

# Suspended in Huntsville On-Line Scandal

11.17.14

Huntsville City Schools paid a former FBI agent \$157,000 last year to investigate and monitor social media activity of its 24,000 public school students, leading to the disproportionate expulsion of African American students.

AL.com obtained public records showing that Huntsville City Schools expelled 305 students last year, of whom 238 were Black. In a system where 40 percent of students are Black, 78 percent of the students expelled are African American.

Fourteen of the expulsions last year were related to the social media monitoring. Twelve of those students, or 86 percent, are Black.

Madison County Commissioner Bob Harrison said the numbers suggest the system is targeting social media activities of Black children. "That is effectively targeting or profiling Black children in terms of behavior and behavioral issues," said Harrison.

The online investigation, called the SAFe program, is run by former FBI agent Chris McRae. Superintendent Casey Wardynski said security personnel have investigated the social media accounts of 600 students since January, looking for images of guns or gang signs on sites like Facebook and Twitter in response to anonymous tips from teachers or students. AL.com reported that the district provided records showing \$586,000 to be paid for salaries of employees of McRae's consulting firm, T&W Operations, including at least four data entry and technical services personnel.

Keith Ward, director of communications for Huntsville City Schools, denied that the district's expulsions have unfairly targeted Black students, telling reporters that the district has African American principals and staff who work in student support services.

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Plaintiffs Exhibit 271