

OAKLAND COUNTY

How much Rochester schools paid to settle suit over monitoring parents' social media



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Rochester Community Schools paid \$188,750 to settle a federal civil lawsuit that accused school administrators of monitoring parents' social media activity and reporting posts critical of the district to their employers and police.

The payout was made last month to parent Elena Dinverno and her lawyer, according to documents obtained by The Detroit News through a Freedom of Information Act request.

Dinverno was paid \$116,209.64 and Deborah Gordon Law was paid \$72,540.36.

"This case was never about the money," Dinverno said in an email. "It was about truth and justice. And the ability to open others eyes up to the methods our district has been using to intimidate citizens."

Further details of the agreement remain confidential, according to the documents released by the district on Friday.

Dinverno sued the Oakland County district in May in U.S. District Court, alleging she lost her job at Blake's Hard Cider in December 2020; the suit alleged that then-Board of Education President Kristin Bull called her employer to falsely claim Dinverno was participating in a group launching threats against the school district.

Dinverno later changed the lawsuit to indicate that Deputy Superintendent Debra Fragomeni made the call, not Bull.

Fragomeni later admitted in a deposition she contacted Blake's. Both Fragomeni and Bull were aware of the call that occurred weeks before district attorney Jeremy Chisholm sent Dinverno a cease-and-desist letter.

The suit alleged several school officials monitored Facebook groups started by and comprised of parents in the district, including private Facebook groups. Officials also monitored the personal Facebook profiles of parents.

Specifically, the lawsuit alleges Amy DiCresce, the district's public affairs specialist, and Lori Grein, the district's spokeswoman, were assigned to regularly capture screenshots of district parents' social media posts and comments that criticized the school district and to compile dossiers of the screenshots, which were circulated to administrators and school board members.

Superintendent Robert Shane testified during a Feb. 3 deposition as part of a lawsuit that he called one parent's employer, the Detroit Police Department, because he was "scared" by a social media post that called for protests outside private homes in March 2021.

Several parents have called for Shaner and Fragomeni to resign as well as members of the board of education.

Gordon did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

On Friday, Grein said the district could not discuss the payout.

"The parties in the Dinverno litigation mutually agreed to resolve the matter," she said in an email. "They also agreed as part of the settlement that the only public comment they would make is that they agreed to settle their differences."

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