

The Hartford Courant

Two Men Sue Newington Schools Alleging Sex Abuse 24 Years Ago

By CHRISTOPHER HOFFMAN, Special to The Courant

NEWINGTON — Two men are suing a former long-term substitute gym teacher at John Wallace Middle School alleging that he repeatedly sexually assaulted and abused them at the school 24 years ago.

The lawsuit also names the school system as a defendant, charging that officials failed to act on warning signs that gym teacher James Brown was abusing students.

In 2002, Brown was convicted of molesting boys when he was a gym teacher at St. Mary's School in Newington and sentenced to two years in prison.

Superintendent William C. Collins said Wednesday that the lawsuit was a surprise and has been turned over to the school system's lawyers.

"Nothing will be swept under the rug," Collins said. "Everything will be made public. We're going to cooperate fully."

The alleged assaults took place in the locker room showers during the 1989-90 school year when the men were 12 and 13, said their attorney, Cindy Robinson of Tremont Sheldon Robinson Mahoney of Bridgeport. Robinson said she believes there are more victims.

The boys, identified in the suit as "John Doe" and "Brian Doe," didn't report the alleged abuse to the school or police because they felt ashamed and didn't think anyone would believe them, Robinson said.

"As with most victims of childhood sexual abuse, they were ashamed and guilty," she said. "They feel that people won't believe them and they will be ostracized. That's why they don't tell people."

Asked why the men, now in their 30s, decided to sue now, Robinson said, "I think it's just a matter of them coming to a point in their lives where it's something they need to address."

Both men suffered physical injuries and long-term emotional trauma as a result of the alleged abuse, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and feelings of shame and guilt, the lawsuit charges.

"It's had an effect on their self-esteem," Robinson said. "They've had difficulties in terms of long-term relationships and authority."

Brown, who was in his late 20s at the time of the alleged abuse and is in his early 50s today, routinely required the boys and groups of boys to shower naked together while he watched, Robinson said. He threatened to lower their grades if they refused, she said.

Brown's inappropriate behavior was known to students and faculty and should have triggered action, the suit alleges.

But Collins said he has read Brown's personnel file and found no red flags.

"There was nothing in there that would lead anyone to believe anything more wonderful things," he said. "There were no concerns, no issues. Everything was glowing."

Collins said that Brown left the school system after the 1989-90 school year when the regular gym teacher returned, as was normal practice.

Brown could not be reached for comment Wednesday. The lawsuit seeks compensatory, punitive and other damages in excess of \$15,000.

<http://www.courant.com/community/newington/hc-newington-sex-abuse-1002-20141001-story.html>