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## **3 Girls Accused of Race-Related Attack on Teen**

**By David Nakamura, Washington Post Staff Writer**

Three black girls accused of punching and kicking a 15-year-old white boy have been charged with assault and a racial hate crime and have been suspended from Bowie High School, Prince George's County officials said yesterday.

Police brought the hate crime charge against the girls, all 15 or 16, because witnesses reported that "the girls said they committed the assault because they hate white people," said Cpl. Robert Clark, a county police spokesman.

The Oct. 6 incident began with an argument on a school bus that was taking the four students home after school, county police said. The girls punched the boy on the bus and continued to punch and kick him after they were dropped off at a neighborhood stop, police said.

The boy suffered a bloody nose and other minor injuries, police said.

The Washington Post is not identifying the students because they are juveniles.

The parents of two of the girls acknowledged that an altercation took place, but they said the boy instigated it by calling the girls a disparaging name. The incident was not motivated by race, they said. One parent said the county's NAACP chapter has been contacted for support in the case.

"It was not a hate crime," said the mother of a ninth-grade girl who was involved. "It was a fight that escalated out of proportion. I do not believe in my heart that it's a racial issue. I did not raise my daughter to be a racist."

Bowie High Principal Suzanne Maxey declined to comment on the matter yesterday. Relatives of the boy did not return a call placed to the family home.

The incident comes at a time of unrest in Bowie largely over crowding in the city's schools, highlighted by two recent demonstrations in front of City Hall that drew hundreds of protesters. Sometimes the debate has split along racial lines, with some black residents taking exception to some white parents' suggestion that Bowie secede from Prince George's and become part of neighboring Anne Arundel County.

Last spring, racial tensions flared when the school's PTSA was successful in pushing for the removal of Principal Patricia Brooks, who is black. Many black parents who supported Brooks then joined together to vote in a new slate of PTSA members, seven out of eight of whom are black.

Bowie High is severely crowded, with more than 2,700 students in a building designed for about 2,048. The school has seven trailer classrooms to handle the overflow, but many parents complain that the cafeteria and school buses are too crowded, leading to discipline problems.

Lynn Beiber, a white parent whose son is in 10th grade at Bowie High, said she believes that most of the students "get along fine."

"It's an isolated incident," she said of the Oct. 6 altercation. "I work in that building [as a substitute teacher]. There's not an ongoing racial problem between the students."

But Beiber added, "The over-crowding is the underlying problem that causes more problems and exacerbates already existing tensions."

The three girls are each charged with one count of second-degree assault, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison and a \$2,500 fine, and one hate crime offense, which carries a maximum sentence of three years and a \$5,000 fine. Both charges are misdemeanors.

School officials said the girls will be suspended pending the outcome of the case in juvenile court. They could be expelled from school if found guilty, officials said.