

June 5 '75

# Local High School Superintendent Is Suspended by Educ. Board at Hearing

The Bridgeport Board of Education voted unanimously late Wednesday night to terminate the contract of Supt. Duane Miller for reasons of unprofessional conduct, causing turmoil in the system and misrepresenting his past to the board at the time he was employed. The termination was effective immediately.

David Nuttleman of Gering, Miller's attorney, said that Miller intends to take some legal action but has not yet decided the type of action he wants to take.

According to Nuttleman there are two legal avenues open to Miller. One is that he may take his case into state court, which would be in the form of an appeal through a district court and the other is under the Civil Rights Act, which may be filed in a Federal District Court.

Miller was hired by the board Jan. 1 and given a 2½ year contract. He was notified by a letter from the board of his suspension May 12. A list of 17 complaints against him was attached to the letter and a public hearing to consider his dismissal was scheduled.

The hearing opened at 4:00 p.m. Wednesday and concluded about 11:00 p.m., immediately after the board's approval of the motion to terminate his contract.

Witnesses called by the board's attorney, Robert Bulger of Bridgeport, included Calvin Henne, elementary principal for 11 years. Henne told the board that he was summoned to Miller's office and asked by the superintendent: "Henne, why the hell don't you resign?"

Henne said he then told Miller that he wanted a tape recording of the entire conversa-

tion. Both taped the session and the tape, more than an hour long was played.

Joe Wells, high school principal for six years and acting superintendent since Miller's suspension, testified that Miller suspended him from his duties Febr. 7, told him to go to his office and stay there. Wells then stated that after 45 minutes Miller came to his (Wells') office and said he did not have the authority to suspend him and asked him to stay on.

He continued, "I told him he had suspended me and I was going home at noon, and I did." He voluntarily returned to his duties Febr. 11.

Next on the witness chair was Mrs. Ann Smith, vice president of the Bridgeport Education Assn., and faculty member for five years who commented that "the Wells incident was blamed as being at least part of the cause of breakdown in discipline and had a divisive effect on teachers.

Another teacher and BEA president agreed with Mrs. Smith. They went on to say that they were relating the consensus of views of the faculty, adding that four teachers had already resigned and about 75 per cent of the high school faculty was actively seeking other positions before Miller's suspension.

Next in the line of witnesses was Bridgeport's Police Chief Darrel Brown. He related several meetings with Miller in which, more than once, he described Miller as becoming irrational. Brown testified that when a group of students were driving downtown during the noon hour, he went to Miller to see if the school's automobile policy had been changed. He

stated that Miller was belligerent and "became irrational."

Miller said Brown came to his office and asked why he was not enforcing the policy. Miller said he was not aware there was such a policy but later discovered there was. He said he then encouraged students not to break the policy but to work to change it.

Accused of misrepresenting his past by stating on an application for certification that he had never been convicted of a felony, Miller said, "That was 20 years ago, I had just gotten out of the Navy, I had problems and I got into trouble. I paid my time. The court later gave me the opportunity to enter a not guilty plea, and the Court dismissed the charges and I was released from all penalties. Therefore, to the best of my knowledge I haven't been convicted of a felony."

Miller's above reply was related to information entered in the record of the hearing concerning a felony charge brought against him in King County, Washington, following a 1955 incident.

To the questioning of the board's attorney, Robert Bulger, about having had mental care related to the above felony charge, Miller replied, "Yes, I did, and I was also once treated in a hospital for a sprained ankle too. Is that relevant here?"

Repeatedly Miller said he tried to tell school personnel that if they had complaints they should take them to the board in the established procedure: in writing.

"I'm not here to convince you that you need me, but to con-

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vince you that you've got problems. You can face them now or wait until the next guy comes to town and gets his windows knocked out."

Nuttleman told the board that since neither he nor his client had had an opportunity to read the transcript of the conversation with Miss Tensvold, who was interviewed by Miller for a position in the Bridgeport Schools, that they did not wish to discuss it at the hearing.

At the conclusion of his testimony Miller referred again to the accusations of agitation and turmoil. He stated, "If I could start this much trouble this fast, I should be with the CIA helping to start revolutions in foreign countries."

Mrs. Charlotte King, a bookkeeper hired by the school after Dr. Miller was hired, was the only other witness.

The hearing was then opened to questions and comments from the public and about six persons including both parents and students, responded.

Approximately 200 persons attended this open hearing.

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