

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
MISSOURI, EASTERN DIVISION

John Doe, by and through Legal Guardian v. Rockwood School
District and Special School District of Saint Louis County

Doe v. Rockwood School District · No. 4:24-cv-395-MAL · Decided April 7, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri granted without prejudice the defendants’ Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss claims brought by John Doe arising from alleged sexual abuse by a school janitor. The court held that the complaint did not plausibly allege that an appropriate school official had actual notice of the abuse for purposes of Title IX or disability-discrimination claims under the ADA and Rehabilitation Act. The court also rejected vicarious liability under Title II of the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act and addressed Doe’s claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, with leave to seek amendment within 14 days.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, Eastern Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Maria A. Lanahan
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, Eastern Division
DECIDED	April 7, 2026
DOCKET	4:24-cv-395-MAL
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) to dismiss the First Amended Complaint. The court granted the motion without prejudice and permitted Plaintiff to seek leave to amend.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true and views them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, but disregards legal conclusions and conclusory allegations. The complaint must contain sufficient factual matter to state a claim that is plausible on its face.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

John Doe, by and through Legal Guardian v. Rockwood School
District, Special School District of Saint Louis County

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

ada / disability

section 1983

subject matter jurisdiction

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

education law

disability discrimination

civil procedure

municipal liability

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the First Amended Complaint plausibly alleged a Title IX sex-discrimination claim based on the School Districts' deliberate indifference to employee-on-student sexual harassment.
2. Whether the court could construe the complaint and opposition as asserting disability-discrimination claims under Title II of the ADA and § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
3. Whether the IDEA exhaustion requirement barred or deprived the court of subject-matter jurisdiction over Doe's ADA and Rehabilitation Act claims.
4. Whether the complaint plausibly alleged direct or vicarious disability-discrimination liability against public school districts under Title II of the ADA or § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
5. Whether the complaint plausibly alleged municipal liability under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 based on an official policy, failure to act, or failure to train.
6. Whether the complaint plausibly alleged a causal connection between protected activity and an adverse action for a Title IX retaliation claim.
7. Whether the court should exercise supplemental jurisdiction over the Missouri Human Rights Act claims after dismissing all federal claims.

HOLDINGS

1. A Title IX claim against a school district for employee-on-student sexual harassment requires plausible factual allegations that an appropriate school official with authority to institute corrective measures had actual notice of the harassment and acted with deliberate indifference. Doe's allegation that the abuse was reported to unidentified administrators with disciplinary authority was a legal conclusion unsupported by sufficient facts and therefore did not state a plausible claim.
2. The court did not recognize failure to adopt Title IX policies or implement Title IX training as an independent Title IX theory because Doe conceded those allegations could not independently support a claim. The court also did not consider a Title IX disability-discrimination theory because Title IX does not provide a cause of action for disability discrimination.
3. The court construed the First Amended Complaint as attempting to assert disability-discrimination claims under Title II of the ADA and § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, notwithstanding Doe's failure to expressly identify those statutes in the pleading.

4. The IDEA exhaustion requirement did not apply to Doe's ADA and Rehabilitation Act claims because the gravamen of those claims was alleged sexual-abuse-related discrimination, not denial of a free appropriate public education.
5. Doe failed to plausibly plead direct liability under Title II of the ADA or § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act because he did not allege facts showing that an employee with authority to institute corrective measures had actual knowledge of the alleged disability discrimination.
6. Public entities cannot be held vicariously liable under Title II of the ADA or § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act for the conduct of their employees.
7. Doe failed to state a § 1983 claim based on an official School District policy because he did not plausibly allege that the administrators who allegedly failed to discipline the janitor possessed final, unreviewable policymaking authority.
8. Doe failed to plausibly allege § 1983 liability under either a failure-to-act or failure-to-train theory because the complaint did not plead facts showing policymaker knowledge, deliberate indifference, a widespread pattern of unconstitutional conduct, inadequate training, or notice that training was deficient.
9. Doe failed to state a Title IX retaliation claim because he did not plead facts establishing a causal connection between his alleged protected activity and any adverse action.
10. After dismissing all claims over which it had original federal-question jurisdiction, the court declined to exercise supplemental jurisdiction over Doe's Missouri Human Rights Act claims and dismissed them without prejudice.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To survive a motion to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), Doe’s complaint must allege more than “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements.”” (at 4)

“Rule 8 “does not unlock the doors of discovery for a plaintiff armed with nothing more than conclusions.”” (at 8)

“The text and history of these statutes make clear that the School District cannot be held vicariously liable for the actions of its employee under Title II of the ADA or the RA.” (at 13)

“Because “[n]otice is the touchstone of deliberate indifference in the context of § 1983 municipal liability[.]”” (at 19)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Doe, a student with Down syndrome and autism at Eureka High School, was sexually abused at least twice by a school janitor. Some abuse allegedly occurred in front of school employees, and an initial report to unidentified administrators allegedly resulted in no disciplinary action before a subsequent assault occurred. The First Amended Complaint alleged that school employees knew of the janitor's conduct and could have stopped it, but it did not identify the officials who received notice, specify the report's contents or timing, or plead facts

showing final policymaker knowledge, deficient training, or a causal connection between protected activity and retaliation.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Doe filed suit in Missouri state court asserting federal and state civil-rights claims. Defendants removed the case to the Eastern District of Missouri based on federal-question jurisdiction. After Doe filed a First Amended Complaint asserting Title IX, 42 U.S.C. § 1983, Missouri Human Rights Act, and Title IX retaliation claims, Defendants moved to dismiss all claims under Rule 12(b)(6). The court dismissed the federal claims without prejudice and declined supplemental jurisdiction over the state-law claim.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Hager v. Arkansas Department of Health, 735 F.3d 1009, 1013 (8th Cir. 2013)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Crest Construction II, Inc. v. Doe, 660 F.3d 346, 355 (8th Cir. 2011)
- K.C. v. Mayo, 983 F.3d 365, 368 (8th Cir. 2020)
- Franklin v. Gwinnett County Public Schools, 503 U.S. 60, 74-75 (1992)
- Ostrander v. Duggan, 341 F.3d 745, 750 (8th Cir. 2003)
- Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District, 524 U.S. 274, 285-86, 290 (1998)
- Plamp v. Mitchell School District No. 17-2, 565 F.3d 450, 456, 459, 462 (8th Cir. 2009)
- P.H. v. School District of Kansas City, Missouri, 265 F.3d 653, 660-61 (8th Cir. 2001)
- Shrum ex rel. Kelly v. Kluck, 249 F.3d 773, 778, 782 (8th Cir. 2001)
- K.T. v. Culver-Stockton College, 865 F.3d 1054, 1058 (8th Cir. 2017)
- Walker v. Barrett, 650 F.3d 1198, 1209 (8th Cir. 2011)
- Mungai v. University of Minnesota, 141 F.4th 959, 964-65 (8th Cir. 2025)
- Hood v. United States, 342 F.3d 861, 864 (8th Cir. 2003)
- Junhao Su v. Eastern Illinois University, 565 F. App'x 520, 521-22 (7th Cir. 2014)
- Doe v. School Board of Miami-Dade County, 403 F. Supp. 3d 1241, 1248-49, 1259 (S.D. Fla. 2019)
- Johnson v. City of Shelby, Mississippi, 574 U.S. 10, 11-12 (2014)
- Fry v. Napoleon Community Schools, 580 U.S. 154, 165, 168, 171 (2017)
- Hooper v. City of St. Paul, 2019 WL 4015443, at *8-*9 (D. Minn. Aug. 26, 2019)
- Casey v. Cooper, 2024 WL 1856176, at *5 (E.D. Mo. Apr. 29, 2024)
- Hill v. Walker, 737 F.3d 1209, 1216 (8th Cir. 2013)
- Barnes v. Gorman, 536 U.S. 181, 185 (2002)
- U.S. E.E.O.C. v. AIC Security Investigations, Ltd., 55 F.3d 1276, 1281 (7th Cir. 1995)

- *Ingram v. Kubik*, 30 F.4th 1241, 1258 (11th Cir. 2022)
- *Jones v. City of Detroit*, 20 F.4th 1117, 1119-21 (6th Cir. 2021)
- *Turning Point USA at Arkansas State University v. Rhodes*, 973 F.3d 868, 874 (8th Cir. 2020)
- *Marksmeier v. Davie*, 622 F.3d 896, 902 (8th Cir. 2010)
- *Artis v. Francis Howell North Band Booster Association, Inc.*, 161 F.3d 1178, 1181-82 (8th Cir. 1998)
- *Board of County Commissioners v. Brown*, 520 U.S. 397, 404 (1997)
- *Mettler v. Whitedge*, 165 F.3d 1197, 1204 (8th Cir. 1999)
- *Thelma D. v. Board of Education, City of St. Louis*, 934 F.2d 929, 932-35 (8th Cir. 1991)
- *Jett v. Dallas Independent School District*, 491 U.S. 701, 738 (1989)
- *Atkinson v. City of Mountain View*, 709 F.3d 1201, 1216 (8th Cir. 2013)
- *Du Bois v. Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota*, 987 F.3d 1199, 1203-04 (8th Cir. 2021)

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