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PW-S educator who took retirement deal faced firing over alleged incidents

A veteran Port Washington-Saukville School District teacher who accepted a $20,000 retirement settlement was accused by administrators of leaving a 7-year-old student with severe cognitive disabilities unattended outside on several occasions, according to documents recently released by the district.

Jean Gorski was suspended with pay in January and retired on March 7 after administrators recommended she be fired for failing to properly care for a disabled student.

Gorski challenged the recommendation and requested a hearing before the School Board in March. That hearing, however, was cancelled when Gorski and the board agreed to a settlement.

Pending at the time was a claim Gorski filed with the Wisconsin Equal Rights Division accusing the district of discriminating against her because of her age and disability.

The district denies it discriminated against Gorski and stated, “The district investigated Gorski’s conduct and performance in her position with the district and has concerns with respect to her conduct and performance,” according to the settlement document obtained by Ozaukee Press through an open records request.

Gorski denies any “unacceptable conduct or poor performance,” according to the settlement.

Contacted last week at her Fox Point home, Gorski declined to comment on accusations she did not properly care for students. The latest document obtained by Ozaukee Press details the accusations against Gorski, who was hired by the district in 1994 and was assigned to two special-education students at Lincoln Elementary School when she was suspended.

Gorski was accused of leaving one of her students unattended on three occasions beginning in September despite instructions from Principal Eric Burke that the student was not to be left alone while walking between the school bus and his classroom.

The 7-year-old student has cognitive disabilities and functions at the level of a 2 or 3-year-old, according to the district’s investigative report.

On Jan. 6, Gorski left the student unattended in the hallway and was reminded by Burke that the child was not to be left alone, according to the report.

The next day, Burke found the student, who appeared confused, alone outside on a sidewalk near one of the school’s parking lots. The temperature at the time was 14 degrees with a wind chill of 1 degree, cold enough that outside recesses were cancelled that day, the report states.

When confronted by Burke, Gorski did not offer an explanation and apologized, according to the

report. But in a voice mail message left for Burke the next day, Gorski said she arranged to have a paraprofessional make sure the child got on the bus safely.

The paraprofessional said she didn't speak to Gorski about the child and was in Burke's office talking to him when the alleged exchange with Gorski took place, which Burke confirmed, according to the report.

Gorski's attorney, Thomas Lenz, declined to comment on the case but directed Ozaukee Press to the discrimination complaint his client filed against the district on Oct. 19.

In that complaint, which has been dismissed because of a lack of proof, Gorski, 64, accused the district trying to force her to retire because of her age and disability. She had a knee replaced and suffers from arthritis, the complaint states.

Gorski said she requested an "accommodation" from the district in 2008 to comply with her doctor's order to "avoid unusual high risk activities such as restraining violent or disruptive students who could easily kick her in the knee," according to the complaint.

Following that request, Gorski claimed, the district repeatedly asked her to retire and shuffled her to different schools.

State investigators determined Gorski failed to show probable cause she was discriminated against and closed the case on April 11.

According to the settlement:

The district will pay Gorski $8,588 for attorney's fees, $6,411 in wages and $5,000 to be converted into sick days that will be used as payments toward her dental benefits. The money will come from funds that were budgeted to pay her salary and benefits, Supt. Michael Weber said.

The district will provide Gorski with one year of family health insurance coverage and three years of Medicare supplemental insurance as called for under the 2009-11 master contract agreement.

The district will also "provide a mutually agreeable factual letter of reference."

Weber said the board agreed to the settlement to avoid paying additional attorney's fees and to end a dispute that was usurping administrators' time.