

PIKE COUNTY COURIER

[Print Page](#)

Parent questions school handling of writing on the wall

By David Hulse

WESTFALL - A parent is questioning the response of Delaware Valley Elementary School officials to graffiti incidents in one of the school's bathrooms.

In an Oct. 25 letter, parent Brian J. Paulison expressed concern that school officials didn't notify parents when, following the second of two graffiti incidents last month, they allowed police to detail the seriousness of sexual assault to an assembly of fourth, fifth and sixth graders, directed the students to write out answers to provocative questions related to the incidents, and began limiting bathroom trips at various times of the day.

Parents learned of the situation, said Paulison, when children began asking them to define rape. "They heard about things they don't need to know. They're kids," he said in a recent interview.

Paulison said the situation began sometime shortly after the beginning of the school year, when graffiti was found on a stall in a boys' fourth/fifth/sixth grade bathroom. He said the messages included a hate message against Principal Sonya Cole and the threat of sexual violence against a student. Initially, the graffiti was removed, and children were required to go to the school nurse for permission for subsequent bathroom visits.

Paulison said he agreed with solution, assuming that at the same time, "something was being done to find the offender."

In mid-October, the same messages were found on a stall again. The student whose name was written learned of it and became frightened, Paulison said. Following the second incident, toilet access was restricted which, he believes, "can be dangerous."

But he said he was even more concerned about the police investigation that followed as the situation "snowballed."

Paulison said he believed Principal Cole acted correctly by involving police. Westfall Police Chief Mark Moglia addressed a school assembly, explaining what had been written, what it meant and what consequences could be involved for the guilty party.

Moglia confirmed that he visited the school, not at Cole's request, but following up on a complaint by a student's mother. While the graffiti may have been a prank, the threat was in writing. "I take this seriously," he added.

He said the principal directed him to comment on the particulars to the assembled students, but he admitted, "I didn't think it was right."

Paulison said students were also asked to write responses, which he assumed is the collection of writing samples, to questions such as: who are the most popular girls in the fifth and sixth grades, whether they had ever heard anyone saying that they wanted to rape someone, or that they hated Mrs. Cole.

"This is where it all went wrong," Paulison wrote. "Questions can have a powerful effect on children, by asking them to answer questions on topics about which they have no knowledge ... How many kids asked their parents what rape was?"

"At the point it was demanded of the children to complete the questionnaire and writing sample, they became an active part in a criminal investigation," he continued in the letter.

"Before my child and his classmates were subjected to what is the functional equivalent of interrogation, I and other parents should have been notified. Understanding the current atmosphere in society regarding the safety of our children in schools, it is still of the utmost importance to remember the children are just that, children," the letter concluded.

Moglia said that there is no current investigation. He said that the principal, who has identified the culprit, has decided not to press charges.

Paulison said he has not questioned Cole privately about the incident, because of concerns that his doing so might lead to repercussions for his children. He said a neighbor told him of an incident in which the neighbor questioned the principal, and then school administrators "made things difficult for him and his son."

Formerly a broadcast journalist, Paulison said he wanted to let people know what was going on and felt the media was the best way to raise public awareness.

Cole was unavailable for comment Wednesday and has not returned a telephone message requesting her comments regarding the issue.