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Ex-teacher charged with sex abuse of disabled student

LORI DUNN
TEXARKANA GAZETTE

TEXARKANA, Texas — A former Pleasant Grove Independent School District special education teacher has been formally charged with sexual abuse of a disabled student.

Jeffrey Merrill Parker, 63, of Queen City, Texas, is charged with one count of continuous sexual abuse of a disabled person and three counts of improper relationship between an educator and student, according to documents filed Wednesday in Bowie County



PARKER

Parker was arrested in April in Cass County, Texas, by the Texas Department of Public Safety. He was transferred to the Bowie County Detention Center on May 1 and remains in custody with bail set at \$1.25 million, according to jail records.

Parker has been fired as a special education teacher at Pleasant

District Court.

Parker was arrested in April in Cass County, Texas, by the Texas Department of Public Safety. He was transferred to the Bowie County Detention Center on May 1 and remains in custody with bail set at \$1.25 million, according to jail records.

Parker has been fired as a special education teacher at Pleasant

Grove High School.

The investigation started after the district received an anonymous letter accusing Parker of misconduct. The allegations were reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, the Texarkana Texas Police Department and the Texas Education Agency, according to the school district.

Parker was interviewed by investigators on April 27 and allegedly took an excess of prescription medications and alcohol the same day. He was transported to a local hospital for treatment, according to

a probable cause affidavit.

The victim was interviewed at the Texarkana Children's Advocacy Center on April 29, according to a probable cause affidavit. The victim reported that the sexual abuse began when she started at Pleasant Grove in August 2023 and continued through April of this year, according to the affidavit.

Parker would have her stay alone with him in the classroom with the door locked during lunch, according to the affidavit. The girl reported he touched her inappropriately under her clothes, kissed

her body under clothes and made her touch him. The girl reported she was upset during the abuse and would cry in the bathroom after the abuse occurred.

Parker's case has been assigned to Fifth District Judge Bill Miller, according to court records. An attorney has not been listed for Parker.

Sexual abuse of a disabled person is punishable by five to 99 years or life in prison. Improper relationship between an educator and student is punishable by two to 20 years in prison.

Cruz pegs Red River Army Depot as critical to nation's war efforts



U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas speaks on drone production and the modernization of the Army on Thursday at Red River Army Depot in Hooks, Texas. The depot will play a pivotal role in the production of unmanned aerial vehicles to support the warfighter, Cruz said to a small audience that included Texarkana Chamber of Commerce president/CEO Dr. Robin Hickerson, AR-TX REDI president/CEO Rob Sitterley, TexAmericas Center executive director/CEO Scott Norton and Texarkana, Texas, city manager Dr. David Orr. Cruz said the war in Ukraine, where drones are part of combat, is like 'looking into a crystal ball' on the future of warfare. 'We need to make sure that Red River Army Depot remains front and center and a critical part of the sustainment mission going forward,' Cruz said. 'I've made absolutely clear to the top brass at the Army that there is no outcome that results in Red River getting the short shrift.' In 2025, Cruz introduced the SkyFoundry Act, a proposal to establish a drone production facility at Red River. Sens. John Cornyn of Texas and Tom Cotton and John Boozman of Arkansas support the plan. At present, there is no projected date for when the first drone could roll out at Red River. See related photo on page 3A. (Staff photo by Stevon Gamble)

Program to promote local health units

Sanders, state officials target pregnant women, new mothers in ad campaign

NATHAN ANSELL
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Arkansas health officials debuted a new campaign Wednesday to promote the availability of prenatal and postpartum care at the state Department of Health's local health units.

The campaign, launched with the tagline "Claim Your Care," was announced at Little Rock's War Memorial Stadium during the third annual Month of May (MOM) Block Party and Women's Health Expo, an event which also included sign-ups and informational tables for area services.

Health Secretary Renee Mallory said the Strategic Committee for Maternal Health, an advisory panel created by Sanders in 2024, found many pregnant women and postpartum women were unaware of their nearby service options and recommended an advertising campaign to boost awareness.

Mallory noted the 92 health units across all 75 of the state's counties were providing prenatal care and postpartum follow-ups, mental health screenings and referrals to other providers.

"These services are already in place, already working and already improving outcomes for families across Arkansas," Mallory said. "The services only make a difference (for) women if we know they exist."

Sanders said services at the health units are "free to patients, either because they're covered by insurance or because the state will cover" the cost. Such services are critical, she said, but too few Arkansans know they exist.

"Hopefully, (the campaign) will draw (the) attention of Arkansans, and that's important, because we want every woman, whether she's having a happy and easy and smooth pregnancy or feels totally alone and scared, to know that our health units are there to help them," Sanders said.

Dr. Kay Chandler, Arkansas' surgeon general, said some of the most underutilized services at the health units include the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, which includes nutritional services, breastfeeding counseling and food vouchers, among other benefits.

She alluded to the state's low WIC utilization rate. According to UAMS, as of last year, just 35% of eligible Arkansans participated in the program — the second-lowest rate in the nation and below the national average of 51%.

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SWEPSCO awards TASD for energy efficiency

MALLORY WYATT
TEXARKANA GAZETTE

TEXARKANA, Ark. — The maintenance and operations department at Texarkana Arkansas School District was recently recognized for its energy conservation efforts.

The district entered a partnership with Southwestern Electric Power Company in 2021 with a focus on conserving electricity, said TASD Director of Support Services Jeff Hensley.

"They said we would get incentive checks if we saved electricity. ... They taught us ways to save electricity — purchasing the right equipment, the right lighting, the right AC equipment," Hensley said. "Then they would compare our new equipment to our old equipment and they would calculate the savings that we would get and we would get a portion of that savings through a check."

Hensley said the district would receive the incentive check one to two

times a year and that SWEPSCO was recognizing them for the overall amount of over \$435,000 saved.

"We did a big project at North Heights (Community School) where we changed out all the air conditioning and all the lighting and did some insulation upgrades, and we cut that energy bill by fifty percent," Hensley said.

SWEPSCO's press release regarding the partnership said the district has

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Tennessee enacts new map carving up Memphis majority-Black district

TRAVIS LOLLER,
KIM CHANDLER,
JEFFREY COLLINS
AND DAVID A. LIEB
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Amid raucous protests Thursday, Republicans in Tennessee enacted a new U.S. House map that carves up a majority-Black district in Memphis, reshaping it to the GOP's advantage as part of President Donald Trump's strategy to hold on to a slim majority in the November midterm elections.

The final Senate vote unfolded as demonstrators chanted loudly in the galleries and hallways. Democratic state Sen. Charlane Oliver stood on her desk in the Senate chamber, holding a banner denouncing the redistricting as a "Jim Crow" effort, then clapping and dancing. Other Democratic senators linked arms in the front of the chamber. Republican leadership quickly adjourned the special session, sending the new map on to Republican Gov. Bill Lee, who promptly signed it into law.

Protesters in the galleries also had disrupted the Republican-led House as it voted for the new map — yelling, chanting and blowing air horns. In the hallways, other shouting protesters were held back by Tennessee state troopers.

Tennessee is the first state to pass new congressional districts since a U.S. Supreme Court ruling last week significantly weakened federal Voting Rights Act protections for minorities. But more Southern states could follow. Republicans in Louisiana, Alabama and South Carolina also have taken steps toward redistricting. More legal challenges are expected.

The Supreme Court ruled that Louisiana relied too heavily on race when creating a second Black-majority House district as it attempted to comply with federal law. The high court's decision altered a decades-old understanding of the law, giving Republicans grounds to try to eliminate majority-Black districts that have elected Democrats.

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National Day of Prayer



Texarkana, Texas, Mayor Bob Bruggeman reads President Donald Trump's National Day of Prayer statement on Thursday in front of the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in downtown Texarkana. (Staff photo by Andrea Loreda)



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or clerk@texarkanagazette.com

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