

Hononegah OKs \$75,000 deal over racism claim

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ROCKTON — The Hononegah School District has reached a \$75,000 settlement with the mother of a student who sued the district in November.

Kelly Wilkerson's lawsuit said high school officials violated the civil rights of her daughter, Antoneisha Walker.

The district's private liability insurer will cover the tab. Assistant Superintendent Lynn Gibson declined to offer further comment on the settlement or on the allegations.

Walker said her algebra teacher, Maureen Schnaper, told a racist joke at her expense during class in December 2009.

According to the complaint, Schnaper wrote an algebra problem on the board in front of the class. Walker, a freshman at the time, indicated that she didn't understand the problem. Schnaper responded: "You wouldn't. It's a white thing."

Schnaper wrote a second problem on the board and told Walker that she should understand that one.

"Why, because I'm black?" Walker asked. "Yes," Schnaper said, and the rest of the class laughed.

The complaint also said administrators did not adequately address the situation when Wilkerson told Principal Ehren Jarrett and Superintendent Randy Gross what happened.

Schnaper, Gross and Jarrett were named as defendants in the lawsuit.

Schnaper is still teaching at Hononegah. School officials would not comment on whether she was disciplined.

Wilkerson and Walker also describe several cases of white high school students using racial slurs and jokes and writing racist graffiti on a bathroom wall.

More than 93 percent of students at Hononegah are white.

The allegations were investigated by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, which reached a settlement with the district in October. The district agreed to update its policies and provide quarterly reports for the next two years on incidents of harassment, but it was not found to be in violation of the Civil Rights Act.

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