



# Rochester CUSD #3A

4 Rocket Drive Rochester, Illinois 62563-9282, United States

October 25, 2024

Notice VIA Email

On September 30, 2024, Rochester CUSD #3A received a formal complaint alleging bullying and hazing within the high school varsity football team. In response, the District launched an investigation, appointing two District Complaint Managers, to examine the allegations of hazing and the student-organized gatherings, informally called “Bleachers,” where the incidents reportedly occurred.

## Findings:

- Students organized and attended non-sanctioned, unsupervised gatherings referred to as “Bleachers” on the high school football field.
- These gatherings were student-led and occurred without approval or the oversight of coaches, staff, or administration.
- Coaches, staff, and administration were unaware of the activities occurring at these gatherings.
- During these gatherings, students engaged in various forms of bullying, which included:
  - Bringing airsoft and CO2 pistols onto campus and using them to target fellow players.
  - Conducting “cookie races,” where players raced with a cookie between their buttocks, with the loser required to eat their cookie.
  - Urinating on or around the visiting team's bleachers.
  - Held “Wrestle offs” where upperclassmen would pair up lower classmen to wrestle until one of the players was pinned.

Knowing that the Illinois School Code requires an investigation when a formal complaint of bullying or hazing is made, and in light of the preliminary findings, the Board of Education engaged the independent law firm Tueth Keeney to conduct a thorough investigation into the allegations and make findings and recommendations.

Suzanne Keller  
*Director of Educational Services*

Dr. Kris Kahler  
*Director of Business Services*

Dan W. Cox  
*Superintendent*

Jennifer Shaw  
*Director of Special Education*

Jon Hansen  
*Director of Communications*



# Rochester CUSD #3A

4 Rocket Drive Rochester, Illinois 62563-9282, United States

Although the initial allegations were made with regard to the football team, the Board also requested recommendations to ensure the safety and well-being of students involved in extra-curricular groups and activities district-wide.

While the investigation confirmed that bullying occurred, a lack of evidence identifying specific individual participants resulted in a recommendation that no disciplinary action could be taken against individual students.

The investigation concluded that, although coaches were aware that gatherings took place on Thursday evenings on school property, there was no follow-up inquiry or guidance provided by the coaching staff. This lack of oversight was determined to be inconsistent with the responsibilities outlined in the Illinois Administrative Code.

For these reasons, the Rochester CUSD #3A Board of Education adopted the report of the investigator, including the recommendations, which included head coach Derek Leonard being sidelined from coaching at the game against Sacred Heart Griffin on Friday, October 25, 2024.

The District has made the full unredacted report available under the Board documents section of the [website](#).

Sincerely,

Rochester CUSD #3A

Suzanne Keller  
*Director of Educational Services*

Dr. Kris Kahler  
*Director of Business Services*

Dan W. Cox  
*Superintendent*

Jennifer Shaw  
*Director of Special Education*

Jon Hansen  
*Director of Communications*