

Teacher arrest: What to tell children

Man accused of recording girls

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Many parents want to know how to talk to their children about the arrest of an elementary teacher.

Terrance P. Hoctor, a fourth-grade teacher at State Road Elementary School in Webster, is accused of recording two female students with a mobile phone as the girls changed their clothing in a school bathroom on March 3. He was charged Wednesday with two counts of unlawful surveillance, a felony, and two counts of endangering the welfare of a child, a misdemeanor.

Mary Whittier, executive director of the Bivona Child Advocacy Center in Rochester, suggested parents try to approach the news as a teachable moment.

“Of course we trust our teachers, church members, coaches and other adults,” she said. But in the case that something happens, “we try to turn an unfortunate, horrible situation into an educational situation.”

Whittier suggested the following for parents on the State Road Elementary incident: » Ask your child what they’ve heard about the incident. Let them share concerns and let their responses steer the conversation.

- » Remind your child that some body parts are private and that it is never OK for an adult to touch or photograph those body parts.
- » Reassure your child that if someone does touch them inappropriately, it is never their fault. They can come to parents to talk about it.
- » Remind your child that while one teacher is accused of doing something inappropriate, most teachers do great work.

Also for all parents: » Starting at a young age, teach your child the proper names of body parts.

» Teach children that it is not OK for any adult to touch a child in a way that makes your child feel uncomfortable, or in kidspeak: “icky” or “yucky.”

Whittier commended the girls involved in the Webster case for speaking up.

“It takes a tremendous amount of courage, bravery and guts for these two girls to come forward,” she said. “That needs to be believed,

encouraged and supported. If, God forbid, there's another child in this situation, they need to feel comfortable coming forward too.”

Webster Central School District Superintendent Carmen Gumina on Wednesday said the district will provide counseling services for any child in need of support within the district. Whittier echoed that offer. She also said she plans to reach out to the district to offer to hold an educational program for Webster parents.

Webster parents can also directly contact the center at (585) 935-7800. Bivona provides direct care, services and advocacy efforts for children who have been sexually or physically abused.

Parents have other questions about the arrest and its aftermath.

Could there be other students affected?

The Webster Police Department is still investigating this case. Police Chief Joseph Rieger said there is “still information to be processed,” which could potentially lead to more victims, he said. At this point, police cannot say for sure if there were or were not other victims.

Why is Hctor on paid leave?

From a broad legal perspective, individuals charged in the U.S. legal system are innocent until proven guilty, said Webster Teacher Association president Steven Turiano.

In regard to district discipline of a tenured teacher — Hctor was tenured, as he has been teaching at State Road Elementary for over a decade — disciplinary measures like termination and suspension without pay would only be implemented if Hctor was convicted of a crime, said Turiano.

The Webster Police Department is handling the criminal case, and the district is not taking a disciplinary role at this time, he said. Hctor was placed on paid leave before charges were filed, and he'll remain on paid leave as his case progresses through the criminal justice system, said Turiano.

What should parents do if they're worried their child could be a victim of potential abuse at school?

In general, parents should discuss with their children any suspicion of abuse in their children's school environment, and reach out to their local police department if they believe their child has experienced abuse at school.

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Superintendent Carmen Gumina speaks at a news conference about a Webster teacher who was arrested and charged with recording two girls changing clothes in a school restroom.

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