

# Los Angeles Times

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## Troubles mount for school

*Second accused teacher fired, charged in one fondling case*

One of two teachers accused of abusing students at Miramonte Elementary School was charged Tuesday with three felony counts and fired by the Los Angeles Board of Education.

Martin Bernard Springer, 49, was arrested Friday after two students at the school accused him of fondling them.

But the charges filed Tuesday – three counts of committing lewd acts – involve a single girl. A law enforcement source with knowledge of the investigation said the second girl recanted her accusation.

Springer pleaded not guilty.

Judge Upinder Kalra set bail at \$300,000 and directed that Springer wear an ankle monitoring device if released. He must also stay 100 yards from the alleged victim and witnesses, and 250 feet from schools and parks, and may not be in the company of minors without a supervising adult.

If convicted, Springer of Alhambra, faces a maximum sentence of 12 years in prison, district attorney's spokeswoman Sandi Gibbons said.

Springer's arrest came as the elementary school in the unincorporated Florence-Firestone neighborhood of South Los Angeles was still reeling from the arrest of former teacher Mark Berndt, 61.

Prosecutors allege that Berndt spoon-fed his semen to blindfolded children as part of what he called a "tasting game."

Police have collected hundreds of disturbing photos; in some, children are shown with a milky substance around their mouths.

Berndt was charged with 23 felony counts and was being held in lieu of \$23-million bail.

Springer, like Berndt, had spent his entire teaching career at Miramonte. Berndt, a Torrance resident, began working as a teacher there in 1979, Springer in 1986.

On Monday, Los Angeles Unified School District Supt. John Deasy announced that he was temporarily replacing the entire staff of Miramonte with new personnel.

Deasy said he took the action to help restore parent confidence in the school. Several former students and parents have come forward to say, in interviews with the Times, that they complained about Berndt's conduct over the last 20 years.

Deasy said he has launched investigations aimed at examining a possible "culture of silence" at the school in which "someone could have known something and then chose not to act."

"How is it conceivably possible that this could take place... and [administrators] didn't know or say anything is what I'm trying to understand," he said. "And of course I recognize that I'm trying to do it from a very far distance."

When asked about his personal feelings on the case, Deasy said he was "outraged and disgusted."

"If any of you are parents, you know exactly how I feel," he said.

School was closed Tuesday and will be closed Wednesday so officials can begin the transition from the old to the new staff. Some employees said they were upset by the decision announced Monday.