



Odem school officials and pastor take steps to ensure children's safety

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ODEM - The San Patricio Sheriff's Department continued to work on two separate cases of sexual assault involving children on Friday. Zaragoza Gonzalez, a 54-year-old high school band volunteer and 58-year-old Charles Vickers, an Odem High teacher's aide, both face aggravated sexual assault charges with a child.

They were arrested on Wednesday, but as of Friday, were out of jail. 6 News found Gonzalez at his home Friday, but he refused to comment. Vickers would not answer his phone, and although 6 News left a message on his voicemail, he has not returned the call.



Odem ISD Superintendent Ricardo Chapa said he and his staff are still in shock over the allegations. But that isn't stopping them from making some changes to get a better handle on protecting their students.

"It's unfortunate. I'm sad to see something like this can happen in our community," Chapa said. "We have a great community."

Chapa's only been with the district for a little more than year, but he said he's heard nothing but great things about Gonzalez and Vickers.

"It's a surprise. He's been working well with our school. He's an excellent employee," Chapa said.

Reputations aside, Chapa said he's mainly concerned with allegations that Gonzalez's alleged assault happened while he was riding a bus filled with band members as a parent volunteer.

Chapa said, in the past, volunteers weren't subjected to a background check because everyone knows each other well in the community.

"They've lived here all their life," he said. "They were born and raised here. They went to school here. For those people, we accept them. We want them to help out."

Chapa said these sex allegations have change everything. He said parent volunteers will no longer be allowed to ride on school buses, and he and the board are considering background checks for all parent volunteers.

These are steps Chapa said unfortunately will affect parents the most.

"Innocent people are going to have to pay the price, but it's a step we're going to have to take," he said.

Chapa said he hopes these changes will assure parents that their kids are safe at Odem High School.

6 News also spoke with the Pastor Wade Rush at First Baptist Church in Odem, where Gonzalez

did volunteer work. The pastor was also shocked by the news, but he said he isn't making any judgements yet.

"As a church, we're here to love and support, and that's what we're going to do during this situation," he said. "It's a difficult situation nonetheless. The whole community is dealing with it; I know the school's dealing with it, and the people that are involved."

The pastor said Gonzalez is welcome to continue worshiping at the church, but he won't be allowed to work as a volunteer, pending the investigation.

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