

Report on McKinney cheer dispute finished

School board to review findings on how squad was disciplined

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By KAREN AYRES / The Dallas Morning News

McKINNEY – Did the principal of McKinney North High School use her power to shield her daughter and other cheerleaders from discipline? The investigator tapped by the McKinney school district to look into that issue presented his findings to the school board this week. His 70-page report was not released to the public.

The Dallas Morning News filed a request Tuesday under the state's public records laws to obtain a copy of the document.

McKinney schools spokesman Cody Cunningham said the district will probably contact the state attorney general's office to determine what parts of the report can be made public.

"It gives a lot of intimate details about several individuals," school board President Wade Johnson said. "We have a responsibility to protect their privacy. ... The full report may never be public because it has so much information about individuals." Mr. Johnson declined to specify whether the investigation showed that principal Linda Theret abused her position, but he said the document presented a very clear picture. Ms. Theret, who has disputed the allegations, used personal days to stay out of the building for the bulk of the investigation.

The board will meet behind closed doors Saturday to review the report. Afterward, district leaders could take action regarding personnel or comment on the findings, Mr. Johnson said.

"It's a very thorough and very detailed report," he said.

The McKinney school district hired Dallas lawyer Harry Jones in October to investigate the matter after cheerleading coach Michaela Ward resigned because she said district officials interfered with her attempts to discipline the squad, which includes the principal's daughter. Among other problems, there

was a dispute over punishment for a group of girls who posed for a picture in their uniforms inside a condom store. The picture was posted on the Internet.

Mr. Jones spent more than a month interviewing staff, parents and others to compile the report. He presented an outline of his findings to the board during an executive session Monday. Mr. Jones said Tuesday that he interviewed 70 witnesses and reviewed thousands of documents, but he declined to comment on specific findings.

"They're going to have to chew on it for a while because there are a lot of different points in it," Mr. Jones said.

Mr. Johnson said the report points out several issues with the district's discipline process and communication system that may be addressed by the board. It also shows flaws in the cheerleading constitution, which outlines discipline policies for the squad, he said.

"It just leaves room for people to make judgment calls vs. there being some definite enforceable rules," Mr. Johnson said.

The district hasn't determined the price of the investigation, Mr. Cunningham said. Under the agreement, Mr. Jones was to be paid \$195 an hour. Mr. Johnson said that fee was well worth it.

"I don't believe we could have gotten as thorough or as unbiased a report had we not gone outside the district and paid for someone to do that," Mr. Johnson said. "He was very effective in getting people to open up and communicate with him."