



## Milwaukee Public Schools ordered to pay \$450,000 in legal fees

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Milwaukee Public Schools must pay just more than \$450,000 to the legal staff representing plaintiffs in a class-action suit over how the district serves students with special needs, a federal judge has ordered.

The order Friday followed a ruling in June that MPS must do more for special needs students, including assessments for children who might need services and interventions for students who have a high number of suspensions and for those who have failed a grade.

Staff at Disability Rights Wisconsin sought \$1.2 million in attorneys' fees incurred in arguing the suit through the end of September, when the court decided that MPS and the state Department of Public Instruction had violated federal special education law.

DPI, initially a co-defendant, was dismissed from the case after it settled with the organization this spring. The state agency agreed to pay \$475,000 in attorneys' fees as part of the settlement.

The court has now ordered that MPS pay \$459,124.

In petitioning the court, Disability Rights Wisconsin argued that its staff of four attorneys, five paralegals and seven law clerks put in roughly 7,400 hours of work on the case over more than six years.

In a response e-mailed Friday, school officials offered little on the latest development in the suit.

"MPS continues to provide quality services to children with special needs," wrote Patricia Yahle, the district's director of special services. "The Board is considering its options."

The settlement with DPI, announced in March, included the appointment of an outside authority, paid by the state agency, to monitor MPS compliance with state and federal special education law and establish standards for MPS.

MPS did not enter into the agreement and issued a statement calling DPI's decision a disappointment because of the tax increase that district officials say will result for taxpayers.

Still ahead is a trial in November on issues such as whether MPS might be required to provide compensatory damages to anyone who was denied adequate special education in 2000, the starting point for the lawsuit.

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