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## Blackboard romeo rocks town: Superintendent gave galpal big raise

By **Thomas Caywood**

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The North Andover School Committee was already facing a tough job convincing townspeople to support a hike in their property taxes to head off job cuts when allegations surfaced this month that the superintendent gave a huge pay raise to a school secretary with whom he had an affair.

"To have something like this occur in the middle of trying to explain the urgent need to the public is devastating," School Committee Chairman Daniel J. Murphy said. "We're in a very difficult situation right now where it looks like the School Committee could be laying off 40 to 60 employees."

Superintendent Harry K. Harutunian, who publicly acknowledged the relationship with secretary Brenda Shea last week after a disciplinary hearing, is taking vacation time while a private investigator hired by the school committee looks into whether the two were romantically involved last summer when he gave her a whopping 29 percent raise.

Harutunian, who is married, moved Shea out of the union and hiked her pay by nearly \$9,500 to \$42,000 a year in June, according to published reports.

Among the lines of idling minivans waiting outside North Andover schools yesterday afternoon, parents said the scandal likely killed what was already a longshot bid for an override.

"The superintendent let us down. But the kids are the most important thing," said Diane Iannone, who has two children in town schools.

Another parent who didn't want to be identified by name put it bluntly. "The people who he's really hurt are the kids in this town," she said. "They may cut music, art and gym. That's on the chopping block."

Another plan for closing the roughly \$3 million budget gap if an override doesn't make it to the ballot or fails would boost class sizes, which bothers parent Eleanor Cox.

"I'm very worried about the effect on the kids," said Cox, who has three kids in town schools. She called the superintendent's affair "highly distracting."

Harutunian, who makes \$163,000 a year after a pay raise last year, didn't return calls yesterday. He has four years left on his contract.

"There will be a trust issue whether he leaves or stays," said Karen Carito, who has two kids in town schools.

School Committee members have been inundated with calls and e-mails from parents, Murphy said.

"The real concern is whether or not, regardless of the outcome of the investigation, whether he's damaged his credibility to lead the district. That's what we're hearing," Murphy said.



North Andover parents react to the scandal involving Superintendent Harry K. Harutunian. (Staff photo by Ted Fitzgerald)

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