



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 13, 2013

Outcry Grows Over Suspension of Student Who Disarmed Suspect

Following widespread national media attention, outrage continues to grow surrounding the [controversial suspension of a 16-year-old Florida student](#) who reportedly helped disarm a gunman on a school bus, potentially saving at least one life. School officials dispute those reports. Now, however, a national youth-rights organization has officially become involved in the case to advocate on behalf of the suspended teen and have his permanent record cleared. Members of the local community have also rallied to the cause.



The student in question, whose name is being withheld by *The New American* and other media outlets for safety reasons, was supposedly disciplined for failing to cooperate with school officials and the investigation after the incident, an amended document from the school obtained by *TNA* shows. The original reason cited for the suspension was being “involved” in an incident in which a “weapon was present.” It appears to critics of the school decision, though, that suspending the teen after such a reportedly heroic act was a display of poor judgment at the very least, and that officials are now trying to rationalize the move.

After originally [reporting](#) the news on March 4, *The New American* obtained e-mail correspondence from the school principal indicating that the narrative as portrayed in the press was inaccurate and that there was more to the story. Local media outlets were the first to report the controversial suspension, which quickly resulted in national and even international attention. Based on the information available at the time, critics of the decision were outraged and quickly rallied to the student’s cause.

The school principal, however, was clearly upset by the negative attention directed at her and Cypress Lake High School in Ft. Myers. “I just wish people would use common sense and realize there is MUCH more to the story,” Principal Tracy Perkins stated in an e-mail to an individual who criticized the suspension, adding that, by law, she was not allowed to disclose all the details of what transpired. “I agree that it would be ABSOLUTELY ABSURD to punish a student for doing something heroic.”

In a phone interview with *The New American*, she echoed those remarks. “As per school law, I’m not allowed to discuss information related to student behavior and discipline, but ... there is more to the story,” she said. “The media took some students’ information to be 100 percent factual, but they do not have the entire story. If you read between the lines, you’ll see there is a lot more involved.”

Documents obtained by *The New American*, including referral slips suspending the student and police reports, however, appear to confirm the general outlines of the story as reported by the press. Lee County Sheriff’s Office records state, citing statements by witnesses and the victim, that the 15-year-old suspected gunman had a pistol on his lap before “pointing the gun directly at [the intended victim] and threatening to shoot him.”



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The intended victim, according to the police report, told investigators that “several other students grabbed a hold of [the suspect] and wrestled the gun away from him.” The victim’s sister issued a similar statement to authorities after meeting her brother at the bus stop and helping him get out of the fray. A video camera on the bus, however, was apparently not working at the time of the incident, detectives said in the report.

After arriving home, the student who had the gun pointed at him told his mother about what had transpired, and she promptly informed the Fort Meyers Police Department, according to the report. The next day, the county sheriff’s office arrested the suspect and searched his home, where investigators found and seized a loaded .22 caliber handgun.

The 15-year-old suspect, a football player whose name is being withheld by *TNA* because he is a minor, was taken to a juvenile detention facility. Based on available evidence, he was charged with possession of a firearm on school property and assault with a deadly weapon “without intent to kill,” according to official documents.

At least one of the students who reportedly helped disarm the suspect, according to witnesses and news reports, was suspended from school the next day. As *The New American* [reported](#) on March 4, however, the suspended student in question — who has been dubbed a hero, a Good Samaritan, and more — apparently refused to cooperate with the investigation.

The original referral slip suspending the student, which was obtained by *TNA* this week, cites only the fact that he “was involved in an incident on the bus in which a weapon was present.” A subsequent referral slip — apparently a modified version of the original, also obtained by *TNA* — adds that the student was “uncooperative” and “lied repeatedly” to school administrators and law enforcement.

As *TNA* reported in the previous article, the youth subculture frequently views any cooperation with police or government authorities under any circumstances as an absolute non-starter, hence the common saying “snitches get stitches.” The student may have feared for his own safety, too — after all, helping law enforcement build a case against somebody could potentially result in retaliation from the suspect or his comrades.

“Perhaps the most important aspect of the story to understand when considering the school’s justifications is the matter of the referral slips,” said President Jeffrey Nadel with the [National Youth Rights Association](#), the non-profit organization that has taken up the suspended student’s cause. “The student was interrogated for nearly four hours against his will.”

Nadel told *The New American* that the student in question was denied access to an attorney and to his mother. He was also never read his rights, according to Nadel, and was apparently told that he had to “answer all questions and cooperate fully.” Following the interrogation, when the boy’s mother was finally able to pick up her son from school, the assistant principal issued the original referral slip implementing the three-day suspension.

“After the local media caught wind of the story and after the first local TV news report aired, the school sent the mother an ‘updated’ referral slip,” Nadel told *TNA*. “This was a photocopy of the first slip with additional reasons added in different handwriting with a different pen. The added information states that the student was insubordinate, was uncooperative, and that he lied.”

On the first referral there was no “incident category” circled to indicate what offense the student had allegedly committed meriting a suspension. “This makes sense, as the reason the student was punished is an absurd reason to punish a student,” Nadel said. The second version of the referral, though, has



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“insubordination / disrespect” circled as the cause for discipline.

“What is important to understand is that the student’s involvement in the incident on the bus — in which, of course, he disarmed a gunman who was wielding a loaded firearm and saved the lives of other students — was sufficient in the minds of the school administrators to justify the suspension,” Nadel said. “That was the single reason for which the student was suspended. When the school realized that the reasoning was indefensible, administrators altered the original referral to add more defensible reasons that are not grounded in fact.”

Since the news sparked a national outcry earlier this month, the intended victim has called the suspended student a hero, telling reporters that there was no question the boy had saved his life. The gunman’s mother, who consented to the search that eventually revealed her son’s firearm to authorities as described in official documents, has also claimed the suspended student got “a raw deal,” as Nadel put it.

“The school is very quick to dole out blame to the heroic student who saved lives, yet they are so quick to jump to the defense of their own employee — the bus driver — who is charged with keeping the students safe,” Nadel continued. “They suspended the student for his heroism. After failing to report the incident or do anything to stop it, was the bus driver suspended? Did they fire him? We do not know.”

Responding to claims by school authorities that the issue was more complicated than it seems, Nadel disagreed. “They are trying to muddy the waters so that the story is less attractive to the media,” he said. “It may very well be more complicated insofar as other students are concerned. As far as the student we are representing is concerned, however, the issue is quite simple: they suspended him because of his involvement in the incident, and they are now trying to rationalize and justify their decision.”

Nadel’s youth-led non-profit organization, which [describes itself](#) as the “nation’s premier youth rights organization” that fights for “the civil rights and liberties of young people,” has opened an ongoing dialogue with the school district on behalf of the suspended student. But so far, Nadel said, officials “have yet to make the just decision.”

“We want nothing more than to sit down with the district and rectify this issue in a reasonable way,” he concluded, echoing widely expressed sentiments among community members and commentators who spoke with *TNA* and other media outlets. “All we want is for the suspension to be removed from the student’s record. We very much hope to resolve this issue amicably, but we will not be going away until this student sees justice. If we are forced by the district to retain counsel and pursue this issue in the courts, we will do so.”

The school principal, however, suggested she would welcome a court challenge because it would put all of the facts into the public record. “There is a reason that the referral slip was amended,” Principal Perkins told *TNA*, pointing out multiple times that law enforcement did not discover the gun or arrest the suspect until the next day, strongly implying that this was a significant detail in the story that would vindicate the school’s decision. “I just have to implore people with common, rational sense to assume something doesn’t add up. There is more to this story, and I wish I could stand up on a rooftop and tell everyone in America.... I know all the facts, I made disciplinary action based on that; America does not have all the facts.”

If the case does end up in court, the public may eventually find out more about what happened. For



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now, though, it appears that both sides intend to hold their ground, with each insisting that it is in the right. The suspended student reportedly returned to school on Monday but, unless something changes, will have a permanent disciplinary record following the suspension.

Image: [giving gun from hand to hand on grey wall background](#) via Shutterstock

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