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Teachers accused of breaking law at meeting

By Brenda Meadows
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Two teachers accused of breaking the law were the focus at Rocklin Unified School District's board meeting on Oct. 16.

Board President Mark Forbes stated he was "disturbed to bring it up" but he

had received two e-mails sent by two teachers that were "in total disregard for the law."

"The (teachers) forwarding e-mails used district email systems, district computers to send campaign information to other teachers," Forbes said. "This is expressly forbidden by state law. Even worse the date stamps conclusively prove

they were sent during school time."

The e-mails asked teachers at Rocklin High School to meet some of the candidates for the school board to remain after an after school meeting. They were sent on Oct. 14 and 15.

"This is not only against state law, but also district policy and Rocklin teachers' con-

tracts," Forbes said. He added that the teachers have "willfully broken the law and it's time we stopped with a slap on the wrist and as a board demand immediate and strong disciplinary action."

Stating that it was against policy to mention the teachers' names, the two who wrote the e-mails are government teachers.

"What does this say to our children," he said. "Why can't the RPTA (Rocklin Parent Teachers' Club) simply participate fairly and openly in the school board campaign?"

RHS government teacher Colleen Crowe, who was not at the meeting, was disturbed by the accusations. She sent one of the e-mails.

"People knew who Mr. Forbes was speaking about and that is why I was called," she said. "I was told by Barbara Moreno (RPTA president) about the incident."

Crowe said there are three government teachers at RHS. "I was disappointed and

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saddened by the way Mr. Forbes chose to handle this matter. There is a process for handling complaints against a teacher and he seems to have ignored this process."

Moreno, president of the RPTA, attended and spoke at the meeting.

"I'd like the two names of the two teachers who blame the RPTA," she said. "We have not endorsed candidates, we decided to stay out of this one (election)."

Moreno said the letters might have been sent during lunch time or a teacher's break since the subject was not on the Oct. 16 agenda, board member Camille Maben said it should be put on a future agenda and not discussed.

Board member Mark Klang agreed it should be put on the agenda, but said he would support firing the two teachers or "very harsh disciplinary action."

"I would like to see them brought before the board in a closed session and since we can't mention those teachers'

(names) I would like to see that done at the next meeting or call a special meeting," Klang added.

During the public discussion period parent Greg Daley said, "I was at the board meeting to continue my education. I was Principal of the Day a couple of days ago and was very impressed with the principal and teachers.

They gave me great insight and confidence in our school system. I was looking to learn the same at the board meeting also.

"I would not have been that concerned if all the candidates had the opportunity to meet with the teachers."

— Mark Forbes
Rocklin Unified School
Board president

Unfortunately, I discovered that two of our board members were more concerned with political minutiae than setting good leadership examples to the student representative and community members present. I was very frustrated with their display of overexcited behavior."

Crowe said she was upset. "Claiming that a government teacher should be fired

for sending an e-mail without investigating the issue first is, I feel, deplorable," Crowe said.

"There seems to have been no attempt to investigate the matter before his comments. Mr. Klang's support of firing 'the two teachers' immediately is also unfortunate. I feel it was an attempt to intimidate teachers from exercising their free speech rights."

Forbes said the issues discussed were strictly personnel issues were not addressed.

"Both of the individuals are what are called site representatives and they represent all of their faculty at the RPTA executive council," he said. "The law and our policy speaks to promoting, endorsing and using school equipment for any political issue or any political candidate."

He said it is legal at the end of a faculty meeting, at the end of a school day, for the RPTA

to hold a meeting in a school facility and from what he was reading, the teachers chose to invite some candidates, after their meeting, to hear what they had to say.

"It is my hope that someone publicly can clear my name and re-instate my reputation," said RHS government teacher Brandee Ambrosia. "I was accused of being a criminal and a negligent government teacher by Trustee Mark Klang, Board President Forbes and even implicated by board candidate Brent Moore. These accusations were false and without merit. The laws protect the e-mail, where a simple, in-house investigation would have discovered that fact."

Since the board meeting, as was suggested, Brown spoke with representatives for legal counsel.

"The review of education code and board policy has been completed by me and David Girard of Girard and Vinson attorneys for the board of trustees," Brown said. "Their findings have concluded that 'while procedurally this

matter could have been handled better, and with greater sensitivity, it seems unlikely that there have been any legally actionable violations."

"Unless a majority of the board wishes to further pursue this matter it is concluded and no disciplinary action will be taken against staff," Brown continued. "It has also been substantiated that the RPTA had absolutely nothing to do with this activity and were inadvertently accused."

Crowe was glad someone sought an interpretation from "experts."

"It is scary to think that if I participate in the democratic process my job could be threatened and my reputation tarnished by false accusations of criminal wrongdoing without investigation," she said. "I advocate everyday that students be informed and participate in the democratic process."

"I hope that someone will publicly clear my name as it is my understanding that I did not break any laws and was totally within my legal rights to send the e-mail on my time."