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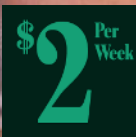
'I saw history repeating itself'

By Noah Diedrich Sentinel Staff
Aug 15, 2026

In September 2025, Taneeka Thompson’s daughter was starting seventh grade at Hinsdale Middle/High School.

Not long after the school year started, classmates began to bully her, her mother said. They called her the N-word and “Travis Scott fish” — a reference to an internet meme of a fish photoshopped to look like a popular Black rap artist — and told her to “go back to her cave,” she said.





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Hinsdale Middle/High School Principal Anna Roth attends a school board meeting on July 28 at the Hinsdale School District office in Hinsdale.
Bailey Stover / Sentinel Staff

When Principal Anna Roth learned of the incidents, Thompson said, she seemed to blame her daughter, who is Black and was new to the district. In one instance, Thompson said Roth claimed her daughter had given other students permission to say the N-word.

In an emailed response to a Sentinel question about this, Principal Anna Roth said she had asked Thompson's daughter "if she had given some students the 'N-word pass' as this had been reported by another student."

Thompson said her daughter denied doing so.

Eventually, the abuse escalated from verbal to physical, according to Thompson. She said her daughter told her a student in her class force-fed her, telling her to "eat her scraps."

Thompson's frustrations are chronicled on her Facebook page, where she posted about her daughter's experience at the school.

On Jan. 7, she posted that her kids were "walking into an environment filled with bullying, hate, and cruelty over race, over differences, over simply being themselves." What hurt most, she wrote, were "the adults. The silence. The excuses. The looking the other way.

"... I am done staying quiet. Our kids deserve better. They deserve protection, kindness, and a school system that actually shows up for them."

Roth said Thompson called the school in October 2025 and spoke to Assistant Principal Christopher Ponce, but that Thompson "declined to give names of any parties involved or give specific information.



"He advised that we could not address the issue without more information, which she still declined to give," Roth wrote in an emailed response to The Sentinel.



Thompson said her daughter — fearing social reprisal — had not told her the

names of the children, but Thompson said she'd wanted to make the school aware of the behavior.

She called Roth on Jan. 7 to report that issues persisted, according to the principal. After meeting with Thompson and her daughter, Roth said she opened an investigation, and "responsible parties were addressed in accordance with our code of conduct" and district policy.

Then, as her daughter was leaving school for the day on Feb. 3, Thompson said, a fellow student pulled her hair so hard they ripped a hair extension from her head.

In an email to Thompson that day, which Thompson posted to Facebook, Roth said Thompson's daughter had told her the comments about her had stopped, but added she'd been told her hair had been pulled on the way out the door. Roth said the girl had not wanted to elaborate so as "not to make it a big deal."

The incident sparked a student walkout on Feb. 9 and an online petition that called on Roth to resign. The petition, alleging the principal "has not demonstrated the necessary leadership or empathy required to foster a secure and inclusive atmosphere for all students," had 260 signatures as of this month.

Roth told The Sentinel the incident was addressed "immediately the next school day" and that the "responsible student was assigned discipline in accordance with our code of conduct."

After the walkout and online backlash, Superintendent David Ryan said in a written statement that some posts made on social media contained "misinformation and opinions without evidence."

He also said students who participated in the walkout acted "without all of the facts or correct information."

Thompson said this assertion confused her.



"I don't know what there could be more to the story of someone pulling out someone else's hair," she said.



In written responses that Roth, Ryan and Ponce gave to Sentinel questions, Ryan

included a Feb. 5 email Roth had sent Thompson.

In the email, Roth said she had “completed a very thorough investigation” the previous afternoon and was going to have “serious conversations with both students and parents regarding accountability and continuing education.

“I want to assure you that we are doing everything within our authority to respond to the behaviors substantiated, as well as to address the overall culture in our school,” she said.



The Hinsdale School District office on July 28 in Hinsdale.
Bailey Stover / Sentinel Staff

Roth said in the email that she and Ryan “both have prior experience addressing culture issues in schools related to belonging and are committed to doing that

work here.” She also said she had met with a racial equity consultant to address the issue.

“The consultant will be working to help me make it clear to our community that HMHS is a school where each child belongs and where behaviors such as those experienced by [name redacted] are unacceptable.”

Ryan said Thompson reported the incident to the N.H. Department of Education on Feb. 5 after receiving an update from Roth. He said school officials shared information about the incident and their response with a department investigator, who the superintendent said responded, “ ‘Thanks. I agree with the determination. I will also forward my response to (Parent Name Redacted).’ ”

Later that month, Thompson said she and her family met with Ryan to discuss the situation. She wanted her daughter to be transferred to a school with a more diverse environment — a notion Ryan told The Sentinel he agreed with.

The two dispute details about what happened next, but Ryan said he did not agree with the transfer request, and Thompson ultimately withdrew her from Hinsdale Middle/High.

The Twin Valley investigation

For Thompson, her daughter’s experience seemed to echo that of the Black student at Twin Valley Middle High School in Vermont who in 2021 alleged the school’s administration — including Roth, then the school’s principal — ignored and failed to adequately address racial harassment against her. Likewise, Thompson said she feels her efforts to protect her daughter were dismissed.

In response to Thompson’s comparison, Roth told The Sentinel via email that “Both students experienced harm based on racially motivated behavior on behalf of their peers. In both instances, responsible students were assigned discipline in accordance with respective state laws, school board policies, and codes of conduct.”

But in the Vermont case, a civil rights complaint prompted a federal investigation that determined the Twin Valley School District was aware of and did not respond

appropriately to racial harassment. This cultivated “a hostile environment for Black students,” according to a 2023 settlement agreement.

Less than three years after the ACLU of Vermont filed the complaint with the Vermont Human Rights Commission on the student’s behalf, Roth was hired to lead Hinsdale Middle/High School, just 30 miles to the east of Twin Valley.

The Hinsdale School Board offered her a contract over four other candidates to lead the school in May 2024 after the previous principal resigned, according to meeting minutes and a recording.



Trees wave in the wind as a storm blows in on Aug. 3 in Hinsdale.

Ethan Weston / Sentinel Staff

The December 2021 complaint alleged the Twin Valley district took no meaningful action despite receiving multiple reports of Nazi salutes, racial slurs and physical threats directed at the only Black student in the school.

The student — identified as “C.B.” in the complaint — and her mother accused Roth of putting the onus on C.B. to avoid the bullying. C.B. and her mother also alleged that Roth did not implement any remedial action despite receiving multiple reports and conducting two investigations.

It also accused Roth of trying to downplay the effect of the alleged abuse on C.B.,

noting one instance where, the complaint alleged, Roth told the student's mother that students performing the Nazi salute was not personal, but "just something the kids did here."

"With no action from the school, the perpetrators became emboldened, and the harassment escalated," the complaint said.

As a result of the treatment, C.B. quit school sports, her grades suffered and she developed anxiety and depression, according to the complaint. Her mother transferred her to Brattleboro Union High School, and the family later moved to Arizona.

In 2023, the U.S. Department of Justice and the Twin Valley School District entered into a three-year settlement that aimed to prevent further harassment and improve the district's response to it, according to the agreement. The department also had "concerns that students had experienced serious and persistent harassment based on sex, including based on sexual orientation and sex stereotypes, that were not sufficiently addressed through the actions taken by the District under its policies and procedures," the agreement stated.

The federal justice department ended the terms of the settlement agreement one year early in 2025, citing the district's compliance and improved policies, per reporting by VTDigger.

By that time, Roth was principal in Hinsdale.

'All of our questions were answered'

Superintendent Ryan said the Twin Valley investigation didn't concern him when considering Roth for this role.

"What people go through in the moment when they're working on responding to issues like that requires experience and training," he told The Sentinel in a May interview. "It didn't concern me that she had a learning experience."

Ryan said that, while interviewing Roth, he wanted to understand what she learned from that experience and what she had changed in her own practice to make sure it would not happen again.

“Everybody has experiences where they’ve gone through something and they’re thinking, ‘Maybe I could have done that differently,’ ” he said.

The board’s vote to offer Roth a contract was unanimous, per minutes from a May 15, 2024, nonpublic session.

Vice Chair Kaylah Hemlow, who was also vice chair at the time, said board members were very aware of what had occurred during Roth’s tenure at Twin Valley before they hired her.

“I really didn’t have concerns,” Hemlow said of Roth. “Nobody is perfect. It sounded like she learned a lot from those experiences.”

Board member Kendra Gardner said Roth was upfront about her time at Twin Valley during her interview, and that “all of our questions were answered.”

“I feel that the right choice was made as a parent and a school board member,” she said.

Hemlow said she read news coverage about the Twin Valley complaint, but that it was Ryan who did a more thorough look into the matter. Gardner agreed, noting that the superintendent explained the allegations against Roth to the board, as well as the due process she went through in following the district’s policies and the subsequent settlement agreement.

Both Hemlow and Gardner said they have been impressed with Roth’s time at the Hinsdale school so far.

“I don’t for one second believe, personally or professionally, that she would allow a student to be harmed and let it be swept under the rug,” Gardner said.





Hinsdale Town Hall on July 28 near the Ashuelot River in Hinsdale.

Bailey Stover / Sentinel Staff

Board member Wayne Dingman Jr. declined to answer questions for this article, and instead referred a reporter to Ryan. April Anderson, who was school board chair then and now, and former board member Marc Sprague did not return calls for comment.

‘I am very concerned’

But Roth’s past at Twin Valley did worry some Hinsdale community members.

A spreadsheet, which The Sentinel obtained through a public records request, logged responses from people who met with her when she visited the middle/high school as a finalist for the principal job in May 2024.



Some people were excited about the prospect of Roth leading the school. One person praised her “willingness to speak about previous incidents and how she learned from it.” But another wrote that they were “disappointed she didn’t bring up her being in the national news.”



Another said they were concerned about the Twin Valley case, questioning how

she felt she had grown from that experience and what she would do differently.

“I AM VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE RACIAL SITUATION THAT OCCURRED IN MS. ROTH’S CURRENT SCHOOL,” a third comment in the spreadsheet said.

For Thompson two years later, she said reading about the Twin Valley situation was like looking in a mirror.

“I saw history repeating itself,” she said. “When I was reading it, my heart sank. It was very similar.”

When asked this past May if he was concerned about the similarities between the experience Thompson described and the situation at Twin Valley, Ryan said he did not have enough information about the Twin Valley situation to compare the two.

The full complaint and the settlement agreement are publicly available documents. Statewide news organizations in Vermont and national outlets like the Associated Press, NBC News and Black Entertainment Television ran stories on the situation as well.

Aftermath

Thompson said moving to Hinsdale from Keene last summer has changed her daughter, and she’s now concerned about her mental health.

“Her light has totally dimmed,” Thompson said. “She’s not the same bubbly girl she used to be.”

In the wake of voicing her concerns on Facebook earlier this year, Thompson said she has felt a chilled attitude toward herself and her family in Hinsdale — a town of just over 4,000 people that in 2024 was roughly 98 percent white, according to census data.

As the next school year approaches, Thompson’s daughter is being homeschooled, but leaving the school was just a partial solution, she said. Her family plans to move out of town next month.

“The whole entire community stares at you like you’ve done something wrong,”

she said of the aftermath of speaking up about the alleged racial harassment.

Before the bullying she said her daughter experienced, Thompson said her child was active in extracurricular activities. She enjoyed playing the violin and was on the school’s cheer team.

Now, it’s hard to get her to leave the house, even for a routine trip to Walmart, Thompson said.

“It hurts me,” she said. “All of these outgoing things she used to do, she doesn’t want to do anymore.”

The Sentinel is not identifying Taneeka Thompson’s daughter in this article because she is a minor. The Sentinel is identifying Thompson because she has publicly identified herself online in connection with this situation.



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