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## Virtual Library of Newspaper Articles



### Boy, 6, hit with sex harass rap

The Boston Herald, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A., By Laura Crimaldi and Casey Ross, February 8, 2006

An irate Brockton mother is refusing to let her 6-year-old son return to school after he was suspended for alleged sexual harassment, a term deemed preposterous for a first-grader by a leading sexual harassment expert.

My son doesn't know what sexual harassment is, said Berthena Dorinvil. He keeps saying to me, Mommy, why are they being so mean to me? What did I do wrong?

Dorinvil's son, a first-grader at Downey Elementary School, was suspended for three days Jan. 30 after school officials accused him of inappropriately touching a girl in his class.

Dorinvil said school officials told her the boy had put two fingers inside the waistband of the girl's pants and touched her skin, causing the girl to complain to teachers.

I think to call it sexual harassment is preposterous and it trivializes the episodes that really are sexual harassment, said sexual harassment and bullying expert Nan Stein, who is a senior research scientist at Wellesley College's Center for Research on Women. I applaud them for their vigilance, but they have to use better terminology with kids.

According to the Brockton schools Web site, sexual harassment is defined as repeated, unwanted, or unwelcomed verbalisms or behaviors of a sexist nature related to a person's sex or sexual orientation. In addition sexual harassment includes unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

The policy also includes a six-step process for reporting and investigating sexual harassment allegations. The policy requires a written account of the alleged harassment submitted by the accuser.

and a meeting between the alleged harasser and a principal or school administrator.

The state Department of Education requires each school to develop a non-discrimination policy which covers harassment and bullying, said spokeswoman Melanie Winklosky. Schools are expected to explain those policies in age-appropriate language, Winklosky said.

Dorinvil said no one contacted her about their concerns until Jan. 30 when she was instructed to pick her son up from school.

When I got there, they had all this paperwork in front of them, Dorinvil said. They said they had already called the district attorney and school police.

I was shocked. I was crying. I was out of control because I see that this is not fair, Dorinvil said.

Brockton schools spokeswoman Cynthia E. McNally said administrators followed the school policy in investigating the harassment claims. She declined to say whether the boy was previously disciplined for his treatment of this female classmate.

We take all allegations of sexual harassment very seriously, Superintendent Basan Nembirkow said in a statement. An investigation is always conducted when reports of sexual harassment arise. The school declined further comment, citing private student records.

Dorinvil said her son had never been in trouble at the school before and expressed disbelief that her son was treated so harshly.

I asked them, Did my son commit a felony? I told them that this is discrimination, she said.