

# THE BLADE

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## Parents sue Otsego; harassment alleged

### They say 2 boys targeted daughter

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Koch

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Saying Otsego Local Schools failed to protect their young daughter from sexual harassment and bullying, the parents of a former Otsego student filed a federal lawsuit Tuesday against the school district.

The parents, identified in the complaint only by their initials, allege that beginning in the 2012-13 school year, while their now-11-year-old daughter was a second grader at Otsego Elementary, two brothers — one in second grade and the other in third grade — began a campaign of bullying and sexual harassment that continued through last November when they transferred their daughter to the Napoleon City Schools.

Otsego officials, they claim, repeatedly failed to protect their daughter, to investigate the allegations, and to enforce their own policies.

“It’s really a betrayal of trust,” said Toledo attorney Charles Boyk, who filed the complaint in U.S. District Court. “I just don’t think these guys knew what they were doing. I don’t think anything was intentional. I just think they’re the Keystone Cops.”

The incidents allegedly began with name-calling and escalated to physical assaults and death threats. In one incident, the young girl was allegedly pushed down on the school bus, where the boys pulled her pants down and spanked her.

The suit claims that incident and others that occurred in the school were captured on surveillance video the district later destroyed.

The complaint alleges that school officials — from bus drivers and recess monitors to teachers and administrators — either dismissed or ignored the her complaints, failed to follow up on them, or, when a safety plan for her was put into place, failed to enforce it.

The harassment negatively affected her academic performance, behavior, and mental health, the suit states. When the older boy began attending Otsego Junior High for the 2015-16 school year, the girl received 38 demerits for “acting out” between October, 2015, and March, 2016.

Adam Koch, Otsego superintendent, said he couldn’t comment on pending litigation. Still, he said, the district has policies and procedures for dealing with bullying and harassment, and it enforces them.

“We take all allegations very seriously, and we act in a responsible way when students misbehave,” Mr. Koch said. “Student safety is definitely a high priority for us. We care about all our kids. We have to keep a safe environment, and we do that.”

Mr. Boyk said emails and other correspondence between the parents and the district show otherwise.

“I think a parent has to be super-proactive, go into the school, get information in writing, probably check on a weekly basis, but the crazy thing here is this mother is very proactive and I have a paper trail of emails back and forth,” he said. “It’s just that these guys didn’t follow up or the left hand didn’t know what the right was doing.”

The suit, assigned to Judge Jeffrey Helmick, seeks unspecified compensatory and punitive damages and attorney fees.



Koch

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