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News

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Indiana school worker arrested for relationship with student

Bethany Christian Schools

A former assistant theater director at Bethany Christian Schools in Goshen, Ind., was arrested April 30 on five felony counts of child seduction.

Goshen Police allege Kyle Snyder, 26, was in sexual contact with a 17-year-old Bethany student. He first met the student when she was 16 years old in theater classes before tutoring her in math outside school. About 34,000 text messages, many explicit, were shared since April 2023.

The Goshen News reported text messages indicate the two became physical last fall and the student told police the relationship continued through April 21, occurring mainly at Snyder's house where he lives with his parents, while his parents were present in another room. The specific charges of "child seduction" in this situation refer to sexual activities with an individual between the ages of 16-18 in the context of a professional relationship.

Snyder was a theater director for the middle school and high school and is a Bethany graduate, valedictorian of the Class of 2016. *The Goshen News* reported Bethany terminated his employment in February upon learning about inappropriate comments he made to other students during a math tutoring session outside of school.

When contacted by *Anabaptist World*, Bethany head of school Tim Lehman provided a press release that noted Snyder was an independent contractor for theater productions and was not a Bethany teacher or employee. The release states that Snyder's alleged actions did not take place on school premises and that Bethany reported the information immediately to Indiana's Department of Child Services and ended the contract upon learning about it.

The release does not mention whether Bethany staff knew about Snyder's tutoring work. Lehman declined to respond to questions, "in compliance with privacy laws and to not jeopardize or interfere with the ongoing investigation," according to the release.

Lehman did not answer whether Bethany has policies for communicating with students and parents when it learns about a worker's inappropriate behavior. School safety policies on Bethany's website are limited to a student hotline to report bullying, harassment and safety concerns, parking lot restrictions and a post-crisis reunification plan in case of emergencies.

"The well-being and safety of our students is Bethany Christian Schools' top priority," said Lehman in the release. "We are working closely with those impacted to provide additional support as needed and requested."

As of May 30, a trial was scheduled for Sept. 9 in Elkhart County Superior Court.

Bethany Christian Schools is a member of the Mennonite Schools Council within Mennonite Education Agency of Mennonite Church USA. MC USA's Safe Church ministry recommends every faith community develop a safe protection policy, which includes a process for handling a complaint of suspected abuse. The guidelines recommend all suspected cases be reported to local authorities and informing the faith community appropriately if there is an investigation: "The safety of persons will override the offender's right for confidentiality."

MEA executive director Michael Danner said the Mennonite Schools Council is a network of schools that relate to MEA and there is no accountability relationship between the denomination and the schools. Safe Church guidelines can serve as best practices or guidelines for schools, but human resources laws might put limits on what an employer can share about reasons for dismissing an employee.

"In general, it is best to be transparent when a person who has contact with students is found to have engaged in inappropriate behavior with minors, including a clear way for persons to report any inappropriate encounters with said person," he said. "This creates a safe environment for disclosure and more potential for healing."

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