



Wooddale Elementary School is on Peppermill, west of Farmington Road, north of 12 Mile.

Alleged sex assault probed

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The identity of the employee could not be confirmed, nor could the school department in which he works.

ON WEDNESDAY, Wooddale principal David Coffin mailed a letter home explaining the situation to parents.

The situation also was discussed Tuesday with parents at a regular Parent/Teacher Organization meeting, attended by Zurvalec, district personnel director Robert Coleman and police Inspector Thomas Godwin.

At that meeting, the district released a statement explaining the allegation was made, the employee was temporarily removed and the employee was "willingly cooperating with all the investigations."

In his letter, Coffin told parents: "I believe, as do the police, you should not worry about the safety of your child at Wooddale." He also

'When a very serious charge is made against an employee, we, in effect, remove them from the workplace until our investigation is completed.'

— Sue Zurvalec
employee relations director

explained the "sexual misconduct" allegation and the employee's temporary removal.

"I think what's key in this situation is the district's policy that the employee is removed from the situation — even if the person is innocent," Coffin said.

COFFIN PLANS to handle parent calls and questions individually, as they arise. "Because of the cooperation I've received from the central office and Farmington Hills police, I have really been able

to keep this school in a stable condition," he said.

Zurvalec said the district is interviewing people involved with the situation, including the person making the accusation, the employee and any witnesses. "We follow a due process procedure," she said.

There is no timeline on completing the investigation. "It's important we not try and hurry it and that we be thorough," she said.

Staff writer Bob Sklar contributed to this report.

Parent lauds handling of situation

Wooddale Elementary parent Bev Bahr is pleased with how principal David Coffin, the school district and the police are handling the alleged sexual assault at the school.

"The police responded, the district responded. Everything was answered," she said. "I think they're doing as much as they can."

PTO president Diane Hagen said her group could only offer parental support and an open ear.

"I can't answer anything about how I feel about this," she said. "Children always need to be protected — they need to be the focus. It's a tragedy for this employee, regardless of how this turns out."

Hagen said her group has con-

tacted an abuse reaction clinic in hopes of having a representative attend a future PTO meeting to inform parents about how to deal with similar situations.

As part of a letter to Wooddale parents following the alleged assault, Coffin included a list of preventive measures to help thwart the sexual abuse of children.

School suit claims state cuts violate Headlee rule

By Casey Hana
staff writer

Farmington school trustees have authorized their attorneys to sue the state over what they believe to be a violation of the Headlee Tax Limitation Amendment.

Under the amendment, "the state could not reduce support given to local schools," said acting superintendent Michael Flanagan, in recommending the move. "It's clear they have. They're in violation of the amendment."

Farmington's suit will allege the state has underpaid the district for mandated programs since 1978, when the Constitutional amendment was approved by Michigan voters.

Farmington joins some 40 other districts with similar cases that are being held in abeyance at the Michigan Court of Appeals, awaiting possible appeals to the Supreme Court.

Attorney Dennis Pollard, who will represent the district, stressed that Farmington would not join a class action suit, but will file an individual suit, which could require more than \$1 million the state has not paid Farmington since 1978. The suit will not ask for a specific dollar amount.

Any Headlee-related trial, Pollard added, is filed in the Court of Appeals and not in a county circuit court. Also different is that the suit is being filed on behalf of the "taxpayers" of the district, using trustees names and not that of the district.

"To the extent you don't file each year, you lose more funding based on a statute of limitations argument," Pollard told the board. "You're going to lose each year."

THE VOTE to move ahead with the lawsuit was unanimous when approved Nov. 7, but trustee Janice Rolnick said she wondered where the state would get the money to pay such a large settlement if all the dis-

tricts' cases were settled. "You're mistaken, if you think there won't be a tax increase," she said.

Pollard agreed that there's no fund of money at the state level to possibly pay the \$200 to \$300 million that would be needed if all the districts are successful.

"The state's just going to have to adjust," he said.

But Joel Wittenberg, representing the Farmington Hills-based Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co., Richard Headlee and the Taxpayers United for the Michigan Constitution — a watchdog group — said he believes the state does have the money.

"The state has a rainy day fund of over \$300 million," he said. "Obviously, the money is there." He had come to voice support for the board's action.

Farmington trustees decided to join the statewide effort following a report by Pollard, who offered an update on a related 1980 case: *Durant v. the State of Michigan* involving the Fitzgerald Public Schools in

Macomb County.

APPEALS COURT Judge George Deneweth said in a recent ruling on the Fitzgerald case that: "As the testimony unfolded at trial, it became immediately apparent . . . the Department of Education has engaged in a plan or scheme to circumvent the effect of the Headlee Amendment."

Pollard said in his report to the board that Farmington's situation parallels Fitzgerald's "in the sense that the state's funding for categorical programs has been either eliminated or proportionately reduced."

"It is our opinion that your school district will be entitled to recover from the state."

Pollard expects the Fitzgerald case to be appealed to the Supreme Court.

Flanagan told the board he is convinced the district should get involved.

"It's a modest amount to be protected," he said. "If we don't file a suit, we're not protected."

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Forum helps avoid illegal liquor sales

As part of a citywide crackdown on the sale of alcohol to minors, Mayor Terry Sever has invited all owners and employees of Farmington Hills liquor license establishments to a community forum Wednesday.

The forum will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the city council chambers in the city hall, 31555 11 Mile, at Orchard Lake Road.

Sever will unveil two new concepts.

The first, "Operation Cooperation," is a partnership among licensees, the city council, the police and Farmington Public Schools' administration and students. Sever will emphasize the responsibility of each of the partners in this cooperative effort.

Police Chief William Dwyer will outline the second new concept, a law enforcement effort known as the "reverse sting."

That brings a misdemeanor ticket to minors who use fraudulent or altered identification, or who unlawfully represent or display the driver's license of another, in the purchase of alcoholic beverages.

We would like to announce the addition of Robert, Lori and Sandy, formerly of a la coiffure, to our staff.

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