

EDUCATION

Lakota superintendent investigation: Here's what we know



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Key Points

Superintendent Matt Miller is not on leave during the district's investigation, though there is a petition that says he should be.

The Butler County Sheriff's Department conducted an investigation into Miller without filing charges.

The woman who filed a complaint against Miller with the sheriff's office is Vanessa Wells, a parent in the district who ran for school board last year.

The Lakota Local Schools board of education announced two weeks ago that it was investigating superintendent Matt Miller, but wouldn't say why. The investigation came after Butler County detectives received a complaint against Miller; they decided there wasn't enough probable cause to bring criminal charges.

The board's secrecy has prompted a petition from local parents who want Miller to go on leave while the investigation continues. Meanwhile, two lawsuits were filed against the district, its treasurer and Miller for refusing to provide public records regarding the accusations.

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Miller, 50, heads the second largest district in southwest Ohio and the eighth largest school system in the state, serving more than 16,000 students in 20 schools in Butler County. His attorney, Kevin Tierney of Rittgers & Rittgers, told The Enquirer Wednesday that Miller is the target of attempted character assassination, and that all allegations against him are false.

"He expects to be fully vindicated," Tierney said.

How much does your school's superintendent make? We have the details.

Here's what we know and a timeline of when the information came out.

November 2019: Miller's wife files for divorce

Miller's wife, Barbara Kristy Miller, files for a divorce after 25 years of marriage. The Enquirer obtained more than 100 pages of the divorce records through Butler County Common Pleas Court. Barbara Kristy Miller reassumed her maiden name, Brackenridge, through the divorce.

In her complaint, Brackenridge alleges she and Miller are “incompatible” and that Miller “is guilty of gross neglect of duty” and “extreme cruelty.” She writes that they share a home in West Chester but that she stays elsewhere at night “due to safety concerns.”

Miller, who came to Lakota in 2017 and received a contract renewal in 2020, agrees they are incompatible but denies he is guilty of gross neglect of duty or extreme cruelty. In his counterclaim, he writes Brackenridge is guilty of those same charges, which Brackenridge then denies.

Throughout 2019 and 2020: Miller's dating profile was subpoenaed in divorce proceedings

Court records show Brackenridge's attorney, Vicki L. Richmond of Lampe Law, subpoenas Miller's Tinder and AshleyMadison.com profiles, including all messages sent and received and all matches Miller made through the Tinder app starting in January of 2018. Both Tinder and Ashley Madison are online dating services. Ashley Madison is an extramarital social network that claims to be “the world's leading married dating website” on its Twitter page.

Richmond subpoenas Craigslist Inc. for Miller's profile and “all personal ads containing MF for M” between January 2013 and September 2018. She also subpoenas other documents relating to Miller's bank records, salary and benefits.

Miller's attorney, Adrienne Roach of Keating Muething & Klekamp PLL, moves to quash subpoenas to Miller's therapists asking for notes, evaluations, recommendations, treatment plans, progress reports and diagnoses, claiming Miller's “most private and intimate disclosures would be exposed solely for the purposes of embarrassing him” and not for reasons relevant to the case. Those subpoenas and three others, including the one on the Tinder account, are withdrawn. court records show.

January 2021: Miller and Brackenridge are officially divorced

The couple's divorce is finalized.

Aug. 8, 2022: Complaint filed with Butler County sheriff's office

Vanessa Wells, a Lakota parent who unsuccessfully ran for school board last year, makes a complaint against Miller to the Butler County Sheriff's Office.

The Enquirer obtained these records through the sheriff's office by requesting all complaints filed against Miller on Sept. 13. A detective called The Enquirer to say the department could not respond to that specific request, since Miller was not charged, but said The Enquirer should instead request Wells' complaint to the department. The Enquirer made that request on Sept. 14 and received the agency's redacted investigation records, which have since been confirmed to The Enquirer to be about Miller and Brackenridge.

According to police records, Wells reported second-hand claims against Miller that she heard from Brackenridge. Brackenridge told Wells that Miller asked her to volunteer to babysit three local children, drug them with sleeping pills, molest them and record it. Brackenridge told Wells she refused. Wells also claimed Brackenridge said Miller would send her photos of nude children from the Internet and then have her re-send them back to him.

Wells declined to comment to The Enquirer on her complaint while the district's investigation is ongoing.

Aug. 10: Detectives interview Miller's ex-wife

Butler County detectives interview Brackenridge at her residence, records show.

During the investigation, Brackenridge tells detectives Miller's "sexual conduct grew more and more bizarre." Miller would want her to engage in sexual relationships with other men, Brackenridge tells police, and would send her nude photos of kids.

The investigation report notes that Brackenridge was unable to provide any proof of those photos and does not have the same phone or account as she did at the time when she said photos were allegedly sent.

She says Miller would arrange sexual encounters for them, which police note "all appear to be between consenting adults "

Brackenridge confirms Wells' version that Miller asked her to babysit three kids, drug them, molest them and record herself but says she did not do that. She also tells police Miller asked her to have sex with their son and his friends, which she did not do.

Miller admitted to a marriage counselor that he had made these requests, Brackenridge says.

Aug. 15: Marriage counselor contradicts ex-wife's claims; Miller admits to 'role-play' about kids

Detectives talk with the couple's marriage counselor, who says she did not recall anything to that effect and if she had heard those things "she would have reported it because she is a mandated reporter."

The detectives then interview Miller, who initially denies all of the claims. But, according to police records, Miller did say that when it came to sexual encounters, he and his ex-wife "would arrange and participate in these activities but there were never any minors involved."

The investigation report states Miller says he and his ex-wife would "role-play" and engage in "pillow talk," which on one occasion included a discussion of drugging, molesting and recording three kids.

Aug. 17: Detectives review case, no cause to file charges

Detectives meet with a Butler County prosecutor to review the evidence and determine that there is not enough probable cause to initiate any criminal charges against Miller "at this time."

Sept. 9: Lakota gets sheriff's notice

The notice says there was no probable cause that Miller had committed a crime.

Sept. 12: Lakota board announces its investigation

Board president Lynda O'Connor announces the district would investigate Miller at the Sept. 12 school board meeting. Miller, who has a yearly salary of \$192,000 plus a yearly car allowance of \$6,000, remains on the job during the investigation. Her statement is supported by board members Isaac Adi, Kelley Casper and Julie Shaffer.

Board member Darbi Boddy does not concur with the statement. She says: "The police have confirmed that, at the very least, our superintendent Matt Miller has sexual desires that he acts on in ways that are corrupting of others and puts himself and others in psychological and physical danger."

Sept. 13: Petition to place Lakota superintendent Matt Miller on administrative leave is created

More than 450 people have signed an online petition to place Miller on administrative as of Thursday, two weeks after a group called Protect Our Lakota Kids created it. The district has about 75,000 adults of voting age, according to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

The website, which was founded through an anonymous domain, says the group represents "a growing number of parents and community members that have serious concerns regarding allegations of gross sexual misconduct that may include juveniles by Matt Miller."

The website was created the day after the district opened its investigation of Miller. It lists no individuals as founders or spokespersons; it gives no contact information other than an online form. It does outline how to request police and district records related to the investigation.

The Enquirer makes a record request with the Butler County Sheriff's Office asking for complaints, incident reports and other documents regarding Miller.

Sept. 20: District sued over failure to produce public records about Miller, investigation

Cincinnati lawyer Curt Hartman, who has a reputation for filing lawsuits against local government agencies and school boards over open meeting and public records infractions, files a complaint with the Ohio Supreme Court on behalf of Liberty Township resident Diane Hughes against Lakota's school board and treasurer Adam Zink.

Hartman charges that between 20 to 30 records requests, including one from Hughes, were made to the school board asking to inspect the complaint against Miller.

Several hours later Hughes receives an email, as does The Enquirer, saying no records would be produced until after the district completed its investigation.

Sept. 22: Another suit is filed against Miller and Lakota Local Schools

Diane Butsch-Siereveld, of Hamilton, files a lawsuit against the Lakota board and Miller through attorney Matt Miller-Novak of Barron, Peck, Bennie & Schlemmer Co. LPA.

The complaint states Butsch-Siereveld attended the board meeting on Sept. 12 and observed Miller and board member Julie Shaffer texting during the meeting. She requested the text messages through an Ohio Open Records Act request, to which Lakota attorney Brodi Conover refuses to provide the records because the request is "overly broad and ambiguous."

Sept. 28: Miller's attorney says superintendent is target of attempted character assassination

Tierney calls The Enquirer to make a statement on Miller's behalf, claiming all allegations made against Miller are false. He says Miller is the target of attempted character assassination, that Miller fully complied with the sheriff's investigation that did not result in any criminal charges and that Miller "expects to be fully vindicated."

"A lot of false allegations have been made against him," Tierney tells The Enquirer.

Tierney emphasizes Miller is committed to serving the students, staff and community of the Lakota school district.