



# Prior sex abuse claims made against teacher

**By GREG RISLING**  
 ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — Just weeks after the arrest of a third-grade teacher accused of sexually abusing nearly two dozen students in his classroom engulfed Los Angeles school officials in a scandal last year, word surfaced that children were being fondled by a fourth-grade teacher at another elementary school.

In the wake of the first scandal, Los Angeles Unified School District officials moved swiftly. The fourth grade teacher, Robert Pimentel, was pulled from his classroom, the state teacher credentialing commission was notified and parents were alerted. When it became clear that years-old allegations against Pimentel hadn't been thoroughly investigated, the principal at his school was also removed.

While it took nearly a year to bring charges against Pimentel, the reaction by the school district shows how reforms put in place last year have reshaped policies over dealing with sexual abuse by teachers.

Police were contacted in March by the parents of five

students at George De La Torre Jr. Elementary School who said Pimentel had touched their children inappropriately. District officials immediately removed him from campus and notifications were sent out.

More than 70 interviews were conducted during the police investigation, and 20 female students were found to have been victimized, Los Angeles police Capt. Fabian Lizarraga said. Another victim was a female teacher who complained that Pimentel had inappropriately touched her, police said.

The alleged abuse occurred in Pimentel's fourth-grade classroom during school hours and in some cases was witnessed by other students, Lizarraga said. The sexual abuse involved fondling over and underneath clothing, he said.

The Pimentel case may have been the first in the district that fell under the new policy, district Superintendent John Deasy said.

The accusations against Pimentel, 57, span eight months, dating back to September 2011. He was arrested Wednesday and charged with 15 felony counts.



# Review of teacher misconduct lags

California Commission can take months to take action

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Months after the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing was notified of a Los Angeles Unified elementary school teacher suspected of molesting at least a dozen students and a principal who failed to report him to authorities, the agency has not taken action on the cases.

Both educators retired soon after the Los Angeles Police Department started investigating the allegations last March. However, the commission's time lag in resolving the cases, which could include revoking the person's teaching credential, underscores how teachers accused of grievous misconduct can take advantage of a loophole and simply move on to another district.

Although districts routinely check teaching applicants' credentials, the record may not show if complaints are pending and applicants can appear as clear. By the time the commission takes action, the teachers are already

employed and their credential may not be checked again for years.

Experts said studies show pedophile teachers work at, on average, three schools before they are caught.

"This is one more example of why we have to change things," said Jolie Logan, chief executive of Darkness to Light, a non-profit that works to prevent child sex abuse.

Credentialing Commission spokeswoman Erin Sullivan said she could not comment on specific cases. She noted that, under state law, the commission proceeds with cases after prosecutors file charges against a teacher, although it does have some latitude to take action sooner.

In the case of Robert Pimentel, a former teacher at George de la Torre Jr. Elementary School who was arrested Wednesday on charges of molesting 12 students, the police investigation took 10 months. Pimentel's record shows that his teaching creden-

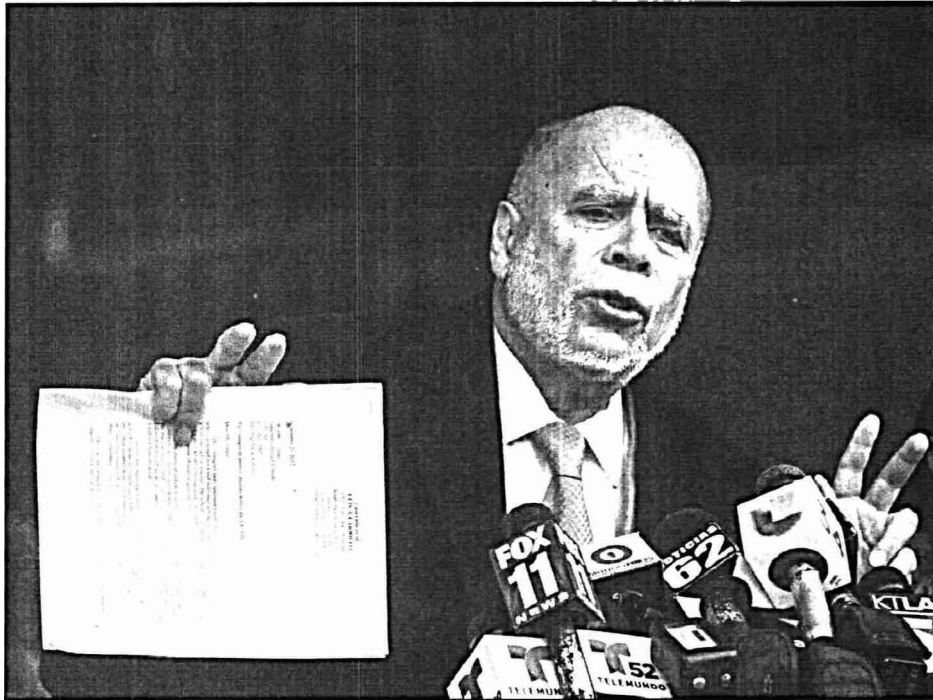
tial expired last August.

Orange County prosecutors said Friday that they had dropped a molestation investigation against Pimentel in 2005, and they would send the case to Los Angeles prosecutors so they can re-examine allegations of four youths.

The investigation was dropped because of insufficient evidence, lack of corroboration, problems with the availability of witnesses and other issues, spokeswoman Susan Kang Schroeder told the Los Angeles Times.

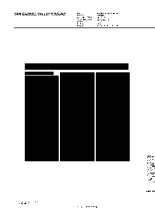
Los Angeles' school district also reported former Principal Irene Hinojosa to the commission for failing to inform police of two complaints in 2002 and 2008 about Pimentel's alleged touching of female students to law enforcement, as required under the law. Her credential remains valid.

District Superintendent John Deasy said it was frustrating that disciplinary action isn't taken faster in cases involving sexual abuse of children.



Associated Press

**Attorney Luis Carrillo, demands the resignation of John Deasy, the superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest school district for failing to protect its students, outside the George De La Torre Jr. Elementary in the Wilmington area of Los Angeles Thursday.**



## Attorney: Latinos are targeted for molestation

By Rob Kuznia Staff Writer

In the wake of yet another sex-abuse arrest in Los Angeles Unified School District, former state Sen. Martha Escutia came to a Wilmington elementary school Monday to call for an LAUSD investigation into what she believes is a pattern of such abuse against Latino youth by teachers in low-income areas.

Escutia, an attorney who serves on the legal team representing more than 30 children allegedly abused by teachers at Miramonte Elementary School in South Los Angeles, blasted the district for refusing to turn over documents pertaining to 600 complaints about teacher misconduct.

She likened the LAUSD's reaction to the abuse cases to that of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, which kept sensitive documents sealed until ordered by a judge to release them.

"I don't think LAUSD wants to become the next Archdiocese of Los Angeles," she said.

Escutia's comments come several days after law enforcement officials announced the arrest of former LAUSD teacher Robert Pimentel on charges he sexually

abused at least 20 children at George De La Torre Jr. Elementary School in Wilmington, where Escutia spoke.

In that case, the school's principal at the time took no action when similar allegations were leveled against the same teacher at another school, according to LAUSD Superintendent John Deasy. Pimentel and the principal, Irene Hinojosa, both retired on the same day, just as Deasy was moving to fire them, he said. Despite Deasy's comments on the latest case, Escutia accused LAUSD officials of being tight-lipped on the matter.

"We wouldn't even be here having this press conference if LAUSD would speak up," she said. "Their silence has frankly been deafening."

LAUSD responded to her complaints with a statement Monday detailing the efforts it has made to crack down on abusive teachers since the Miramonte scandal erupted nearly a year ago.

"We are consistently working to strengthen student safety, including implementing numerous policy changes and supporting meaningful statewide legisla-

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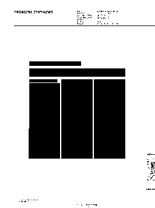
He cited reforms that have already occurred within the district, such as a new policy mandating that parents be notified within 72 hours of any misconduct allegations at a school where their children attend.

The Miramonte Elementary scandal erupted a year ago, when police arrested teacher Mark Berndt at his Torrance residence on suspicion of lewd acts, such as taking photos of kids eating spoonfuls of his semen.

In addition to the scandals at Miramonte and George De La Torre, similar allegations of sexual abuse have surfaced at other campuses in poor neighborhoods populated mainly by Latino families, Escutia said.

Escutia criticized LAUSD for not following through on a plan to form an independent commission headed up by former Supreme Court Justice Carlos Moreno.

"Well, guess what? We haven't heard anything about that independent commission," she said. "And my question is: Why not?"



## SCHOOL MOLESTATION

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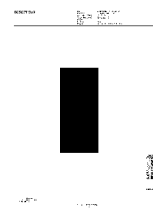
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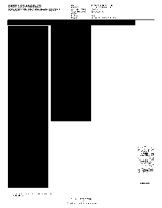
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## **L.A. Unified leaders sued over abuse**

LOS ANGELES — The current Los Angeles schools superintendent and five of his predecessors were sued Tuesday on grounds that they systematically covered up complaints about teacher sex abuse of students over the past two decades.

Attorney Brian Claypool said he filed the suit on behalf of the 12 children and 19 parents he is representing in another lawsuit stemming from the 2012 case of a former third-grade teacher facing charges for allegedly feeding students his semen over five years. Principals as far back as 1992 had received complaints about the teacher, Mark Berndt, but no action had been taken against him.

*Associated Press*



## Escutia Calls for Probe of Sexual Abuse of Latino Students In LAUSD

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Former state Sen. Martha Escutia, now a partner at an Irvine law firm, called Monday for an independent investigation of what she called disproportionate sexual abuse of Latino students by teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

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"We need to know why LAUSD is unable to protect children and why a majority of these sex abusers end up teaching at poor Latino schools," she added.

Escutia expressed concern that allegations of abuse by Latino children and parents are ignored, and said undocumented parents of victims are reluctant to report abuse due to fear of deportation.

LAUSD attorney David Holmquist said the district has always worked to provide a safe environment for students, and it has conducted extensive reviews of its policies over the past year. The district updated its system of notifying state teacher-credentialing authorities when allegations arise

and placed more specialists in the field to advise schools on misconduct issues. It changed its policy for notifying parents about abuse allegations and was working with Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Van Nuys, on legislation to allow faster dismissal of teachers accused of abuse.

"Anytime an incident like this occurs, it impacts our entire community," Holmquist said. "Every child we serve is important, and we would never willfully place students in harm's way," he said.

"We would encourage Senator Escutia and Mr. (John) Manly to work with us to support statewide legislative reforms that will provide a safer learning environment for our students," he said.

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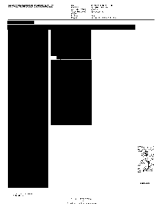
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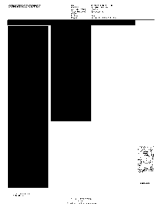
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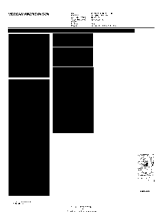
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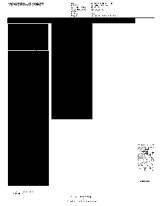
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The call came in the wake of claims that LAUSD teacher Robert Pimentel sexually abused children at George De La Torre Jr. Elementary School in Wilmington.

Escutia's firm, Manly & Stewart, represents more than 30 children allegedly molested by teachers at Miramonte Elementary School in South Los Angeles. She also noted that another teacher, Paul Chapel, abused students at Telfair Elementary in Pacoima.

"There now appears to be a consistent pattern of mass sexual abuse that has occurred almost exclusively in poor and largely Latino schools run by LAUSD," Escutia said.

"We need to know why LAUSD is unable to protect children and why a majority of these sex abusers end up teaching at poor Latino schools," she added.

Escutia expressed concern that allegations of abuse by Latino children and parents are ignored, and said undocumented parents of victims are reluctant to report abuse due to fear of deportation.

LAUSD attorney David Holmquist said the district has always worked to provide a safe environment for students, and it has conducted extensive reviews of its policies over the past year. The district updated its system of notifying state teacher-credentialing authorities when allegations arise

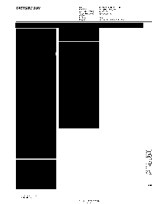
and placed more specialists in the field to advise schools on misconduct issues. It changed its policy for notifying parents about abuse allegations and was working with Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Van Nuys, on legislation to allow faster dismissal of teachers accused of abuse.

"Anytime an incident like this occurs, it impacts our entire community," Holmquist said. "Every child we serve is important, and we would never willfully place students in harm's way," he said.

"We would encourage Senator Escutia and Mr. (John) Manly to work with us to support statewide legislative reforms that will provide a safer learning environment for our students," he said.

Pimentel, who was arrested Jan. 22, pleaded not guilty to eight counts of continuous sexual abuse and seven counts of lewd acts upon a child, for alleged assaults of 12 children under age 14. Police said he is suspected of assaulting as many as 20 children and one adult.





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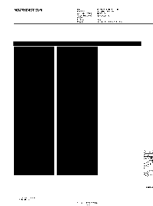
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