

Showdown in Hempstead

District's battle with Waronker set for Monday

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A showdown is brewing over the fate of embattled Hempstead school Superintendent Shimon Waronker.

After a lengthy executive session this week, the board of education of the struggling district passed a resolution calling on Waronker to appear for a hearing Monday to discuss his legal claim challenging being placed on administrative leave by the board. If he fails to appear, it "should be deemed gross insubordination," according to the resolution read aloud at the meeting.

But Waronker's attorney, Frederick Brewington of Hempstead, says the board had no authority to demand that his client be there. "This is an outrageous abuse of authority and an attempt to use thuggish means to accomplish ill-conceived ends," he told Newsday.

Waronker will not be in attendance at the Monday hearing, Brewington added.

Waronker has been a flashpoint for the divided school board. He was hired by the former board majority in May and started in June under a four-year contract at an annual base salary of \$265,000. On Jan. 9, he was placed on paid administrative leave after the board's



Hempstead Superintendent Shimon Waronker on Jan. 30

balance of power shifted to the new majority — LaMont Johnson, David Gates and Randy Stith. Regina Armstrong, a longtime administrator in the district, is serving as acting superintendent.

Waronker on Jan. 19 sued in federal court, alleging his re-

moval from the district was a punitive suspension and that his rights to speak out against problems and to due process had been violated. The judge denied his request for a temporary injunction, but his case continues.

According to Jonathan Scher,

This is an outrageous abuse of authority and an attempt to use thuggish means to accomplish ill-conceived ends."

— Frederick Brewington,
Shimon Waronker's
attorney

an attorney for the district, Monday's hearing was scheduled in response to a legal notice received by the district, which Brewington said was intended to alert the district to further legal action Waronker plans to take in state court.

Scher said the hearing is "very important" because it "allows you to assess your situation." District officials can then decide how they wish to proceed, for example, choosing whether to settle or move forward with litigation, Scher said.

The notice, filed in January, says Waronker plans to seek damages for "breach of contract, retaliation, mental/emotional injuries, mental pain and suffering," among other claims.

At Monday's board meeting, trustees emerged from a lengthy closed-door session and approved the resolution seeking Waronker's appearance.

Stith, Johnson and Gates voted in favor of the resolution.

President Maribel Touré, who was in the board majority when Waronker was hired, abstained from the vote. Vice president Gwendolyn Jackson had left the meeting earlier.

On Thursday, Johnson declined a request for comment about Monday's hearing.

Touré said she couldn't comment on personnel matters, but as to why she abstained from the vote, told Newsday she's "very opposed" to Waronker being on administrative leave. "It doesn't make any sense to be paying two salaries for superintendents," she said.

Brewington said he and his client had originally sent suggested dates for the hearing to Scher, but had heard nothing until they were notified of the resolution Tuesday.

On Thursday, Brewington wrote to Scher, taking issue with the resolution and its use of the phrase "gross insubordination."

"The outrageous determination to menace our client and place him in fear of his employment is yet another senseless act which demonstrates the illogical and erratic use of the public trust by the majority of the board," he wrote in the letter.

He further called on the district's attorneys to have the board rescind its resolution and warned against taking any action regarding Waronker's employment status as a result of his absence from the hearing.

The hearing is scheduled for 10 a.m. Monday at Scher's office in Carle Place.

Officer hurt helping motorist along LIE

A Suffolk County Highway Patrol officer was injured Thursday when his vehicle was struck by another vehicle while he was assisting a third motorist on the snowy Long Island Expressway, authorities said.

The officer, who was in his vehicle when it was hit, was helping a motorist who had spun out on the eastbound LIE in Medford, Suffolk County police said.

Police said the officer was taken to Long Island Medical Center in East Patchogue for treatment of minor injuries. The accident happened about 7:40 a.m. No other information was immediately available.

— LISA IRIZARRY



The scene Thursday on LIE where a police vehicle was hit while cop aided a driver who had spun out.