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News

Harutunian still earning more than \$3,000 a week

By Jason G. Howe
Staff Writer

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NORTH ANDOVER — Departing School Superintendent Harry Harutunian is currently on paid administrative leave and will continue to collect his weekly salary of just over \$3,134 until his resignation settlement is signed, says School Committee Chairman Alfred Perry.

The pending farewell package will ultimately cost the School Department \$187,000, but has been mired in legal wrangling over the wording since Harutunian agreed to it April 11, Perry said.

Perry could not say when Harutunian's status went from paid vacation to paid administrative leave, but the five weeks of paid vacation allotted him under his contract have run out. None of the paychecks written to Harutunian will be deducted from the final settlement, once it is signed by both the town and Harutunian.

Harutunian agreed to resign his post following allegations he gave a raise to a school secretary with whom he had an affair. The School Committee hired a private investigator to look into the affair and any possible wrongdoing.

Meanwhile, the School Committee began working on the scope of an audit which, when completed, could explain any irregularities in Harutunian's \$34.1 million budget. While committee members insisted they are not looking for wrongdoing, Perry refused to comment if the audit might be used as grounds to fire Harutunian. If Harutunian were fired, the town would not have to pay him the \$187,000 agreed to in the resignation settlement.

Over the last 5 1/2 weeks, committee members have publicly insisted the only reason for a delay in signing the severance contract with Harutunian — the terms of which have not yet been disclosed — is based on ongoing negotiation between their attorney Peter J. Berry and Harutunian's lawyer Mike Long.

Calls to both attorneys' offices were not returned yesterday.

"Most of our points were agreed to," Perry said. "We're pretty close to getting it signed, but we still have to cross our t's and dot our i's."

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School Committee members are awaiting the results of tonight's Finance Committee meeting to see whether they will get help paying for the \$30,000 audit. School officials are hopeful the Finance Committee will tap its emergency fund to help pay at least part of the cost of the audit.

The School Committee has scheduled a special meeting Tuesday night to vote on signing the letter of intent authorizing the audit.

"The earliest we could begin that (audit) would be Wednesday," Perry said.



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