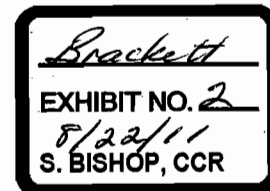


Right-to-know petition filed against Oyster River board

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Personnel issues: Improper closed-door sessions alleged. DURHAM ♦ A concerned parent and former board member has filed a right-to-know petition against the Oyster River Cooperative School District board and its chairman, alleging that discussions about the departure of the former superintendent and the hiring of his replacement were improperly done behind closed doors.

The petition comes in the wake of a chaotic few months that saw the departure of several top administrators amid an outcry from students and parents. The flashpoint came in April, when the school board rejected the leading candidate to replace the outgoing high school principal. Hundreds of high school students later walked out of class en masse to protest.

A leading criticism has been a lack of public information regarding decisions about top administrators, including why that principal candidate was not chosen and how the board and former Superintendent Howard Colter came to an agreement to have him leave at the end of last month.

David Taylor, who has a daughter in the high school and previously served on the school board, filed a right-to-know request on June 20 seeking all records of communications made between board members and others regarding non-meetings, which are exempt from the open meetings provisions of the right-to-know law. He contends that board members have made personnel decisions during the non-meetings, which can include consultations with legal counsel.

Officials responded in part to Taylor's request, as every board member except for Chairman Henry Brackett turned over emails that showed numerous non-meetings took place before and after Colter's departure.

In a right-to-know petition filed yesterday in Strafford County Superior Court, Taylor alleges that decisions about Colter's employment, as well

as the hiring of his replacement, were made during those meetings and is seeking more information from them.

◆The board has used the vehicle of a non-meeting to circumvent the spirit and purpose of RSA 91-A (the right-to-know law),◆ Taylor wrote.

But Brackett said yesterday that Taylor is wrong and is on a ◆fishing expedition.◆

◆Everything we did is proper. We had non-meetings, which is with an attorney,◆ he said. ◆We followed the right-to-know law 100 percent.◆

Brackett also admitted that he has not produced any emails for Taylor. He said he simply has not had time to go through all of his accounts.

◆He◆s right on one thing,◆ Brackett said of Taylor. ◆I have not delivered on his right-to-know request. I◆m going through 3,500 emails, both school district and my own personal things. I◆ve been remiss in doing that.◆

Taylor said he is pursuing the information because the public has a right to know what the school board is doing.

◆I◆m trying to reconstruct what the decisions are and what happened, trying to fill in the missing pieces,◆ he said yesterday.

Taylor◆s petition seeks additional information about the non-meetings and to force the school board to be more open.

No hearing on the matter had been scheduled as of yesterday.

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