

Girl suspended in '14 for voicing concerns

After middle schooler complained of accused teacher's relationship with students, she was reprimanded for 'malicious and slanderous gossip'

HOWIE LEUNG CASE

By CAITLIN ANDREWS

Monitor staff

At 13 years old, Ana Goble said the way **Howie Leung** treated some of his female students at Rundlett Middle School made her feel so uncomfortable, her stomach hurt.

A seventh-grade student in 2014, Goble noticed the popular teacher often holding special lunches and field trips with a select group of girls. She felt boundaries were being crossed and said his relationship with some students was inappropriate.

But when Goble spoke up, first to some fellow students and then to her parents, she was suspended by Tom Sica, then the principal of Rundlett, for spreading "malicious and slanderous gossip."

It turns out her concerns were justified, according to the police investigation that led to **Leung's** arrest this past April on sexual assault charges. He is accused of repeatedly sexually assaulting a Rundlett Middle School student starting in the 201415 school year, around the same time Goble spoke up.

According to its own policies in place at the time, the school district was supposed to investigate any claims of possible sexual harassment against staff or a student, including interviewing the complainant,

the person accused of the harassment and possible witnesses.

"We will not tolerate retaliation against anyone who complains of harassment," the district's policy said. "Retaliation violates this policy and the law."

Goble said she was never interviewed prior to her suspension from school on

SEE SUSPENDED A5



Ana Goble stands with her mother Kate Frey in the living room of their South End home in Concord on June 7.

GEOFF FORESTER / Monitor staff

Girl suspended in 2014 for voicing concerns about accused CHS teacher

SUSPENDED FROM A1

Dec. 19, 2014, the Friday before Christmas vacation. She was warned that if a suspended student returns to school property, police would be called and she could be charged with trespassing. She was allowed back at school on Monday, Jan. 5, 2015, when she was to serve two more days of inschool suspension.

The suspension letter, which does not mention **Leung** or the nature of the accusations, was signed by Sica and a copy was sent to the superintendent's office. Goble said she suffered years of guilt and was ostracized by fellow students because she told the truth.

"I just felt so alone so many times," she said in an interview with the *Monitor*. "I was kind of seen as some crazy middle school girl who just wanted attention."

Concord School District Superintendent Terri Forsten has not answered whether there is a record of an investigation into **Leung** by Sica or

the safety of their children and the Board understands this fact and is taking significant measures to ensure that all reports, whether involving staff or students, are responded to in a manner which puts student safety first," the board said in a joint statement.

Concord police Lt. Sean Ford said police looked into the student's suspension as part of their initial investigation into the allegations against **Leung** but couldn't comment further, citing the ongoing investigations into **Leung** in New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

Police have said they believe there may be additional victims.

Apolog y

Frey said she and her husband, Quentin Goble, were disappointed in 2014 to hear their daughter was accused of spreading "malicious rumors and gossip," but they believed in Sica.

"We trusted in the administration that was supposed to be taking care of our kids," Frey said.

others, or whether the principal reported the nature of the incident to district administrators.

Sica became principal of Concord High at the start of the 2016 school year. **Leung** moved up to the high school from Rundlett at the same time, just as Goble and her friends moved on to ninth grade.

The alleged victim, who is now 17, told police she was inappropriately touched by **Leung** on several occasions at Rundlett – both on school property and in his vehicle when he gave her rides home, according to court documents. She also said he assaulted her approximately 20 times at the Fessenden School in Massachusetts, where she was an unpaid helper for the overnight English Language Learning summer program.

Leung faces the most serious charges in Massachusetts. Any abuse that occurred at the Fessenden School happened after Goble spoke up and was suspended.

The school district on Wednesday night issued a statement calling for an independent investigation of how the incident with Goble was handled in 2014 and the December 2018 accusations against **Leung**.

‘Never happens to anyone again’

Goble and her parents say they’re speaking out so that others who might have noticed behavior by **Leung** will have the courage to come forward.

“We want to close this chapter and make sure something good comes out of this,” said Kate Frey, Goble’s mother. “We want to make sure this never happens to anyone again.”

After **Leung**’s arrest in April on two counts of aggravated rape of a child, one count of indecent assault and battery on a child under 14 and one count of indecent assault and battery on a child over 14, Goble’s world shifted.

“I felt like I was dreaming,” Goble, now an incoming senior at CHS, said of the news of **Leung**’s arrest. “I felt for so long that I was crazy, that I shouldn’t have said those things about him. I kind of carried this guilt with me.”

But now, the district is offering Goble something she didn’t expect: an apology.

Goble and her family are pleased the school district is beginning to review its sexual harassment and police communication policies in the wake of **Leung**’s arrest. In fact, they demanded it.

After **Leung**’s arrest, Goble’s parents formally asked the school district to eliminate her suspension from their daughter’s student record and to train teachers and administrators on how to respond to reports of sexual misconduct, according to a letter from their lawyer, Scott Harris, sent April 29.

In June, the school board began a review of several of its policies.

The school district also agreed to remove Goble’s suspension, according to an agreement dated June 4. The district has agreed to pay a \$10,000 settlement to Ana and \$5,000 to the parents for legal fees through its insurer Primex.

The agreement also says there will be “district-wide training for its educators and administrators on best practices in protecting students from educator misconduct and addressing complaints by students and educators regarding potential Title IX discrimination.”

“The District desires to pursue restoration of its relationship with the Parents and Ana,” the agreement reads. “To that end, representatives of the District respectfully request a private face-to-face meeting with the family to request forgiveness from the Parents and Ana.”

The day of April 3, the same day of **Leung**’s arrest, sent the family into upheaval.

“I remember I got home from school and me and my sister were talking in the car,” she said. “Dad ... seemed distressed and said we had to go to the police station, but he wouldn’t tell me why. I thought I was going to be arrested.”

“It was surreal with all of these emotions coming back,” Frey said.

Quentin Goble said he felt immediate guilt. “I came home that night and apologized to Ana,” he said.

The next day at school as news of the arrest spread, Ana said some students were supportive, saying they remembered her speaking up back in middle school and getting suspended.

As more details were made public, the family became frustrated.

In particular, they were bothered by Forsten saying in a *Monitor* report she had no knowledge of someone speaking up about **Leung**, even after the family sent the district its letter on April 29. Frey said they were also frustrated by School Board president Jennifer Patterson’s May 17 letter to the community.

In that letter, Patterson said the school district handled its investigation into **Leung** correctly, despite an agreement Forsten and Concord police Chief Bradley Osgood signed in 2016 that requires school officials to report all forms of sexual assault, including cases of harassment, to law enforcement.

Leung remained at Concord High for 3 ½ months after the school district first received a report on Dec. 10 that **Leung** had “engaged in inappropriate conduct” with an 18-year-old female student, who is not the victim **Leung** is accused of sexually assaulting as a middle school student.

“The process worked, in the sense that the district’s decision to turn to the Department of Education, and the department’s decision to turn to the Concord Police, were what revealed the need for further action which has been taken,” Patterson wrote.

Frey disagreed. “I felt that was a huge betrayal to the victims and the community because how did the system work when you have a kid that was suspended for trying to do the right thing and when you have victims of sexual assault?”

Frey said earlier this week the district has not yet reached out about scheduling their apology to Goble.

But Frey said the district’s agreement is a “good first step” toward fixing the problem. They are encouraged by the district’s plan to review its policies and implement districtwide training, and they hope the district chooses to be more transparent with how it investigates allegations of misconduct going forward.

Forsten has said the board has decided to take a look at 19 policies along with the district’s student and staff handbooks to develop more specific standards and communication practices.

Some of the policies are schooldistrict created, like the “relations with police authorities” and “communications of concerns to school officials.” Others are recommended by the New Hampshire School Board Association.

Frey said they sought legal action because they knew Goble’s suspension was unjust after **Leung** was arrested.

“What was most important to us was making this right for Ana, to make it right going forward,” she said. “Maybe it will make other people feel comfortable coming forward as well.”

The agreement states the settlement “shall not be deemed an admission of fact by either party,” and states Goble’s family will not pursue the matter further.

Forsten, who took over leadership of the district in July 2015, has previously said she was unaware of any past complaints of inappropriate behavior or sexual misconduct against **Leung** while he was working at Rundlett.

Forsten and Sica declined to speak with the *Monitor* for this story. Forsten deferred to the school board statement issued Wednesday night calling for an independent investigation.

“The allegations regarding Mr. **Leung** have caused concern on the part of families for

Goble said her experience was difficult and transformative. Now, she thinks she might make speaking out for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence her career.

“Now I’m definitely motivated to speak out, not only about my experience, but I want to help others speak out about what’s happened to them,” she said.

(Caitlin Andrews can be reached at 369-3309, candrews@cmonitor.com or on Twitter at [@Actual-CAndrews](https://twitter.com/Actual-CAndrews).)

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