

Keller trustees file complaints

By SARAH BAHARI

KELLER — Three Keller school board trustees have filed complaints with the Texas Education Agency saying certain board members routinely violate operating procedures, intimidate and threaten district employees, and micromanage the district's daily operations.

The letters — written by Trustees Cindy Lotton, Bob Apetz and Linn Jencopale this month — plead for the agency to intervene and investigate.

"We are in desperate need of some outside direction," Jencopale wrote.

Apetz and Lotton both described the board as "spinning out of control."

A TEA spokeswoman said Friday afternoon that the complaints are being reviewed and that a decision has not been made whether an investigation will be conducted.

The letters, released by the TEA through the Texas Public Information Act, shed light on the board's troubles and sharp divisions. Tension has been building for months as the school board and administrators have battled over oversight issues.

The three trustees who wrote the letters support Superintendent James Veitenheimer and say he is being unfairly targeted by the school board. The other four — Trustees Randy Pugh, Gerry Knowles, Scott Brown and board President David Farmer — want a change in leadership.

Veitenheimer's future with the school district may be decided as early as Monday at a school board meeting.

The three grievances, dated March 1 to 5, are the latest in a string of conflicts. Complaints detailed in the letters include:

Lotton and Apetz said Farmer would not include their comments in Veitenheimer's annual evaluation. As a result, they requested that their names be removed from the evaluation.

Four board members are suspected of meeting in secret to discuss district business, violating the state's Open Meetings Act.

Farmer and Pugh ignore suggestions from other trustees, often saying, "Your vote does not matter."

Knowles told Keith McBurnett, executive director of elementary education, to find a "creative way" to let a teacher with cancer stay at home and continue to receive a salary. When McBurnett said that would violate board policy, Knowles replied that it would help McBurnett's career.

Knowles called that allegation misleading. He said a teacher at Shady Grove Elementary asked him to help a teacher who has cancer and is out of sick days. Knowles said he asked McBurnett whether he could find the teacher alternative work that she could do from home.

McBurnett said he would look into it, Knowles said. A couple of weeks later, he told Knowles that it would not be possible, and Knowles said he dropped the issue.

"This is a desperate attempt to come after us," Knowles said. "I was just trying to help a teacher who has cancer. I don't see anything wrong with that." McBurnett said he felt intimidated because he was pulled out of a meeting to talk with a trustee without the superintendent's knowledge.

"It made me feel uncomfortable," said McBurnett, who will leave Keller in May to work in the Pflugerville school district.

In response to the other allegations, Pugh and Farmer said they have never discussed district business outside school board meetings. Farmer said Lotton's and Apetz's comments were not allowed into Veitenheimer's review because they were submitted too late.

"I would welcome any proof of these allegations," Farmer said.

In the letters, the three trustees also lamented the length of school board meetings, which typically last five to six hours. Executive sessions, where trustees are allowed to meet in private, have recently lasted three to four hours.

If the TEA investigates based on those complaints, the agency will send staff members to Keller to review documents, interview board members and employees, and possibly attend school board meetings, agency spokeswoman DeEtta Culbertson said.

The agency could then require additional training for board members or send a monitor to meetings to ensure that the board follows procedures. In an extreme case, the agency could install a conservator, who would oversee the district and have final say on all matters.

Culbertson said such complaints from trustees, community members and teachers are not unusual.

Jencopale, who is not running for re-election in May, said she cannot remember when the board last discussed what's best for students.

"Everything is a power struggle," she said. "We've lost sight of what's important."
In the know

Complaints

Examples of complaints that three Keller school trustees made to the Texas Education Agency:
Cindy Lotton's letter: Gerry Knowles contacted Mark Smith, executive director of secondary education, and discussed the contract renewal for a high school principal. Knowles said, "Don't throw yourself on a grenade for Mr. [high school principal]. I would hate for your recommendation of him to hurt your career here."

Knowles' reply: That principal is on a probationary contract, and the comment was made after Smith said the principal was doing only an OK job.

Bob Apetz's letter: Four trustees are suspected of discussing district business in secret, violating the state's Open Meetings Act. After one meeting, four members remained in the boardroom and talked for several minutes. The cameras that tape the sessions were still running, but there was no tape in the machine. Two employees watched the conversation from the television in their office.

Farmer's reply: "After a meeting, you take a few minutes to collect your thoughts, your things. You may wait around a couple minutes talking to reporters. If we were left in the room, we were certainly not discussing board business. We were probably talking about our kids' sports or something."

Linn Jencopale's letter: Administrators feel intimidated and threatened when giving reports to the board during meetings. They regularly feel bullied by Trustees Randy Pugh and David Farmer.

Pugh's reply: When trustees receive complaints about things going on in the administration building, they must investigate. They want thorough and honest information from administrators.

General Inquiries - governance

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March 4, 2007

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Linn Jencopale
993 Post Oak Road
Keller, TX 76248

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Dear Dr. Frazier,

After speaking with you on the phone, I am submitting this letter to TEA for possible investigation of the Keller ISD School Board.

I am in my second term as a KISD trustee, serving as vice president for the last two years. Over the past year, it has been apparent that individual members of the school board have crossed the line in going from overseeing the district to micromanaging the school district. Recently we completed the yearly summative evaluation of our superintendent, Dr. James Veitenheimer. It was chaotic at best. This board has never really set yearly performance goals for Dr. Veitenheimer. So evaluating one's performance without specific goals becomes subjective. For sake of time here, let me just say the split board review came up with 4 members believing he is below expectations and 3 members thinking he is above expectations. No extension of contract or raise was given since majority rules. I understand the democratic process. Now, against our attorney's advice that we have no grounds, the majority is looking to terminate the superintendent. They have sought out another attorney without this board taking action on spending tax dollars for this attorney or approving a contract with this attorney.

Board trustee Randy Pugh has told me that my vote does not matter, since they have 4 votes. This leads me to believe that we have four board members violating the open meetings act. It appears they must be speaking about board business among themselves to know how the votes will go ahead of time.

On February 27, 2007, board trustee Gerry Knowles showed up to meet with Keith McBurnett, Executive Director of Elementary Education, without an appointment, pulling him out of another meeting. He proceeded to tell Keith that there is a teacher in the district with cancer. Keith was directed to find a "creative way" to help the teacher stay at home and still get her salary. Keith told him that would be violating board policy and he would be unable to accommodate him. Gerry then told him (in so many words) that it would help Keith in his KISD career to make this happen. This is upsetting to me in that 1) Gerry Knowles intimidate an employee, and 2) he circumvented the superintendent in going straight to Keith. I believe the superintendent is the only employee that the board should be meeting with and directing. This appears to be micromanagement as well as attempting to interfere in school business operations.

Keller ISD has board operating procedures, one of which is that complaints from employees and/or citizens should be given to the superintendent and/or administrator to address. Just about every meeting, trustee Randy Pugh and board president David Farmer bring "anonymous" complaints to executive session and drill the superintendent

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and/or administrator about why this event has not been handled. Sometimes this is done in open session, which, of course, is demeaning to administrators. Since they unfairly knew nothing about the complaint beforehand, the administrators have had no time to address the matter.

Randy and David continually lead citizens to believe that they can "fix" their complaints about the district. I recently had someone tell me that he voted for David Farmer last May because he was going to "fire the athletic director." To which I explained that David could not fire any employee in KISD, and the only employee the seven members of the board could hire or fire was the superintendent. Hiring and firing employees is not a duty of a board member. Yet, even though his evaluation was good and the superintendent has recommended two year contract extension for athletic director, David Farmer has requested that the contract not be extended. After nine years on the board, it is apparent to me that David Farmer does not understand the evaluation process. And since his wife is a teacher in the district, he should understand the evaluation process.

It has been reported to me that the administrators are concerned about the confidentiality of speaking about personnel issues in executive session with the board. Apparently, after this last meeting on February 26, 2007, a director has been told by the next day details that had been reported in closed session. Administrators feel intimidated and threatened when giving reports to the board in open meetings also. They feel like they are being bullied by Randy Pugh and David Farmer on a regular basis.

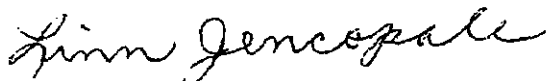
Our meetings usually last five to six hours. When I have tried to use parliamentary procedure to call a question, I have been told, "I am ignoring you" by the board president. David Farmer refused to schedule the mandatory team building session last year, even though it was continually requested.

This board is in desperate need of some outside direction. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It is difficult to sit back and watch four men destroy what is potentially one of the best school districts in Texas. It is embarrassing to be a member of this board right now. Please advise me of what can be done. If I can answer any questions, please feel free to call me at 817-431-9674.

Thanking you in advance.

Sincerely,



Linn Jencopale
Vice President
Keller ISD Board of Trustees

Governance

Bob Apetz
7701 Arcadia Tr.
Fort Worth, Texas 76137
817-266-9600

March 5, 2007

Dr. Jo Frazier,

I am writing this letter in response to a phone call to the Texas Education Agency Governance Division on Friday, March 2, 2007. I am writing to document events in the Keller Independent School District, which are of great concern to me as a school board member and to other school board members as well as people within the community.

Individual members of our school board are exhibiting conduct which violates the Board Member Code of Ethics and the Board Operating Procedures developed by the membership of this board of trustees.

Recently we conducted our annual superintendent evaluation. The evaluation was conducted in closed session; I was a part of the initial meeting. At the following meeting (three weeks later) the President finally provided a copy of the final evaluation. We were given a few minutes to look over the evaluation and instructed to sign the 3 copies. Initially, I found that a paragraph of the summation from my evaluation was left off the evaluation and immediately requested that it be placed back on the evaluation. Upon review later that week I discovered that the President failed to include two more paragraphs from my evaluation of the Superintendent. I sent a letter attached (dated 2/23/07) to the President, Dr. D. Farmer, V. President, Linn Jencopale and the KISD attorney, Tom Myers, stating that I be allowed review the evaluation again, that my signature be removed from the evaluation and that the two paragraphs that he purposely left off the final evaluation be added to the evaluation. The President on February 23 and March 6, 2007 has refused to honor my request. I will agree with Ms. Lotton statements: "The document was riddled with many conflicting and untrue statements".

Board member Randy Pugh and President David Farmer continue to ridicule and malign those of us who try to hold them accountable to Board Policy and Operating Procedures. Most recently during administrator recommendations, Mr. Pugh had compiled a list of complaints from parents concerning one

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1 *[Signature]*
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After one meeting, these four members remained in the boardroom and talked among themselves for several minutes. The cameras that tape the sessions were still running, but there was no tape in the machine. Two employees watched the "2nd meeting" for several minutes from the television in their office.

Our board meetings continually take 5-6 hours; we have executive sessions that take 3-4 hours before the regularly scheduled meeting begins. Other members of the administration and staff must wait in the building and are often in meetings until midnight. When questioned in open session about the micromanaging questions and lack of control of the meeting, members are met with comments such as "I am ignoring you" by the board president.

The board has violated its own Policy and Operating Procedures under the leadership of Dr. Farmer. Last year, we were out of compliance with policy concerning the annual team building session. We never held one.

This year we held a team building session only at my insistence and initiative. We had a TASB team come for a session, but the agreed upon follow-up was never completed. No follow-up session is scheduled.

Most recently, and disturbingly, these 3-4 Board members have decided that is it time to get a new superintendent. One year ago, Dr. Veitenheimer was given an extension and a raise with his contract. The district has improved on all levels and Dr. Veitenheimer has met all of the goals he set for himself, (he had no formal goals from us). The district is moving ahead in many positive ways. This year, no action was taken on his contract as a result of the faulty evaluation mentioned earlier in the letter. These members have inquired about obtaining the services of a second lawyer to get an opinion that agrees with their desire to terminate him. The Board attorney has told them they do not have grounds to terminate. Someone (a retired superintendent in our area) has been contacted to solicit interest in an interim-superintendent job, even though we have a superintendent with a contract until 2009. It appears to me that they believe and have conspired to get their four votes to terminate Dr. Veitenheimer. They have done this behind closed doors and with little regard for the policies and operating procedures that have been set to govern School Boards. The public is unaware of any of this action. Dr. Veitenheimer has used the utmost discretion and candor with his staff, as to not cause alarm and dismay."

We are in need of assistance from you agency. I do not know how to proceed with a Board that is spinning out of control. Please advise me on what I can do.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Apetz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bob Apetz
Member, Keller ISD Board of Trustees

Attachment

DATE: February 23, 2007

TO: Dr. David Farmer-President
Linn Jencopale-Vice President
Tom Meyers-KISD Attorney

FROM: Bob Apetz

Subject: Superintendent Evaluation – Summative 2006-2007

This is to request that my signature (Bob Apetz) be removed from Dr. Veitenheimer's Summative Evaluation for the school year of 2006-2007 effective immediately and a copy of this letter placed with the three (3) copies of the Evaluation.

After review of the evaluation that I sent to the President of the KISD School Board and the brief time that I reviewed Dr. Veitenheimer's Evaluation at the school board meeting on February 12, 2007, there are at least two paragraphs that failed to be included in the Superintendent's Evaluation.

In addition, I would like that a copy of the Evaluation be made available for me to review further as there was not substantial time to review at the meeting on February 12, 2007.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter,


Bob Apetz
KISD Board of Trustee

for logistics/Governance

Fax Cover

ATTN: GOVERNANCE DIVISION

Attention: Dr. J. Frazier

From: C.M. LOTTON

Fax Number: 512-475-3665

KELLER, TX

Company: TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

Date: 3-3-07

Pages including cover: 6

Notes:

Thank you for your attention.

I look forward to hearing from you -

Cindy Lotton

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TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

2007 MAR -2 PM 1:13

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Cynthia Lotton, M.Ed.
5304 Grand Mesa Drive
Fort Worth, Texas 76137
817-891-2206

March 1, 2007

Dr. Joe Frazier,

I am writing this letter in response to a phone call to the Texas Education Agency Governance Division earlier today.

I am writing to document events in the Keller Independent School District, which are of great concern to me as a school board member.

Individual members of our school board are exhibiting conduct which violates the Board Member Code of Ethics and the Board Operating Procedures developed by the membership of this board of trustees.

Recently we conducted our annual superintendent evaluation. The evaluation was conducted in closed session; I was a part of the initial meeting. On the following week, I was ill and did not attend the meeting when the evaluation was signed. I was able to study the completed evaluation in the Superintendent's office at a later date. The document was riddled with many conflicting and untrue statements. (I will attach my explanatory notes) I refused to sign the document and told the Board President that I would be bringing a letter of explanation to the meeting the following week. During the executive session when discussion of the evaluation came up, the Board President refused to allow my comments to be added to the evaluation document, he told me that as Board President, he could refuse such attachments and he declared the evaluation closed.

Board member Randy Pugh and President David Farmer continue to ridicule and malign those of us who try to hold them accountable to Board Policy and Operating Procedures. Most recently during administrator recommendations, Mr. Pugh had compiled a list of complaints from parents concerning one principal. According to Board Operating Procedures, referrals are to be given directly to the Superintendent for correction, Mr. Pugh had not done so, as a result, the administrator in charge was unable to address the concerns in a timely manner. Mr. Pugh continually refuses to give such information to the superintendent or his staff for action.

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He (Mr. Pugh) speaks on behalf of the board concerning personnel and financial matters, involving the board in matters directly designated to the Superintendent. Mr. Pugh consistently goes through the districts cancelled checks to measure accuracy. He monitors classroom temperatures to keep track of the reliability of the heat/air units. (The classroom just happens to be his wife's). All activity on his wife's campus is constantly monitored, causing the Principal much stress. The Board President also constantly monitors the activity on the Elementary campus where his wife teaches. We often hear from parents on this campus that have information that should have gone to the administration for action and the Board President steps in to "take care of it".

Another Board member, Gerry Knowles, contacted an administrator, Mr. Mark Smith, Executive Director of Secondary Education and made the following comments concerning a High School Principal's contract renewal. On Tuesday February 27 at about 10:00 Mr. Knowles told Mr. Smith "Don't throw yourself on a grenade for Mr...(HS principal) I would hate for your recommendation of him to hurt your career here." I believe that his behavior is out of line and threatening. He is also an individual speaking on behalf of the board.

Board member Randy Pugh, President Farmer have said in front of the entire Board things like, "we have four votes", and "myself and three friends are all this will take". Other members of the Board suspect that extra meetings (rolling or parking lot) and violations of the Open Meetings act take place regularly. Members Randy Pugh, Dr. Farmer, Mr. Knowles and member Scott Brown regularly have "like mindedness" on issues that leads me to believe that they have made plans on votes, amendments to items and questions ahead of time. After one meeting, four of the members remained in the boardroom and talked among themselves for several minutes. The cameras that tape the sessions were still running, but there was no tape in the machine. Two employees watched the "2nd meeting" for several minutes from the television in their office.

Our board meetings continually take 5-6 hours; we have executive sessions that take 3-4 hours before the regularly scheduled meeting begins. Other members of the administration and staff must wait in the building and are often in meetings until midnight. When questioned in open session about the micromanaging questions and lack of control of the meeting, members are met with comments such as "I am ignoring you" by the board president.

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The board has violated its own Policy and Operating Procedures under the leadership of Dr. Farmer. Last year, we were out of compliance with policy concerning the annual team building session. We never held one.

This year we held a team building session only at my insistence and initiative. We had a TASB team come for a session, but the agreed upon follow-up was never completed. No follow-up session is scheduled.

Most recently, and disturbingly, these 3-4 Board members have decided that is it time to get a new superintendent. One year ago, Dr. Veitenheimer was given an extension and a raise with his contract. The district has improved on all levels and Dr. Veitenheimer has met all of the goals he set for himself, (he had no formal goals from us). The district is moving ahead in many positive ways. This year, no action was taken on his contract as a result of the faulty evaluation mentioned earlier in the letter. These members have inquired about obtaining the services of a second lawyer to get an opinion that agrees with their desire to terminate him. The Board attorney has told them they do not have grounds to terminate. Someone (a retired superintendent in our area) has been contacted to solicit interest in an interim-superintendent job, even though we have a superintendent with a contract until 2009. It appears to me that they believe and have conspired to get their four votes to terminate Dr. Veitenheimer. They have done this behind closed doors and with little regard for the policies and operating procedures that have been set to govern School Boards. The public is unaware of any of this action. Dr. Veitenheimer has used the utmost discretion and candor with his staff, as to not cause alarm and dismay.

We are in need of assistance from your agency. I do not know how to proceed with a Board that is spinning out of control. Please advise me on what I can do. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Cindy Lotton,
Member, Keller ISD Board of Trustees

Attachment

February 26, 2007

*Attachment
For March 1, 2007*

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter to document my reasons for refusing to sign the summative evaluation for Dr. James Veitenheimer, Superintendent of Keller ISD for January 2007.

The evaluation is in violation of Board Local policy BJCD which states " The written evaluation shall be based on the Superintendent's job description (See BJA) and other criteria as identified by the board. The board shall furnish the Superintendent with a copy of the completed evaluation and shall discuss its conclusions with the Superintendent in a closed meeting."

The policy also states "The Board shall strive to accomplish the following objectives in conducting the Superintendent's evaluation: 1. Clarify to the Superintendent his or her role, as seen by the board. 2. Clarify to Board members the Superintendent's role, according to the Board's written criteria, as expressed in the Superintendent's job description and the District's goals and objectives."

To my knowledge, the board has never established clearly defined goals for Dr. Veitenheimer during his three years as Superintendent, though he has continued to ask the board to supply written goals.

The evaluation comments are also littered with conflicting statements and opinions based upon information that is false or incomplete.

Some of the conflicting statements are as follows:

"There is increased dissention among the board because of Dr. Veitenheimer's refusal to take a stand."
"Dr. Veitenheimer is unwilling to take direction or hear feedback." When Dr. V has taken a stand or given opinion such as the lowering of the amount of spending approval to 10,000, he has met with opposition and direction from the board to go against his recommendations, when such direction ends in debacle (as w/ CH Local), he has been blamed for the mess.

"You are paid to be the curriculum experts, but have been more passive and placed blame on the board for the implementation of the audit."

"The curriculum audit and implementation were a Board of Trustees initiative."
Where does the responsibility lie, with the board or with the staff?

"The superintendent is too involved with minutiae"

"The superintendent does not know how many chillers we have."

The superintendent is not involved in extracurricular activities, such as the Keller Swim Team (a non-district entity) and the cheerleader code of conduct.

Is he to be involved in minutiae or not?

The following false statements are of great concern to me. Statements are based upon unsubstantiated opinion and have little or no basis in fact.

"Dr. Veitenheimer has no observed leadership skills".

On the Superintendent feedback form the principals listed more than 35 specific characteristics of leadership they have observed as they worked with Dr. Veitenheimer.

When asked what the principals would change or did not like, out of 7 comments, four were directly involving Board meetings or Board directives, not the administration.

"The Brown Bag Luncheons illustrate the superintendents weak leadership style".

To my knowledge, I am the only trustee to attend a brown bag lunch. I have attended several and find them to be excellent community relations tools for parents and staff.

"The Board is unaware of the use of wireless technology in the district."

In February of 2005 the Technology plan was approved, and recently \$398, 970 was approved by the board for updates from the 2006 bond.

"The Board is unaware of Professional Development schedule and implementation".

Professional development schedule was given as a part of the Friday Update on November 3, 2006.

"The board has not been informed on the progress of the District Improvement Plan".

Reports on the progress of the DIP has been scheduled quarterly, our last report was Jan. 22, 2007.

"Too much time has been spent in level III grievances".

In the three years since Dr. Veitenheimer has been in KISD there have been 3 grievances,

Several comments were made about low morale in the district.

On the Mid-year Feedback form received from district principals, more than 40 comments were made about the positive work environment that takes place in our district.

There was a comment about Dr. Veitenheimer meeting with the policy committee twice without the members of the committee. The committee chairman, Bob Apetz denies that this has happened, and prior to his chairmanship, I was the chairman. To my recollection, the last time the policy committee met was during the beginning stages of the audit implementation with Dr. Rountree.

I will close with two written comments that are the most disturbing to me.

"Why in the midst of chaos and unsettledness related to the curriculum implementation and the change involved in the new High School schedule would we want to stir everyone in the district up over new start times?" and "There is a pattern of too many things changing at one time".

I must admit that I am confused. Members of this board are uncomfortable with change, but are acting in a manner that would advocate for the biggest change a district would undergo, that of a change in Superintendent leadership. Do you want change or not? Comments such as these are an example of the perplexing direction that Dr. Veitenheimer has received from this board during his tenure here. I will not add my name to an evaluation document that is so conflicted and unprofessional.

Cindy Lotton, M.Ed.

Keller ISD Board of Trustees

2 top Keller district officials resign

By SARAH BAHARI

KELLER -- Two top Keller school district officials have resigned in the wake of an investigation into thousands of misspent tax dollars, according to documents obtained by the *Star-Telegram*.

The resignations -- submitted Monday by Bill Stone, assistant superintendent of business operations, and Steve Levering, director of maintenance and operations -- provide some closure after weeks of uncertainty and speculation about whether some employees would lose their jobs.

But some trustees said more must be done to prevent financial mismanagement.

"The changes need to be more far-reaching than this," school board President David Farmer said. "We want to have a strong reputation for financial responsibility."

The district violated state law and its own policies when it paid a Mansfield company \$75,000 last year for repairs to heating and air-conditioning units without seeking competitive bids or school board approval, according to two internal reviews of the spending.

The district owes Mechtrend Solutions an additional \$25,000 for completed work, but payments are pending further investigation.

District employees did not intentionally circumvent policies, according to the reviews. Instead, a lack of oversight and understanding of purchasing rules caused the lapses.

"In a nutshell, we made a mistake," Stone told the school board late Monday night.

The Tarrant County district attorney's office would investigate the violation of state law only if asked to, said David Montague, an office spokesman. No one has asked for an investigation, he said.

On Monday, Stone and Levering received letters of reprimand from Superintendent James Veitenheimer for their roles in the Mechtrend payments.

In the letter, Stone, who oversees the department in charge of vendors, was directed not to sign any official documents if there are legal concerns. He was also reprimanded for "any real or perceived coercion of an employee," in response to concerns that an employee felt intimidated into signing off on the purchase orders. Stone said that he is disappointed with the Mechtrend situation, but that he is resigning for other reasons.

"I have some other opportunities I'd like to pursue," he said Tuesday.

Levering, who signed off on many of the unapproved invoices, was removed from his position as a department head and reassigned to special maintenance projects, the letter says. He could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

The two officials submitted their resignations the same day they received the letters. Stone will remain with the district through June. Levering's resignation is effective immediately.

Veitenheimer said they were not pressured or asked to resign, and their decisions were not connected to the payments to Mechtrend.

"I have nothing but praise and thanks for these men," Veitenheimer said. "People need to be happy doing what they do. They need to feel respected. When those things don't happen, they look for other opportunities."

Tension has been building in the district for months as some trustees have battled with administrators over various oversight issues. Veitenheimer's future with the district is shaky. The board has hired a lawyer who is negotiating Veitenheimer's resignation or termination.

Three board members -- Cindy Lotton, Bob Apetz and Linn Jencopale -- support him and say he is being unfairly targeted by the board.

The other four trustees -- Randy Pugh, Gerry Knowles, Scott Brown and Farmer -- say they want a change. They say administrators have been ineffective and withheld information from the board.

The Mechtrend investigation has only fueled the unrest.

The district hired Mechtrend Solutions last year after receiving a referral from a Fort Worth company, according to the district's review. Most of the money was paid without purchase orders, which violates district policy. School officials say the company was never on the list of authorized vendors.

District policy previously required the school board's approval for purchases of more than \$10,000. That is now \$15,000. For purchases of more than \$25,000, state law requires competitive bidding and board approval. Problems came to light in late February, when the purchasing department received nine purchase orders for completed work. Purchase orders typically arrive one or two at a time and almost always before the work is done.

After investigating, officials found that the district had paid the company \$75,000 without purchase orders.

Employees said they then felt intimidated by some administrators to sign off on the purchases and to keep the issue quiet.

As a result, the purchasing department has been moved from business operations to the finance department. The district may also hire an outside firm to review its vendors and purchasing policies. The outside audit is long overdue, Pugh said.

Apetz and Lotton said they are satisfied with the outcome of the investigations. "I think they got to the bottom of everything," Apetz said.

Pugh and Knowles said that the resignations may be a step forward but that more needs to be done.

"I'm never pleased when people have to give up their jobs," Knowles said. "But this needed to happen to move forward."