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# In New Haven, Schools Can't Escape Politics

Connecticut Public Radio | By Neena Satija

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Results of an investigation into alleged grade tampering at a New Haven High School are expected to be released on Friday/today. WNPR's Neena Satija reports on the way school reform is mixing with city politics... and has reaction to the investigation so far.

Kermit Carolina was brought on board as principal of James Hillhouse High last year to turn around the low-performing school as part of the city's school reform campaign. He's gained substantial support from his school and the surrounding community, but now he's being investigated by New Haven's school board for allegedly tampering with students' grades in order to make them look higher. Carolina's attorney Michael Jefferson says there's no basis for the investigation.

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JEFFERSON: "We feel it's bogus, we feel it's politically motivated, and we feel that now the investigation has become a fishing expedition."

Jefferson thinks the school board is only investigating Carolina because he declined to support Mayor John DeStefano during his re-election campaign last fall...and points to a note Carolina received in the mail from DeStefano with the words "You Were There." DeStefano contends the note was congratulating Carolina for finishing a road race. But Jefferson says the note was referring to a campaign event for DeStefano's opponent Jeffrey Kerekes.

JEFFERSON: "Now that's as lame as they get. You would say 'great job, Kermit, way to finish, Kermit, not 'You were there!'"

City staffers later produced *similar* notes they said they received from the mayor congratulating them on finishing the same road race. The mayor's office referred comment to New Haven Board of Education officials, who did not respond to WNPR's requests for comment.

Whatever the note actually meant, it's clear that school reform in New Haven is being affected by politics, especially in light of a bitterly fought mayoral campaign last fall. Paul Bass is editor of the New Haven Independent.

BASS: "What people believe about that note says more about the state of politics and education in the city than it does about the note or the road race. It says whether people believe that school reform is going on the right track, free of petty political considerations, or whether they believe that even the most high-minded, best-intentioned efforts in New Haven are always hamstrung by petty politics."

Carolina and Jefferson say if grades were changed, it was due to computer error and not human tampering. For WNPR, I'm Neena Satija.

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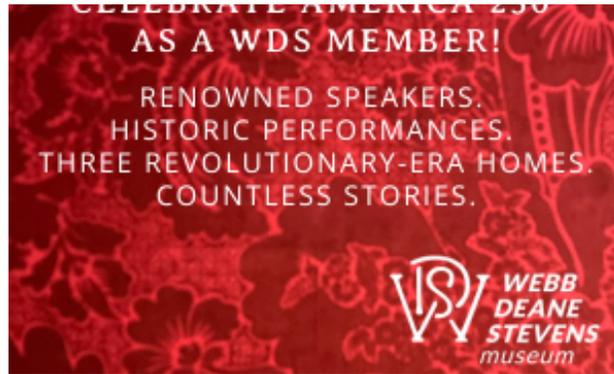


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