



Large Loss Report 2024

The Large Loss Report 2024 summarizes 71 publicly reported major damage awards and settlements of at least \$1 million that affected K-12 schools, colleges, and universities in 2023.

This report provides insights on the liability landscape. Not all claims are as high cost as the awards and settlements in this report. But these claims reflect the challenges United Educators' (UE's) members face, including social inflation and difficult litigation environments that vary geographically.

The report serves as a reminder for educational institutions to consider the three aspects of liability insurance: strategic risk management, education-specific underwriting, and thoughtful claims resolution. A strong foundation leaning on those components can help your institution mitigate risks.

Summaries are drawn solely from published accounts. **Most losses in this report don't involve UE members.**

Most public K-12 schools and public colleges and universities are subject to sunshine laws and their settlements routinely appear in the public domain. Private or independent schools don't typically have the same public reporting requirements. As a result, their settlements don't appear in this report.

Not all topics in the report are subject to UE coverage, but the losses reflect claims trends across our membership.

Losses in this report occurred between Jan. 1, 2023, and Dec. 10, 2023.

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Disclaimer: The summaries herein are provided for the purpose of informing institutions of trends in publicly available data. We provide this report as a service to our members, but the report in no way indicates UE’s assessment of the value of any claim. While some losses included in this report reflect trends UE has seen among our members’ education claims, the topics included aren’t an indication of the scope of UE coverage, nor should the inclusion of a settlement or award in this report be interpreted as reflecting an opinion by UE or our membership of its reasonableness. In addition, some of the loss outcomes may have changed due to the progress of legal proceedings since they were reported. Some losses occurred in prior years but weren’t publicly reported until 2023. Although UE included ransomware as a topic in the prior reports, it was removed this year; we determined it’s a risk but not a liability that has led to settlements and awards.

UE Insights

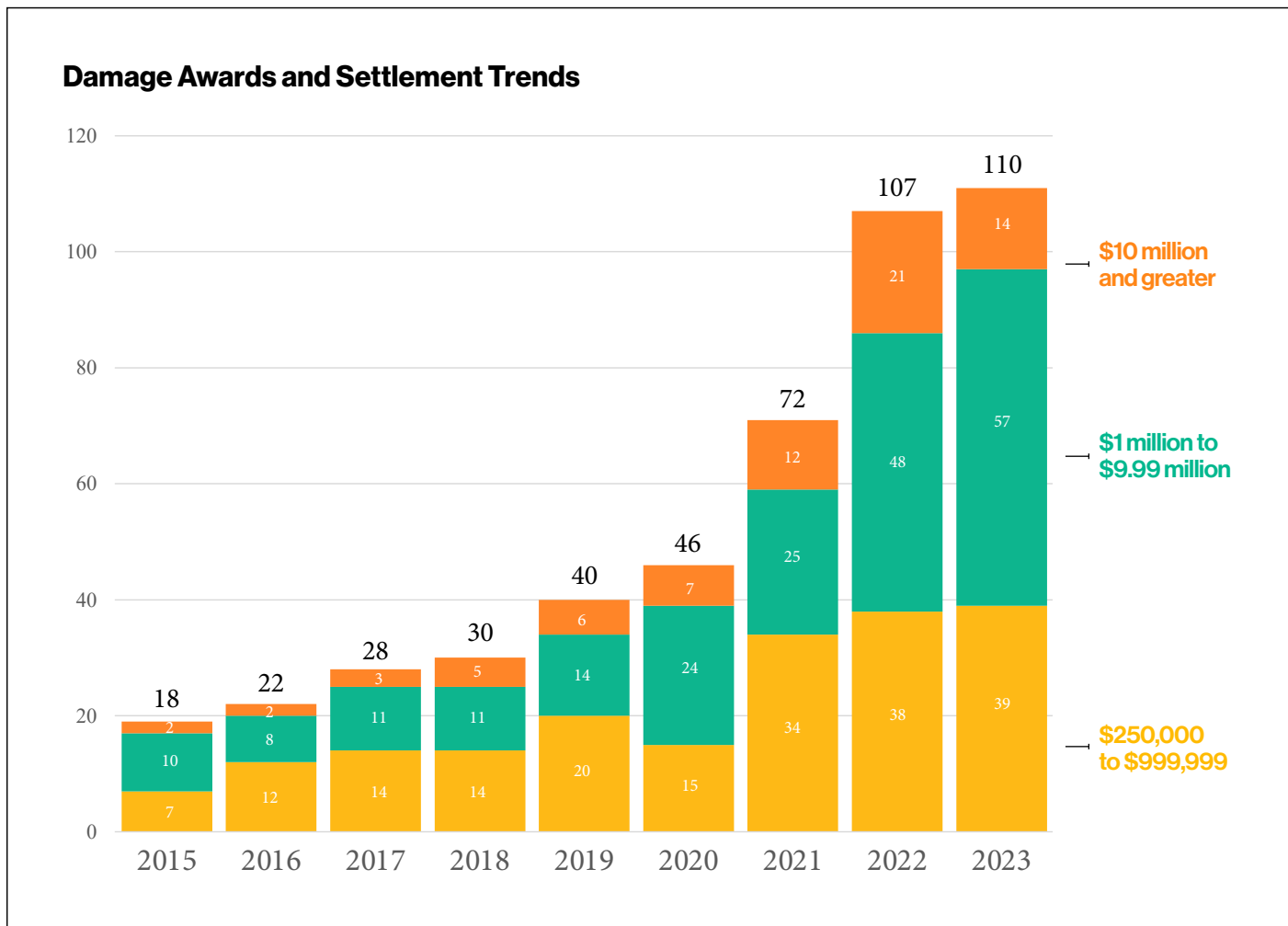
From 2017 to 2022, the average cost doubled for UE primary general liability (CGL) and educators legal liability (ELL) claims. Defense costs are contributing significantly to increasing claims costs along with larger awards and settlements.

K-12 and higher education members experience the types of losses described in this report. Both higher education

institutions and K-12 schools continue to experience losses related to sexual misconduct, accounting for roughly 25% of all claim costs over the past few years. Other top causes of loss for UE claims include discrimination and breach of contract for educators legal liability coverage and slips, trips, and falls; accidents causing injury or damage; and vehicle claims for general liability coverage.

Trends From 2015-23

An analysis of the Large Loss Reports from 2015-23 shows troubling trends for K-12 schools and higher education institutions.

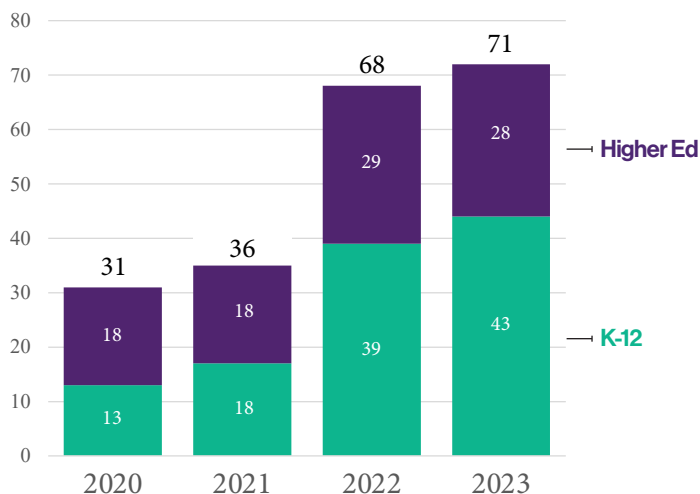


Of the damage awards or settlements this report includes, 71 were for at least \$1 million. That's slightly more than the number of such awards or settlements as in 2022 but significantly more than in 2021. The trend offers a reminder of the ways social inflation impacts education claims, with high escalation of settlements and defense costs.

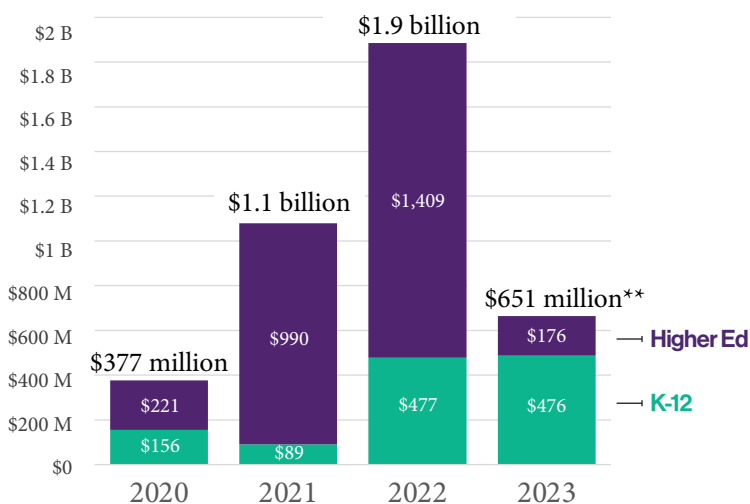
Large Losses Rising at K-12 and Higher Ed Schools

K-12 schools, colleges, and universities are suffering an increasing number of **publicly reported** large losses of at least \$1 million, and those losses are becoming increasingly costly. But a few losses exceeding \$100 million each in 2021 and 2022 made the final loss figure considerably larger than the loss figure in 2023.

Number of Losses



Total Amount of Losses



* This chart was updated from last year's report to exclude ransomware-related losses.

**Higher ed and K-12 losses might not match the total because loss figures are rounded to the nearest million.

Source: 2021-24 Large Loss Reports

Of the publicly reported settlements or awards of at least \$1 million:



22 involved Sexual Misconduct



8 involved Accidents and Crimes Resulting in Death



8 involved Discrimination



8 involved COVID-19

While incidents involving sexual misconduct have been the most common large loss for many years, a different issue has emerged as a major risk in the past few years — discrimination. Discrimination is tied for the second-most common publicly reported settlement or award listed in this year's large loss report.

One additional factor impacting trends and figures is the [shuttering of community newspapers](#) as documented by Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications at Northwestern University. Media historically have followed local court cases and filed Freedom of Information Act requests related to settlements. With fewer local education or court reporters tracking down the proceedings, the figures presented in this report likely underrepresent education losses.

Warning: This report contains references to graphic content related to harm of adults and minors.

Accidents and Crimes Resulting in Death

Paramus school district in Paramus, N.J., reached **\$19.5 million** in settlements with two families of student victims in a bus crash that took the lives of a teacher and student. The family of a 10-year-old who was killed received \$12.5 million and the family of a student who was “severely injured” received \$7 million. The crash occurred in 2018 when the bus driver attempted an illegal U-turn on Route 80, according to reports. The driver admitted he missed an exit and drove the bus sideways across three lanes of traffic to get to an “official use only” crossover before it was struck by a dump truck. In 2019, the driver pleaded guilty to reckless vehicular homicide, assault by auto, and child endangerment; he was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Los Angeles Unified School District must pay **\$15 million** to the family of a 13-year-old boy who collapsed during gym class, wasn’t treated with a defibrillator by school staff, and later died. A jury found the district liable for the student’s 2016 death. The boy was jogging around the school track when he collapsed and gasped for air. Teachers attended to the unresponsive boy and called 911 but didn’t use the defibrillator in the school’s office, according to the complaint. Medical personnel arrived about 10 minutes after the collapse; the boy died two days after being taken to a hospital. While the district provided the school with the defibrillator, it didn’t properly inform staff and teachers about its availability, according to the family’s attorney.

University of the Cumberlands reached a settlement including **“more than \$14 million”** in payments with the family of a men’s wrestling team member who died of exertional heat stroke hours after on-campus workouts in 2020. According to police, coaches refused to provide him help on the first day of conditioning despite his asking for it. In addition to the financial settlement, the university will engage in a heat-illness training project and promote the work being done by the student’s family to raise awareness of heat-related injuries.

Long Beach Unified School District in Long Beach, Calif., reached a **\$13 million** settlement agreement with the family of 18-year-old woman who was shot and killed by a school safety officer. The officer was captured on video shooting into a car in which the woman was a passenger. The officer shot at the car, which had been parked, when it drove away.



The district’s use of force policy prohibits officers from shooting into a moving vehicle or shooting at fleeing people. In the lawsuit, the woman’s mother alleged the officer couldn’t get past probation with the Los Alamitos and Sierra Madre police departments, but the district still hired him and then further failed by negligently training him. The safety officer has pleaded not guilty and is awaiting trial for second-degree murder. An attorney for the safety officer said the officer feared for his life and acted in self-defense.

University of Utah will pay a \$5 million settlement to the parents of a murdered international student from China. The settlement calls for the university to establish a memorial on campus for the student, who was killed in February 2022. In the settlement, the university “acknowledges shortcomings in the response and of its housing and residential education team to the complex situation that resulted in Zhifan Dong’s death and acknowledges the terrible loss that the Dong Family has suffered.” The Dongs acknowledge the university’s continued efforts to identify ways to improve training for responding to safety risks. Zhifan Dong allegedly was killed by an abusive boyfriend, Haoyu Wang, with whom she’d broken up and against whom she had gotten a restraining order. She and her roommate had complained to campus housing staff about harassment and threats from Wang. She told campus housing officials he hit her when she broke up with him and that she worried he would harm her. But officials didn’t call campus police until about a month after Dong’s first report. Employees in the dorms and elsewhere repeatedly mixed up the name of Dong and Wang, and repeatedly called the number of another student with the same name as the man Dong was reporting. Wang faces charges in connection with her death and is in jail. He hasn’t been declared competent to stand trial.

Vallejo City Unified School District in Vallejo, Calif., reached a **\$5 million** settlement agreement with the family of a teenager who died following seizures suffered when he was allowed to wander away from a supervised special needs program. The student had several medical issues including encephalopathy, epilepsy, and diminished executive functioning, according to a lawsuit. In September 2021 he wandered off campus during school hours and suffered seizures that went unnoticed and caused his death two days later. The student's family contended the district was negligent.

Millersville University paid a **\$1.5 million** settlement in a wrongful death lawsuit filed by the family of a freshman who was killed in her dorm room by her boyfriend in 2015. The family said the university could have prevented her death if officials had acted to address her boyfriend's prior acts of violence. Millersville didn't admit liability as part of the settlement, but it agreed to implement or continue efforts to educate students on recognizing and addressing sexual misconduct. In 2016, the woman's boyfriend was found guilty of third-degree murder.

Papillion La Vista school board in Papillion, Neb., will pay **\$1 million** to the family of an eighth grader who died after eating a granola bar a teacher gave him. The boy's father posted online that a teacher offered the child a granola bar after the child asked to go to the office for a snack. The father didn't detail the child's allergies or say if the school was aware of the allergies, but he said the child went to the school nurse's office and was given Benadryl. When Benadryl didn't help, the nurse gave the child an epinephrine shot with an EpiPen, according to reports. The child died after being taken to the hospital.

Breach of Fiduciary Duties

Education Corporation of America (ECA) will pay a **\$28 million** settlement related to the sudden closure of its chain of for-profit colleges in 2018. The closures included Brightwood College, Brightwood Career Institute, and Virginia College. The plaintiffs claimed ECA breached its fiduciary duties by leaving more than 20,000 students without a degree pathway. Three former ECA officials were named in the settlement.

Bullying

Moreno Valley Unified School District in Moreno Valley, Calif., reached a **\$27 million** settlement with the legal guardians of a 13-year-old boy who was fatally attacked at school. Attorneys representing the family say this is "the largest bullying settlement in the United States." In the incident, a middle school student was punched in the head by two other male students. He fell and hit his head on a concrete pillar, causing a brain injury that led to his death days later, according to a lawsuit filed in 2020. The two teenage boys who struck the student admitted to charges of involuntary manslaughter, spent 47 days in custody, then were released on probation. The complaint alleged that school administrators disregarded warnings that the student was being bullied. According to the lawsuit, bullies previously punched the boy in the head and he sought help from a science teacher. When reporting the incident to the Assistant Principal, the teacher noted it likely was captured on video. The Assistant Principal didn't check the video footage. Despite telling the boy that the bullies would be suspended for three days, and their schedules would be changed so they would no longer be in the same class, the bullies remained in school, the suit states. Following the settlement, the district's Board of Education voted to fire the Superintendent.



Rockaway School District in Rockaway, N.J., reached a **\$9.1 million** settlement related to a cyberbullying lawsuit following the death of a 12-year-old girl. The girl's family said she died by suicide in 2017 after being bullied for a year. The family filed a lawsuit against the district and individual school officials, contending they failed to protect their daughter. When the lawsuit was filed, the district said the allegation that it ignored the family and failed to address bullying was false. The settlement is the largest related to a bullying case in New Jersey history. The child's death also led to the passage of Mallory's Law, which strengthened the state's bullying laws.

The town of Greenwich in Greenwich, Conn., reached a **\$5 million** settlement with the estate of a 15-year-old boy who killed himself after being bullied in public school from 2009-13. The student reportedly was kicked, punched, pushed down stairs, pelted with trash, and called names, according to the lawsuit. In middle school, administrators, teachers, and counselors were aware of the bullying, and the bullying was reported to the student's high school. In November 2012, a high school counselor notified all his teachers about the history of bullying. He took his own life in August 2013. His parents sued the town, alleging the school didn't investigate reported bullying allegations or discipline his alleged bullies.

Davis School District in Farmington, Utah, reached a **\$2 million** settlement agreement with the family of a 10-year-old girl who died by suicide in 2021. The fifth grader's family said the child's school and the district were responsible

for events leading to her death. The child's mother said there had been several bullying episodes targeting the child, who had autism and was the only Black student in her class. The family said the child was teased about her skin color, her eyebrows, and a beauty mark on her forehead. Before the suicide, the district agreed to act to address widespread racial harassment discovered by a Department of Justice investigation; the department determined the district persistently failed to respond to reports of race-based harassment. After the suicide, an independent investigation found reports of bullying but no direct evidence the bullying was based on the child's race or disability.

COVID-19

Eight colleges or universities will pay settlements ranging from \$1 million to \$8.9 million related to charges during 2020, when classes were disrupted by the COVID pandemic. In the settlements, the universities (**University of New Haven; Point Park University; University of La Verne; University of Delaware; University of Colorado; University of Minnesota; Cornell University; and Molloy University**) were accused of overcharging students. For example, the University of La Verne agreed to pay \$8.9 million to resolve claims seeking tuition and fee refunds following COVID-19-related closures. Eligible students may receive cash payments based on how much they paid in tuition for the spring 2020 semester.



Cybersecurity

Marymount Manhattan College reached a **\$1.3 million** settlement resolving claims it failed to prevent a 2021 data breach that compromised sensitive student, parent, and employee information. The settlement benefits people who received a notice from the college telling them their personal information was compromised in the breach.

Defamation

Sequim School District in Sequim, Wash., will pay **\$1 million** and its former Superintendent will pay \$500,000 to settle lawsuits a former Student Support Specialist filed against them, according to reports. The lawsuits alleged the former Superintendent destroyed the former employee's professional and personal reputation by discussing a "scurrilous rumor" that she had an affair with her predecessor. The former Student Support Specialist said the former Superintendent was investigating her complaints against a former middle school Principal — allegations of discrimination and harassment on the part of a special needs student — when the Superintendent spoke about the rumored affair with her supervisor and family members. In a court brief, she said that the actions devastated her life, her marriage collapsed, she was left in financial distress and mass debt, and she was hospitalized four times in 2022 due to her mental health symptoms. In a statement, the district's current Superintendent noted the district doesn't agree with the former employee's "position on a number of issues."

Discrimination

St. Louis Public Schools will pay more than **\$6 million** in damages to a former high school counselor who said the district and a Principal committed gender and age discrimination and retaliation against him. When the former counselor was fired in 2017, he was the school's oldest and only male counselor. According to a firm representing him, he had received positive reviews for most of his tenure. But the Principal, who came to the school about four years before the counselor was fired, favored younger women and "frequently demeaned, belittled and yelled" at him, according to the lawsuit. The counselor's request for a transfer was blocked, and the district approved

firing him based on the Principal's recommendation. The counselor was replaced with a younger, less experienced female counselor, according to the lawsuit. A jury determined the district should pay \$5.2 million in punitive damages. It also awarded him nearly \$250,000 in compensatory damages on his retaliation claim and more than \$700,000 in compensatory damages on his claim of gender discrimination. The jury found for the district on his claim of age discrimination. A district spokesperson said the district was considering appealing.

University of Iowa will pay **\$4.2 million** to settle a racial discrimination lawsuit filed by former football players. The players sued the football program and coaches in November 2020 after accusations of racism on social media and years of internal and external investigations into allegations. The players alleged coaches created a racially hostile environment, using derogatory terms and discriminating against players. The settlement was reached not long after a federal court allowed the lawsuit's individual defendants, which included the Athletics Director, head coach, and other coaches, to be excused from the lawsuit, leaving the university and Board of Regents as the sole remaining defendants. The State Appeal Board allowed the settlement amount despite opposition from school coaches and the state auditor. After an uproar when it was announced that taxpayer funds would cover \$2 million of the settlement, the university's President announced the university would pay the full settlement amount.

Clover Park School District Board in Lakewood, Wash., reached a **\$2.5 million** settlement with a former Assistant Superintendent who alleged officials discriminated against her after a head injury and demoted her through a series of unnecessary organizational changes following her complaints of harassment. After the district's Board of Directors voted to approve the settlement with her, she agreed to go on paid administrative leave and resign effective at the end of September 2023.

Brandeis University must pay **\$2.46 million** to a former administrator who said she faced racial discrimination and suffered retaliation at the hands of school officials. A jury awarded the administrator the money following a seven-day trial. The administrator made the accusations against Brandeis after a scandal over the handling of complaints against a basketball coach, who was later fired. The award includes \$1.5 million in punitive damages, \$650,000 in emotional distress, and \$310,000 in lost wages.

North Syracuse Central School District in North Syracuse, N.Y., reached a **\$1.55 million** settlement with the family of an autistic child. The family claimed the district didn't provide the child with a proper education and denied him autism-related services. The parents also said teachers improperly strapped the child to a chair in school instead of having proper staffing to monitor and educate him.

Newark Public Schools in Newark, N.J., and an unidentified man and woman — John and Jane Doe — must pay **\$1.3 million** in compensatory and punitive damages to two white educators who contended they were denied vice principal jobs at high schools because of their age and race. They argued the jobs were given to younger people of color who were less qualified and less experienced. A jury awarded the money to the educators in the decade-old reverse discrimination case. The lawsuit charged that Newark Public Schools and John and Jane Doe “engaged in a continuing pattern and practice of disparate treatment and discrimination against older and/or Caucasian employees, including but not limited to denying them promotions and subjecting them to demotions or terminations,” thus violating the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination.

South Tama County Community School District in Tama, Iowa, reached **\$1.17 million** in settlements with three former employees who filed age discrimination lawsuits against the district and its former Superintendent. The lawsuits were related to their termination or non-renewal of employment. As part of the settlements, the ex-employees aren't eligible to be rehired. The district doesn't admit violating local, state, or federal law and “expressly denies any such violation,” according to the settlements.

Texas A&M University reached a **\$1 million** settlement with a Black journalism professor who wasn't hired because of her prior work promoting diversity. The university apologized, admitting “mistakes were made” during her hiring process. The university initially welcomed Kathleen McElroy — a former *New York Times* editor and Texas A&M alum — who had led the journalism school at the University of Texas. But she contended pushback arose related to her prior work to improve diversity and inclusion in newsrooms. She said an initial offer of a tenure-track position was reduced to a five-year post before dropping to a one-year position from which she could be fired at any time. She rejected that offer.



Due Process

University of New Orleans must pay two tenured geography professors about **\$1.29 million** after they alleged the university violated their due process rights in gutting the Geography department. A trial court agreed on liability. A verdict resulted in \$772,000 being awarded to one professor and \$515,000 to the other.

False Advertising, Misrepresentation, and Unfair Competition

Mills College at Northeastern University reached a **\$1.25 million** settlement with former students who said they were misled, and forced to spend more money on education, when Mills merged with Northeastern. Mills was an all-women's school that ended its 170-year history after merging with coed Northeastern University in 2022. Officials said the merger would help students, who could complete their studies at no extra cost. But the more than 400 students in the class-action suit said Mills didn't tell them it would offer its final degrees in 2022, not 2023, and that the new Mills College at Northeastern University would eliminate many of its prior degree programs. Students said they missed deadlines to transfer elsewhere, which delayed their academic progress and cost them thousands of dollars.

First Amendment

The **Bremerton school board** in Bremerton, Wash., will pay a **\$1.7 million** settlement to a high school football coach who lost his job after leading students in midfield prayers after games. As part of the settlement, the coach also would get his job back for the next season. In June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision holding that the coach's prayer groups were protected by the First Amendment. The coach began praying alone at the 50-yard line after games; eventually, students and players joined him. The coach began making religious references during talks, and the district asked him to stop and eventually suspended him. His contract wasn't renewed, according to reports. In 2023, after regaining his job, the coach resigned after one game, saying he planned to focus on working for religious liberty.

Hazing

Kingfisher School District in Kingfisher, Okla., reached a **\$5 million** settlement with a former high school football player who had filed a federal hazing lawsuit against his school. The player said he had suffered years of abuse under one head coach; he described wet towel beatings and coach-sanctioned locker room fights. The district's Superintendent told the media that the "risk to our school system and to our patrons was too great to gamble on a jury trial that our attorneys just did not think we could win." The coach is on administrative leave pending the outcome of a felony charge of child neglect. The district didn't admit liability as part of the settlement.



Bowling Green State University reached a **\$2.9 million** settlement with the family of a 20-year-old student who died in 2021 after a hazing incident. During an off-campus initiation event, a sophomore pledging the Pi Alpha Kappa fraternity drank a liter of bourbon and died days later of alcohol poisoning. The student's family filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the university, contending Bowling Green knew its fraternities engaged in hazing rituals but didn't stop them. One Pi Alpha Kappa was found not guilty of involuntary manslaughter, reckless homicide, and tampering with evidence, but was found guilty of eight counts of hazing and seven counts of failure to comply, according to his attorney. Another was found not guilty of two counts of involuntary manslaughter, reckless homicide, and felonious assault, but was convicted of obstruction of official business, hazing, and failure to comply, according to his attorney. The settlement is the largest by a public university in a hazing case in Ohio's history, according to the lawyer for the family. As part of the settlement, Bowling Green agreed to partner with the family to work to end hazing.

Intellectual Property

Binghamton University paid a former Dean **\$1.5 million** after a judge ruled the university had refused to return his equipment and other materials. The former Dean accused Binghamton of stealing equipment, supplies, and research notes he had brought with him to the university. The judge questioned the credibility of administrators' testimony and criticized them for not letting the former Dean visit his offices to get documents that could help prove he owned the equipment. The settlement — which occurred before the start of a damages trial — only covers a fraction of the overall worth of the former Dean's lost intellectual property, he said.

Other Losses

University of California, San Diego must pay more than **\$39 million** to a former university doctor who alleged the university tried redirecting a \$10 million gift for his research into a general gift to a cancer center and that the university retaliated against him when he spoke up. The university didn't renew his contract in 2020. He sued the UC Board of Regents, alleging whistleblower retaliation occurred. A university spokesperson declined to comment.

Pacific University must pay about **\$4 million** to a student who accused the school of improperly handling sexual allegations against him. A jury reached a verdict against the university. In the incident, a student was accused of sexual assault in 2020 and was suspended. The student settled with his accuser but sued the university, contending it improperly suspended and expelled him. The jury sided with the university on all other counts, finding Pacific didn't violate Title IX. The two claims the jury sided with the student on were that Pacific breached the "implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing" and that Pacific inflicted emotional distress on him.

University of Connecticut will pay a **\$1.4 million** settlement to a former professor who resigned in 2019 — a day before she was to be fired after allegedly not disclosing financial affiliations with Wenzhou Medical University and the National Natural Science Foundation of China, according to reports. The settlement was reached after an American Arbitration Association arbitrator issued a decision requiring the university to reinstate the former professor and provide back pay. The arbitrator's decision concluded the former professor didn't falsify records or provide false information, and that the only offenses she committed related to citations on grants suggesting she was the principal investigator.

Physical Abuse

Clark County School District in Las Vegas reached a **\$9.95 million** settlement with parents who alleged a teacher hit their autistic child with a stick. The child was 5 at the time of the alleged incident. The child's parents filed a lawsuit in 2019 against the district and their child's former teacher. The teacher was arrested in 2018 and initially charged with felony child abuse, through it was reduced to a misdemeanor count of disorderly conduct and dismissed after she completed anger management counseling.

Clark County School District Board of Trustees in Las Vegas reached a **\$2 million** settlement after a teacher was accused of abusing a child with autism. The child's mother said he was 3 years old and non-verbal when he came home from school with injuries. She sued the district, alleging negligence and misconduct in providing proper care for her child.

Newark Public Schools in Newark, N.J., reached a **\$1.2 million** settlement of a lawsuit contending that on at least two occasions, a paraprofessional assaulted a 7-year-old boy with autism. According to the lawsuit, in one of the alleged incidents, the paraprofessional dragged the boy, pushed him down the stairs, grabbed him, and pushed him to the floor. Police say that at a medical center, officers saw bruises on the boy's chin, back, and arms, and the boy's tooth was bleeding. The paraprofessional was charged with two counts of aggravated assault and two counts of endangering the welfare of a child, according to the county's prosecutor's office.

Price-Fixing

University of Chicago reached a **\$13.5 million** settlement related to allegations that it conspired with other top universities to limit financial aid awarded to students. A class action lawsuit that involved the university and other schools alleged they broke antitrust laws by illegally considering financial need in admissions while also fixing the price of student aid, thereby limiting competition and the overall amount the schools awarded to those students. The University of Chicago maintains the plaintiffs' claims are without merit and said it looks "forward to putting this matter behind us." A judge must approve the proposed settlement.



Retaliation

University of Pennsylvania must pay nearly **\$1.4 million** in compensatory damages, back pay, front pay, interest, and a tax offset, to a former architecture professor who accused the university of retaliation. While a jury felt the university retaliated by denying a re-review of her tenure application, the jury determined Penn didn't discriminate against her gender or parental status — which the former professor had alleged.

Retirement Plans

University of Southern California agreed to pay a **\$13.05 million** settlement to nine current and former participants in two university retirement plans who contended the plans' high fees and duplication of services violated the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA). The legal battle with the university and participants in the plans began in August 2016. The university denies wrongdoing and claims asserted in the class action lawsuit.

Sexual Misconduct

Moreno Valley Unified School District in Moreno Valley, Calif., must pay **\$121.5 million** following a jury award to two former students who were sexually assaulted by a middle school teacher about 30 years ago. The sexual abuse continued from when the students were in middle school through their sophomore year in high school; they reported the abuse to the sheriff's department when they were 17. The teacher was convicted in 2006 on multiple counts of child molestation and received a 52-year sentence. They sued the district for negligence after a law passed in 2020 that allowed survivors of child sexual abuse to pursue civil actions. They argued the teacher previously faced child molestation charges and district officials knew — or should have known — he was a threat to students. In October 2023, a jury found the district 90% at fault and the teacher 10% at fault. The total verdict was \$135 million. A district spokesperson said the verdict was “unprecedented” and the district “is weighing its options moving forward.”



Sacramento City Unified School District in Sacramento, Calif., and the city of Sacramento combined to reach roughly **\$52 million** in settlements following allegations of negligence by officials who ignored repeated warning signs about the behavior of an after-school aide who was a sexual predator. The aide groomed and abused at least eight elementary school children in a classroom. The children were as young as 7. Settlement agreements in May 2023 included a payout of \$40 million to five victims, with the city paying about 60% of the settlement amount and the district paying the rest. A prior settlement agreement with a sixth victim led to a \$12.5 million payout. The aide, Joshua Vasquez, pleaded guilty in 2016 and was sentenced to 150 years to life in prison.

Miracle Meadows School, a now-closed boarding school for troubled youths in Salem, W.Va., was at the heart of a **\$50 million** settlement involving widespread sexual, mental, and physical abuse. The lawsuit, which involved 32 plaintiffs and named the school's operating entities and its co-founder, alleged students (who are now adults) were chained and shackled to beds and kept in small isolation rooms for long periods. According to the lawsuit, students were routinely beaten, sexually assaulted, starved, and forced to perform manual labor. An earlier lawsuit filed on behalf of 29 Miracle Meadows students was settled in 2020 for \$52 million. After the first settlement, the state's legislature increased the statute of limitations for abuse claims to age 36; that prompted the second lawsuit, according to attorneys representing the plaintiffs.

Los Angeles Unified School District reached **\$15.1 million** in total settlements with four former students at a charter high school who alleged they were groomed and sexually abused between the mid-1990s and 2009. In one of the settlements, a woman said when she was a teenager, a now-deceased male teacher and his female colleague manipulated her into a sexual relationship. She alleged the two adults were in an extramarital affair and groomed her for years; during her senior year, the male teacher sexually abused her and later both did. According to court records, while the female teacher denied abusing the girl, she said the girl came to her house in May 2001 so they could have a “healing ceremony” due to the woman having had a mastectomy. During the ceremony, the female teacher said, candles and incense were lit and the girl painted the teacher’s bare chest. A fifth lawsuit involving the charter school remains unresolved. That alleged victim said she was abused by a different teacher who was convicted in 2009 of misdemeanor statutory rape. According to the lawsuit, the same teenager was also sexually abused by another teacher in spring 2007.

Cold Spring Harbor Central School District in Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y., agreed to pay **\$14 million** to settle two lawsuits from students who said teachers sexually abused them in the late 1970s and early 1980s. One student will receive \$8 million; the other will get \$6 million. The students were able to report the incidents as the result of the 2019 Child Victims Act, which extended the deadline for when sexual abuse lawsuits could be filed. Both accused teachers are no longer alive. The district’s Superintendent said the district has funds to make initial payments but needs to finance the remaining \$7.2 million — which would lead to a community vote on whether to liquidate a capital reserve.

Montgomery County Public Schools in Rockville, Md., reached a **\$9.7 million settlement** with families of four former high school football players who said the students were sexually assaulted by teammates wielding broomsticks in the locker room in 2017 and 2018. The incidents led to criminal charges against four of their teammates on charges of rape and attempted rape. An attorney for a student allegedly assaulted in 2017 said that incident was reported to the school’s Principal and should have served as a warning about the dangers. That attorney said the settlement shows the school system “turned a blind eye to their legal duty to properly protect their own students.” While the system

denied liability as part of the settlement, a spokesperson told the media the system has “taken extensive measures to prevent such incidents from happening in the future.”

University Place School District in University Place, Wash., will pay a **\$9.5 million** settlement to three former students who say they were sexually abused by a volunteer wrestling coach between 2005 and 2007 during an off-campus conditioning and weightlifting program the coach developed. The students were 14 to 16 years old at the time. One of the former students reported the abuse to police in 2014 but was told at the time the criminal statute of limitations had expired. An attorney representing the students said evidence shows the coach “was found guilty in 1977 of sexually abusing five children” elsewhere and the district didn’t flag that criminal history in its screening and hiring process.

Clark County School District in Las Vegas reached a **\$9 million** settlement agreement with the family of a student who was sexually abused by a bus driver. The district’s Board of Trustees unanimously approved the settlement. The driver is serving 35 years to life in prison for molesting students with special needs; he pleaded guilty in 2018 to molesting students who were 3 and 4 years old at that time.

Cheektowaga Maryvale Union Free School District in Cheektowaga, N.Y., reached **\$8.4 million** in settlements involving five Child Victims Act lawsuits; the former students alleged they were sexually abused in the 1970s by an elementary school music teacher. The largest settlement — \$3.5 million — went to a 60-year-old man who alleged he was repeatedly molested by the teacher. In 1980, the former teacher killed himself at age 34.

New Mexico State University reached an **\$8 million** settlement involving two basketball players who said teammates sexually assaulted them multiple times. One of the players said that after seeing a teammate get assaulted, he asked a coach for help and the coached laughed and asked, “What do you want me to do about it?” One of the players ultimately spoke with campus police, which led to the cancellation of the 2022-23 season and a coach being fired. In the settlement, the university’s Board of Regents didn’t admit liability. An attorney for one of the players said the settlement occurred partly to protect the claimants from having to relive their experiences during a prolonged legal dispute.

Sumner-Bonney Lake School District in Sumner, Wash., reached a **\$7.6 million** settlement with a family that accused the district of failing to protect a 17-year-old high school student — who has a disability that limits her cognitive and adaptive skills — from being sexually assaulted by another student. A 15-year-old student from the developmental learning center coaxed her into a bathroom and sexually assaulted her, according to a lawsuit. After another student walked in and reported the incident to school staff, police and the Principal questioned the girl and the 15-year-old. The girl was evaluated at a hospital while the boy was placed on a two-week disciplinary suspension. The lawsuit said the girl’s legal guardian was assured the girl would have adult supervision when she left the center, but on the day of the incident, the girl only was supervised in the morning. Court documents alleged video the district provided of the bathroom had “significant lapses in time.” The girl’s attorney said by law, the district is supposed to keep all video surveillance footage when litigation is anticipated. Court documents also alleged the district didn’t follow procedures on recognizing and preventing sexual assault listed in its policy. A district spokesperson declined to comment beyond saying student safety and education are the district’s top priorities.

Harborfields school board in Greenlawn, N.Y., authorized a **\$7.3 million** settlement of two lawsuits in which two former students said they were sexually abused by the same music teacher in the 1970s.

Los Angeles Unified School District reached a **\$6.5 million** settlement with a former student who sued the district and two of its administrators, saying they’d failed to report a science teacher who had molested the student. The former student filed a lawsuit about 16 years after she allegedly was molested, abused, and raped by her school mentor. The student reported the alleged abuse to the administrators. They later were convicted of violating a state law requiring school administrators to report any reasonable suspicion of child abuse. Despite facing criticism from prosecutors, the administrators were allowed to return to their school and eventually were promoted within the district, the lawsuit stated.

Pittston Area School District in Pittston, Pa., will pay a total of **\$6 million** in settlement money to four victims of sexual abuse. In 2018, a former teacher was arrested on sexual assault charges; he later was found guilty and sentenced to up to 14 years in prison.

New Hanover County Board of Education in Wilmington, N.C., reached a **\$5.75 million** settlement to resolve claims from 14 men related to sexual abuse and exploitation committed by a former teacher and convicted felon. The teacher pled guilty in 2019 to 59 felony sex crimes. The settlement includes, among other things, commitments for expanded training for staff, administrators, and students on sexual abuse and recognizing and reporting such abuse. The board’s chairperson said the board has worked for the past several years to improve policies, provide training, and expand its Title IX department.

Redlands Unified School District in Redlands, Calif., reached two separate settlements totaling **\$4.15 million** related to sexual abuse. One of the settlements in 2023 — for \$2.25 million — involved teacher Laura Whitehurst, who became pregnant by one of at least two students she was accused of sexually abusing. The district has paid \$8.25 million in settlement to that teacher’s victims since her 2013 arrest, according to reports. In the most recent lawsuit involving that teacher, a student said he was preyed upon and sexually abused in 2007 and 2008 when he was 14, according to the plaintiff’s attorney. The teacher told police in 2013 that she had sex with the youth 10 to 15 times in her apartment and classroom. The teacher pled guilty to unlawful sex with three former students, served six months in jail, and registered as a sex offender. The other Redlands settlement in 2023 was for \$1.9 million. That incident involved Sean Ramiro Lopez, a former middle school teacher who is serving a 74-year prison sentence for abusing students in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The victim claimed the teacher sexually abused him and showed him pornography when the victim was 13. One California-based law firm said thus far it has collected \$12.9 million from the district on behalf of the former teacher’s victims — and that an additional \$30.2 million has been received from the district in other lawsuits following a sex abuse scandal uncovered during a yearlong Southern California News Group investigation. The victim’s firm also announced the filing of another lawsuit against the district on behalf of another former student alleging he was sexually abused by the teacher. That lawsuit alleges school and district officials were aware of complaints about Lopez’s conduct but failed to act.

Tahoma School District in Maple Valley, Wash., reached a **\$3.9 million** settlement in sexual abuse lawsuit after admitting it was negligent in continuing to employ a former paraeducator after reports that he allegedly sexually abused

students. One student allegedly was abused between 2018 and 2020, when the student was between ages 5 and 7. The former paraeducator is facing child rape and molestation charges involving three boys, and first-degree rape charges involving a fourth child. The district has acknowledged it didn't take steps to keep the student safe from the paraeducator, an attorney representing the student said.

Sonora Union High School District in Sonora, Calif., will pay a **\$3.5 million** settlement to a former student-athlete who sued the district related to sexual abuse from the varsity basketball coach. The lawsuit was filed after the coach pleaded guilty in 2020 to sexually abusing the former student-athlete several times while she played on the team from 2011-15. The former coach was sentenced to two years and eight months in prison.

Springboro School District in Springboro, Ohio., reached a **\$3.5 million** total settlement with parents of 32 students who allegedly were sexually abused by a gym teacher. Nearly every student received a roughly \$110,000 settlement. The settlement doesn't release the former gym teacher from civil claims. He was convicted in 2020 of more than 30 counts of gross sexual imposition, involving 27 victims who were in first grade when the incidents occurred. He was sentenced to eight years in prison and designated as a Tier II sexual offender.

Augustinian Catholic religious order and the New Lenox, Ill., Catholic high school it runs that the **Diocese of Joliet** owns reached a **\$2 million** settlement with a man who accused a priest of raping him when he was a high school student in the 1990s. Church officials didn't admit wrongdoing.

Brighton Central School District in Rochester, N.Y., reached a **\$1.75 million** settlement with a former student who alleged a teacher sexually abused her more than 30 years ago. She said the district ignored warning signs the teacher was sexually inappropriate with her and other female students. The lawsuit was filed under the New York State Child Victims Act. The settlement occurred in late 2022 but was reported in early 2023. In a statement, the district said nobody of issue has worked for the district for 25 or more years.

San Diego Unified School District paid a total of **\$1.5 million** to five former high school students who said their physics teacher groped them at school when they were 16- and 17-year-old students. A lawsuit alleged the school's then-Principal and the district were aware of these accusations but let the teacher keep teaching. The settlement agreement

also requires the district to update its handling of sexual abuse allegations and mandating sexual abuse and misconduct training for all managerial staff members and administrators.

Suicide

Bainbridge Island School District in Bainbridge Island, Wash., agreed to a **\$1.325 million** settlement with a family whose 15-year-old daughter killed herself in a wooded area at the end of school property in 2017. The family contended the district disregarded a substantial risk of harm because the girl previously attempted suicide, which resulted in inpatient hospitalization. An attorney representing the family in 2020 noted that a counselor emailed teachers after receiving information from a social media post hinting that the girl was suicidal — and that it was recommended that school officials watch the girl until her parents picked her up. Counselors later stated the girl seemed happy with peers at lunch. But the attorney wrote that a video shows the girl walking out of school with no one else in the picture until she left the frame. The district expressly denied liability. While the settlement occurred in 2020, it wasn't publicly reported until 2023.

Whistleblowers

Linfield University will pay more than **\$1 million** following a settlement with a tenured professor who was fired after speaking out against the university's Board of Trustees and President about alleged sexual misconduct and antisemitism. The professor alleged unlawful whistleblower retaliation had occurred. The professor had stated on Twitter that he'd dealt with antisemitism and retaliation from board members — after he had pressed them to do more to prevent sexual misconduct. According to media reports, four board members were accused of sexual misconduct by several students and a faculty member, and three of those trustees remain on the board. The university didn't admit fault in the settlement.

Wrongful Termination

Forest Hills School District in Cincinnati reached a **\$1.85 million** settlement with a construction company. The company contended it was wrongfully fired from a project at a high school. The company said the district's failure to pay caused the company to lay off a third of its employees.

Risk Management Resources

UE member institutions can draw upon our deep library of education-specific risk management resources, online learning, claims studies, and webinars as well as our team of risk consultants to learn strategies to reduce risk and conduct enterprise risk management (ERM) activities. Our consultants are here to assist in providing personalized risk management guidance. Contact us at risk@ue.org if there's anything we can do to help with your risk management concerns or ERM preparation.

Rising Cost of Claims

UE's data shows that claim defense and settlement costs continue to rise for K-12 schools, colleges, and universities. Social inflation — the increase in insurer costs above general economic inflation — as reflected in this report can have a significant impact on the cost of defense, as matters become more difficult to resolve for reasonable amounts, increasing the overall cost of claims.

The main factors driving social inflation include institutional mistrust, a changing litigation environment, and increased legislative risk.

View these resources to learn more:

[Steps to Combat Social Inflation](#)

[The Rising Cost of Claims: By the Numbers](#)

[Social Inflation: What It Is and Why It Matters](#)



To learn more, please visit www.ue.org or call **(301) 907-4908**.

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Appendix: Higher Education Claims by Category

Liability Topic	School Name	Amount	Page
Accidents and Crimes Resulting in Death	Millersville University	\$1,500,000	6
Accidents and Crimes Resulting in Death	University of the Cumberland	\$14,000,000	5
Accidents and Crimes Resulting in Death	University of Utah	\$5,000,000	5
Breach of Fiduciary Duties	Education Corporation of America (ECA)	\$28,000,000	6
COVID-19	Cornell University	\$3,000,000	7
COVID-19	Molloy University	\$1,500,000	7
COVID-19	Point Park University	\$1,250,000	7
COVID-19	University of Colorado	\$5,000,000	7
COVID-19	University of Delaware	\$6,300,000	7
COVID-19	University of La Verne	\$8,900,000	7
COVID-19	University of Minnesota	\$3,000,000	7
COVID-19	University of New Haven	\$1,000,000	7
Cybersecurity	Marymount Manhattan College	\$1,300,000	8
Discrimination	Brandeis University	\$2,460,000	8
Discrimination	Texas A&M University	\$1,000,000	9
Discrimination	University of Iowa	\$4,200,000	8
Due Process	University of New Orleans	\$1,290,000	9
False Advertising, Misrepresentation, and Unfair Competition	Mills College at Northeastern University	\$1,250,000	9
Hazing	Bowling Green State University	\$2,900,000	10
Intellectual Property	Binghamton University	\$1,500,000	10
Other Losses	Pacific University	\$4,000,000	11
Other Losses	University of California, San Diego	\$39,000,000	10
Other Losses	University of Connecticut	\$1,400,000	11
Price-Fixing	University of Chicago	\$13,500,000	11
Retaliation	University of Pennsylvania	\$1,400,000	12
Retirement Plans	University of Southern California	\$13,050,000	12
Sexual Misconduct	New Mexico State University	\$8,000,000	13
Whistleblowers	Linfield University	\$1,000,000	15
		\$175,700,000	

Appendix: K-12 Claims by Category

Liability Topic	School Name	Amount	Page
Accidents and Crimes Resulting in Death	Long Beach Unified School District	\$13,000,000	5
Accidents and Crimes Resulting in Death	Los Angeles Unified School District	\$15,000,000	5
Accidents and Crimes Resulting in Death	Papillion La Vista school board	\$1,000,000	6
Accidents and Crimes Resulting in Death	Paramus school district	\$19,500,000	5
Accidents and Crimes Resulting in Death	Vallejo City Unified School District	\$5,000,000	6
Bullying	Davis School District	\$2,000,000	7
Bullying	Moreno Valley Unified School District	\$27,000,000	6
Bullying	Rockaway School District	\$9,100,000	7
Bullying	Town of Greenwich	\$5,000,000	7
Defamation	Sequim School District	\$1,000,000	8
Discrimination	Clover Park School District Board	\$2,500,000	8
Discrimination	Newark Public Schools	\$1,300,000	9
Discrimination	North Syracuse Central School District	\$1,550,000	9
Discrimination	South Tama County Community School District	\$1,117,000	9
Discrimination	St. Louis Public Schools	\$6,000,000	8
First Amendment	Bremerton school board	\$1,700,000	10
Hazing	Kingfisher School District	\$5,000,000	10
Physical Abuse	Clark County School District	\$9,995,000	11
Physical Abuse	Clark County School District Board of Trustees	\$2,000,000	11
Physical Abuse	Newark Public Schools	\$1,200,000	11
Sexual Misconduct	Augustinian Catholic religious order	\$2,000,000	15
Sexual Misconduct	Brighton Central School District	\$1,750,000	15
Sexual Misconduct	Cheektowaga Maryvale Union Free School District	\$8,400,000	13
Sexual Misconduct	Clark County School District	\$9,000,000	13
Sexual Misconduct	Cold Spring Harbor Central School District	\$14,000,000	13
Sexual Misconduct	Harborfields school board	\$7,300,000	14
Sexual Misconduct	Los Angeles Unified School District	\$15,100,000	13
Sexual Misconduct	Los Angeles Unified School District	\$6,500,000	14
Sexual Misconduct	Miracle Meadows School	\$50,000,000	12
Sexual Misconduct	Montgomery County Public Schools	\$9,700,000	13
Sexual Misconduct	Moreno Valley Unified School District	\$121,500,000	12

Appendix: K-12 Claims by Category

Liability Topic	School Name	Amount	Page
Sexual Misconduct	New Hanover County Board of Education	\$5,750,000	14
Sexual Misconduct	Pittston Area School District	\$6,000,000	14
Sexual Misconduct	Redlands Unified School District	\$4,150,000	14
Sexual Misconduct	Sacramento City Unified School District	\$52,000,000	12
Sexual Misconduct	San Diego Unified School District	\$1,500,000	15
Sexual Misconduct	Sonora Union High School District	\$3,500,000	15
Sexual Misconduct	Springboro School District	\$3,500,000	15
Sexual Misconduct	Sumner-Bonney Lake School District	\$7,600,000	14
Sexual Misconduct	Tahoma School District	\$3,900,000	14
Sexual Misconduct	University Place School District	\$9,500,000	13
Suicide	Bainbridge Island School District	\$1,325,000	15
Wrongful Termination	Forest Hills School District	\$1,850,000	15
		\$478,787,000	