

Rev. Jackson tried to sway SD 227 on Leak vote

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Before the Rich Township High School District 227 Board narrowly voted to oust Supt. Donna Leak, trustees were asked by the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. to reconsider.

In a letter hand-delivered to the board the day of its June 15 meeting, during which members voted 4 to 3 to fire Leak, Jackson asked them to consider an “administrative intervention in lieu of the drastic step” of dismissing the superintendent.

The head of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition told board members he was “ready to assist you in whatever ways you find helpful, if not necessary for a quick and equitable resolution of this matter.”

It was unclear who had asked Jackson to intercede on Leak’s behalf. A spokesman for Rainbow PUSH said he was uncertain what or who prompted the letter, adding that Jackson was traveling Monday.

But Jackson’s offer of help was rebuffed by some residents of the district.

Helen Burleson, with the group Rich Township High Schools Coalition for Better Schools, wrote in a letter that she said was being sent to Jackson that “this an internal local problem that can be resolved and perhaps solved expeditiously without outside intervention.”

In a statement following the board’s vote to dismiss Leak, District 227 board President Cheryl Coleman said the superintendent was fired for “gross improprieties” in the process for student expulsions, for recommending that the board enter into unenforceable contracts with several administrators and for improperly denying a board member access to the administration center. The issues required that she be dismissed immediately, Coleman said.

In his letter, Jackson said he was “saddened by the circumstances” that brought about the correspondence, noting he had “dedicated my life to the work of advancing the cause of competent people such as yourselves, Superintendent Dr. Donna Simpson Leak and countless other African Americans who deserved a chance to lead and serve.”

Coleman, who provided a copy of Jackson’s letter to the SouthtownStar, declined to comment on his attempt to intervene in the personnel matter.

“I’ve allowed the community to answer the Rev. Jackson letter,” she said in an email. “I’ve kept my focus on the restoration of the new Rich District.”

Leak, who had been District 227 superintendent since 2010, is contemplating legal action against the district, according to her attorney. She had five years left on a contract paying her \$200,000 per year.

Coleman alleges that, following the vote, Leak’s father-in-law threatened Coleman. Spencer Leak Sr., who is facing a misdemeanor charge of disorderly conduct stemming from the alleged incident, denied Coleman’s claim.