

JUDGE SENDS BOY TO ADULT JAIL FOR RAPE - HE GETS UP TO 15 YEARS IN SCHOOLMATE'S ASSAULT

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As a judge prepared to send 15-year-old **Audi Dawson** to prison Wednesday for raping another student inside their Detroit middle school, his former math teacher pleaded for leniency.

"He's nothing but a big softie -- he's not a predator," teacher Douglas Carey said of the 6-foot-3, 200-pound **Dawson**, who was convicted of assaulting a 12-year-old seventh-grader in the school's attic.

"**Audi**'s not an evil person," Carey said.

Carey and school counselor Emily Gay asked Wayne County Circuit Judge Patricia Fresard to sentence **Dawson** as a juvenile so he could be educated and helped.

But Fresard said, under agreements **Audi** and his attorney reached with the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, she had no choice but to impose a 3- to 15-year sentence in an adult prison.

"I want to say that I do accept responsibility for my actions on May 1st," **Dawson** told the judge. "God knows what happened on that date."

Details of the incident are still a matter of debate at Hutchins Middle School.

The fourth-floor attic at the west-side school apparently had been used by students previously as a hideout or for sexual experimentation, according to statements made to police and in depositions obtained by the Free Press under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act.

Some students, teachers and parents blame the victim for what happened May 1. The victim, who has since changed schools and has entered counseling, was not in court Wednesday.

Her parents are suing the school district and Hutchins staff members, and school officials have declined to comment because of the lawsuit.

Four juveniles were charged in the case. In November, a 14-year-old boy and 13-year-old girl pleaded no contest in juvenile court to fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct. They admitted to luring the girl to the attic, and both are to be sentenced next week.

Dawson pleaded guilty Dec. 5 as an adult to third-degree criminal sexual conduct. He admitted having sexual contact with someone under age 13, but he maintained it was consensual and denied carrying the girl across a narrow catwalk to the secluded area.

The girl, a slender 5-footer, testified that **Dawson** did carry her to the spot where the 13-year-old girl and Dominique Brown, 15, held her down during the assault.

Last month, Brown admitted her role and pleaded guilty as an adult to fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct and was sent to the Vista Maria residential program for delinquent girls in Dearborn Heights for one year. During the investigation, some Hutchins students told police there were rumors the girl had gone to the attic with boys for several months before the assault, though none said they saw anything. Students also said Brown told them **Dawson** and the victim had "done it."

On May 1, the girl did not immediately report the attack. But after classmates teased her, she began to cry and a teacher asked her what was wrong.

In an interview with the Free Press last week, the girl, whose name is being withheld because of her age and the nature of the crime, said she often was teased by classmates, especially Brown.

Before entering sixth grade at Hutchins in 1999, the girl attended the district's Foreign Language Immersion School. She said she and other students from FLIS were better prepared for their studies than many students entering Hutchins that year.

The girl said her first homeroom teacher once asked the class for a show of hands on who lived with both parents. Hers was the only hand that went up, she said, and that seemed to anger Brown.

"She lived with her grandma and didn't like that I stayed with both my parents," the girl said.

She said classmates she thought were her friends began making fun of the way she dressed and acted. According to police reports, Brown and others circulated rumors that the 12-year-old was promiscuous.

Despite that, the girl said she did her homework, got good grades and wrote for the school newspaper.

The girl said she still isn't sure why this happened to her.

"I really didn't know **Audi**," she said. "I wasn't like really around him much."

Now, she said, she is afraid of being in a room with the door closed. Her parents said she is worried that her new classmates will find out what happened.

Hedy Nuriel, executive director of HAVEN in Pontiac, which provides counseling to sexual assault victims, said it is common in school-related cases for blame to be directed at the victim.

"I don't understand the dynamic, but people often side with the popular guy, usually a sports figure," Nuriel said. "And the victim is the one who is ostracized."

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WHERE TO GET HELP

Sexual assault victims can seek help by calling these organizations, which can be reached 24 hours a day.

Wayne County

* Detroit Rape Counseling Center: 313-833-1660

* Women's Justice Center, Detroit: 313-371-3900

Oakland County

* HAVEN: 248-334-1274

Macomb County

* Turning Point: 810-463-6990

Washtenaw County

* Assault Crisis Center: 734-483-7273

Livingston County

* LACASA/SARA: 517-548-4228

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