



*United States Attorney
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MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and WAN J. KIM, the Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, announced today that the Government has settled a civil rights suit brought under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 against the Rhinebeck Central School District in Rhinebeck, New York (the "District"). The suit alleged that the District failed to take appropriate action in response to repeated reports that Thomas Mawhinney, the former principal of Rhinebeck High School, had sexually harassed a number of female students over an extended period of time. The Government's suit was settled jointly with a private suit brought by four former Rhinebeck High School students against the District and Mawhinney.

"The federal Government is dedicated to protecting the right to an educational environment free from harassment," said Mr. GARCIA. "School districts have a responsibility to safeguard this right. When school officials learn about the sexual harassment of students, the law requires that they take prompt and effective action to stop the harassment."

The Government's complaint alleged that during the ten years from 1993 to 2003 in which Mawhinney was principal of Rhinebeck High School, he subjected female students to unwelcome sexual harassment that was severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive. The Government further alleged that Mawhinney's behavior with respect to female students created a hostile educational environment and constituted discrimination on the basis of sex.

The Government further alleged that District officials knew about the incidents in which Mawhinney sexually harassed the students but were deliberately indifferent to reports of the harassment. The Government also alleged that the District's

deliberate indifference prevented female students at Rhineback High School from enjoying the educational benefits and opportunities provided by the District. The District and Mawhinney have denied all of the allegations.

A Consent Decree between the Government and the District was signed today by United States District Judge STEPHEN C. ROBINSON, who is presiding over the cases.

The Consent Decree requires the District to develop, adopt, and timely implement a comprehensive plan that will ensure a discrimination-free educational environment for all of its students. The Consent Decree also requires the District to retain an expert in the area of sexual harassment prevention and training. The expert will be required to evaluate the District's policies regarding sexual harassment, conduct a school climate assessment, assist in developing a comprehensive plan against sexual harassment, and develop a mandatory education and training program. In addition, the Consent Decree requires the District to educate school board members and school employees throughout the entire district regarding sexual harassment and the appropriate handling of sexual harassment complaints.

In conjunction with the settlement of the action brought by the students, the Consent Decree also requires the District to pay \$152,500 to compensate the student victims and to pay their attorney's fees.

Assistant United States Attorney HEIDI A. WENDEL is in charge of the case.

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