

What do you think?

Two editorials – on the sentencing of former teacher convicted for “sex with students”

Editorial

- Lancaster New Era - October 19, 2012

Ex-teacher pays dearly for crimes

Former teacher Christy Lee Smith must be the unluckiest person on the planet.

The 34-year-old Smith was just handed a state prison sentence of up to 40 years for having sex with two students.

Perhaps when times were different, when such crimes were taken less seriously or ignored, Smith would have fared better in the justice system.

But with the Sandusky scandal still fresh in people's minds, the Catholic Church scandal and, now, the unfolding scandal in the Boy Scouts of America, child sex abuse is getting much more attention. Tolerance and/or ignorance have given way to tough jail sentences for child predators like Smith.

Maybe Smith thought she could get away with it (and even if she didn't, she would be treated differently because she is a woman).

Maybe she thought it was OK because the victims, 15 and 17, were mature for their age -- one considered her his "girlfriend."

Maybe she thought it was OK because the students were from a district other than McCaskey, where she taught English between 2008 and 2010.

Wrong, wrong and wrong.

Judge Dennis Reinaker had some harsh words for Smith, saying she proved "incapable" of knowing where to draw the line in student-teacher relationships.

But she wasn't the only one to be on the receiving end of criticism from the judge.

Reinaker chastised the McCaskey administration for not taking the Smith matter seriously.

McCaskey officials apparently ignored warnings from several teachers and other staff that Smith was getting too close to the two students.

The administrators, it seems, were more interested in protecting the reputation of the school district and the teacher than protecting students.

Smith is probably feeling sorry for herself as the reality of her conviction (on 18 counts of illicit sex) sinks in. That's to be expected from a person in her dire predicament.

But she also should be getting down on her knees and asking for forgiveness from her victims and their families, and God, for committing horrible acts against children.

Smith will be serving a sentence reserved for the worst kinds of criminals -- murderers, rapists, drug kingpins.

Editorial

- Intelligencer Journal - October 19, 2012

A tough sentence

When Lancaster teacher Christy Smith stepped into Courtroom No. 8 in the Lancaster County Courthouse Wednesday, she faced a minimum sentence of 10 years in prison for having had sex with two students.

She wound up with what is believed to be the toughest sentence given to a teacher for a sex crime in this county -- 20 to 40 years.

The harshness of the sentence is striking in the context of teacher-student sex crimes in Lancaster County.

Smith's sentence surpasses the 8-to-30-year sentence given to Troy May, a Warwick teacher who pleaded guilty to statutory rape in 2005; the 3 1/2- to 15-year sentence given to Michael Wolff, a county resident and music teacher at Cedar Crest High School for sexually assaulting two girls; the 3 to 9 years given to Warwick High School music teacher Todd Sheerer, who had a two-year relationship with a student; or the 29-month to 59-month sentence to Columbia High School music teacher, Robert Richards for having sex with a student.

Judge Dennis Reinaker, who sentenced Smith, said the sentence was driven by several factors:

- As a teacher, Smith held a position of authority and trust.
- Smith had the student in class and "preyed" upon him.
- The student was under the age of 16.

The sentence sends a message to teachers and to school districts that sex between teachers and students is far more punishable than the mere loss of a teaching certificate. Indeed, Reinaker scolded school officials for what he termed their "inappropriate response" to the situation. Even though other teachers notified administrators that Smith was becoming too close to the students with whom she ultimately engaged in sex, administrators failed to intervene.

Left unsaid is that a school district's No. 1 priority must be its students, not its staff or its administrators.

A quick check of the Internet finds that, in some jurisdictions, teachers who have had sexual relations with students have received far lesser sentences. In some cases, they have received no jail time at all.

In Ohio this year, teacher Constance Yacobozzi, 29, received no jail time for having had sex with a student.

In Texas, teacher Brittni Colleps, 28, was sentenced to five years for having had group sex with five students. In both of those cases, however, the students were of the age of consent.

Laws differ from state to state. Pennsylvania's 10-year minimum sentencing law for child sex offenders was signed by Gov. Ed Rendell in 2006.

Smith's sentence is harsh. Some may view the punishment as excessive. But no one should question whether jail time was warranted.