

# News Clips

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## **Rocky Mountain News**

# **Wednesday, March 19, 2008**

## **Web site lacks info on teacher discipline**

*By Steven K. Paulson ASSOCIATED PRESS*

A decision by the state Board of Education to switch to an electronic meeting agenda and paperless system in 2005 has left many parents in the dark about teachers who have been suspended or fired for serious crimes, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

Records affected include the case of a teacher accused of sexual assault on a child and of another who engaged in immoral conduct with a child, according to settlement agreements with the teachers.

Those records are available to the public at board headquarters in Denver, but they are no longer posted on the Web site with the board minutes.

The state Board of Education is one of 50 school boards across the country that signed up for an Internet-based, paperless system called eBoard. The system allows votes to be recorded electronically and made available instantly to the board and the public during board meetings.

But documents involving teacher names discussed at disciplinary hearings, executive sessions, meetings with board attorneys, personnel matters and any other issues that come before the board are not public.

Board Chairwoman Pamela Jo Suckla did not return a phone call seeking comment.

Board spokeswoman Mary Frances Nevens issued a statement saying, "At present, state board final disciplinary actions are posted on the electronic agenda. If there are no further details, there was no final state board action."

Before the change, the board disclosed teacher settlements in its board minutes posted on the Internet. It provided details of sexual assaults in schools and identified teachers who tried to hide past and serious crimes. That allowed parents to find out if anything was happening in their school districts.

During the past two years, however, the board has posted on the Internet the results of only one disciplinary action: a

Denver teacher who engaged in inappropriate conduct toward a former student and who lied about his dismissal from another school district.

# **Denver Post**

**Wednesday, March 19, 2008**

## **AP Exclusive: Public left in the dark about teacher assaults**

By STEVEN K. PAULSON Associated Press Writer

Article Last Updated: 03/18/2008 04:57:01 PM MDT

DENVER—A decision by the state Board of Education to switch to an electronic meeting agenda and paperless system in 2005 has left many parents in the dark about public school teachers who have been suspended or fired for serious crimes, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

Records affected by the move include the case of a teacher accused of sexual assault on a child, and another who engaged in immoral conduct with a child, according to settlement agreements with the teachers, who gave up their licenses.

Those records are available to the public at board headquarters in Denver. But they are no longer posted on the board minutes Web site.

The Lincoln Elementary School sixth-grade teacher convicted of two felony sexual assaults on a child was accused by the board of providing and drinking alcoholic beverages and smoking marijuana with students, providing them with prescription medicine, showing a pornographic movie and having sex with male students between June 2005 and May 2006, according to a paper copy of the settlement agreement obtained at board headquarters by the AP.

The board's electronic record of the incident available to the public reads: "Disciplinary proceedings concerning License No. 304965 Charge No. 2007EC23."

The case of the teacher who engaged in immoral conduct with a child reads: "Disciplinary proceedings concerning License No. 313236 Charge No. 2007EC13."

The Colorado Board of Education is one of 50 school boards across the country that signed up for an Internet-based, paperless system called eBoard. The system allows votes to be recorded electronically and made available instantly to the board and the public during board meetings. Documents involving teacher names discussed at disciplinary hearings, executive sessions, meetings with board attorneys, personnel matters and any other issues that come before the board are not public.

Board chairwoman Pamela Jo Suckla did not return a phone call seeking comment. Board spokeswoman Mary Frances Nevans issued a statement saying, "At present, state board final disciplinary actions are posted on the electronic agenda. If there are no further details, there was no final state board action."

Nevans did not respond to questions about the apparent conflict between that statement and the 2005 change in Internet-posting policy.

Before the change, the board disclosed teacher settlements in its board minutes posted on the Internet. It provided details of sexual assaults in schools, and identified teachers who tried to hide past and serious crimes. That allowed parents to find out if anything was happening in their school districts.

However, over the past two years, the board has posted on the Internet the results of only one disciplinary action: A teacher in Denver Public Schools who engaged in inappropriate conduct toward a former student and who lied about his dismissal from another school district. Those details were published on the Internet in the October minutes.

Dozens of other cases have no detailed information.

Rep. Cory Gardner, R-Yuma, said he was shocked by the documents obtained by the AP showing the board did not alert the public about problem teachers. He said he plans to introduce an amendment to a bill that would require the board to post the results of teacher settlements on the Internet and tell parents which teachers and school districts were involved.

"Parents have a right to know," Gardner said.

Records obtained by the AP show that even when the board did disclose details of settlements over the past 10 years, it agreed to keep crucial details secret in some cases, including a teacher from Northglenn who was convicted of allowing a minor to consume alcohol and sexual assault on a child. The teacher received a two-year suspension.

The board said the Legislature in 2003 required the board to take disciplinary action against a teacher if he or she is convicted of a felony. Prior to that time, the law did not mandate action on a teacher's license when a license holder or applicant engaged in misconduct.

Automatic disqualification is required when educators are convicted of felony child abuse, a crime of violence, felony unlawful sexual behavior and domestic violence. However, the board said other felony convictions do not necessarily keep a teacher out of the classroom.

A teacher at Colorado Christian Academy Flatirons Christian School in Boulder still has a teaching license after he was suspended in 2001 for felony menacing. Another teacher in Boulder County schools still has his license after he pleaded guilty to obtaining a controlled substance by fraud and deceit. A third teacher in Douglas County schools who pleaded guilty to forgery was given a suspension and allowed to keep her license.

The board said all three were given their licenses back after they showed they were rehabilitated.

All three cases were published in electronic board minutes before the board changed its policy.

In another case involving a teacher who pleaded guilty to a felony and received a "deferred revocation," the board told the AP, "this was a one-time occurrence and the educator received accolades from his school district, which opposed a stronger sanction."

"There are also felony offenses in which the conviction does not result in the automatic disqualification of a license. When deciding whether to take disciplinary action against the license of a person who has been convicted of a felony offense ... the state board carefully reviews the facts and circumstances surrounding the offense. The board also considers aggravating and mitigating factors and evidence of rehabilitation and commitment to the teaching profession," the board said in a statement in response to written questions from the AP.

Eric Yoder, an investigator for the Department of Education who investigates allegations against teachers, said details included in some of the older settlements often depended on the ability of teachers' lawyers to negotiate what went into the settlement agreements, which are public records.

A report by the Board of Education showed there were 293 disciplinary actions against Colorado teachers from 1998-2007, including 51 involving sexual assaults on a child and four sexual assaults involving adults.

Records obtained by The Associated Press show there are more than 200 cases going back to 1995, including 104 teachers who had their licenses revoked, signed settlement agreements or received suspensions for sexual misconduct, teachers who fondled students, teachers who had sex with students and teachers who allowed students to see pornographic material on school computers.