

New super was acquitted of charges **(<http://tahlequahdailypress.com/local/x519342347/New-super-was-acquitted-of-charges>)**

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TAHLEQUAH DAILY PRESS — Some Tahlequah Public Schools patrons are concerned about a “blemish” on newly hired Superintendent Shannon Goodsell’s record at his previous post as superintendent at Crooked Oak Schools.

But school board members say Goodsell was a victim of circumstance, and that he’s the ideal candidate for the job.

According to Oklahoma State Courts Network documents, Goodsell was charged with two counts of obstructing an officer in the performance of his official duties in Oklahoma County in October of last year. Goodsell was acquitted after a four-day jury trial in April.

The charges were filed after Oklahoma County sheriff’s deputies investigated a September assault allegation against Richard Dale Thomas, the school’s transportation director.

Thomas was accused of shoving a black student into a locker. The ensuing investigation revealed a similar incident, resulting in two misdemeanor hate crime charges being filed against Thomas. Goodsell was implicated after he contacted the prosecutor who filed charges against Thomas. Throughout the process, Goodsell maintained his innocence.

Tahlequah Public School Board member and attorney Tim Baker believes the charges against Goodsell were “bogus,” and said board members completed a thorough investigation before deciding to hire him.

“The school he came from had some kids who may have been gang members, and it was an election year in that jurisdiction,” said Baker. “The jury was out 15 minutes after a four-day trial and acquitted him. I’ve worked with jury trials for a long time, and that proved to me they were convinced the charges were bogus.”

Goodsell told the Press he had acted on recommendations made by the Crooked Oak School Board counsel.

“Whenever I talk to anyone about this, the question they ask is, after having been through the process, would I have done anything differently?” said Goodsell. “The answer is no, absolutely not. The actions I took were my responsibility to maintain the integrity of the school and to protect the school district.”

Thomas is set to stand trial on misdemeanor charges in August.

Fellow board member Tony Boyle echoed Baker's statements, and said the board was aware of Goodsell's charges.

"He [Goodsell] spent about 30 minutes explaining to us the circumstances of the charges during our meeting last Thursday, and it was clear they were absolutely bogus," said Boyle. "Had he been [working] here and not acted in the same way, I would be really upset. It's important to stand up for your people, and that's what he did."

Baker said in addition to talking to attorneys, the board visited with members of Goodsell's school board in Crooked Oak, as well as with teachers and staff.

"Everyone [at Crooked Oak] thinks the world of him," said Baker. "Test scores have improved, attendance has improved, and he's made a positive difference in his district. At 38, he's one of the youngest superintendents to make such positive strides. Anyone can sue anyone these days, and this action was a product of that. Did it concern us? Sure. Did we look into the matter thoroughly? Definitely. We believe we made the right decision in hiring him."

Goodsell is looking forward to making a new home in Tahlequah. "The school board really cares about kids, and by that I mean all kids, not just certain groups, which is incredibly important to me," said Goodsell. "It's one of the things that attracted me to Tahlequah."