

*****PRESS RELEASE*****

**ISSUED BY PORT HURON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT AND
ST. CLAIR COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

TEACHER PLEADS GUILTY TO ASSAULTING STUDENTS

(Port Huron) A Port Huron Area School District Teacher has pleaded guilty to two counts of assault and battery as the result of a Sheriff's Office investigation and prosecution by the St. Clair County Prosecutor's Office.

The Sheriff's Office Detective Bureau was contacted by Tracie Eschenburg, Executive Director of Employee and Student Services on September 25. The contact was made after the school district was made aware of possible assaultive behavior towards students by Shirley Thoen. Thoen was at the time an Early Childhood Special Education Teacher at Thomas Edison Elementary School in Fort Gratiot Township.

The abusive behavior was reported to the district by two paraprofessionals who worked in Thoen's class.

With the cooperation of the PHASD, detectives conducted interviews with the paraprofessionals. Also interviewed were bus drivers and bus aides who transported the students to and from the school.

Based on information received during the interviews, a search warrant was obtained to conduct video and audio surveillance in Thoen's classroom.

"On October 30, the district was notified by a detective that there was video evidence of mistreatment of a student in the classroom," said Eschenburg. "Mrs. Thoen was immediately removed and placed on administrative leave pending the results of the investigation."

After a lengthy review of about 400 hours of video and audio evidence, in conjunction with the interviews conducted, a request for criminal charges against Thoen was submitted to the St. Clair County Prosecutor's Office on November 11.

The school district was notified on December 3 that Thoen resigned her position with the school district and plead guilty to two counts of assault and battery in 72nd District Court in Port Huron.

On December 8, members of the PHASD administration, detectives from the Sheriff's Office and a member of the St. Clair County Prosecutor's Office conducted a meeting with families of the students to provide accurate information.

"We want to make sure everyone understands that no other Thomas Edison students were impacted by the actions of Mrs. Thoen," said Eschenburg. She went on to say that there is no evidence to suggest that additional incidents of assault or abuse took place during Thoen's employment with the district.

There was a prior complaint against Thoen investigated by the Sheriff's Office in September of 2014. No criminal charges were sought as a result of that investigation.