

# Former CMS teacher Leardini "The Accused" is acquitted

**RICHARD THURMOND**

In the December 2006 issue of *Charlotte* mag, Ted Reed wrote a story titled "The Accused" about Jeff Leardini, the former Community House Middle School teacher who had been accused of improperly touching a number of his female students. (I'd link to the original story, but unfortunately it's not available in our archives. UPDATE: Now available.) A judge found him guilty to two counts of assault and acquitted him of two counts of sexual battery. But Leardini felt that CMS was making an unfair example of him, after the system had been accused of not acting quickly in a previous similar case involving another teacher. Leardini categorically denied all the charges ("I couldn't have been more shocked if you smacked me in the face with a brick," he told us of being informed of the initial allegations), and in fact many parents rallied to protest the charges.

Leardini's lawyer, Noell Tin, appealed the convictions, requesting a jury trial, which one person in our story deemed risky. Last week, that risk paid off, as Leardini was acquitted of all charges. He told the paper that he feels vindicated, but as he told us for our story, his outlook on his former profession is forever altered: "When I was in teaching, I knew what I was doing with kids was the most beneficial thing that I could do," he said. "But now, I am more skeptical. I have seen that a teacher can work as hard as he or she can, and if someone wants to make wild accusations, there's nothing you can do to defend yourself because teachers are at the bottom of the pecking order."