

## CORTINES SEXUAL HARASSMENT CASE LINGERS AS BOARD REJECTS NEW SETTLEMENT OFFER



A senior L.A. school district official, who refused to accept the settlement orally agreed upon by both the parties, is seeking additional damages, alleging that the school officials violated his privacy, by publicly disclosing specific details about the allegations and prematurely leaking details of the settlement approved by the Board of Education. Scot Graham's attorneys now say that they want to deal directly with the current Supt. John Deasy, who so far has stayed somewhat detached from the whole matter. The school board had intentionally kept Deasy out of previous negotiations. The new developments came to light in a letter that Graham's attorneys wrote to the Los Angeles Unified School District. In the letter, the attorneys assert that the "public-relations campaign" initiated by the L.A. Unified School District "was a clear invasion of Mr. Graham's privacy and placed him in a false light." The letter presented the district one more chance to reach a new deal, based on suggestions made by Graham. But Linda Hurevitz, an outside attorney representing the district, in a statement said that in a closed-door meeting the school board had rejected Graham's offer. "The Board of Education considered and voted unanimously to reject a new counter settlement proposal made by Scot Graham," she said. "The district stands by the terms it approved at the May 22 board meeting." In an earlier settlement May 23, which the Board of education felt was agreed upon, it was announced that it was approved to pay \$200,000 plus lifetime benefits to Scot Graham. Graham worked as a senior manager and had put in 12 years of service in the facilities. He drew a salary of around \$150,000 a year. As part of the, now-discarded settlement, Graham agreed to resign from his post. Mr. Graham, 56, had accused Mr. Cortines of taking him to his ranch north of Los Angeles in July 2010 and making improper sexual advances. Mr. Cortines was a schools chancellor in New York City and took over the helm of affairs of Los Angeles, the country's second-largest district, in 2000. Mr. Cortines, 79, whilst accepting that an encounter between them had taken place in his ranch, had denied allegations of harassment, saying there were none and said that there was only consensual and spontaneous "adult behavior." The district's public disclosure was perhaps hasty and premature as Graham had not yet signed the settlement. Even though Graham refused to accept it, the district contended for a week that the settlement was binding. The district accounted for Graham's absence saying that he was on paid leave and would leave permanently on May 31, after his employment would end. District officials said that the announcements were made in good faith to show that they were not concealing anything from the people. However, Mr. Graham's lawyers said that they should not have revealed any of the specific accusations; moreover, the districts had told them that the benefits were valued at \$50,000 more than what was reported in the news media. Graham's attorney Arnold Peter said that, the district changed its stance and said that if he is unwilling to accept the settlement, than he must return to work. However, Graham is disinclined to return and believes he has been "constructively terminated," according to the letter. "The LAUSD knew or should have known that its actions were likely to humiliate Mr. Graham, make the prospect of returning to work at LAUSD intolerable, and greatly diminish his ability to secure new employment," wrote attorney Maurice D. Pessah. The district's actions "give rise to additional claims against the LAUSD, and will be pursued."