



## GUIDELINE Luck and pluck

With a bit of luck and a lot of tenacity and talent, Dallas native Travis Mitchell is off to a good start in country music with a CD under his belt and concerts on his calendar. IG

DallasNews.com Wednesday, October 18, 2006

# Lawyer to look at cheer program

### McKinney ISD: He'll focus on discipline in wake of coach's resignation

By KAREN AYRES  
Staff Writer

**McKINNEY** — The McKinney school district has hired an investigator to look into allegations of discipline problems and other issues at McKinney North High School stemming from the resignation of the school's cheerleading coach.

District spokesman Cody Cunningham said Tuesday that officials want an outsider to review reports of inconsistent discipline and other complaints from staff and parents.

Harry Jones, a Dallas lawyer hired to perform the investigation, said he would start by checking into whether Principal Linda Theret used her job to shield cheerleaders from punishment or otherwise influence the squad.

Ms. Theret's daughter is a cheerleader. Ms. Theret could not be reached for comment Tuesday. The principal will remain out of the building this week during the investigation.

The inquiry comes two weeks after coach Michaela Ward resigned because, she said, administrators — including Ms. Theret and Superintendent Tom Crowe — thwarted her efforts to discipline the cheerleading squad.

"I want to know the truth," Mr. Jones said. "I know that there are going to be different versions of the truth. To the best of my ability, I would like to find out if there was any kind of abuse of power or any favoritism shown."

Mr. Jones started meeting with district officials Tuesday and plans to visit with staff members and others this week. He will be paid \$195 per hour.

Mr. Cunningham said that the principal will use personal days throughout the week and that she has not been placed on leave. She has been with the district for nine years, three as principal at North.

Mr. Jones said he wants to interview staff members and others associated with cheerleading, but



TOM FOX/Staff Photographer

A Dallas lawyer will investigate reports of inconsistent discipline and other complaints from staff and parents of McKinney North High School cheerleaders. "My starting point is the cheerleading issue," Harry Jones said. "I'll take it wherever it goes."

# Discipline issues to be inquiry focus

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"My starting point is the cheerleading issue," Mr. Jones said. "I'll take it wherever it goes."

Mr. Jones, who specializes in employment law, plans to meet with Ms. Ward in the coming days.

Among other problems on the squad, Ms. Ward said, several girls received a light punishment after they posed for a picture in their cheerleading uniforms inside a condom store and later posted the picture on the Internet.

Mr. Cunningham said the superintendent has reviewed six disciplinary cases from the squad this year, which is an unusually high number. But he has said the usual appeal process was followed.

Mr. Crowe declined comment Tuesday, saying he would not address questions until the investigation is complete.

The district announced the investigation days after Ms. Ward,



Michaela Ward resigned as coach, saying she wasn't allowed to make important decisions about discipline.

They're going to be shocked at what they find. It goes well beyond cheerleading."

Steve Griffin, whose daughter is on the squad, said he understands why the district hired an investigator, but he stressed that he never saw any favoritism.

"I'm still confident that any girl, no matter who she is, will be disciplined on that squad in the appropriate manner and through the appropriate channels," Mr. Griffin said.

26, met with the superintendent to discuss her concerns.

"It's definitely something that needs to be done," Ms. Ward said Tuesday of the investigation.

"It's very smart on their part to remove themselves from it."

"Our goal is to find out if there is an issue at McKinney North High School," Mr. Cunningham said. "If that is the case, we will take that report and take appropriate action."

Mr. Jones, who was recommended by the district's lawyers, said he wasn't familiar with the McKinney school district until Tuesday. He believes it would have been difficult to do an internal investigation. Some of his interviews will take place at confidential outside locations, he said.

"There are too many people in the district who know each other to do an effective internal investigation of themselves," Mr. Jones

Mr. Cunningham said Ms. Ward's public comments about her resignation seem to have prompted parents and staff members to bring up similar concerns. Mr. Crowe decided to hire someone outside the district in hopes that people involved would be more forthcoming, Mr. Cunningham said.

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School board president Wade Johnson said Tuesday that he supports the decision to hire an outside investigator because Ms. Theret and Mr. Crowe were both involved with decisions about discipline on the squad.

"It's good to have an independent third party come in and see how things were handled," Mr. Johnson said.

Mr. Cunningham said he hopes the investigation will be wrapped up this week, but Mr. Jones said it could take longer. A final report is expected to be presented to the superintendent and the board.

"I don't want people to get the misperception that we have huge disciplinary issues at McKinney North High School, because that's not the case," Mr. Cunningham said. "The school operates just like any other high school and has the same challenges as any other high school."

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09:54 AM CDT on Wednesday, October 18, 2006

By KAREN AYRES / The Dallas Morning News

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TOM FOX/DMN

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