

1 of 5 DOCUMENTS

Buffalo News (New York)

May 29, 2008 Thursday
CENTRAL EDITION

Truth lacking from school officials

BYLINE: By Rod Watson - NEWS STAFF REPORTER

SECTION: LOCAL; Pg. B1

LENGTH: 591 words

Despite the many things the **Buffalo** Board of Education is probing in the McKinley High **School** fiasco, one critical issue has yet to surface: What to do about board members who appear to lie to the public?

Reminiscent of Bill Clinton wagging his finger into the camera, two members had the audacity to hold a news conference early on to denounce a report about why McKinley dismissed a popular volunteer girls assistant basketball coach.

The **Buffalo** News' Mark Sommer reported early in this mess that in a board executive session, Superintendent James A. Williams said the coach, Michelle Stiles, was ousted because of suspicions she was sleeping with team members. It was an ugly rumor about the woman whose dismissal led to the entire Jayvonna Kincannon episode.

But before assembled TV cameras and microphones, board President Mary Ruth Kapsiak and at-large member Chris Jacobs flatly denied the report.

"I am deeply disturbed and disappointed that things got into the paper that were not true and that were not discussed in executive session, or were supposedly discussed in executive session," Kapsiak said at the time. "The things that were in the paper today were unequivocally not true."

Jacobs sang the same false tune: "What was written in the paper today was not said in executive session. I will honor executive session and not say anything more."

And Williams stood right there and let them say it.

Fast-forward to last week's release of the report from special investigator David L. Edmunds Jr., who said Williams told him he had indeed reported the unfounded rumors to the board.

So what's Kapsiak's excuse?

Apparently, it's tough remembering a meeting while chairing it.

"Sometimes I get taken away from where I'm supposed to be in maintaining order," Kapsiak said. "I don't recall anything being said about that . . . because I try to focus on keeping the board [meeting] going."

Jacobs, on the other hand, sticks to his story. He hangs his denial on the slender thread that no verbal link was made

in the session between the rumor and Stiles' dismissal.

"That connection was never said in executive session," he said. "That was not said . . . the superintendent did not say that was the reason that she was terminated."

But any discussion of Stiles and the rumor proceeds from the fact that she was terminated. Without the termination, there is nothing to discuss. The link didn't have to be stated -- it hung over the entire session.

In fact, not since Clinton debated the meaning of "is" has a public **official** come up with such tortured wordplay to mislead the public. And Williams stood there and let his board members dissemble while knowing what he'd told them.

And if The News hadn't obtained the unredacted Edmunds report -- instead of the version released by the board -- the public still would never know for sure what was said. It was no doubt **officials** like these that Thomas Jefferson had in mind when saying that if forced to pick, he'd choose newspapers over government.

This is in a district already struggling for credibility after: Williams said he never read a registered letter alleging sex abuse at Discovery **School 67**; the Stiles "suspicions" still haven't been reported to law enforcement; and the process used to suspend Jayvonna gives the term "kangaroo court" a bad name.

Instead of worrying about "leaks," maybe **school officials** should spend more time worrying about the **truth**.

If public **officials** can't be competent, they can at least be credible.

Right now, **Buffalo school officials** are neither.

e-mail: rwatson@buffnews.com

LOAD-DATE: May 30, 2008

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

DOCUMENT-TYPE: Commentary

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper