



Calendars Classifieds Forums Sports Weather Yellow Pages

[Home](#)

**Columnist**  
Jan Gildewell

**News Sections**  
Action  
Arts & Entertainment  
Business  
Citrus County  
Columnists  
Florida  
Hernando  
County  
Osceola  
Gaines  
Pasco County  
State  
Tampa Bay  
Walt & Nation

**Featured areas**  
AP The Wire  
Aval  
Area Guide  
A-Z index  
Classifieds  
Comics & Games  
Employment  
Health  
Homes  
Letters  
Movies  
Police Report  
Real Estate  
Sports  
Stocks  
Weather  
What's New

**Weekly Sections**  
Home & Garden  
Perspective  
Tide  
Tech Times  
Travel  
Weekend

**Other Sections**  
Buccabests  
College  
Football  
Dead Rays  
Lightning  
Ongoing  
Stories  
Photo Reprints  
Photo Review  
Security  
Web Specials  
Ybor City

**Market Info**  
Advertise with the Times

**Contact Us**  
All Departments

[Email this story](#) [Print this story](#)

## Boy charged with bringing gun to school

**A teacher at West Zephyrhills Elementary confiscates the weapon after a classmate turns in the 11-year-old during a fire drill.**

By CARY DAVIS

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ZEPHYRHILLS -- Police arrested an 11-year-old boy at West Zephyrhills Elementary Wednesday after a teacher found a loaded .357-caliber Magnum handgun in the duffel bag he brought to school.

Despite the brief scare, school administrators and police say the incident was handled perfectly, and they credited a classmate of the fifth-grade suspect with notifying his teacher as soon as he learned his friend had a gun on campus.

Principal Madonna Wise said the classmate delivered the disturbing news during a routine fire drill about 10 a.m. Wednesday. While students were outside the building, a teacher went to the boy's classroom, found the gun inside his duffel bag and took it to the office, Wise said.

"This is the way these types of things are supposed to be handled," said Pasco schools Superintendent John Long. "Everything was done perfectly and I couldn't be prouder of the classmate. He's the real hero in this."

Police charged the boy with possession of a weapon on school grounds and took him to the Pasco County Juvenile Detention Center in San Antonio. The Times is withholding the boy's name because of his age.

Long said this is the first time in his 24 years with the district that an elementary student was found with a gun at school. The boy will likely be expelled from West Zephyrhills Elementary and transferred to the James Irvin Education Center, Long said.

Police said the boy didn't intend to harm anyone with the gun.

"He doesn't have a history of violence," Long said. "He just brought the gun to school to show off."

Said Wise: "He made a real error in judgment. I don't think he thought of the repercussions. But this is not characteristic of him."

Neighbors in the modest south Zephyrhills neighborhood where the fifth-grader and his parents live expressed shock when they learned of the boy's arrest from a Times reporter.

"They're a good Christian family and very hard-working people," said David Hengphill, 34. "(The boy) spends a lot of his time at church."

No one answered the door at the family's single-wide mobile home Wednesday afternoon. They do not have a listed phone number.

The gun apparently belonged to the boy's 43-year-old father, Long said.

"I can't help but wonder how a kid gets a hold of something like this," Long said.

Zephyrhills police Capt. Medford Griffin said his agency is referring the case to the Pasco County Sheriff's Office to determine how the boy obtained the loaded weapon from his family's home. The mobile home is outside the city limits of Zephyrhills.

### Headlines

- Water pumping adds another dimension
- Everyone asks: What about water?
- Can fire ban hit Pasco for the holiday
- Authorities zero in on suspect in killing
- Boy charged with bringing gun to school
- ESC delays reevaluation of bus lanes
- Center of fire in New town in instant
- Tape reveals story of mobile, 911 call
- So-called amnesia, just an excuse for insanity
- No prison time for DUI conviction
- Two persons stick up a convenience store
- Police arrest in fatal accident identified