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Black Horse Pike district hit with bullying suit

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A former student has sued the Black Horse Pike Regional School District, saying other students bullied and sexually abused her for years and the administration did nothing to stop it.

The suit, filed Friday in New Jersey Superior Court in Camden, contends that school officials repeatedly ignored the student and her parents' cries for help, culminating in a 2009 meeting in which a then-school official told the family, "It takes two to tango."

Superintendent John Golden, who was named to the post earlier this year, declined to comment on the specifics of the suit. He referred questions to the district's attorney, who was unavailable for comment.

"We had expected this would eventually come forward," Golden said.

The lawsuit describes abuses and taunts that the now 19-year-old student experienced with such regularity that she took to hiding out in the nurse's office. The bullying extended over her entire four years at Timber Creek Regional High School, the lawsuit alleges, and ranged from other girls calling her a "slut" to a male student sitting next to her in class and sticking his hand down her pants.

The student, who is not named in the suit, is undergoing medical treatment to deal with the anxiety and battery of associated medical and psychological conditions that sprang up during the bullying, said her attorney, Jamie Epstein.

"It's up to the school to protect students from being bullied, intimidated, and harassed," he said.

The suit also alleges that the district removed the girl from school for an extended period after the parents of one of her alleged tormentors pressed charges against her, claiming she had threatened her daughter.

Bullying has become a national issue in recent years after a series of high-profile incidents, including one in South Hadley, Mass., in which a student committed suicide after repeated harassment by her classmates at school and online.

Lawsuits by bullied students have been filed against school districts across the country. And many states, including New Jersey, have passed laws requiring school districts to maintain anti-bullying programs.

But Epstein, who is representing another student in a bullying lawsuit against Berlin Township schools, said that avenues for legal recourse remained limited for many students.

He sued under antidiscrimination laws, contending that the school had allowed a "hostile environment" to develop where by virtue of her gender and disabilities - which include a host of psychological conditions that developed as she was bullied - she was deprived access to an education.

"There's very little option for victims of generic bullying," he said.

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