

A Del. teacher was arrested in the latest high-profile case.

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When a Delaware elementary school science teacher was charged last week with 28 counts of raping a sixth-grade student, parents with children at the Clayton Elementary School just north of Dover were thunderstruck.

That the offender was a 34-year-old woman and her victim a 13-year-old boy compounded their horror.

Rachel L. Holt, a popular four-year veteran at the school, was placed on leave after her arrest on Tuesday. Her victim was one of her students, police said.

"We're all kind of gasping at this one," said Robert Zeigler, spokesman for the Brandywine School District.

The case is the latest in a series of high-profile arrests of female educators charged with preying on students.

But are there really more female predators now than 20 years ago?

"I doubt it," said Dr. James M. Pedigo, medical director at the Joseph J. Peters Institute, which treats sex offenders and their victims in Philadelphia.

"It's just that society is now recognizing it as sexual abuse when an older woman preys on a younger male," Pedigo said.

Only two of every 100 sexual predators are women, said Dr. Fred Berlin, who founded the Sexual Disorders Clinic at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

"I've been doing this work for over 25 years," Berlin said. "I've seen a couple of thousand men. I've seen fewer than 15 women."

Police said Holt admitted having sex with her student 28 times during the last week of March at her Wilmington condominium.

According to court documents, she plied her victim and a 12-year-old boy with alcohol, then had sex with the 13-year-old while the younger boy watched.

She concocted a sleep-over lie that tricked the 13-year-old's father into allowing the boy to spend the night at what he thought was another child's house, according to police.

She was released on \$560,000 bail. Holt could not be reached at her home or at her mother's house.

"As you can imagine, we were all horrified," said Melanie Mask, president of the Clayton PTA.

Mask said her 13-year-old daughter is "absolutely shocked and disillusioned. But fortunately, our daughter is moving on."

The boy's family has hired Philadelphia personal-injury lawyer Thomas R. Kline, who said he is independently investigating.

"The parents are distraught," Kline said. "Our probe will be broader and go to the heart of whether the school district failed the family, this child and other children. We need to determine what Holt's record was, what the school district knew, or whether there were prior incidents or behavior that could have alerted them."

Brandywine School District officials declined to discuss Holt's employment record.

Unless sex predators have a criminal record, school districts have few ways to screen them before they strike, Pedigo said.

"I don't think lie-detector tests are valid at all, nor are there any kind of psychological tests that can reveal it," Pedigo said. "They just don't work."

Boys - even at very young ages - sometimes fail to recognize that they've been victimized, according to the experts.

Boys "often think something good has happened to them," Berlin said. "They and their peers may believe they've scored by having a sexual experience with their teacher. No 12-year-old girl thinks they've scored by having a relationship with their teacher."

Many of the women who become predators, like former Seattle teacher Mary Kay Letourneau, have trouble relating to adults and convince themselves they're in love with their victims, Pedigo said.

"They think they're taking care of the one they're sexually involved with," he said. "She later got married to her student and they've had a couple of kids."

Pedigo said such women are the most "difficult to turn around."

"It's very difficult to tell someone who is in love that they're doing something inappropriate and wrong," he said.

"They don't want it to end."

Teachers and Students: A Rogues' Gallery of Sex Charges

Reports of female teachers preying on male students have been in the news with alarming frequency. Some examples:

Rachel L. Holt, 34, Wilmington, Del., elementary school science teacher.

Arrested April 2006.

Charged with having sex with a 13-year-old student 28 times in one week while another student watched.

Jaymee Lane Wallace, 28 at the time, Tampa, Fla., high school teacher and coach.

Arrested November 2005.

Accused of having sex with a female student more than 50 times in her car and house beginning when the girl was 14.

Deanna Bobo, 37 at the time, Sebastian County, Ark., junior high school special education teacher.

Arrested November 2005.

Accused of having sex with a 14-year-old male student and exchanging sexually explicit e-mail with him.

Pamela Joan Turner, 27 at the time, McMinnville, Tenn., elementary school gym teacher.

Arrested February 2005.

Charged with 13 counts of statutory rape and 15 counts of sexual battery for encounters with a 13-year-old male student at school and in the boy's home.

Sandra Geisel, 42 at the time, Albany, N.Y., English teacher at all-boys Christian Brothers Academy.

Arrested July 2005.

Charged with repeated rapes of a 16-year-old student in her home and at the school football field press box.

Angela M. Stellwag, 24 at the time, Delran, substitute teacher for the Riverside School District.

Arrested February 2005.

Charged with having a sexual relationship with a 14-year-old male student throughout the summer of 2004 at her apartment.

Nadine Nunnelee, 40 at the time, Garden City, Kan., high school teacher.

Arrested January 2005.

Accused of having sex five times at her home with a 16-year-old male student.

Amber Kay Marshall, 23 at the time, Crown Point, Ind., high school teacher's aide.

Arrested August 2004.

Charged with providing liquor and sex to two male special education students, aged 14 and 16, in her car and in a motel.

Mary Kay Letourneau, 44, former Seattle elementary school teacher.

Arrested 1996.

Accused of repeated sexual encounters with a 12-year-old male student. She served seven years in prison, married the boy and had two children by him.