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Final Edition

**School that got Pilgrim funds lost sex case; teacher won harassment complaint, now wants part of payout**

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SPRINGFIELD-A private school that Gov. Blagojevich said errantly received $1 million from his administration retaliated against a former kindergarten teacher after she complained about being sexually harassed by a school official, a state panel ruled in 2006.

The judgment by the state Human Rights Commission against Loop Lab School and one of its former officials, Tyrone Johnson, came two months before Blagojevich's administration awarded the $1 million grant to the school.

The little-noticed sexual harassment case raises troubling new questions about why the school got the money and to what extent, if any, its operation was vetted by Blagojevich's administration.

Late Tuesday, the governor's office said the school did not disclose the sexual harassment judgment before getting the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity grant.

"DCEO is reviewing the school's compliance with the grant agreement. There appear to be some red flags that they're investigating more closely," Blagojevich spokeswoman Abby Ottenhoff said.

Loop Lab School has been the focal point this week of one of the most embarrassing escapades under the two-term governor, who publicly acknowledged sending state dollars to "the wrong place."

The governor promised $1 million to historic Pilgrim Baptist Church in Bronzeville to rebuild from a catastrophic 2006 fire.

But Loop Lab School, which rented fire-damaged quarters from the church but had no other affiliation, was given the money instead.

Church officials and even the governor were unaware of where the money had gone until the Sun-Times broke the story Monday.

The sexual harassment controversy involves a kindergarten teacher's claims against Johnson, the school's former personnel manager and administrator who allegedly put his hand in the teacher's shirt and on her buttocks, kissed her and placed a candy bar between her legs over her protests, the commission ruled.

The teacher complained to the school's business manager and, later, its director, Elmira Mayes, who implied the teacher's job could be in peril. The business manager allegedly accused the teacher of theft, as well.

The teacher resigned, filed a complaint and won.

Late Tuesday, Johnson denied her accusations, calling them "frivolous," and said, "There's a lot of what they said is not even true. They can't even prove a shred of it."

But neither Johnson nor the school mounted a defense in the case and were declared by an administrative law judge to be in default. They were ordered to pay damages to the ex-teacher in excess of $40,000 -- money the woman has yet to collect.

Now, the teacher's lawyer, Patricia Motto, said she intends to stake a claim on the $1 million state payout to Loop Lab School, which used that money last year to buy and renovate the second floor of 318 W. Adams but has yet to hold any classes there.

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