

GMCS Superintendent placed on leave

Written by By Babette Herrmann Staff Report
Friday, 21 August 2015 04:17



Local citizen to push for deconsolidation

The decision of the Board of Education to place Gallup McKinley County Schools Superintendent Frank Chiapetti on administrative leave Aug. 17, created a whirlwind of comments on social media that gravitated between praise and hate for the superintendent now in limbo, as well as the board itself.

As with most personnel matters, the five-member school board was tightlipped on the matter. The board went into closed session to discuss Chiapetti's fate that Monday evening.

That same evening, the district appointed administrator Carmen Moffett the role of interim superintendent, until the board decides whether to continue on with Chiapetti, who served as the principal of Miyamura High School before taking the district's top job.

District 5 Board Member Lynn Huenemann said he couldn't discuss any details about Chiapetti's status, but said that the district's attorney is in the process of hiring an outside investigation firm to look into unspecified allegations made against Chiapetti.

Huenemann said he hopes that the investigation wraps up by next meeting, Sept. 8, so the board can "get to work on better things" that centers on students and teachers.

"I hope the investigation is complete and done with the guidance of the school district's attorney," he said.

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Chiapetti did not return a phone call for comment prior to deadline, but Ryan Hudgeons, who had vied to fill Bruce Tempest's District 5 vacancy when he retired several weeks ago, didn't mince words on how he felt about the school board's decision.

Although he didn't mention names, he suspects that board members held private meetings to discuss Chiapetti's fate, which could be a violation of New Mexico Open Meetings Act. OMA requires that any meeting where a quorum of a public body, held for the purpose of "discussing public business," must be open to the public at all times.

"We heard though sources that this was basically a done deal [prior to the closed session]," Hudgeons said. "It's a huge ethical violation."

Huenemann, who was appointed by board to replace Tempest, said he has no knowledge of any illegal meetings being held by board members.

"There was no decision made before the executive session meeting," he said.

While the shock of Chiapetti being placed on leave resonates with Hudgeons, he is looking to form a grassroots movement to deconsolidate the district.

He is in the process of compiling a letter stating why the community should support breaking up the current district, which spans about 4,000 square miles, into smaller districts to improve the quality of education.

New Mexico currently ranks 49th nationwide in quality of education statistics.

"We always talk about smaller classrooms, but we should talk about smaller districts," he said.

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He explained that this change is in line with New Mexico's counties versus district ratio. There are 33 counties, he said, and 89 school districts.

Hudgeons said this move would be beneficial to students and each area. A Crownpoint-based school board, for example, would be able to create plans that best target students needs in that area.

"This county has grown too big," he said.

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