

CHIAPETTI OUSTED! GMCS Superintendent: Doesn't play well with others?

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 23 December 2016 06:16



The Gallup-McKinley County School Board released Superintendent Frank Chiapetti from his duties Dec. 19, putting the long-time educator on paid administrative leave until June 2017. June 30 marks the official end of the \$132,000 annual contract that Chiapetti has with the school district.

The action took place at Tse Yi Gai High School in Pueblo Pintado and during a regular school board meeting. After a little more than two hours in an executive session, board member Lynn Huenemann motioned for Chiapetti's exit and to put assistant superintendent of business and human resources Mike Hyatt in the superintendent's seat on a temporary basis.

The vote to remove Chiapetti was 4-1 with retired Gallup High School educator Joe Menini

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opposed. Menini and Huenemann are white, and board members Sandra Jeff, Kevin Mitchell and Priscilla Manuelito are Navajo. Some in the community have said major board decisions often times fall along racial lines.

“After more than a year of attempting to work out our differences and attempting to supervise and communicate with (Mr. Chiapetti), the Board of Education has come to the point in its evaluation of that employer-employee relationship that it no longer has trust nor confidence in him (Chiapetti) to work with the Board of Education in a manner necessary for him to be the administrative and educational leader of the school district,” Manuelito wrote in a one-page letter distributed Dec. 21 and that was not dated.

Manuelito continued, “It has become apparent that (Mr. Chiapetti) and the Board of Education do not share a common view nor are in agreement on how to best achieve the primary goal of increasing the quality of the education provided to all students of the school district. It has resulted in repeated conflicts and disagreements. The relationship has become toxic and a distraction in moving forward in the school year and in the school years to follow.”

During a phone interview Dec. 21, Manuelito said that the board can evaluate the superintendent anytime before his contract is up for renewal – every month if need be.

But this isn't Chiapetti's first board-mandated administrative leave, as the board placed him on leave in August 2015, pending an internal investigation. Sources have said that the investigation stemmed from grievances filed against the superintendent. However, Chiapetti was reinstated in November 2015. To date, the district hasn't offered media groups access to documents pertaining to the investigation, and is facing a lawsuit filed by a local media group, which argues that the denial of releasing the investigative report constitutes a violation of New Mexico Inspection of Public Records Act.

Reached by telephone Dec. 21, Chiapetti said he was “still in the dark” about the whole matter. He said specifics about what he was doing wrong and right were never really explained. He said he was at a loss in trying to figure out the rationale behind the administrative leave decision. The board's evaluative process hasn't been wide open and available to the public.

“I don't really understand the decision,” he said. “Not a lot was ever explained to me in detail.”

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Manuelito said in the correspondence that the board will continue to look for an interim superintendent as well as a permanent superintendent for the 2017-2018 academic year.

“... the Board of Education needs an employee who is not only an expert in public education, but willing to work with the community’s representatives who are sitting on the Board of Education to achieve the same goal.”

The Gallup Sun reached out to Menini Dec. 21 via telephone, but the person who answered the phone said Menini – known to be very approachable and affable - was told not to speak with reporters.

When questioned on whether the meeting to discuss Chiapetti’s fate was held in Pueblo Pintado – about 97 miles from Gallup – to shut out public comment from Gallup constituents, Manuelito denied the assertion, saying it was about rotating meetings outside of Gallup periodically to more remote locations in the district.

“That’s a huge concern of our constituents,” she said, adding that the the board meeting was held at Tse Yi Gai High School at the request of Jeff.

The next Gallup-McKinley County Board of Education meeting is Jan. 3 at the Student Support Center on Boardman Drive in Gallup.

***By Bernie Dotson
Sun Correspondent***