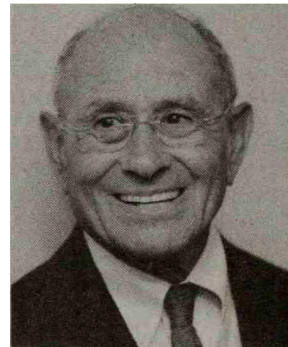
May that his interactions with Graham were all consensual.

According to the lawsuit, Cortines propositioned Graham shortly after he was hired as director of real estate in March 2000. The lawsuit contends that Cortines "violated a myriad of LAUSD policies to hire" Graham, noting that he was not required to submit to any of the "prerequisites of securing employment at the LAUSD."

Cortines left the district in June 2000 and returned to the LAUSD in 2009.

He retired in April 2011. Graham reported Cortines' alleged actions to his supervisor and later to the district's general counsel, but no action was taken and the worker was advised to just "forget about the incident with Cortines," according to the lawsuit.

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A case against Ramon Cortines was thrown out.



# LAUSD to hire new sex-abuse investigators

By Barbara Jones Staff Writer

With awareness of child molestation heightened since the Miramonte Elementary case broke a year ago, Los Angeles Unified is creating a special team to investigate sex-abuse allegations.

Superintendent John Deasy said he plans to hire two investigators who have backgrounds in law enforcement and also know education law to oversee cases in which teachers or other campus employees are accused of sexual misconduct.

"We don't tolerate the mistreatment of students," Deasy said in a recent interview. "The threshold by which we look at that is much, much higher than it was in the past.

"It doesn't have to involve touching — it may be harassment or (sexually) inappropriate comments.

"An employee doesn't have to be convicted of a felony to be dismissed," he said.

The district will continue reporting suspected misconduct to police, so they can determine whether to pursue criminal charges, before launching its own investigation.

District officials last year instituted a "zero-tolerance" policy for misconduct following the high-profile arrests of teachers accused of molesting youngsters at Miramonte and Telfair elementary schools.

An allegation of abuse or harassment — sexual, physical or verbal — now triggers an investigation, with district officials moving aggressively to fire those found to have jeopardized student safety.

School principals have handled most of the complaints, although there are now three investigators and a computer specialist available to help with more difficult cases.

Human Resources chief Vivian Ekchian said adding a sex-abuse team will give the current investigators more time to work with principals looking into other types of complaints. She hopes that will shorten a process that now can drag on for six

month in salary and benefits for each educator, plus the pay for a substitute to fill in.

"With each case, we'll have someone with the specific expertise so we can accelerate the investigations," she said. "This will be more strategic, more centrally driven."

She said the new investigators will help officials navigate the more challenging cases, such as those involving very young children or kids with developmental disabilities for whom communication is difficult.

Ekchian said the LAUSD board has OK'd the firing of 24 teachers since school started last fall, half for misconduct and half for incompetence. With the board meeting once a month, she expects that two or three dozen more will be terminated by the time school ends in late May.

The board fired 99 teachers in 2011-12, most of them for misconduct. The year before, 56 teachers were dismissed.

By comparison, 92 teachers on track for termination have decided to resign instead. That four-month total nearly equals the 122 who resigned in 2011-12 and the 105 who quit in 2010-11 rather than going through the arduous dismissal process.

"The majority are performance related," Ekchian said. "When (principals) started to visit the classroom, teachers knew they were dismissal bound and they chose the easy out."

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**LAUSD A5**

months or longer.

During that time, teachers accused of misconduct are pulled from the classroom and "housed" at an administrative office at a steep cost to taxpayers — about \$7,100 a



## OUR REGION

**\$4.75 million for pupil molested by bus driver****SETTLEMENT REACHED BY LODI SCHOOLS  
IN SEX ASSAULT OF SPECIAL-NEEDS CHILD**

By ROSS FARROW  
*Lodi News-Sentinel*

The Lodi Unified School District has agreed to a \$4.75 million settlement in the case of a special-needs student who was kidnapped and sexually assaulted by a former bus driver.

The settlement was announced Tuesday in San Joaquin Superior Court and at a news conference outside the Stockton courthouse by the plaintiff's attorneys.

A jury unanimously determined that the school district was liable for hiring Richard Dale Evans despite district officials' knowledge that Evans had a misdemeanor conviction for having sex with a prostitute in downtown Stockton.

"(Lodi Unified) didn't check for references," Vince Finaldi, an attorney for the plaintiff, said at the news conference. "They said they relied on intuition."

A \$4.2 million settlement was offered in October, but Lodi Unified officials and the district's insurance company, Nor Cal Relief, rejected the offer, Finaldi said.

Nor Cal Relief is a self-insurance that is funded by tax dollars from the 330-member public school districts, Lodi Unified Superintendent Cathy

Nichols-Washer said in an email statement.

"Lodi Unified School District is pleased that Nor Cal Relief and the plaintiffs in this case have reached a settlement that will provide resources for the family of the student who was harmed," Nichols-Washer said.

"The district regards this situation very seriously."

In a 2011 criminal trial, Evans pleaded guilty to multiple counts of child molestation, including kidnapping and lewd acts on a minor. He received a 25-year prison sentence.

The victim, who was 8 at the time and is now 11, is suffering from fear, anxiety and emotional distress, according to the lawsuit.

The jury in the civil trial determined on Feb. 27 that Lodi Unified was 90 percent liable and Evans 10 percent.

The second phase of the trial, to determine how much in damages Evans and the school district should pay the child's family, was scheduled to be completed by the end of the week.

"I think this settlement is the first step in the family's recovery," said Ken Meleyco, another attorney for the plaintiff.

"This child needs therapy right away, and with this settlement, she'll get it."

Meleyco and Finaldi said they hope the enormity of the settlement will prompt school district trustees and administrators to change their hiring practices.

Lodi Unified administrators said during the trial that they followed the same procedures for years, Meleyco said.

They knew that Evans pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of having sex with a prostitute in a potato chip delivery truck in 2000, yet Lodi Unified hired him as a full-time school bus driver in 2004, Meleyco said.

"The health and safety of our students is the highest priority for Lodi Unified School District," Nichols-Washer said "We understand how important this is to the parents of our community who entrust their children to us each day."

Evans was fired in November 2010 after the girl told her parents about the incidents, Meleyco said. The two incidents, in October and November 2010, were filmed by videotape.