

## 604 DISCIPLINE CASES OF LA PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS TO BE INVESTIGATED BY STATE AUTHORITIES



A teacher misconduct scandal has revived discipline cases against 604 teachers, from the last four years. The Los Angeles School officials have referred them to the state authorities to re-investigate if they were serious enough to merit revoking of the teacher's licenses. Speaking to CNN school officials said that of the 604 cases of misconduct, 60 teachers were accused of sexual misconduct with pupils on or off campus or with minors, who weren't students. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing will investigate 366 of the 604 teacher cases, spokeswoman Anne Padilla said on Thursday. The nation's second largest school system is struggling to recover from a scandal at Miramonte elementary school where two teachers have been charged with vulgar acts on students. One teacher faces accusations of putting children in adult-like bondage situations and placing semen-filled spoons at their mouths. Faced with such disgusting and abominable behavior, the schools are resorting to referral of the cases to state licensing investigators. The shocking allegations impelled an internal review of whether earlier cases of misconduct had been handled appropriately, and the district concluded that 604 cases merited to be referred to state licensing authorities for review, though "a substantial number" of other misconduct cases had already been reported to the state "Protecting California's schoolchildren is always a priority for the commission. The workload has been a challenge, but a necessary one," commission executive director Mary Vixie Sandy said in a statement. According to Ira Berman, Los Angeles Unified School District director of employee relations, and Vivian Ekchian, the district's chief human resources officer, said that the 604 cases included teachers who had already been disciplined or were facing discipline. "The safety of our students is our No. 1 priority," Ekchian said in explaining why the system referred the 604 cases to the state. The United Teachers Los Angeles, the teachers' union, had no comment Thursday on the school board's action, union spokeswoman Marla Eby said. Parental outrage broke out at Miramonte, where a teacher was forced to resign, but was not referred to the state for possible license revocation. The teacher, Mark Berndt, said that the allegations against him were not true and pleaded not guilty. He is alleged to have tied young students, and then taken their photographs with semen-filled spoons held at their mouths and three-inch cockroaches crawling across their faces, among other graphic depictions. "We had not informed Sacramento to revoke Mr. Berndt's credentials," Waldman said. Berndt's teaching credentials have been suspended, Padilla said. Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office said that, "Berndt is currently being held on a \$23 million bond and faces 23 counts of lewd acts on a child. His 23 victims were between 7 and 10 years old, and all but two of them were girls." Authorities have said they have found approximately 600 photographs purportedly clicked by Berndt in his classroom. Los Angeles School Superintendent John Deasy has said Berndt was relieved from his services, when the school got to know of the police investigation. Berndt had been a teacher at the school for three decades and having earlier denied the allegations against him, also challenged the school's decision to dismiss him from his 30 year long service. However, he later dropped his appeal and handed in his resignation. To make matters worse and to bring the question of children safety back on the anvil, another Miramonte Elementary teacher -- Martin Springer, 49 -- was arrested and charged with three felony counts of lewd acts with a girl younger than 14, a mere few days after Berndt was arrested. Like Berndt he too pleaded not guilty. The seriousness of the crime, forced the school board to shut Miramonte for two days. The entire staff in the 1,400-student school was reconstituted. State Assemblyman Ricardo Lara, D-Bell Gardens, who sponsored the performance audit proposal said that the California state auditor is going to carry out an emergency \$300,000 audit of the Los Angeles Unified School District's actions in managing and documenting child abuse claims. The ongoing child abuse conduct at Miramonte and other schools in the area had facilitated the move, he added.