

Reality check for Trustee Edwards

Board minutes say she voted for top administrators' benefits

Karen Gray

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

"IT WASN'T ME," should be the new campaign slogan for Clark County schools trustee Carolyn Edwards.

As the battle heats up between the Clark County School District and the CCSD administrators' union over recent benefit increases approved by the board for Superintendent Walt Rulffes' five top lieutenants, Edwards, up for reelection this year, is attempting to distance herself from the decision.

Given the record financial pressures on the district and most employees, that decision is bringing Edwards and other trustees under fire. But to hear Edwards explain it, she wasn't involved.

"Please understand that the reports in the paper about our five confidential employees receiving additional benefits this year that no other administrators received are erroneous," she wrote constituents in her March newsletter. "The additional benefits discussed were awarded in 2006, prior to my joining the Board."

According to official board-meeting minutes obtained by NPRI, however, that statement is false. Edwards' own words in the minutes — minutes actually approved by Edwards — substantiate that she did in fact, last October, approve additional benefits "that no other administrators received."

Not only did Edwards approve the additional benefits, she — according to official minutes — was the trustee who made the parliamentary motion to award the extra benefits.

Here's what the official school board minutes say:

*Motion to extend the current confidential contracts for a two-year period **with the following changes:** ... and two, accumulated sick leave - upon termination of service, any employee will be compensated the employee's daily rate of pay at the rate of one day for each five days of accumulated sick leave and may elect to have the District purchase a health reimbursement account of the employee's choosing or purchase PERS credit. Employee may not participate in any other form of payment for unused sick leave. (Emphasis in bold added)*

Motion: Edwards

Second: Moulton

Vote: Unanimous

Trustee Garvey was not present for the vote.

Although Edwards told her constituents that the confidential employees did not receive benefits "that no other administrators received," the record reveals they did.

According to Stephen Augspurger — executive director of the Clark County Association of School Administrators and Professional-technical Employees — on June 19, 2009 the school district and the administrators union agreed to amend the CCASAPE 2007-2009 contract to eliminate the \$20,000 health account reimbursement benefit for retiring employees. It was that benefit that CCSD trustees — including Edwards — not only reinstated in the confidential employees' contract, but did so at a level above the terms of the previous CCASAPE contract.

That contract provided, in Article 13-9, that administrators who retired with no less than 250 accumulated sick days could elect to have up to 45 of those days translated into their cash value — with a \$20,000 cap — and paid into a health reimbursement account.

Contrastingly, the revised 2009 contracts for the confidential employees — approved by Edwards last October — established a health account reimbursement that appears to have no cap at all. Also, unlike the original CCASAPE contract, the new contract does not require that employees first accumulate 250 sick days before the benefit is triggered. Nor do the contracts limit the number of days to be reimbursed or cap the dollar amount. Finally, the new 2009 contracts for the superintendent's top lieutenants allow those employees to purchase PERS credit with their accumulated sick days. The CCASAPE contract did not allow purchase of PERS credits.

At a time of severe economic recession, when the school district is calling upon all employees to share in sacrifice, the board's gift to the confidential employees reinforces public impressions that CCSD is run for and by its insider employees. Here are the costs to taxpayers:

Confidential Employee	# of sick days	Daily rate of pay	Reimbursement under CCASAPE Article 13-9	Reimbursement Under 2009 contract
Martha Tittle, Chief Human Resource Officer	395.5	\$548.24	\$0	\$43,365.78
Lauren Kohut-Rost, Deputy Superintendent Instruction	299	\$604.13	\$0	\$35,120.99
William (Bill) Hoffman, General Council	145.5	\$623.23	\$0	\$18,135.99
Charlene Green, Deputy Superintendent Student Support Services	7.5	\$563.97	\$0	\$845.96
Jeff Weiler, Chief Financial Officer	43.5	\$558.73	\$0	\$4860.95
TOTALS			\$0	\$103,392.67

*Source for sick day and daily rate of pay data, *Las Vegas Review Journal*, http://www.lvrj.com/news/rulffes-aides_-sacrifice-urged-84683047.html.

No one disputes that administrators, including those in question, had entitlements to sick-pay reimbursement, before Edwards joined the board of trustees — they did. Edwards' narrative, however — that she had no hand in awarding the extra benefits to the five — should, given the record, educate the public about this school board.

Trustee Edwards may now say "the additional benefits discussed were awarded in 2006, prior to my joining the Board." But she cannot escape the fact that only months ago, as CCSD faced dire budgetary cuts, she not only voted for the special benefits now in the spotlight, but led the charge for them.

Karen Gray is an education researcher at the Nevada Policy Research Institute. For more visit <http://www.npri.org>.

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Tel (702) 222-0642

Fax (702) 227-0927

E-mail office at [npri.org](http://www.npri.org)

3155 E. Patrick Lane

Suite 10

Las Vegas, NV 89120