Ascension principal resigns following audit

By TIM TALLEY

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GONZALES — The Ascension Parish School Board on Tuesday night accepted the resignation of school Principal Lawrence Gipson, who is under investigation by the board for financial irregularities at his school.

Superintendent of Schools Ralph Ricardo said Gipson, principal of Carver Primary School in Gonzales, agreed to resign Monday after an independent audit revealed about $6,000 in misappropriated funds.

In accepting Gipson’s resignation, the School Board demanded restitution from Gipson and agreed to turn the matter over to District Attorney Donald T. Carmouche, who may press criminal charges.

The board took the action following a 20-minute executive session where Gipson and the misappropriated money were discussed behind closed doors.

Gipson was granted a leave of absence with pay March 4 after an auditor uncovered financial discrepancies in Carver’s general fund account.

The board agreed to extend Gipson’s leave, with pay, to compensate for accumulated sick leave and vacation time, Ricardo said. The resignation will be effective Oct. 28.

The audit of Carver’s general fund covers an 18-month period from July 1984 to December 1985. The audit uncovered about $6,000 in financial discrepancies in the fund, Ricardo said.

He declined to comment on what happened to the money or how it was used. However, the superintendent said the money is missing from the school’s account.

Gipson offered to resign during a meeting with Ricardo Monday, Ricardo said.

Gipson, who was a candidate for the Gonzales Board of Aldermen in April 1984, is the second resignation in recent months of a school principal investigated for financial irregularities at his school.

Joel D. “Shank” Meredith, former principal of East Ascension High School in Gonzales, resigned after an audit uncovered about $16,000 in irregularities in three accounts at the high school.

The board also demanded restitution from Meredith and turned the matter over to Carmouche’s office.

On another matter, board members learned that construction of a new primary school in the Galvez community has been idled by the default of the building contractor.

Campbell Engineering of Covington defaulted on the $3.33 million contract for the Galvez Primary School when workers walked off the job in mid-February, Ricardo said.

“He failed to man the job,” Ricardo said. The company has been notified that its contract has been terminated.

The school is about 58 percent complete, and a little more than half of the school’s cost has been paid to Campbell, Ricardo said. School Board officials will meet with the contractor’s bonding company this week to begin the process of choosing another contractor and completing the job.

Performance bonds are required on all school construction projects. If a contractor fails to meet the requirements of his contract, the board can call in the contractor’s bond and require the bond’s guarantor to complete the job.

Ricardo said he believes the School Board has the right to appoint the building contractor that will finish the project.

“The School Board wants to be satisfied with the contractor that’s chosen,” he said.

Galvez Primary is one of three new schools being built with funds from a $19.98 million school improvement bond issue approved in July 1984. The other two are located in the Lake community and near Donaldsonville.

Ricardo did not reveal whether the construction delay will affect the school’s scheduled opening at the beginning of the 1986-87 school year.

In other action, the board:

* Took under advisement bids for new athletic facilities, including new field house and physical education buildings, at the St. Amant High School.
* Adopted a new policy manual.