

July 10, 2012

## **LAUSD Lawsuit: Miramonte Families Sue District For Failing To Protect Students**

LOS ANGELES -- A former Los Angeles elementary school teacher molested 14 students and officials did nothing to protect them, according to a lawsuit filed Tuesday against the nation's second-largest school district.

The negligence and liability suit is the third to stem from charges that Mark Berndt abused children as young as 7 at Miramonte Elementary School. He was arrested in January and remains jailed after pleading not guilty to committing lewd acts with 23 youngsters.

The suit claims current and former school principals and other officials in the Los Angeles Unified School District ignored student complaints dating back more than a decade that Berndt engaged in improper behavior with students.

The district also has a continuing "culture of silence" regarding teacher misconduct, according to the suit that also claims the mothers of 14 children suffered emotional trauma. It seeks unspecified damages.

The district, which has not yet seen the lawsuit, is committed to working with the community to "improve trust and promote healing," said a statement by district General Counsel David Holmquest.

"We are continuing our efforts to ensure that we are doing everything possible to provide a safe learning and working environment for our students and staff," the statement said.

Prosecutors contend that Berndt made students play a bizarre tasting game, blindfolding and feeding them his semen smeared on cookies and spoons. Some of the alleged acts date back to 2005.

The case surfaced when pictures of the students were sent to a photo processor.

Berndt is not named as a defendant in the lawsuit, which was filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court on behalf of the mothers of 14 children, who are among 20 alleged victims represented by a similar lawsuit filed in May.

A third suit also was filed earlier this year on behalf of parents and 11 former students.