

CITY OF NEW YORK
THE SPECIAL COMMISSIONER OF INVESTIGATION
FOR THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

ED STANCIK
Special Commissioner

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SEXUAL MISCONDUCT OF MICHAEL FRIEDMAN
DIRECTOR OF THE BRIDGE SCHOOL (PS 101 MANHATTAN)**

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INTRODUCTION

On May 20, 1992, this office received a "Law Enforcement Referral" from the New York State Central Register for Child Abuse and Maltreatment. A fourteen year old male student at the Bridge School (PS 101) in Manhattan telephoned the Central Register to report that he had been a victim of abuse. Student "A"¹ alleged that the Director of the school, Michael Friedman, had kept the student after school for detention. During this time, Student "A" reported, Mr. Friedman fondled the student's penis. Although officially Mr. Friedman is a teacher within the Board of Education system, in practical terms his role at the Bridge School is that of the chief administrator, thus he is the equivalent of a principal.

The allegations made by Student "A" were substantiated. Michael Friedman, the Director of the Bridge School, confessed that he removed Student "A's" clothes, spanked him and touched his penis.

THE FACTS

Student "A"

During the 1991-92 school year, Student "A," a fourteen year old male, was a ninth grader at the Bridge School in Manhattan. The school is an "alternative"² Junior High School located at 141 East 111th Street in Community School District 4.

By his own admission, Student "A" had an attendance problem at the Bridge School. Records corroborate that Student "A" missed over 100 days of school during the 1991-92 year. The school was aware of this problem and took steps to correct it. Student "A" reported that he would receive telephone calls from Mr. Friedman as early as 6:30 a.m. reminding Student "A" to attend school.³

During the spring semester Student "A" developed an

¹ The identity of the student, although known to this office and other appropriate authorities, will remain confidential.

² The school is designed to be relatively small in order to provide personal contact between teachers and students. It caters to "at risk" students from the neighborhood and allows for "alternative assessment" of their school work.

³ Mr. Friedman admitted that he and members of his staff telephoned Student "A" and other students as early as 6:30 a.m. to try to increase their attendance.

additional reason to stay away from school. In his office, behind closed and locked doors, Friedman removed Student "A's" clothes, spanked him, and on at least one occasion, touched his penis. Student "A" was so disturbed by the actions of Mr. Friedman that he called the New York State Central Register for Child Abuse and Maltreatment to report his own abuse.⁴

The Central Register referred the report to this office and the New York City Police Department. A Detective from the 23rd Police Precinct was assigned. An investigator from this office and the detective on the case interviewed Student "A" and informed him that there would be a full investigation. Nevertheless, on his own initiative, Student "A" decided to enhance the proof in the case by telephoning Mr. Friedman and taping the conversation.

The Tapes

On or about May 20, 1992, Student "A" telephoned Mr. Friedman at the Bridge School. The following is a portion of the conversation that was taped by Student "A":

A: I said I don't like the way you are touching me.

F: I'm sorry.

A: I don't want it to happen no more.

F: Okay.

A: Okay?

F: Absolutely....

Student "A" played the tape for the assigned investigator and detective. After consultation with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, it was decided that Student "A" would attempt to capture Friedman on tape again, this time by use of a body wire which would be monitored by the investigation team.

On June 25, 1992, the following conversation took place between Student "A" and Mr. Friedman:

F: Why didn't you come for the party at least?

A: Because...

F: I would have let you come for that. I don't care about

⁴ Student "A" contacted the Registry through the "800" number which is commonly referred to as the "child abuse hotline."

the graduation. You should have come for the party.

A: Because I didn't feel comfortable with the way you are touching me Mr. Friedman.

F: (talking over) Everybody was asking for you. You know that. Let me show you what that envelope looks like all right?

A: But the reason I didn't come is because I had to pull my pants down and you were spanking...(sound of door closing)

F: (softly) Yeah.

A: You...me...

F: (talks about returning money to Student "A" for trips he did not attend, ignores the reference to spanking).

Later in the conversation Friedman talks about changing Student "A's" grades from forty-fives to sixty-fives.⁵

Michael Friedman

On December 10, 1992, a hearing was held at this office and with his attorney present Michael Friedman was interviewed under oath by the attorney and investigator assigned to the case.

Initially, Friedman was questioned about the changing of grades. Eventually, the topic of Friedman's relationship with Student "A" was raised. Friedman vehemently denied having anything but a professional relationship with Student "A." Upon further questioning on the subject, Friedman suggested that Student "A" was not a credible individual.

Portions of the tape made by Student "A" were played for Friedman. He explained that he thought Student "A" had said "I don't like the way you are treating me," rather than "touching me" as Student "A" actually says on the tape. Friedman said that he had embarrassed Student "A" by severely reprimanding him in front of other people and that was why he apologized.

Portions of the second tape were played for Friedman. Again Friedman was questioned about his relationship with Student "A." After conferring with his attorney, Friedman testified, "I didn't tell the truth before...the allegations that you presented to me are true. That I did, that I did, I did touch [Student

⁵ We originally believed that Friedman's sole motive for changing the grades was to keep Student "A" quiet about the abuse and to move him out of the school. However, further investigation revealed additional reasons for the grade changes. The issue of the changing of grades will be discussed in a future report.

"A"], I did spank him -- not to hurt him but -- I did commit that indiscretion and I fully admit to that...." Friedman went on to say that his conduct occurred on two occasions that he could remember, both times right after school, behind the closed doors of his office. He said that Student "A's" pants and underpants had been removed before he spanked him and touched him. Friedman admitted touching Student "A" on the penis. Friedman denied that Student "A's" grades were changed because of these incidents.

CONCLUSION

Michael Friedman, Director of the Bridge School in Manhattan, sexually abused Student "A," a fourteen year old male student at the school. Mr. Friedman surrendered to investigators at this office on December 21, 1992, to be arrested for the sexual abuse of Student "A."⁶ The prosecution of Mr. Friedman will be handled by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the evidence described here, we recommend that Mr. Friedman's employment with the Board of Education be terminated and that this matter be considered should Mr. Friedman ever apply for reemployment with the Board. A copy of our report concerning this investigation is being forwarded to the State Education Department for whatever action they deem appropriate.

⁶ Upon his arrest, Mr. Friedman admitted to attorneys and investigators from this office that he had abused other students. The investigation into this new information is continuing.