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## Police say girl lied about school attack

Perry Hall Middle student was not assaulted, they say

By Gina Davis | Sun Reporter  
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A sixth-grade girl at Perry Hall Middle School lied about being sexually assaulted this week in a school restroom, Baltimore County police said yesterday.

Based on their investigation, police concluded that the incident did not occur, said Bill Toohey, a county police spokesman.

Baltimore County State's Attorney Scott D. Shellenberger said that prosecutors have reviewed the facts of the case and decided not to charge the 11-year-old girl.

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"The [girl's] family acted extremely appropriately," Shellenberger said, "and we've decided that the situation is better handled in the family and not in the criminal justice system."

County schools spokeswoman Kara Calder said yesterday that she did not know whether the girl would be disciplined by school officials, and would be prohibited in any event from discussing the issue because of student privacy concerns.

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The girl described her alleged attacker as a construction worker employed on a renovation project at the school, but police determined that he had no involvement, Toohey said.

Police said their investigation included interviewing the girl and the worker and reviewing video from one of the school's 18 surveillance cameras.

About 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, the girl reported to the principal's office that a man had followed her into the restroom between classes and sexually assaulted her, police said. The girl said she fought off the man, ran out of the restroom and reported the attack to a county police officer stationed at the school, police said.

Police initially incorrectly said yesterday that the girl had admitted to lying, but soon after said she hadn't made such a confession. Though relieved to hear the girl hadn't been harmed, parents said the incident helped raise awareness about the potential dangers posed by contractors working in the buildings during the school day.

Some said school officials should consider requiring background checks and fingerprinting of contractors and their employees, as they do of teachers and other school workers. They also said construction workers should be further restricted from areas where children might be.

"I'm glad nothing happened and I feel sorry for everybody involved, but I still think maybe it was an eye-opener," said Crystal Curtis, whose son, James, 11, also is in sixth grade. "Everything happens for a reason. Maybe this is something they want to look into."

Amy Vahle of Perry Hall, whose daughter, Alexis, 11, is in sixth grade, said construction projects such as the two-year renovation under way at the school should be limited to weekends, holidays and summer.

"The school system should not allow contract workers or outside sources during school

hours," she said. "Even if a school is a good school, bad things can happen. Instead of waiting for something to really happen, they should make some changes."

Calder said she did not know whether the system would begin requiring background checks of contract workers.

She stressed that while police had concluded that nothing had happened to the girl, the school had made changes in response to safety concerns.

Children were instructed to travel in pairs, more teachers were in the hallways between classes and more police were stationed at the school.

Also, construction was curtailed the day after the girl's accusations were made to give the general contractor, James Ancel Inc., time to install a separate entrance to the work zone by replacing a window with a door, Calder said. Any worker who doesn't use that entrance during school hours will be barred from the project, Principal Allen H. Zink said earlier this week.

Calder said she believed the entrance was installed Thursday and workers had returned to the 1,500-student school yesterday.

"In the past 10 years, if not more, we have had a huge scope of projects," she said. "By and large, we've been very successful at getting them done in conjunction with operating schools successfully and safely."

Calder said it isn't always possible to limit construction to off-hours, weekends and holidays.

"Our primary objective is for the work to happen before school, after school, during holidays and summer, but given the breadth and scope of projects, it isn't always possible to do the work at those times and meet the public's expectations that we improve the physical quality of the schools," she said.

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*Sun reporter Jennifer McMenamin contributed to this article.*