



National Briefing

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California: School District to Pay Settlement in Sex Abuse Case

The Los Angeles Unified School District will pay \$139 million to end all remaining litigation involving an elementary school teacher convicted of committing numerous counts of lewd conduct against his students, according to a settlement announced Friday. The deal involving 82 students puts a legal end to the episode that began when Mark Berndt, a teacher at Miramonte Elementary School, was arrested in 2012 and accused of blindfolding students and feeding them his semen on cookies. Lawyers in the case said the settlement, reached during jury selection, was believed to be the largest involving a school district. Plaintiffs' lawyers had planned to present evidence suggesting the school district was aware of sexual misconduct by Mr. Berndt three decades ago but failed to act until a photo processor at a pharmacy contacted the police about film that Mr. Berndt dropped off that showed pictures of blindfolded children and being fed some substance. The case brought about big changes in how Los Angeles Unified, the nation's second-largest school district, handles allegations of sexual abuse. After Mr. Berndt's arrest, the district removed all 130 staff members from the school. Mr. Berndt was sentenced to 25 years in prison after pleading no contest to 23 counts of lewd conduct. The \$139 million settlement is in addition to \$30 million

the district previously agreed to pay to settle 65 other cases involving Mr. Berndt.

(AP)