

Lawsuit filed over student's beating State education agency launches investigation into charter school

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Attorney Brant Stogner is representing Alesha Johnson, the mother of 13-year-old Isaiah Reagins, in a lawsuit against Jamie's House Charter School in north Harris County. Stogner says other adults were in the room during the beating.

"I thought she was playing at first until she threw the desk, and then that's when I got scared," Isaiah said of Davis, who has worked at Jamie's House for three years.

Isaiah said he and other students were dancing and laughing at a female student before Davis entered the room. He recalled Davis telling him, "So, you want to fight a girl? Fight me."

Davis' attorney, Chip Lewis, declined to comment.

The Texas Education Agency sent four representatives to Jamie's House on Thursday to conduct its own investigation. The agency does not have the power to sanction Davis because she is not certified, but it could move to revoke the school's accreditation.

"There have been some special-education problems reported in the past," TEA spokeswoman Debbie Ratcliffe said about the school, declining to elaborate. "But I'm not aware of anything along this line — this kind of violent issue."

Jamie's House, located on Bamwood Drive in north Harris County, serves about 100 at-risk middle and high school students and is rated "academically acceptable" under the state's rating system for alternative schools.

Legislator wants inquiry

Raw video: School beating

Harris County charter school teacher, Sheri Lynn Davis, caught on video allegedly beating up a student. 5/12/2010.

The tearful mother of a 13-year-old boy announced on Thursday that she is suing Jamie's House Charter School and a teacher there who was caught on video allegedly beating up the teen late last month.

The lawsuit, filed in Harris County, accuses Sheri Lynn Davis, 40, of assaulting Isaiah Reagins for more than a minute — kicking him, slapping his face and dragging him on the floor of a classroom. The suit also accuses the school of negligence and attempting to cover up the incident, which another student filmed with a cell phone camera.

State Sen. Dan Patrick, a self-described “champion of charter schools,” wrote Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott a letter Thursday asking him to investigate Jamie’s House.

“The video clearly depicts a teacher physically abusing a student while other students and faculty members observe,” Patrick, R-Houston, wrote. “Given the small size of this facility and their faculty, the failure of these teachers to act or respond correctly is observably systemic.”

Brant Stogner, an attorney for Isaiah and his mother, Alesha Johnson, said at least three teachers and three or four other adults were in the room during the beating.

Stogner also said school officials told Johnson that the classroom had a security camera but it didn’t capture anything.

A spokeswoman for Jamie’s House said the security camera erases on the first of every month. The beating happened on April 29, and Johnson said she called the school on April 30 but didn’t get a response. Johnson said she met with the teacher and administrators at the school May 3.

Principal: ‘No excuse’

The school put Davis on administrative duty after the meeting and fired her this week after the cell phone video aired on a local television news show. Principal David Jones has said there was “no excuse” for the teacher’s actions.

School officials have identified one other teacher who was in the room during the beating, and disciplinary action is pending against him, according to spokeswoman Sue Davis, who is not related to the teacher.

The Harris County Sheriff’s Office is investigating the incident. Sheri Lynn Davis has not been charged, but she has an unrelated criminal mischief charge pending. She is accused of using a knife to slash the tires of another woman’s car, court records show.

Johnson’s lawsuit against the teacher and school is seeking an unspecified amount in damages. Her attorneys with the law firm Abraham, Watkins, Nichols, Sorrels, Agosto & Friend said they plan to donate any award for attorneys’ fees to a charity for children.

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