

## Cops use autistic teen in undercover drug bust

By: Adam Martin – May 28, 2013

---

An undercover officer in Riverside County, Calif., posed as an autistic teenager's friend — and then busted him for scoring the pot the officer asked him for.

Police in Temecula, Calif., are going back to school to fight drug dealing. But their tactics are raising eyebrows among parents and law enforcement watchdog groups.

In two separate cases, police involved special education students in their investigations. In one, they arrested an autistic high school student after an undercover officer posing as his friend asked him to score marijuana. The boy's parents, Doug and Catherine Snodgrass, are suing the Temecula Valley Unified School District over their son's ordeal.

The 17-year-old student, who is not being identified because he is a minor, was a new student at Chaparral High School last fall when he made friends with a classmate named Daniel in his art class. His parents said they were thrilled because their son doesn't make friends easily. But when they invited Daniel over, he would always have an excuse not to visit.

Daniel quickly started asking the boy to find him marijuana, and Doug Snodgrass said after three weeks his son finally managed to procure half a joint for \$20. "He asked him to do it again later and it took a few weeks, but then our son brought back about the same amount. After that the officer asked for one of his prescription medications but our son said he didn't have access. We keep them locked up. Suddenly the friendship ended and he said, 'Daniel doesn't hang out with me anymore.'"

Catherine Snodgrass added that "the kids at school, because he was such an obvious narc, they would call him Deputy Dan." But their son didn't pick up on that. Police arrested him, along with a group of students, on Dec. 11. The boy was given 20 hours of community service and informal probation, but he was also expelled.

Later, an administrative law judge ruled that the boy couldn't be expelled, but the Snodgrasses said the school has sought to overturn that ruling.

The Riverside County Sheriff's Department, responding to MSN News via email, said officers were following the rules. "The Riverside County Sheriff's Department followed all pertinent laws and the case was reviewed by the DA's Office. Had there been entrapment issues, the DA's Office would not have filed the case."

An attorney for the school district told MSN News that the district "believes it has acted lawfully and appropriately in cooperating with the Sheriffs' Department and responding to the outcome of their investigation. It is not harassing any students, and has a duty to keep its schools safe. The district intends to defend itself if any lawsuits are brought."

In another case, the parents of a middle school student with a learning disability say the assistant principal of the school recruited their child to pose as "bait" in an undercover

drug sting, against the wishes of the parents. "My son has been labeled a snitch," the boy's mother told Press Enterprise reporter Sarah Burge. Her claim against the school alleges "outrageous, reckless, illegal and egregious conduct."

The Snodgrass case, in particular, has raised the ire of watchdog groups after an ABC News report gave it national exposure. The Libertarian Cato Institute listed the story on its Police Misconduct blog. And representatives with the Drug Policy Alliance and the group Law Enforcement Against Prohibition condemned the case to the alternative news site Alternet.

Police routinely operate undercover on high school campuses, and it doesn't always go smoothly — like the time a teenage boy fell in love with the officer investigating him.