

Para Educator Talks About Sexual Assault by Student She's Fired for Taking Too Much Time to Recover

By Dick Myers
Editor

It happened more than two years ago, yet the incident still preys on her mind.

Of all the horror stories revealed over the past six months about incidents of violence in Calvert County Public Schools (CCPS) classrooms, this may be the most horrific. The then 59-year-old grandmother and paraeducator was sexually assaulted by a 16-year-old special education student inside Huntingtown High School while school was in session. The victim says she knows of no other similar incident.

The ultimate outcome of the incident – the victim was fired.

She has asked The County Times not to use her name in this story. While many people know of the incident and know her, she still wants to get back into the classroom to help kids. But not in Calvert County. She is seeking a job elsewhere and would prefer her name remains unpublished.

The woman says she forgives her attacker but does not forgive School Superintendent Dr. Daniel Curry or the people in the school system who failed to support her when she needed it the most. “Maybe one day,” she said of that forgiveness.

Here is her story.

She was born in Chicago and grew up in Anne Arundel County. She retired from 20 years as an investigator with the Environmental Protection Agency. “I love being busy. I love to work, and I love being with kids,” she explained, so she hooked on with the Anne Arundel County schools as an environmental educator. She had experience from college in Arizona with the Outward-Bound program.

She was a single mom. “I met someone, and he felt the same way about relocating. We liked Calvert County and came down here about 21 years ago and I’d already been in Anne Arundel County school system, so I figured, that’s exactly what I wanted to do was work with kids.”

Her first position in the county was an environmental teacher with CHESPAX, the CCPS environmental program. That contract expired and she moved to special education as a paraeducator, which she liked and where she stayed for more than 20 years, at Dowell Elementary and Calvert Country School. “I was hooked,” she said about special education.

Because of mainstreaming of special education students, they were downsizing the number of adults at Calvert Country School, which has the school systems most profoundly developmentally disabled students. Staff were shifted to other schools. She was assigned to Huntingtown High School.

She said morale was very low there, especially with special education. “The kids are there to get a diploma and they’re not there until they’re 21 (like Calvert Country School) and we did have some problems. But overall, I never had any problems whatsoever with any of my students. I was the swimming coach and I had five clubs and I was just support staff. I was paraeducator too.” She said at her age she didn’t want to go through special education teacher certification. “I just wanted to be able to just concentrate on everything else.”

So, she assisted the teachers with their cohort, a group of special education students, and also other students who would come to them for special help. “I was always pretty happy about it,” she recalled.

Fast forward six years from her assignment to Huntingtown High School, to Tuesday, December 19th, 2017. She said, “I was assigned a student. He was a BDP (Behavior Development Program) student.”

She explained, “These (special education) students are going for a diploma. That’s the goal. They’re taking gen-

eral ed classes as well. And that’s why I was assigned to this male student for two different classes, to go with him, to assist him. Plus, there were other kids in these classes too and I would always help out the teacher when it came to any assistance with any other students too.”

She went on to explain: “The student had to be escorted everywhere he went. So, that made him angry, but he was dealing with it. There were times he would go off. But, with me, I never had a problem until this day. And, so I got to the first floor (from the third floor) and the bell had already rung a second time for kids to be in their classes. There was nobody around. He asked, he wanted to talk to me, but he didn’t say why, but he wanted to go outside and there are two halls that intersect there where there’s one set of doors and then a breezeway and then another set that goes out to the student parking lot.

“I told him we’re absolutely not going outside. We need to stay in the building. We can find a quiet place to go talk. We were told if he needed to talk, we were to give him that time.”

She said they ended up in a foyer between two sets of doors. He threw down his backpack. “I was like thinking, okay, well he’s upset. I’m very laid back. I’m very patient and focused. And so, I’m thinking, well, I didn’t have a problem with that.” She realized, however, there was a problem when he told her to throw down the things she was carrying.

She threw down her lunch bag but held onto her files. “The next thing I know is that he came at me. Now there are cinderblock walls there in that foyer area and he slammed me against that cinder block wall with my arms pinned down and he’s flat against me and he’s got his arms around me holding me there. I was able to push him off and he did it again. He wanted to kiss me. He slammed me into the wall three times and the third time I could barely break from his grip because he had me with my arms down and he was in my face.”

While the assault was happening, she said, “He wanted me to take off my clothes. He wanted to see my chest.”

She finally broke away. “I don’t know what kind of state I was in. Just many different things. He went into his next class and I walked up to the staff bathroom and just broke down.”

She eventually left the bathroom and ran into a teacher friend of hers who helped her to Principal Rick Weber’s office to report the incident. “He didn’t seem concerned. He didn’t seem upset. He was just matter of fact, and that upset me even more, a lot more. His demeanor was not what I expected from my principal.”

A vice principal talked to her. “I did feel interrogated. They picked it apart for at least an hour. They took apart my statement to make sure I was telling them the truth. They would re-ask the same questions over and over and over again, like I was lying.”

The days that followed were a nightmare. She filed a report with the principal the next day and demanded that she be able to press charges with the school resource officer. “They denied me that privilege and that’s unlawful. I shouldn’t have been able to have access to talk to him that day inside school about the incident,” she said, noting she was eventually able to talk to him and press charges two weeks later.

In the meantime, she learned that the student had blamed her for initiating the attack. “I think they took his word over mine by the way they treated me.”

She didn’t return to Huntingtown. “They gave him 11 days suspension and they took every day away. He never got one day of in-school suspension. He never was sent out. I mean, this was a serious assault,” she said.

She said basically no one believed her until the detective in the case came around to her side and eventually

got a confession from the boy.

Eventually the boy was charged with second-degree sexual assault.

She said he

recanted his allegations against her. He was given a reprimand by the judge and ordered to write an apology to her. “He apologized for invading my space and being sexual,” she said.

She said she was only allowed six weeks leave. “I was a mess. So, after six weeks, I had a meeting with the superintendent, and I had to beg him for two more weeks. I was doing intense counseling.” She asked for an assignment something like she had been doing for so many years. “They denied that and that really upset me. They said they didn’t have anything. The only thing available was Title One at Plum Point Elementary.” She said the program is for students with “behavioral. They can be violent. It’s almost inclusion. They have like one-on-one staff to all students.”

She said, “I’m thinking after what I just went through, I’m not going to go back into a situation where I’m going to be hit, spit, kicked. I’m just not ready for that.” Instead she was offered a position at Patuxent-Appeal Campus, one-on-one with a fifth grader. “At the time, they told me he just needed a little assistance with his work. Well, it turned out that the student was behavioral.”

She later learned his previous teacher had been slapped by him and she quit. She was told if she had difficulty removing him to a safe room, “I had been told that most times he willingly will not go to that room so he would have to be dragged. I’m not dragging a student. I don’t do that.”

She did finish the school year, but she admitted, “I was just not happy. I still needed more time. When someone goes through an assault, who are you to dictate how long you take someone to get to that point where, okay, I’m moving past this.”

She didn’t go back to school in the fall. “I was fighting these demons and what had happened and everything I’d been through.”

Then she said, “I had a last meeting in December 2018 with Dr. Curry and the meeting went really well. I was pretty much begging him that I was ready.” She said she would go wherever they assigned her, “even though I’m still struggling because I love being with the kids and it’s my therapy too. And I thought the meeting went well, he said he’d have to talk to human resources and the next thing I know is I got a letter of termination.”

The letter said she had abandoned her job.

She was asked about the concerns from teachers about classroom violence that have been aired recently. “You’ve heard nothing, not even half because teachers and staff are afraid to come forward. And I know he put out this new hotline where you can call, and you’re guarded and that’s not true. Most are afraid of retaliation of their jobs.”

She warned, “There’s got to be student accountability immediately after it happens. When they attack another student or when they attack a staff member, and they’re not doing it. It needs to be put in place. Now!”

She said during her meeting with Curry, she asked him, “What if it was your mother or your sister or your daughter?”

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