

**Principal suspended for not reporting sexual abuse
As school aide charged, superintendent orders principals to review rules**

By Brian R. Ballou and James Vaznis | Globe Staff
December 17, 2011
© 2011 The New York Times Company

As new details emerged in court yesterday about a teacher aide's allegedly inappropriate contact with an autistic student, the Boston School Department suspended a principal who failed to report a prior complaint against the aide, after an internal review determined that she did not follow protocols.

Jessica Bolt - the principal of King K-8 School, who has worked for the School Department for more than 33 years - will be suspended for two weeks without pay, Superintendent Carol R. Johnson said last night.

Bolt received a complaint from a parent in the spring that a teacher's aide at the school, LaShawn Hill, had inappropriate contact with a student.

Bolt investigated the complaint - interviewing the parent, the student, and the aide - but ultimately decided there was not enough information to pursue disciplinary action against Hill.

However, Johnson said, district procedures and state law require school employees to report such complaints to the state Department of Children and Families, which is charged with investigating the validity of complaints. In light of the lapse, Johnson said she will gather principals Monday to review protocols. The principals then will do the same with their staff.

"We want to make sure every adult who works in the school community knows all the protocols and follows them," Johnson said. "We want to make sure every person we employ cares about children and protects their safety."

Johnson said Bolt has been "deeply troubled and concerned" that Hill, who transferred to the Harbor Pilot Middle School in the midst of a districtwide restructuring of special education programs, now stands accused of having inappropriate contact with a student there on Monday.

"This has been a tremendously difficult and emotional situation for her," Johnson said. "She sees herself as a dedicated person who places a high value on creating a safe environment for students."

Bolt, who is expected to resume her duties at the King after her suspension ends, told Johnson about the prior incident Monday, after Johnson called to inform her of the recent complaint against Hill.

Johnson declined to release a copy of the review, out of concern, she said, that releasing all the information could jeopardize a police investigation.

Mary Tamer, a Boston School Committee member, said that Johnson's discipline of the principal did not go nearly far enough, given that a state law was broken and another child was harmed.

"I would expect the removal of the principal would have been the minimal action taken," said Tamer. "As a parent, I know how important it is to believe your children are being protected when they are away from you six hours a day. As a parent, I find the incident deeply disturbing and the response to this equally so."

Hill, 33, of Dorchester, was charged yesterday in Dorchester District Court with lewd and lascivious conduct involving a 14-year-old student from Harbor Pilot Middle School and was held on \$10,000 cash bail. He pleaded not guilty.

Hill, who is married and has three children, is currently on leave from the Harbor School and faces termination.

He also appeared in court Thursday and pleaded not guilty to five counts of larceny after he was accused of stealing laptop computers from the Harbor School.

Prosecutors indicated yesterday that the case may widen.

“We are reviewing other incidences with this defendant and potentially any other victims, and this is the beginning of what I expect to be a lengthy investigation,” Leora Joseph, assistant Suffolk district attorney, said during the arraignment.

Before the arraignment, Hill’s cousin, Mary Hill, spoke in the hallway of the courthouse, saying that Hill had been molested between the ages of 7 and 14 by a relative who has since died. She said she believes he is acting out in response to that abuse.

“That affected him a whole lot, but there’s still no excuse for it,” she said. “I’m here to support my cousin and make sure justice is served. If he did it, he should be punished, but, at the same time, he should be helped. I don’t condone it.”

The maternal grandmother of the Harbor student said in a telephone interview yesterday that the family is devastated. “Now we have to say to ourselves, how long has this been going on?” she said. The boy started school at Harbor Pilot in September.

A copy of the defendant’s resume submitted to the Boston School Department in 2004 and obtained by the Globe yesterday, indicates that he worked closely with children over a prolonged period. From 1998-2003, he was a kindergarten paraprofessional at the Boston Renaissance Charter Public School, performing one-on-one student mentoring and working as a physical education instructor. He also helped students with homework in an after-school program and was a summer camp assistant to students in grades 1-5.

In summer 2004, he served as a summer camp assistant, this time for the Grace Church of All Nations in Boston, working with students in grades K-2.

Hill’s attorney, Jennifer Doherty, said in court that her client has been involved with a local Pop Warner football program. She could not be reached for comment after the arraignment.

According to a police report, a member of the school’s staff started looking for Hill at about 2 p.m. Monday, to remind him it was time for choir practice. The teacher walked into a small room and observed Hill and the student in a corner, both with their pants unzipped and open. Hill allegedly told the staff member that he was “showing him things.”

The staff member told Hill that she would have to report the incident and took the student with her. As she was reporting it to her team, Hill allegedly walked in and said he had been trying to explain arousal and masturbation to the boy.

Those allegations brought gasps yesterday from family members of the victim, including the boy’s mother, who were sitting in the courtroom.

The Globe does not publish the names of victims of sex crimes or the names of their relatives.

“We’re committing a full amount of resources to this investigation,” Joseph said after the arraignment. “We’re working closely with the Boston Police Department. We’re working closely with the schools. We’re working with the children’s advocacy center and our staff at the DA’s office is committed to doing this the way we do all cases of child sexual abuse, methodically, legally sound, and child-centered.”

Hill was rehired at the Boston Renaissance Charter Public School, where he worked in an after-school program. Roger Harris, the charter school’s superintendent, said in an e-mail yesterday that Hill has been suspended pending the outcome of the police investigation.

Hill was ordered to return to court on Jan. 6 for a pretrial hearing.

“We’re all shocked, just can’t believe it,” Mary Hill said. “My cousin is really nice, but I never thought he would go that way, with kids.”

Brian R. Ballou can be reached at bballou@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@globeballou](https://twitter.com/@globeballou). James Vaznis can be reached jvaznis@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@globevaznis](https://twitter.com/@globevaznis).