**Atlanta Schools To Repay $363,000 For Cheating**

by THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Atlanta Public Schools has agreed to repay more than $363,000 in federal money the district won by teachers and administrators who cheated on tests, state officials said Friday.

State schools Superintendent John Barge told The Associated Press that the district has 90 days to return the money. He said in exchange, the state is placing five people who have expertise in helping struggling schools in the 50,000-student district, and providing training for educators.

The district also has agreed to tutor thousands of students affected by the cheating, which administrators have said will carry a price tag of about $4 million.

"We are making sure the students who were affected by this really unfortunate and frustrating series of events are served and remediated in a way that we can make sue they receive the education they need," Barge said.

Atlanta Superintendent Erroll Davis said while the district has to pay back the money, the state is also spending more than $600,000 to help Atlanta schools recover from the cheating scandal and improve its lowest-performing schools.

"The state has been wonderfully helpful to us in getting through this crisis," Davis said.

A state investigation in July revealed widespread cheating by educators in nearly half of the Atlanta's 100 schools dating back to 2001. In all, nearly 180 teachers and principals were accused of giving answers to students or changing answers once the tests had been completed.

Schools serving low-income students that consistently get good test scores receive extra money from the U.S. Department of Education each year. That money can be spent for teacher bonuses and classroom supplies, among other items.

Most of the Atlanta schools received anywhere from a few hundred dollars up to several thousand for each year.

The federal agency's office of inspector general is also investigating the cheating allegations. A spokesman for the Education Department did not immediately return a request for comment.

Educators accused in the probe said they were under immense pressure to improve students' scores by any means possible amid a culture of "fear and retaliation," investigators said. Teachers who reported the cheating to administrators were punished or fired, investigators found.

Criminal investigations are under way in three counties. So far, eight teachers and three school administrators have lost their teaching licenses, though the state's teacher certification commission has halted its investigations until the criminal probes are complete.

The testing problems in Atlanta schools first came to light after The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported that some scores were statistically improbable. The state released audits of test results after the newspaper published its analysis.

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