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Former Athens superintendent, two others sentenced in virtual school case



■ COURTS

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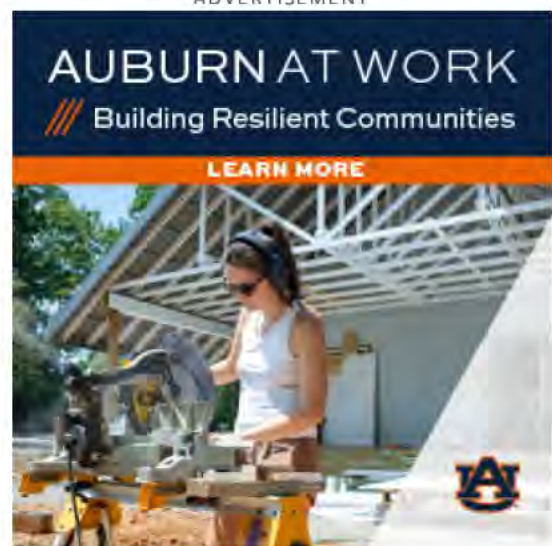
Trey Holladay, the mastermind of the virtual school scam, was hit with a lengthy prison sentence and hefty fine.

By **JOSH MOON** Published on July 22, 2022 at 8:08 am CDT



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he mastermind of Alabama's virtual school enrollment scam was sentenced Thursday to a half-decade in federal prison.

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Former Athens superintendent Trey Hollaway, who pleaded guilty to his role in concocting a scheme to defraud public schools across the state, will spend the next 60 months in federal prison.

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Two more of his co-conspirators will join him for at least a portion of that time. Former teacher Greg Corkren and former Marengo High football coach Webb Tutt will serve 22 and 24 months, respectively, in federal prison. All three men will also face three years of supervised release at the end of those sentences and will pay hefty fines.

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Hollaway was ordered to pay \$2.9 million. Corkren will pay \$1.3 million. Tutt will pay \$259,000.

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A fourth defendant, former Limestone County superintendent Tom Sisk, was sentenced on Wednesday to 18 months in federal prison.

Rick Carter, a former principal in Athens, was found guilty by a federal court jury earlier this year for his role in the scheme and is awaiting sentencing. He faces up to 20 years in prison.

In total, the Alabama Department of Education believes the six people robbed public schools of more than \$5 million using a variety of methods to falsify virtual schools' rolls and illegally gain more per-pupil funding.



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— also concocted a scheme in which
Lorkren and Deborah Holladay,
Trey Holladay's wife, created consulting
companies that allegedly recruited
students to the virtual schools. The
school systems agreed to pay the
consulting companies a percentage of
the per-pupil funds.

In reality, however, the participants of
the scheme were falsifying student
names and using the personal
information of actively enrolled private
school students to bump up enrollment
numbers.

In his sentencing order on Thursday,
federal judge Myron Thompson noted
that the now-felons preyed upon some
of the poorest school districts in
Alabama, diverting hundreds of
thousands of public school dollars from
Alabama public schools and sending
them instead to mostly white private
schools that were operating in
predominantly Black counties.

“Here, both the Limestone County
School District and the Athens City
School District received more than their
fair share of ... funding at the expense
of even the most cash-strapped school
district,” Thompson wrote. “In
connection with the agreements to
acquire student information from the
private schools, the co-conspirators

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ver \$600,000 of the money the
s district received ... to the
participating private schools and their
employees and administrators. As a
result, the private schools obtained
funds ... that they were not lawfully
entitled to receive.”

Thompson noted that all of the private
schools utilized in the scheme were
located in the Black Belt region. The
public schools in those counties are
made up almost entirely of Black
students. The private schools used in
the scheme are almost entirely white.
And Thompson said testimony revealed
that 98 percent of the students used in
the scheme were white.

So far, the operators of the private
schools have not faced charges for their
roles, if any, in the scheme. ■

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down,

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