

Wethersfield's Former School Superintendent Sues Town

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WETHERSFIELD — Former school Superintendent Michael Kohlhagen filed a lawsuit Thursday against the town, its ethics board and members of the school board.

The lawsuit, filed in Superior Court in New Britain, charges that Kohlhagen is being treated unfairly by the town's ethics board, which has hurt his reputation and interfered with his attempt to secure a new job. It also alleges that he was denied his constitutional right to due process.

The lawsuit stems from a long-standing dispute that is currently before the ethics board. Four Republican school board members filed a complaint with the ethics board last year alleging that Kohlhagen worked with Democratic board member Stacey Hodges to replace a low physics grade on her son's transcript with a higher one he earned through an online summer course taken after he graduated. Kohlhagen was placed on administrative leave in March and soon after entered into a separation agreement with the school board. Under the agreement, Kohlhagen will be paid his salary and benefits through March 31, 2011. The deal is estimated to be worth \$220,000. Kohlhagen has denied doing anything wrong in his dealings with Hodges.

The ethics board's hearing on the complaint began in February and is still pending. The Republicans who filed the complaint are named in Kohlhagen's lawsuit: John Cascio and Tristan Stanziale, who declined to comment Thursday, and Gina DeAngelo and Penny Stanziale, who could not be reached for comment.

Town Manager Jeff Bridges said Kohlhagen's lawsuit is being reviewed by town attorneys.

Kohlhagen's attorney, David Slossberg, of Milford, said the ethics board had no authority to continue investigating Kohlhagen, who lives in New York state and is no longer a town employee.

Slossberg also said Kohlhagen got "caught up in a nasty political dispute" and that a lack of clear procedures to guide the ethics board has prevented Kohlhagen from defending himself.

He said because the complaint hurts Kohlhagen's reputation, it interferes with a provision in Kohlhagen's separation agreement that requires Kohlhagen to search for a new job, and the Republicans who filed the ethics complaint know this, he said.

Kohlhagen is seeking punitive and compensatory damages and is asking the court for

both a preliminary and permanent injunction to halt the ethics board's hearing. He also wants money for attorneys' fees and immediate dismissal of all claims against him.

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