

School for scandal :: Playground attack sparks sensitivity-in-classroom debate

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Kids can be cruel. And when it involves a peer with a gay or lesbian parent, they can be downright monstrous.

That's the situation with the 9-year-old daughter of Virginia Gaffey, a lesbian mom based in the Boston suburb of Milton, Mass.

Her child was reportedly attacked by a pack of six boys and girls at recess last month at Tucker Elementary School. Gaffey claims that her daughter was surrounded, smacked and shoved by the crew of insensitive bullies.



Virginia Gaffey (Source: Sunbeam Corp.)

There was a similar incident last year when a group of students encircled the girl on the playground and chanted "lesbian, lesbian, lesbian" when they found out about the mother's sexual orientation.

Gaffey says she's had enough.

"She had been harassed, told she has cooties and that she should be ashamed of her mother because she's a lesbian," Gaffey told a group of reporters on Wednesday. After an unsuccessful attempt by administrators to protect the child, Gaffey had her daughter transferred to nearby Glover Elementary School.

"I don't want this to happen to any other student, ever," Gaffey tells a local newspaper. "I don't have an agenda. I'm not anti-Tucker. I'm anti-my-daughter-getting beat-up."

Gaffey says that administrators didn't do enough to stop the attack on her daughter. She claims that the assault was premeditated and the attackers tried to recruit others on the playground to take part. Another student broke up the schoolyard bashing.

After the fight, Gaffey alleges that administrators moved too slowly to contact parents and didn't punish the offending students. She adds that an agreed-upon safety plan, which included an aide who acted as a bodyguard, was implemented in a way that caused more trouble than helped.

While the Tucker handbook clearly states that this type of offense is punishable by suspension, school administrators simply gave the playground bullies a smack on the wrist.

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Gaffey went public with her fight on Thursday, Sept. 20, at the Tucker School's open house when she handed out flyers listing a number of incidents starting last fall when her daughter began to be abused by a small crew of students.

lesbians having families."

A "concerned parent" phoned the police, saying she was inciting a riot and slandering the

principal.

Milton's superintendent of schools, Magdalene Giffune, maintains that the details surrounding the assault on Gaffey's daughter are false, adding that the Milton School Committee is reviewing its diversity policies.

Jennifer Chrisler, executive director of the Boston-based Family Equality Council, tells EDGE that she met with Giffune on Wednesday and the administrator now seems open to reform.

However, the director says the incident in Milton hits close to home among the thousands of kids with GLBT parents.

"Children of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender parents do get teased," she confirms. "Some get teased more frequently than others. Some of it depends where you live. And even if they're not being teased, their family existence is often being ignored or denied."

Chrisler says Gaffey's plight taps into a systematic problem that administrators need to address on a national level.

"What we certainly know is that schools all across America, and even here in Massachusetts, don't talk enough about gays and lesbians having families," Chrisler continues. "If schools did a better job at talking about (GLBT families), the level of teasing that kids endure would definitely go down."

ON THE WEB:

www.familyequality.org

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