



## Shakiya Sargent still bears the scars of wire glass in Portland Public Schools

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By **Steve Duin, The Oregonian**

Shakiya Sargent was 13 the afternoon she went down in a pile and a puddle at **Beaumont Middle School**.

She emerged soaking wet. By the time she pulled a change of clothes -- a white T-shirt and blue gym shorts -- from her locker, she was late for art class, so, yes, Shakiya was running as she approached the interior wire-glass doors that separated the cafeteria from the art hallway.

Her arms filled with books, she decided to kick the metal crash bar, as she'd seen so many other kids do. "I didn't get that far," she said in a 2009 deposition. "As my leg was going up, I think I kind of slipped."

Shakiya's right leg pierced the lower glass pane. Because wire glass doesn't shatter on impact, the only thing she remembers afterward is lying on the tile floor, screaming, "Oh, my God, oh, my God."

That chorus was joined last week by a Multnomah County jury, which determined that **Portland Public Schools** was negligent in the 2007 accident, then awarded Shakiya, now 17, \$222,000 in damages.

The jury was guided to that conclusion -- which will be capped, thanks to tort limits, at \$147,000 -- by evidence that indicated that PPS lobbied at the Legislature against a 2003 bill that would have required school districts to replace all wire glass in their buildings.

In short order, that Vicki Walker bill died in committee. The Building Codes Division promptly banned wire glass in new school construction.

And **state schools chief Susan Castillo** sent out a December 2003 memo, alerting all superintendents to "documented instances of students being injured as a result of collisions with wire glass both here in Oregon and around the country."

Yet when Keith Dozier, one of Shakiya's lawyers, deposed teachers, custodians and administrators at Beaumont, not one remembered a single word of warning from the district on the problems with wire glass in the four years after Castillo's memo.

"The teachers and principal had no clue about the dangers of this stuff," Dozier said. "Those were caring individuals. This was a bureaucratic problem."

The district offered a bureaucratic defense -- even rushing the case to trial before Shakiya had adequate counsel -- and bureaucratic testimony:

"Glass," argued Patrick Wolfe, the district's senior safety manager, "is not dangerous until it is broken."

When the wire glass sank its broken teeth into Shakiya's right leg on her way to art class, it severed two major nerves and 70 percent of her Achilles tendon. Her medical bills topped \$41,000. She dresses to hide the scars.

She has the district's deep sympathy, spokeswoman Erin Hoover Barnett said. But Barnett adds that wire glass, which is still prevalent in area schools, remains "within code. As we've told voters in Portland, there are aspects of our buildings that need updating. Wire glass is a good example."

Walker, however, still remembers PPS lobbyists objecting to everything she was trying to do in eliminating the hazard of wire glass, even as the Springfield, Eugene and Bethel districts began retrofitting their buildings.

Does the former state senator sympathize with the argument that Portland schools just can't afford to deal with this not-so-hidden danger?

"I would ask Shakiya that question," Walker replied.

-- **Steve Duin**

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