

Felony didn't preclude Ashton from being principal

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When Hilton elementary school principal Kirk Ashton was charged with sexually abusing nine students on Wednesday evening, it was not his first brush with the law.

Ashton has two previous convictions for driving while intoxicated — a felony in 2007 and a misdemeanor in 1998, according to the Monroe County District Attorney's Office.

This prompted many to wonder whether a felony conviction automatically disqualifies someone from working in a public school. The short answer is that it does not.

"A felony DWI conviction does not automatically preclude someone from employment," said Grace Scism, director of communications for the Hilton Central School District.

As for whether the district was aware of the previous convictions, Scism declined to comment.

"Mr. Ashton's hiring occurred before the superintendent's hiring in the district, so we cannot comment specifically," Scism said in an email to a reporter.

Anyone who applies for a teaching certificate must undergo a background check, but simply having a criminal record would not be an automatic disqualifier.

The exceptions

Under New York state law, a professional license can't be denied or revoked based solely on a criminal conviction, with two exceptions.

One is if there is a direct relationship between the criminal offenses and the license held by the individual. The other is if their presence on the

According to the state education department's website, Ashton received certifications to teach special education and pre-K through grade 6 in Sep. 1996. He received a permanent certificate as a school district administrator in Feb. 2001.

Ashton, who had been the principal at Northwood Elementary since 2004, was placed on administrative leave from the school district April 8. The school, part of the Hilton Central School District, hosts students in kindergarten through sixth grade.

Before coming to Hilton schools, Ashton worked for Rush-Henrietta Central School District between 1996 and 2004 at Vollmer Elementary in Henrietta and at Leary Elementary in Rush.

He was also an elementary special educator/consultant teacher for four years and previously worked as a counselor at Crestwood Children's Center, which is part of the Hillside Family of Agencies.

Includes reporting by staff writer Victoria Freile.

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Kirk Ashton is led out of Greece Town Court after he was arraigned Wednesday. WILL CLEVELAND/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND

job would create an unreasonable safety risk to the public. An applicant CHRONICLE cannot be found to lack “good moral character” just because a conviction exists.

Ashton, 51, was charged with six counts of first-degree sexual abuse and five counts of second-degree course of sexual conduct, both felonies, and nine counts of endangering the welfare of a child, a misdemeanor, according to the New York State Police.

Prosecutors say the victims, all boys, were between the ages of 8 and 12, and the allegations date from the past four years. Other cases could predate that, according to the Monroe County District Attorney’s Office.

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