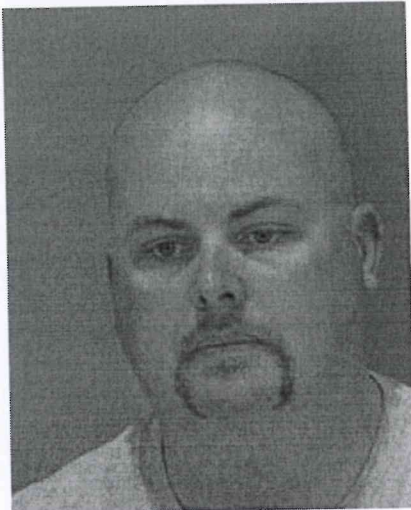


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## Girls say ex-teacher groped them

By Sam Womack  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITERS



Former middle school teacher Shad M. Knutson is scheduled to make his first court appearance Wednesday morning.

Over the past three years, six different girls told officials at Nathan Hale Magnet Middle School that a teacher there had made sexually suggestive remarks or groped them, according to police.

According to a police search warrant for school records, it appears that "none of the incidents were reported to police or Child Protective Services by anyone from Omaha Public Schools."

Based on encounters involving three of those girls, Shad M. Knutson, 34, has been charged with three felony counts of sexually assaulting a child. He is scheduled to make his first court appearance Wednesday.

Knutson no longer teaches at the school.

In the search warrant, which contained interviews with eight girls, six described encounters with Knutson that made them uncomfortable, either because of what he said or how he touched them.

Two female students said they did not experience anything inappropriate from Knutson.

Knutson taught eighth-grade social studies and was an assistant girls basketball coach in 2009, according to OPSs.

Omaha police spokesman Jake Bettin said three girls reported instances of over-the-clothing touching while at school, and those are the incidents on which the charges are based. The girls were 13 at the time of the alleged encounters, he said.

The first incident allegedly occurred in December 2008, the second in 2009 and the third student reported that Knutson touched her in October 2010, Bettin said. All the girls informed their parents and the school at the time the incidents occurred, police said.

According to the search warrant, the mother of the girl involved in the 2010 incident contacted Child Protective Services, which then contacted police.

Janice Garnett, with OPS human resources, said credible allegations against school officials are internally investigated. In cases where the information is inconclusive, human resources follows district policy to determine the next step, she said. And, it would be up to the school's principal to monitor the teacher or employee, Garnett said.

"We don't get very many sexually related allegations," Garnett said. "But we take all allegations seriously, because our role in this district is to protect the young people we educate every day."

Garnett would not say if Knutson had been placed on administrative leave at any point because it is a personnel issue.

In the 2010 case, OPS spokeswoman Luanne Nelson said the school placed Knutson on paid administrative leave that fall, and the district began an investigation. He was not returned to the classroom, she said.

In April, the school district notified Knutson that his contract would not be renewed for the upcoming school year, and by the end of that month, Knutson had officially resigned from his social studies post, Nelson said.

In the meantime, police interviews with the girl involved in the 2010 allegation led them to other potential victims.

The alleged assaults are classified as third-degree because the groping occurred outside clothing, but they are felonies because of the girls' ages, Bettin

said.

The search warrant says that the girl in the 2009 allegation said she was moved to a different school after she and her parents reported the incident to the school's principal. The warrant also says the girl in the 2008 allegations told police that she was suspended by the school's principal after reporting the incident with Knutson.

Garnett said she couldn't speak specifically about Knutson's case, but said neither of those actions would have been undertaken at the direction of her department, if they had occurred.

The Eastern Cornhusker Trapshooting Conference lists Knutson as an assistant coach for a Louisville, Neb., team.

According to court records, Knutson's only other run-ins with the law in Nebraska are speeding tickets in 2000 and 2009.

He was divorced in May 2010 from his wife of nearly eight years. This month he filed for a marriage license with another woman.

Knutson is the third OPS teacher in two years to come under fire for illegal sexual conduct with a student.

A fifth-grade teacher at Ashland Park-Robbins Elementary School, Nicholas J. McKeone, 29, has been ordered to stand trial on two felony counts of third-degree sexual assault concerning two male students. He resigned from his position in February.

In September 2010, Omaha North teacher and tennis coach Joseph Abdalla, 39, was sentenced to two years in prison on misdemeanor charges connected to an illicit relationship he had with a 15-year-old student at the school.

**World-Herald staff writer Jonathon Braden contributed to this report.**

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