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Embattled budget director to resign; job is eliminated

By Tim Eberly
The Virginian-Pilot
© May 31, 2014

PORTSMOUTH

The school division's budget and finance director, who was put on administrative leave two months ago, is resigning at the end of June, school records show.

Meera Phaltankar's decision came as the division is planning to restructure the budget and finance department in a way that eliminates her position.

Her resignation will be effective June 30.

Superintendent David Stuckwisch did not return numerous calls or emails seeking comment for this story. He is preparing for an early departure of his own, also at the end of June.

Stuckwisch's early resignation and Phaltankar's suspension are both connected to a Virginian-Pilot investigative report published in April. The article revealed that the division operated its finances in ways that ran contrary to state law well after a special grand jury castigated it for similar practices. Stuckwisch had previously said he was going to retire on Aug. 15.

As of July 1, with the proposed reorganization, the budget and finance director would be replaced by a director of accounting, Assistant Superintendent Chris Steele said. The division began advertising for the latter position several weeks ago.

Steele noted that the School Board needs to weigh in on the proposal.

Phaltankar did not return a phone message seeking comment. But her attorney, Lisa Bertini, said Thursday that Phaltankar learned of the pending reorganization and, without knowing how it would affect her position, decided it was time to move on.

"She's just trying to have a new life," Bertini said. "She's not the type to sit around and wait - to her credit."

Bertini said Phaltankar's resignation should not be construed as an admission of wrongdoing. Phaltankar contends that she did nothing wrong, she said.

Phaltankar is pursuing a job in another state, but Bertini declined to provide details, saying she wanted to respect the privacy of the parties involved.

School Board Chairman James Bridgeford said Wednesday he was aware that Steele was looking at restructuring but didn't know the details.

Phaltankar was placed on leave March 31. Shortly after, she hired Bertini, who specializes in employment law.

At the time, Phaltankar said her leave would be paid, though school officials would not provide details.

Her employment is based on what amounts to a yearly contract, division records show.

It's a document called a "pay notification," the most recent of which details the division's intent to employ Phaltankar for the 2013-14 school year at a salary of \$103,045, with a \$2,500 supplement for unspecified purposes.

Phaltankar has been working for the school system since March 2006.

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