Ex-HR chief could get $55,500 in settlement

District requiring her to defend claims over disparaging messages

By TAWNELL D. HOBBS and MATTHEW HAAG
Staff Writers

The Dallas ISD personnel chief who resigned Thursday over instant messages that disparaged her co-workers could receive at least $55,500 in a settlement that requires her to work with trustees and administrators to defend any claims, complaints or legal proceedings brought against the district.

Carmen Darville agreed to resign after The Dallas Morning News obtained instant messages in which she and other administrators ridiculed race, religion, age and weight, and discussed ways to get rid of employees. Executive director Jose “Tony” Munoz also resigned and will receive about $22,000 in a settlement.

Superintendent Mike Miles’ decision to offer a severance was rebuked Friday by some of his bosses on the school board.

See TRUSTEES Page 11A
Trustees are questioning severance to 2 from HR

Continued from Page 1A

Trustees have expressed concern to Miles before for his willingness to give lucrative settlements to his top administrators who have left.

Some trustees said Miles should have fired Darville without giving her money because her messages were unprofessional and embarrassed the district.

“She should not have gotten that severance,” trustee Joyce Foreman said. “Looking at all the info that we have so far, it appears that the employees’ complaints to trustees and other people might be true in regards to what has been going on” in the human resources department.

Trustees Dan Micciche and Eric Cowan also said that Darville deserved no money.

Darville made $190,550 a year. Her settlement is for 3½ months’ salary. She also will be paid nearly $24,000 for six weeks of earned leave time, according to DISD spokesman Jon Dahlander.

Munoz’s settlement is for two months’ salary. He made $132,046.

Closed session set

The school board plans to meet in closed session Tuesday evening to discuss the future of the Human Capital Management department, which lost two top leaders on the same day.

Dahlander said the department is being led by human resource executive directors Meredith Hudson and Tonya Sador Grayson, with assistance from deputy chief of staff Justin Coppedge.

The messages were among evidence cited by a former DISD investigator in a Dec. 18 letter requesting a full investigation of Darville and other human resource administrators. The letter alleged possible violations of state law and district policy.

“Some of the info that we have so far, it appears that the employees’ complaints to trustees and other people might be true in regards to what has been going on” in the human resources department.

Trustees Dan Micciche and Eric Cowan also said that Darville deserved no money.

Darville made $190,550 a year. Her settlement is for 3½ months’ salary. She also will be paid nearly $24,000 for six weeks of earned leave time, according to DISD spokesman Jon Dahlander.

Closed session set

The school board plans to meet in closed session Tuesday evening to discuss the future of the Human Capital Management department, which lost two top leaders on the same day.

Dahlander said the department is being led by human resource executive directors Meredith Hudson and Tonya Sador Grayson, with assistance from deputy chief of staff Justin Coppedge.

The messages were among evidence cited by a former DISD investigator in a Dec. 18 letter requesting a full investigation of Darville and other human resource administrators. The letter alleged possible violations of state law and district policy.

The letter was written by Vickie Blair, who worked for the Office of Internal Audit, which reports to the board of trustees. It was intended for the trustees but was never given to them. Blair said she quit in early January because she didn’t feel the district would properly support investigating high-ranking administrators.

The trustees are expected to discuss the allegations laid out in the letter at the Tuesday board meeting.

Teachers group

On Friday, Alliance-AFT, a teachers’ union, filed open records requests to find out how the personnel department operated. The group has complained that teachers have been unfairly fired under Miles.

“Our members know that this is not an isolated incident. This week’s developments are further evidence of a systemic failure by this administration to protect employees from mistreatment,” the teachers group said in a statement.

The issue is being watched closely by some former employees who were fired or resigned in lieu of termination. Peter Schulte, an attorney for fired DISD investigator Jeremy Liebbe, said he is monitoring the situation for his client.

Liebbe was head of DISD’s Professional Standards Office when he was fired in September. He was accused of poor behavior and decision-making and violating district policy and state law. His attorneys adamantly deny the allegations and say they plan to file a

Timing questioned

Some trustees want to know why they were not told about the possible violations of state law and district policy until contacted by The News.

And trustee Lew Blackburn said he wants to know why Miles waited for weeks after viewing some of the instant messages to ask Darville to resign.

Dahlander said Thursday that chief internal auditor Mike Singleton showed Miles some of Darville’s messages about two weeks ago. Dahlander said Miles talked to Darville about them but didn’t ask her to resign until Thursday because “he’s been trying to place the messages in proper context.”

Blackburn said it appeared that Darville was treated differently than other district employees who have been fired for similar actions.

“Did a teacher or principal had done the same thing, would we have taken this action against her?” Blackburn said. “The answer would be yes, and we would have taken it fairly quickly.”

Staff writer Holly K. Hacker contributed to this report.
EDITORIAL

A Mess at DISD

Miles must turn culture toward sense, decency

We can't know whether it was immaturity or poor character or some combination of both, but the culture inside DISD's human resources department was clearly unprofessional. It's now a stain on Superintendent Mike Miles' administration that neither he nor the district needed.

Carmen Darville, chief of the Orwellian-named Human Capital Management office, was considered a wunderkind administrator. At just 30, she was charged with the massive responsibility of overseeing everything from recruitment to termination for the district's 18,000 employees.

Nowhere is professionalism more important than when you deal with people's livelihoods. Yet that's exactly what Darville's department lacked, according to a Dallas Morning News investigation of instant messages between Darville and top assistants.

Miles correctly sought and received Darville's resignation as well as the resignation of Jose "Tony" Munoz, an executive director who reported to her. Among other things, the 1,000 sent messages back and forth that inappropriately referenced race, religion and old age — exactly the subjects that human resources officials should be most sensitive to.

There is also just a meanness and nastiness in many of the messages that might help explain why so many DISD employees say they are dispirited.

It doesn't matter how competent a manager might be. Cruelty, pettiness and immaturity are losing traits, and Darville and Munoz had to go.

That doesn't just apply to the human resources department. Blair, the district's chief internal auditor, prepared a report last year that not only cited the messages but made serious allegations about improper recruiting, retaliatory terminations and falsified records among other things.

Blair detailed her report in a letter to trustees, but Mike Singleton, DISD's chief internal auditor, never provided the letter to the board.

Why? The board deserved to know what was going on, and its members should demand answers about why they didn't.

There's also a lingering question about what this says about Miles. The superintendent has pushed hard on reforms this newspaper supports, and it appeared that he had begun to assemble a strong leadership team to implement them.

Darville was a major piece of that puzzle. The fact that her office is now exposed as less than professional casts a shadow on Miles.

He needs to be the one to shine a light on it. And he needs to explain why there was such a failure of judgment.
Trustees have expressed concern to Miles before for his willingness to give lucrative settlements to his top administrators who have left.

Some trustees said Miles should have fired Darville without giving her money because her messages were unprofessional and embarrased the district.

“She should not have gotten that severance,” trustee Joyce Foreman said. “Looking at all the info that we have so far, it appears that the employees’ complaints to trustees and other people might be true in regards to what has been going on” in the human resources department.

Trustees Dan Micciche and Erin Cowan also said that Darville deserved no money.

Darville made $190,550 a year. Her settlement is for 3 1/2 months’ salary. She also will be paid nearly $24,000 for six weeks of earned leave time, according to DISD spokesman Jon Dahlander.

Munoz’s settlement is for two months’ salary. He made $132,046.

Closed session set

The school board plans to meet in closed session Tuesday evening to discuss the future of the Human Capital Management department, which lost two top leaders on the same day.

Dahlander said the department is being led by human resource executive directors Meredyth Hudson and Tonya Sadler Grayson, with assistance from deputy chief of staff Justin Coppegee.

The messages were among evidence cited by a former DISD investigator in a Dec. 18 letter requesting a full investigation of Darville and other human resource administrators. The letter alleged possible improper recruiting practices, falsified records, retaliatory terminations, nepotism and harassment.

The letter was written by Vickie Blair, who worked for the Office of Internal Audit, which reports to the board of trustees. It was intended for the trustees but was never given to them. Blair said she quit in early January because she didn’t feel the district would properly support investigating high-ranking administrators.

The trustees are expected to discuss the allegations laid out in the letter at the Tuesday board meeting.

Teachers group

On Friday, Alliance-AFT, which represents several thousand DISD teachers, hinted at possible lawsuits from the scandal and said it was determined to find out if the district “engaged in improper recruiting practices, retaliatory firings, nepotism and harassment.”

Alliance-AFT said it will file open records requests to find out how the personnel department operated. The group has complained that teachers have been unfairly fired under Miles.

“Our members know that this is not an isolated incident. This week’s developments are further evidence of a systemic failure by this administration to protect employees from mistreatment,” the teachers group said in a statement.

The issue is being watched closely by some former employees who were fired or resigned in lieu of termination. Peter Schulte, an attorney for fired DISD investigator Jeremy Liebbe, said he is monitoring the situation for his client.

Liebbe was head of DISD’s Professional Standards Office when he was fired in September. He was accused of poor behavior and decision-making and violating district policy and state law. His attorneys adamantly deny the allegations and say they plan to file a lawsuit.

Liebbe’s attorneys say that his troubles began when he started looking into the background of Grayson, his former boss. Grayson failed to disclose her criminal record on her job application. She served 12 months’ probation in 1990 for misdemeanor criminal trespassing in Georgia, when she was 19.

“When he tried to bring this to the attention of the administration, he was retaliated against,” Schulte said. “Now hopefully the truth is starting to come out about what really has been going on in the top ranks of the district. Our goal is to seek justice so individuals like this can never work in public service again.”

Timing questioned

Some trustees want to know why they were not told about the possible violations of state law and district policy until contacted by The News.

And trustee Lew Blackburn said he wants to know why Miles waited for weeks after viewing some of the instant messages to ask Darville to resign.

Dahlander said Thursday that chief internal auditor Mike Singleton showed Miles some of Darville’s messages about two weeks ago. Dahlander said Miles talked to Darville about them but didn’t ask her to resign until Thursday because “he’s been trying to place the messages in proper context.”

Blackburn said it appeared that Darville was treated differently than other district employees who have been fired for similar actions.

“If a teacher or principal had done the same thing, would we have taken this action against her?” Blackburn said. “The answer would be yes, and we would have taken it fairly quickly.”

Staff writer Holly K. Hacker contributed to this report.