

## Who is the principal accused of sex abuse?

### Victoria E. Freile

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Kirk Ashton — the school principal at Northwood Elementary in Hilton accused of sexually abusing nine students — has more than two decades of experience at local schools as an educator.

Hilton parent Scott Upham, whose daughter attended Northwood from 2010-2014, remembers his daughter's former principal as professional and courteous with parents. He reflected on a dozen or so interactions with Ashton, who attended and hosted several school events.

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

Ashton, who has been principal at Northwood since 2004, was placed on administrative leave on April 8.

Earlier this week, the 51-year-old Ashton was arraigned on 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.

He is accused of sexually abusing nine young boys within the school building during school hours over the last four years.

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

Before coming to Hilton schools nearly 17 years ago, Ashton worked for Rush-Henrietta Central School District between 1996 and 2004 — at Vollmer Elementary in Henrietta and at Leary Elementary in Rush.

In Rush-Henrietta, he was a teacher at Vollmer and at Leary was a teacher on special assignment, which is a teacher with administrative duties, according to a district spokesman.

His wife Elizabeth Bridget Ashton is the superintendent at Honeoye Central School District in Ontario County.

The couple, who are Rush residents, have three grown children.

Wednesday's arrest was not Kirk Ashton's first brush with the law. He has two previous convictions for driving while intoxicated — a felony in 2007 and a misdemeanor in 1998, according to the DA's Office.

When asked how Ashton was able to retain his job with a felony conviction, Hilton's communications director Grace Scism said that “a felony DWI conviction does not automatically preclude someone from employment.”

She declined to comment whether the district was aware of Ashton's previous convictions.

“My heart is breaking for those little boys,” said Hilton parent Giovanna DeCrocce-Sellins, a Northwood alumna whose own daughter attended the school between 2010 and 2012. “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.”

Assistant Principal Kelley O'Connell- Byrne is now serving as interim principal at the Northwood school, which houses students in kindergarten through sixth grade.

*Includes reporting by staff writers Rob Bell and Sean Lahman Contact Victoria Freile at [yfreile@gannett.com](mailto:yfreile@gannett.com). Follow her on Twitter @yfreile and Instagram @yfreile. This coverage is only possible with support from our readers.*

Ashton 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.

Rush-Henrietta officials on Thursday said that student safety is the district's top priority and that anyone with concerns should contact the New York State Police, the agency that is leading the investigation. Hillside offered a similar statement. "We are prepared to cooperate fully with authorities as needed with regard to this reported incident," the agency said in an email.

Ashton is not the only educator in his family.

---

[Copyright © 2021 Democrat and Chronicle 4/17/2021](#)  
[Powered by TECNAVIA](#)

---