

The Cycle of Sexual Assault

By Nancy Soto-Garcia

Parents in the United States must send their children to school between the ages of six to sixteen. When choosing a school for their child, a parent might research: the location, ratings, or maybe even the cost of the school. One thing that most people do not usually research is the schools ability to protect their students from sexual assault. Although it is a school's job to make sure campuses are safe for their students, some forms of assault are often not taken seriously. Sexual assault is a big problem in our culture, this problem is reinforced by how the problem is dealt with on grade-school campuses.

November 4th, 2021, news was released of a situation at D.H. Conley Highschool in Greenville, North Carolina. Seven girls were allegedly sexually abused by a boy at the school. Rachel Peed, a 17-year-old student at D.H. Conely stated "He rubbed up against my leg during my class and he also grabbed other girls' thighs during their class as well,". Even after 7 different girls reported these actions to administrators, no disciplinary actions were taken. The boy remained in the classroom. Peed stated: "I thought going to the school administration... they would actually take this serious, and I feel like our comments have been disregarded and it's not okay." Administrators not only disregarded the accusations against the boy but the school attempted to silence the girls. One student was even threatened with three days of out-of-school suspension for false accusations. Peed told WITN that this was not the first time that their reports were not taken seriously. Schools dismiss seemingly "unharmful" actions in an attempt to maintain their reputation. This creates a cycle, a boy sexually assaults a girl, the girl reports it to administrators, the administrators dismiss it, and the cycle begins again.

The United States Department of Education found that rates of sexual assault rapidly increased between 2015-2018. There were about 9,600 cases of sexual assault in schools in 2015, this number increased by over 50 percent. In 2018, the number was reportedly at 15,000.

Most of these cases are not dealt with adequately. Many cases are dismissed but the ones that are actually taken seriously commonly result in victim-blaming. The victims of these assaults are typically blamed for what they were wearing or what they were doing at the time of the assault. Although the harasser may be punished for their actions, the victim is often punished in other ways. One recent case involves a 15-year-old female student from Hawthorne Academy Highschool located in Charlotte, North Carolina. The student reported her abuser after learning about Title IX rights at her school. After reporting the multiple assaults, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department investigated the case and charged the male student with sexual battery. Even after a confession from the male student, Hawthorne Academy Highschool concluded that with the evidence had not shown a clear violation of the Charlotte-Mecklenburgs' Sexual Harrassment Policy. The victim was given a one-day out-of-school suspension, as well as, required to attend a class called "Sexual Harrassment is Preventable". Diann Weston, principal of Hawthorne Academy Highschool, and Charles Jeter, the spokesman for the schoolboard, both did not respond to emails about an interview for the story. The silence coming from officials of the highschool further supports the argument that schools would prefer to keep their good reputation than speak out against sexual assault, even if it happened in their school.

The reason that sexual assault cases are continuing to grow in schools in the United States is because these cases are not dealt with appropriately. When one person assaults another and no action is taken against them other people begin to notice. These people begin to subconsciously believe that they can do what they like with no repercussions. Perhaps, if schools were more interested in protecting their students than protecting their reputation, the cycle might end.

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<https://www.witn.com/2021/11/05/dh-conley-student-says-she-six-other-girls-were-sexually-assaulted/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/10/15/sexual-assault-k-12-schools/>

<https://www.wbtv.com/2021/11/01/cms-student-reported-being-sexually-assaulted-then-she-was-suspended/>