

# Abuse allegations at Greece school fit pattern

Most abusers known and trusted by victims

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For years, while working as a school sentry at the former James Madison School of Excellence, Andre Johnson sodomized young boys who trusted him. David Blaszczak, a Wayne County family physician, sexually abused dozens of young patients. And Joseph Calabrese, a worker at an Irondequoit day care center, molested five girls, ages 5 to 12, over a four-year period.

While there have long been “stranger danger” fears for children, history shows that people in positions of trust — or relatives or known neighbors — are

the most likely to engage in child abuse.

“Kids are more likely to be sexually abused by someone they know and someone they have respect for and



Ashton

trust than be abused by a stranger,” said Assistant U.S. Attorney Melissa Marangola, who prosecutes federal child pornography and exploitation cases. “To exploit a child you need several things, and two of the most important things are trust and access.”

On Wednesday, New York State Police arrested Kirk Ashton, who recently was suspended as principal at the Northwood Elementary School in the Hilton Central School District. Ashton, 51, is accused of sexually molesting nine boys between the ages of 8 and 12 years old.

Ashton pleaded not guilty to the charges Wednesday in Greece Town Court. State Police headed the investigation, and were assisted by Greece police. The elementary school is located in Greece.

“We drop our kids off every day to this guy and he does this, allegedly,” said Greece Police Chief Andrew Forsythe. “It’s the worst thing that could possibly happen, in my mind.”

Andre Johnson, the former school sentry, was accused of molesting 10 children and convicted of abusing six. He was convicted in 2008 and sentenced to up to 39 years. Blaszczak, the former physician, was sentenced in 2018 to almost 22 years in prison. Day care worker Calabrese, convicted in 2011, is serving a 15-year-sentence.

Detective Michael Hockwater, a member of the FBI’s Child Exploitation Task Force, said that the abuse cases in which the accused is known to, and trusted by, the child often include multiple victims.

“It becomes very important for us to address it very quickly because there usually is more than one victim,” he said. (The FBI and U.S. Attorney’s Office is not involved in the Ashton investigation and prosecution; it is not a federal case.) While police can make arrests, that is not the singular answer, Hockwater said. Instead, he said, more education is needed to help families know how to discuss and recognize threats. The Rochester-based Bivona Child Advocacy Center, which

Still, for those in law enforcement or who work with nonprofits that confront child abuse, the likelihood that an offender would be a principal, teacher, priest, coach, or Scout leader is far greater than the chances of abuse by a stranger.

“What we know about children who are sexually abused, 90 percent or more are sexually abused by someone they know, love, or trust,” said Assistant District Attorney Sara VanStrydonck, who is prosecuting Ashton.

**‘They can walk away and stay silent’**

Children often find themselves shaken by the abuse, and hesitant to reveal the molestation. The abuser’s position of trust and respect can make children unsure whether to tell parents or others. Sometimes, the child can feel guilty, as if responsible. “They’re confused when this happens to them,” Marangola said. “They can walk away and stay silent.”

The Rochester community, like most communities for that matter, has examples of tragic cases in which children were victimized by people they knew.

provides such talks in schools and elsewhere, was credited this week for prompting the calls to police that led to Ashton’s arrest.

“We can’t arrest everybody and think it’s going to solve the problem,” Hockwater said.



**Northwood Elementary School on North Greece Road is pictured. The school’s principal was recently suspended following allegations he molested nine boys. TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE**