


School official faces hate crime charges

By Jay F. Marks  0
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A school administrator was charged Tuesday with assaulting two students in what prosecutors are calling a racially motivated attack.

Richard Dale Thomas, transportation director for Crooked Oak Public Schools, faces two misdemeanor counts of harassment because of race under Oklahoma's hate crime law.

District Attorney David Prater said it is the first time that such charges have been filed in Oklahoma County to his knowledge.

The allegations against Thomas emerged when an Oklahoma County sheriff's deputy began looking into a report that the 33-year-old Oklahoma City resident had pushed and threatened a Crooked Oak student on Sept. 11.

Investigators learned Thomas has a history of using racial slurs and trying to pick fights with black students, authorities said.

"This has been going on for years over there," Prater said.

Thomas' attorney, Joe White, said he has not seen the charges, but he intends to clear his client's name.

White said he is troubled by the hate crime allegations, but he hasn't seen any evidence of denigrating statements toward black students by Thomas.

White also rebutted the allegation Thomas assaulted a student on Sept. 11.

"I've seen the (surveillance) video and it didn't happen," he said.

Thomas has been suspended with pay until the criminal case against him has been resolved.

The charges against Thomas carry up to a year in prison because of the racial overtones alleged by prosecutors.

He said it is important to file charges in such cases to empower people to report similar activity involving harassment or intimidation based on race or other factors.

Superintendent also charged

Superintendent Shannon Lee Goodsell, 38, is charged with obstructing an officer for allegedly interfering with the investigation into the assault allegation against Thomas.

Goodsell's attorney, Richard O'Carroll, insists the veteran superintendent did nothing wrong.

Goodsell is accused of threatening to suspend a sheriff's deputy who was assigned as a school resource officer when the deputy refused to provide him with copies of witness statements in his investigation.

O'Carroll said Goodsell was acting on advice from the school district's attorney.

"He needed those reports because the law requires him to make his own investigation," he said.

O'Carroll said Goodsell is disappointed prosecutors filed charges against him.

"This was a misunderstanding," he said. "There was no criminal intent."

At least one member of the Crooked Oak School Board is siding with Goodsell.

"All I can say is that Shannon Goodsell is a very upstanding person," Lisa Nanney said. "He's not out to cover up anything on anybody. He is not out to hurt anyone."

Nanney said Goodsell acted quickly once he learned about the Sept. 11 allegation against Thomas, suspending him until the school could properly investigate.

She said Goodsell also worked quickly to calm the student and his family. Nanney said there were no racial problems in the school district.

Crooked Oak is a five-square-mile district southwest of downtown Oklahoma City with about 1,000 students. About 31 percent of those students are black, according to state records.

Contributing: Staff Writer Jesse Olivarez



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