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Forensic psychologist testified that Episcopal School acted in girl's best interest by forcing her to go

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A forensic psychologist testified Thursday that forcing a student to leave the Episcopal School of Dallas after a sexual relationship with a teacher was discovered enabled her to move forward with her life.

“Under the circumstances it was in [her] best interest to leave the school given the escalation of rumors and hostility and unrest from the students,” said Dr. Rycke Marshall, an expert witness testifying for the school.

Ending the relationship abruptly was painful for the girl, Marshall said, and, “There were lots of reminders and lots of triggers to the relationship at the school.”

Marshall testified in a civil suit brought by the parents of the girl, who are seeking millions of dollars in damages, claiming the school failed to protect their daughter from the sexual relationship with Nathan Campbell and victimized her a second time by forcing her to withdraw from the school.

Marshall testified that while the relationship between the then-16-year-old girl and her 34-year-old teacher was inappropriate and harmful, it was not sexual assault, except in the legal sense because the girl was under the age of consent.

“From a psychological perspective assault implies, to me, coercion which wasn’t really part of the relationship,” she said. “She thought she was in love with Nathan and he with her.”

Marshall told jurors that Campbell is not a sexual predator — as the family’s attorney, Charla Aldous, keeps calling him — because he hasn’t demonstrated a pattern of abuse.

“I’m not saying what he did is right by any means,” Marshall said. But Campbell also is not a pedophile, another term used to describe him in court, because his victim was not pre-pubescent, Marshall said.

Campbell has acknowledged the relationship, and is negotiating a plea bargain on one count of sexual assault of a child and one count of improper relationship with a student.

The girl has a good chance of moving on, Marshall told jurors, because she was an older teen and has already demonstrated strength and resilience.

In testimony earlier Thursday, the school’s chief academic officer, Rebecca Royall, returned to

the stand to clarify and expand on her previous testimony.

School attorney Chrysta Casteñada guided Royall through various events, starting with when Campbell met with Royall after he and the girl were discovered by police in a vehicle one weekend in November 2009.

“‘I’ve done something really stupid,’” she said he told her, mentioning he had met with a student off campus when she appeared upset.

“I looked him in the face and said, ‘Are you completely stupid?’” Royall recalled.

The student has testified that Campbell believed Royall would “protect” him if the relationship were discovered, but Royall told jurors she thinks Campbell was afraid of her.

Royall also said that when she talked to the student, she made it clear that the girl’s continued presence at the school depended on keeping the relationship private, as her family had requested.

“It was set up: If you don’t tell anyone, then you can stay at the school,” Royall testified.

After rumors surfaced at the school that the girl was asking other students to see if Campbell’s wife was still wearing her wedding ring, parents started calling the school asking what was going on. Royall said only then did it become clear it was best for the girl to go elsewhere.

The decision to force the girl to withdraw from the school was urgent, Royall said. “I was unwilling to [have her] in a situation where she would be confronted in the hall ... or be bullied.”

After the jury was dismissed Thursday, attorneys for the school called the girl's former best friend to testify in an effort to persuade the judge to allow jurors to hear what she has to say. The 17-year-old girl, wearing the school's uniform of plaid skirt and dark blazer, told the judge how the girl told her about the relationship as it developed and tried to get her to help her determine the status of Campbell's wife.

The girl asked her to check and see if Mrs. Campbell had "changed her hair, looked pretty that day, was wearing more makeup, had improved her appearance."

Judge D'Metria Benson has not yet ruled on the admissibility of the testimony. Testimony resumes Tuesday.

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