

Bail in teacher attack hefty

By **GARY McELROY**
Staff Reporter

Looking more like gangly adolescents than gang members, two teenagers accused of assaulting a 61-year-old Murphy High School teacher in May were given high bail amounts Thursday in Mobile County District Court.

Bail for 16-year-old Randolph Parker was set at \$250,000. His co-defendant, Dominick Harris, 17, got his bail set at \$100,000.

As District Judge Charles McKnight announced the amounts following an intense and busy half-hour hearing, groans broke out from a dozen of the defendants' supporters, and they rose to walk out, mumbling protests.

One 24-year-old man was literally marched back into the courtroom by the scruff of his neck for cursing out loud just as he exited, but McKnight let him go without ordering his arrest.

With District Attorney John Tyson Jr. looking on, one of his veteran prosecutors, Caroline Siderius, asked McKnight for high bail amounts, explaining in part that the attack on the teacher could very well have been a kind of gang initiation.

Beyond that, Siderius said, the May 18 assault on the unsuspecting English teacher, Melinda Rudensill, was brutal, requiring nearly two



Parker



Harris

Bail set high for accused teenagers

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dozen stitches in her face.

Both defendants, Siderius said, remain "a threat to the victim and a threat to the community."

Harris and Parker will be tried as adults on charges of second-degree assault and could face as much as 10 years in prison if convicted.

Much of the evidence presented by prosecutors Thursday, designed to persuade McKnight to set high bail, came from an often obscured and confusing video of the assault taken from a school-mounted hall camera outside the classroom from which Rudensill emerged before being attacked.

Officials said Rudensill had earlier recommended that Parker be suspended from school for using obscene language.

At the hearing, a police officer was required to stand beside the image projected on a screen and explain what was happening — Harris and Parker milling around a classroom entrance, the officer said, with Parker wearing a red bandanna; Harris waiting, the officer explained, to record Parker's actions on a cell phone camera; and then the assault.

The tall student identified as Parker can be seen rearing way back as the teacher walks out and lunging at her with a powerful haymaker. She is knocked to the floor and continues to lie there as the two figures identified as Harris and Parker make their escape.

At one point, to the clear chagrin of attorney Christine Hernandez, who represents Parker, attorney William

"Jay" Casey told McKnight that all the video shows is that his client, Harris, "was just there," not participating in the assault.

"There's no question Mr. Parker hit the woman," Casey said as Hernandez stared at him.

Mobile police Capt. Jack Dove, a specialist in gang behavior, told McKnight that the assault resembled a classic gang initiation stunt, complete with bandanna and a video record of the violence.

It was not clear Thursday whether investigators recovered any images of the assault from Harris' cell phone.

A few days after the attack, Dove and Cpl. Earl Adams told the judge, gang-like graffiti cropped up around Parker's residence — a five-pointed red star indicating gang "colors."

"It's almost animalistic,"

Dove said of spreading gang symbols around a residence or certain turf. "They put their markers down just like little puppies put their markers down."

Dove also suggested that the assault itself, like the signs, was a "bravado" attempt on the part of the two teens to announce they were "someone special" and worthy of gang membership.

Neither defendant said a word throughout the hearing. McKnight addressed them as "you two young men, very young men."

About that time, small facial muscles in Harris' left cheek twitched uncontrollably, then stopped.

Parker stood looming over his co-defendant, his thin frame stooped from the waist, one arm locked in another behind his back.