



North Side school effort called failure - District says consulting group not hitting its goals.

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Minneapolis public school officials plan to stop payment on a \$375,000 contract with an organization that they say has not fulfilled its pledge of working with students and parents in the North Side's most struggling schools.

The group, Community Standards Initiative (CSI), "has yet to meet its goals and ... is not on track to meet its obligations," said Stan Alleyne, a school district spokesman. "We will not pay them additional funds if they are unable to fulfill the terms of the contract."

School officials awarded the contract in May, without competitive bid, to CSI, a nonprofit organization run by community activists Al Flowers and Clarence Hightower. They got the contract after strong lobbying by DFL state Sens. Bobby Joe Champion and Jeff Hayden, who serves as deputy majority leader in the Senate.

One source said Hayden and Champion threatened to withhold state aid if Minneapolis school officials did not approve the contract.

Alleyne confirmed "we had members of the [local legislative] delegation that reached out to us, urging us to support the work of CSI."

Hayden said Thursday the idea that he and Champion bullied or threatened the school district is "inappropriate language to use."

The district's decision has created a clash with an organization run by two of the North Side's most well-known and politically connected community activists. Hightower is pastor of New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church and the executive director of the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties.

School officials plan to meet with CSI officials later in September to discuss the contract.

Hayden said the district should not be premature in making statements about CSI's performance.

"I would hope the district is a willing partner to make this initiative a success," he said.

CSI formed to address the district's vast achievement gap for black students. Hightower is the registered leader of the organization, which he runs through his church. The organization has no website, office or phone number.

In the community, Flowers has been the public face of the organization. He is currently embroiled in an issue with the city after alleging misconduct during his arrest in July when police were checking on his daughter for violating the terms of her electronic home-monitoring. Flowers' attorney is Champion, one of the senators at the center of the controversy over CSI.

Hightower did not return several phone calls seeking comment. Flowers said he does not want to get "in the middle" of the district's allegations.

"We have a ton of kids that are failing and we have to work together to save the African-American kids," Flowers said.

In a quarterly summary, CSI acknowledged there have been struggles. "As with any implementation of a new program, we continued to encounter and address several road blocks and obstacles within each school," the summary said.

Started at the Legislature

to establish values and "standards of behavior" in all 87 neighborhoods and reward those who modeled that behavior at home, in parks, schools and within the community.

In a presentation to the district, Flowers said the group would establish behavior standards of young people, then reward those who were modeling those behaviors.

Students who were positively contributing to the community or school would be given incentive from local businesses that had partnered with CSI.

"It didn't have the focus needed to award that kind of money," Alleyne said.

Nonetheless, the district awarded \$15,000 to CSI to develop and implement "a positive behavior incentive program for young people" in Minneapolis. CSI also received \$15,000 from the Park Board.

CSI was required to turn in bimonthly reports detailing its work and outcomes.

"Unfortunately we do not have any details or documentation from 2011," Alleyne said.

Rebecca Gagnon, one of the CSI's strongest advocates on the school board, said she is disappointed that the group has not met its goals.

"This is a really important piece to making our schools better. I hope that this is not the case," she said. "I hope there is some kind of miscommunication."

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Caption: Minneapolis public school officials plan to stop payment on a \$375,000 contract with an organization that they say has not fulfilled its pledge of working with students and parents in the North Side's most struggling schools. The group, Community Standards Initiative (CSI), "has yet to meet its goals and ... is not on track to meet its obligations," said Stan Alleyne, a school district spokesman. "We will not pay them additional funds if they are unable to fulfill the terms of the contract." School officials awarded the contract in May, without competitive bid, to CSI, a nonprofit organization run by community activists Al Flowers and Clarence Hightower. They got the contract after strong lobbying by DFL state Sens. Bobby Joe Champion and Jeff Hayden, who serves as deputy majority leader in the Senate.

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