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Parents ask state to probe Chippewa Valley district

Candice Williams / The Detroit News

MACOMB TOWNSHIP -- Two Chippewa Valley School parents are asking that the state investigate the district for what they say is wasteful spending on frivolous items such as catered meals, bereavement fruit baskets and stadium blankets.

"They have a feast on our tax dollars," said John Schmitz, a district parent. "They have a budget for gift baskets. It's a complete waste of money."

Officials for the district, one of Macomb's County's largest with about 16,000 students, say they aren't doing anything illegal.

Henry Chiodini, school board president, said he's confident any investigation of the district will be unfounded. The district has a \$130 million budget and spends about \$3,600 annually on meals for those who attend meetings and about \$3,100 every two years on bereavement fruit baskets for employees who have deaths in their families, he said.

"If they don't like it, that's fine," he said. "It doesn't make it wrong or make it illegal."

Schmitz and his sister, Grace Caporuscio, who maintains a district watchdog Web site, also claim that the district misappropriated bond funds to purchase land to develop an 11-lot subdivision near 22 Mile and Garfield.

The two on Monday forwarded documents including receipts dated 2004-07 to the Michigan Superintendent of Schools, Michigan Departments of Treasury, Attorney General and the Auditor General.

The investigation request comes as the Mackinac Center for Public Policy has requested that each Macomb County school district regularly post their checkbook registers for public review. Kenneth Braun, director of the project, said he had been particularly concerned with Chippewa Valley Schools, which in the past five years has had two district employees convicted of theft related to their jobs.

District officials plan to sit down with Caporuscio to address her concerns regarding the district's spending, said Diane Blain, district spokeswoman.

As for the district purchasing land with the bond money, Chiodini contends that the district did receive approval from the state and the issue was discussed openly. The land will be used for students in the building trades program to build homes, he said.

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