

‘The community is shocked’: Parents speak

Robert Bell

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On Wednesday night, Kirk Ashton, the principal at Hilton’s Northwood Elementary School, was arraigned on accusations that he sexually abused nine students.

“I was shocked,” parent Scott Upham said. “I think everybody in the community is shocked. It’s always a shock when it’s your school district.”

Upham’s daughter attended Northwood Elementary from 2010-2014.

Ashton was placed on administrative leave from the school district on April 8. He had been the principal at the school since 2004.

Upham remembers his daughter’s former principal as professional and courteous with parents. He reflected on a dozen or so interactions with Aston, who attended and hosted several school events.

“They were all positive, and that’s why this is kind of shocking,” Upham said.

Parent Giovanna DeCrocce-Sellins attended Northwood Elementary as a child. Her daughter also was a student at the school from 2010-2012. After speaking with her daughter, she described her child as sad for all of her friends.

“My heart is breaking for those little boys,” DeCrocce-Sellins said.

“Nobody should have to go through that, especially when you trust people that have such a high power position, and you look to them for safety and all the while the safety is the monster. That’s horrible.”

Major Barry Chase said that all of the alleged sexual abuse connected to current charges occurred during school hours over the last four years.

wrap my head around that.”

Upham describes Hilton as a tightknit community with a small-town feel, saying most parents chose to live there for the school district. After speaking with his ex-wife in the morning, they both felt sick to their stomach about the allegations.

“Something like this shatters your faith in the schools,” Upham said.

DeCrocce-Sellins believes action needs to be taken to prevent a similar tragedy in the future.

“I would like to see more extensive background checks on the people who work with our children and more cameras in the schools so we can see what’s going on at all time,” DeCrocce-Sellins said.

“The school district has been cooperating fully with the state police,” the district said in a statement. “Our primary concern is for our students.”

Upham said he believes that others in the school district need to be held responsible. “Whoever was responsible at that time needs to be held accountable because this happened on their watch,” he said.

DeCrocce-Sellins shared a different opinion on accountability. “I don’t believe any other school officials are responsible because discipline happens behind closed doors,” DeCrocce-Sellins said. Amid the range of reactions to the ongoing investigation, she offered a message of comfort for the victims.

“I hope all families get justice. Right now, the whole Hilton community needs our prayers and our love, and our support.”

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According to prosecutors, the victims are all boys between the ages of 8 and 12.

For Upham, his next step is a conversation with his daughter about her former principal. In the aftermath of the news, the root of his frustration lies with the Hilton school district.

“I really wish the school district would be more forthcoming with information,” Upham said. “That’s a source of frustration for everybody.”

Ashton has a history with the law. According to the Monroe County district attorney’s office, Ashton has two prior convictions for driving while intoxicated — a felony in 2007 and a misdemeanor in 1998.

When Ashton’s past became public, Upham wondered how Ashton could keep his job. “I can’t really

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