



Judge rules sex harassment claim too late

By HOWARD BLUME

A Los Angeles County Superior Court judge has ruled against a mid-level manager who had sued former L.A. schools Supt. Ramon Cortines, alleging sexual harassment.

Judge William F. Fahey ruled that real estate manager Scot Graham failed to file his claim within the six-month time limit allowed in such cases, said Sean Rossall, a spokesman for the L.A. Unified School District. The ruling is dated last Wednesday but was issued late Friday, according to the district.

The judge did not rule on the merits of the allegations.

An attorney representing Graham said he plans to appeal, and Graham said he also may seek redress through the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, which handles sexual harassment complaints.

The suit stems primarily from Graham's visit to Cortines' Kern County ranch in July 2010. Cortines has said that he and Graham engaged in one episode of consensual "adult behavior," which Cortines characterized as bad judgment on his part.

Graham, 56, alleges that, over the course of two days, Cortines repeatedly tried to engage him in unwanted sexual behavior, and that he felt trapped.

Graham also alleges that later, two supervisors failed to report the issue for several weeks after Graham confided in them. Subsequently, L.A. Unified General Counsel David Holmquist allegedly urged him to drop the matter, according to the suit, which was filed last July.

The district contends that Graham insisted to his supervisors that the alleged incident should not be acted on, and that officials respected his wishes, while also directing him to report any future misconduct.

Cortines, 80, a leading national figure in education, retired in April 2011.

In March 2012, Graham's attorneys notified L.A. Unified that they intended to file a harassment claim. In May, the Board of Education approved a cash settlement of \$200,000 plus lifetime health benefits for Graham, who also agreed to leave his \$150,000-a-year job as director of leasing and asset management.

The agreement broke down in part because district officials made it public before it was final. Graham ultimately returned to work.

"The facts alone without ever hearing my side of the story should be sickening to the community," Graham wrote in an email. "Superintendent Cortines admitted that he took a married employee to his vacation home and had inappropriate sexual relations."

Meanwhile, parents, students and staff last week voted to change the name of the downtown Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts.

Cortines' name on the district's visually striking \$232-million high school was an issue of contention even before the harassment allegations. The school board overrode its own school naming process to honor Cortines. Board President Monica Garcia, who represents the school, said the action was justified based on Cortines' long service as well as his dedication to the arts

and to the arts high school.

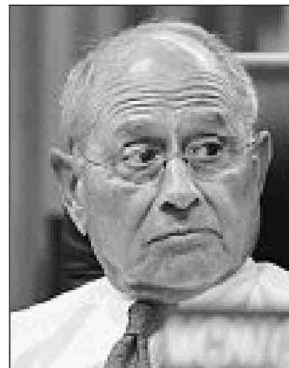
But the allegations helped stoke continued unhappiness over the naming.

In balloting organized at the school, about 60% of participants opted for the name Grand School of Visual and Performing Arts, a reference to the Grand Avenue location, said former PTA leader Judi Bell, a member of the renaming committee.

In second place, with 36%, was a name that incorporated "#9," which refers to the project number before the school was named — and the fact that the campus opened on Sept. 9, 2009. The current name attracted just under 4% of the votes. Leaders of the effort now intend to bring the matter to the Board of Education for consideration.

About half the students voted, as well as about 200 parents and 33 staff members. Some staff members expressed concern about retaliation if they took part in the process.

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Los Angeles T1

RAMON CORTINES former LAUSD superintendent, is the focus of a manager's allegations.



L.A. UNIFIED SCHOOL BOARD

Election draws nation's attention

EDUCATION: Both union and reform camps have a lot riding on primary.

By Barbara Jones
Staff Writer

The race for three Los Angeles Unified school board seats has drawn more than \$4 million in donations — as well as the attention of education leaders nationwide — as the district's powerful unions and the reform movement battle for control of public education.

The Coalition for School Reform just got a \$1 million boost from New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg in its independent campaign in support of three candidates who favor parental choice, charter growth and data-based teacher evaluations.

Organized labor, meanwhile, is backing a slate of pro-teacher candidates that oppose many of the policies implemented since John Deasy became superintendent in April 2011.

"This is not the first time that reformers and the unions have gone head to head, but the stakes have never been this high," said Dan Schnur, director of the Jesse Unruh Institute of Politics at the University of Southern California. "This fight isn't about John Deasy the person, but what he represents — an aggressive approach to reform that raises a lot of very high passions on both sides of the debate.

"These elections represent what it's going to take to make L.A.'s public schools

better."

While there have been other high-profile battles between organized labor and education reformers — the Chicago teachers' strike last fall was one — Schnur said Bloomberg's donation is a strong indicator that what

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happens in Los Angeles could have a ripple effect nationwide.

"L.A. has not historically been a leader on education reform but that could very well be about to change," he said.

Bloomberg's \$1 million contribution, which was brokered by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, swelled the coffers of the reform coalition to more than \$2.5 million. Other high-profile donors to the reform cause include billionaires Eli Broad and Jerry Perenchio, \$250,000; businesswoman Lynda Resnick, \$100,000; and DreamWorks chief Jeffrey Katzenberg and "Everybody Loves Raymond" actress Monica Horan Rosenthal, \$50,000 each.

"We've reached a critical juncture in public education in Los Angeles," said Janelle Erickson, a former Villaraigosa aide who is now working for the coalition. "Schools are a long way from where they should be, but they're moving in the right direction, like double-digit improvement in English and math scores and a rising graduation rate.

"We need to maintain a progressive school board so John Deasy can maintain this momentum."

The group is funding campaign mailers and campaign consultants for its candidates in the three open seats.

The labor candidates are

receiving similar support from independent campaign committees representing United Teachers Los Angeles, SEIU Local 99 and the County Federation of Labor, which together have spent more than \$1 million.

Greg Solkovits, a UTLA vice president who is overseeing the campaign, said organized labor will doubtless be outspent, although the unions are committed to spending whatever they can to support "pro-teacher" candidates who respect the education profession.

"Do voters want board members who have educational experience, who are willing to sit down and listen to the classroom teacher? Or do they want those who are going to listen to wealthy entrepreneurs who want to privatize education?" he said.

The March 5 primary includes three of the seven school board seats, with a May 21 runoff for any race in which no single candidate receives more than 50 percent.

In East L.A., board President Monica Garcia, a staunch Deasy supporter, is being opposed by three UTLA-backed candidates for the District 2 seat.

In District 6 in the East San Fernando Valley, three candidates are vying to succeed Nury Martinez, who is pursuing a seat on the City Council. All have been endorsed by UTLA, while one — Antonio Sanchez — also has the backing of the reformers.

Both sides say the toughest race is for District 4, which stretches from the south San Fernando Valley to the Westside and Hollywood.

Campaign finance statements show the unions have spent almost \$290,000 on first-term incumbent Steve Zimmer as he fends off a chal-

lenge by attorney Kate Anderson, whose has received nearly \$550,000 worth of support from the coalition.

District 4

A former teacher and counselor, Zimmer describes himself as the "independent voice" on the board, providing the swing vote when members tie 3-3 on contentious policy issues.

"I understand that I'm vulnerable, and that powerful forces are aligned against me," said Zimmer, 42, who has received about \$31,000 in campaign contributions.

"But I do think we get to a dangerous place when we decide that independent voices don't have a place on the school board. That's what I worry about — not myself, but if I'm made to be the example of what can be done to somebody who makes decisions issue by issue."

During his first term, he drew the ire of charter supporters when he sought a moratorium on new approvals, but also derailed Deasy's plan to decimate the Adult Education Division.

"My voting record doesn't support anything but independence when it comes to empirical issues," Zimmer said. "Certainly I have my door open to UTLA and reform groups and others. We have to change this district together, and that's how I've approached this office."

If he's re-elected, Zimmer said he wants to work on implementing the teacher evaluation system, which includes the use of student test scores — an issue that put him at odds with Deasy.

He's also focused on improving the district's 64 percent high-school graduation rate and preparing students for college and careers.

Zimmer also said he'd vote to keep Deasy on as superintendent, which he noted is the "critical issue of the campaign."

"That doesn't mean I agree with him on every single pol-

icy issue, and I stand by the idea that I shouldn't have to."

Despite the strong support of the reform coalition, Anderson said she's "running my own campaign," starting with the grass-roots effort that made her the first school board candidate to qualify for the ballot.

An attorney for the non-profit advocacy group Children Now and the mother of third-grade twins, she said she got into the race because she wants to play a role in shaping the education system.

"There's so much enthusiasm and excitement about the future of schools," said Anderson, whose also raised about \$130,000 in individual campaign contributions. "It's a testament to the change that's possible in LAUSD and that people want to see."

Anderson's campaign centers on creating a strong and effective teaching corps so that every student has the best possible chance at a great education. She's also an advocate for greater autonomy at local schools and for giving parents more alternatives for educating their kids.

A former budget aide to U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman, Anderson also said she'd use her role on the school board to "get rid of the waste and inefficiency in LAUSD."

Anderson also said she would "absolutely" vote to retain Deasy, and to collaborate with UTLA, which last week funded a campaign mailer against her.

District 6

In the District 6 race, political newcomers Maria Cano, Monica Ratliff and Antonio Sanchez collected a total of roughly \$30,000 in contributions, according to finance statements.

Both organized labor and the reform committee have gotten behind Sanchez, spending more than \$600,000 on his campaign, according to figures released Friday.

Cano, who turned 43 on Saturday, grew up in the East Valley and worked as a community liaison for LAUSD's Facilities Division during its school-construction boom.

She sees a need for the district to begin reinvesting in the community, restoring programs cut during the financial crisis and reviewing the budget to ensure that money is well-spent.

"There needs to be priorities set before we go looking for ways to glamour-up the district," she said, citing the \$500 million plan to provide a computer tablet to all 650,000 students in LAUSD. "I'm not opposed to technology, but there are questions about access, and what educational programs will look like."

Cano also expressed dissatisfaction with Deasy's efforts to improve the district, noting that the school board just approved a takeover of 24th Street Elementary using the Parent Trigger law.

"We need to start showing results," she said. "It needs to be 100 times better than what we're giving them."

With a degree from Columbia Law School, Ratliff worked as a public-interest attorney in L.A. and Pacoima becoming switching to education and becoming an LAUSD teacher, a career change made in the hopes of bettering the lives of inner-city kids.

"There's nothing like exploring a concept with a student and helping a kid get the meaning out of it," she said.

After 12 years spent in the classroom, Ratliff said her top priority as a board member would be to ensure the health and safety of students, an issue that came to the forefront last year following the Miramonte sex-abuse scandal.

She advocates restoring the jobs of assistant principals that were cut during the budget crisis, freeing up principals to monitor classrooms. She also would work to hire

more psychologists for local campuses.

Ratliff, 43, also would focus as a board member on promoting vocational training for students who aren't college-bound.

She also wants to improve communication between the district and parents and other stakeholders, an effort that would include holding board meetings at night so that more people could attend.

Ratliff conceded that Deasy has "done great things," including requiring more experience before a teacher is granted tenure. But she said she'd want to hear his explanation for how he handled the Miramonte scandal and other personnel matters before deciding whether she'd support him.

Sanchez, 30, who worked on behalf of Los Angeles County Federation of Labor to help pass Proposition 30, the sales-tax hike for education, said he'd follow through as a board member to ensure the revenue gets spent on programs for English-language learning and special-needs students.

He also would push for the expansion of schools as civic hubs, with health clinics and

community centers and programs aimed at bettering students' lives.

He said his endorsement by UTLA and his unwavering support of Deasy's policies would put him in a unique position to make a difference.

"Both sides have something to add to the conversation," he said. "I have the insight that the reform movement and the unions can pull together."

With the potential for a change in the political direction of the nation's second-largest school district, West Valley board member Tamar Galatzan is keeping a close eye on the campaigns.

"We hire and fire the superintendent, oversee the budget and we make policy for the school district," said Galatzan, who is not up for re-election. "The success or the failure of LAUSD affects everybody in Los Angeles."

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District 4 challenger Kate Anderson is heavily backed by reformers.



Antonio Sanchez has union and reformer support in the race for District 6.



District 4 incumbent Steve Zimmer has received union support.



Maria Cano, a District 6 candidate, has worked in LAUSD's Facilities Division.



District 6 candidate Monica Ratliff was a lawyer who became a teacher.