

Problem teachers land new jobs

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physical or sexual misconduct still work with children or young adults.

u Private schools and youth organizations are especially at risk. They are left on their own to perform background checks of new hires and generally have no access to the one tracking system of teachers who were disciplined by state authorities.

u Despite the risks, schools of all kinds regularly fail to do the most basic of background checks. A private high school in Louisiana hired a teacher who was a registered sex offender in Texas. Students using a simple Web search uncovered his past.

u School administrators are rarely penalized for failing to report resignations of problem teachers to state licensing officials. Although 41 states have laws requiring public school administrators to report the firing or resignation of a teacher to state education officials, violations of those laws rarely have consequences.

This isn't supposed to be happening.

A series of high-profile abuse cases and news media investigations in the 1990s and 2000s put a spotlight on lax regulations by government officials at every level and led to changes in a few states.

Congress passed a law in December 2015 requiring states to ban school districts from secretly passing problem teachers to other jurisdictions.

None of those changes closed the gaping holes plaguing the nation's teacher screening system.

"I'm not against what's been put into law," said Charol Shakeshaft, a professor of educational leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University who has studied teacher misconduct. "It just isn't much of a solution."

Although abusive teachers make up only a fraction of 1% of the nation's teaching corps, USA TODAY found dozens of teachers who lost one job after being accused of abusive behavior and had no trouble getting hired somewhere else.

They include a New Jersey teacher who molested five elementary school students, an Oregon substitute teacher who reached under a table to touch a student's genitals and an Illinois teacher who forced elementary students to eat food off his crotch. In each instance, the teacher had been disciplined for sexual misbehavior in a prior school district.

USA TODAY found examples in nearly every state, and the secrecy was often cemented in legally binding contracts. USA TODAY identified more than 100 educators whose public school teaching credentials were revoked or surrendered for serious misconduct, yet they continued to work with youth in different environments.

“It’s enraging when I read these cases about a teacher who has been well-known for abusing little children for over 20 years,” said Charles Hobson, a professor of business management at Indiana University Northwest who studies teacher misconduct. “And nobody — nobody — has picked the phone up and called child protective services or the police. That’s crushing.”

Read more at usatoday.com.



In Montville, N.J., Jason Fennes pleaded guilty in September to molesting four female pupils and having sex with a 15-year-old.

BOB KARP, USA TODAY NETWORK