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Former school superintendent indicted

By Jared Stearns, Globe Correspondent, 7/19/2003

Former Lunenburg school superintendent Richard M. Carlson was indicted yesterday on charges of stealing more than \$420,000 from the central Massachusetts school district in a scheme that authorities said involved funneling money to a dummy corporation he controlled.

A Worcester County grand jury charged Carlson, 49, with 56 counts of larceny over \$250, said District Attorney John J. Conte.

Carlson's lawyer, Bruce A. Singal, said in a statement that his client maintains his innocence, but added that he has offered to "use all resources at his disposal in order to make a very substantial and expeditious payment to the town of the missing funds."

For more than five years, Carlson allegedly authorized payments totaling almost \$367,000 from the town to his company, Patriot Group, for school supplies and equipment, but the School Department never received the items, the district attorney said in a statement. Another \$54,000 allegedly went directly to Carlson, as reimbursement for expenses he falsely claimed to have incurred for the schools, the statement said.

Carlson, who became superintendent in 1992, was suspended in January and resigned several weeks later. He could not be reached for comment.

Lunenburg School Committee Chairman David Reif said yesterday that Carlson has not yet given the town any money. He said the allegations surprised committee members when they surfaced earlier this year and the town has filed a civil lawsuit against Carlson to recover the money.

"It's all the town's money," Reif said in a telephone interview. "If the allegations were proven to be true, [the civil suit] was a way to protect taxpayers' interest and money. People in the town have been curious why the investigation has taken so long. People are anxious to find out what's going on."

Yesterday's indictment follows a six-month investigation by Massachusetts State Police assigned to Conte's office, Lunenburg police, and the office of State Auditor Joseph DeNucci.

The School Committee appointed Loxi Calmes, the school system's former director of instruction, to replace Carlson as superintendent in the spring.

Material from the Associated Press was used in this report.

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