Breda tenure hearing planned

NAACP threatens boycott

By LORI CHANDLER

The School Board voted 9-3 Thursday to hold a tenure hearing for McKinley High School Principal William Breda, prompting NAACP officials to say that they plan to boycott white-owned businesses.

"I knew what was going to happen," said Robert Williams, who represents the local NAACP chapter and Breda. "They'll hold a hearing, vote him out, we'll go to court and he'll be back in the school in three or four years."

The board voted for the tenure hearing after receiving a list of 11 allegations against Breda based on a school system investigation into complaints filed by parents, students and teachers. The list has not been made public.

School boards cannot fire or otherwise affect the tenure of an employee without providing a list of charges to the worker, and a hearing must be held so that the charges can be answered. The hearing may be public or private, at the employee's option.

The three black board members, board President Press Robinson, Eva Legard and Frank Millican, voted against the hearing, and they also were the only members who voted for a substitute motion that would have exonerated Breda of any alleged wrongdoing.

The nearly three-hour debate on the matter at times climbed to a near-religious fervor as church leaders, some faculty members and former McKinley graduates expressed support for Breda. At least 250 people attended the meeting.

Several parents, teachers and students who were in favor of a tenure hearing wore a paper sign that read, "Teachers, Parents and Students for a Better McKinley."

"I care about Mr. Breda as a person, but I'm not sure that he gives us the right respect," student Marie Tabata said. "Mr. Breda is the right person for the job, it'll be found out. I see no reason why it shouldn't be held."

One McKinley teacher said more teachers would have shown support at the meeting for a tenure hearing, but they were afraid they would commit "professional suicide" and face reprisal from Breda.

Legard said there was an organized effort to oust Breda and there is a master plan to take over McKinley. She did not specify who or what the alleged takeover involves.

"I got calls from white parents who said that they were supportive of Mr. Breda, but said that they would be called nigger-lovers," Legard said. "They would have you feel that all whites there are against Mr. Breda. That's not true."

The Rev. T.J. Jemison, president of the Louisiana Baptist State Convention and pastor of Mount Zion First Baptist Church, spoke on Breda's behalf as well as McKinley High School, calling it "our school."

"You are dealing with a man's life, a man's reputation and a man's service to his community," Jemison said. "McKinley is a part of our heritage, part of our black history. It's our symbol of where we started and where we've come."

Jemison said a tenure hearing should not be called and said those teachers who want Breda to resign or retire have three alternatives: "If they're not satisfied, they should seek early retirement. If they're not satisfied, let them ask for a transfer. And if they're not satisfied, maybe they ought to quit the public school system altogether."

The road to Thursday night's meeting began several weeks ago when some teachers, students, parents and others filed written complaints against Breda with board member Jim Talbot. Talbot then asked Superintendent of Schools Raymond Arveson to investigate the matter.

Arveson reported to the board on the investigation in April and at that time said the board's attorneys had advised against a tenure hearing. But at the board's request, Arveson gave members a list of allegations against Breda so that they could decide whether to hold a tenure hearing. Some board members were upset about that move.

A parish grand jury is investigating allegations of sexual improprieties against Breda so that they could decide whether to hold a tenure hearing. Some board members were upset about that move.

Attorney Barton Conradi addresses board

Students Marie Tabata and Adalna Potter talk during meeting

McKinley Principal William Breda listens to debate

Board members Frank Millican, left, and Jim Talbot, right, debate issue
against a McKinley graphic arts
teacher who retired from the school
system after the allegations became
public. Two McKinley teachers who
reported the teacher’s alleged activities
began receiving threatening phone
calls, police said.

Two McKinley employees were
arrested in connection with those calls,
and they subsequently resigned from
the school system. The attorney for the
two teachers also has filed suit against
the employees.

The attorney, Barton Conradi, spoke
Thursday in favor of a hearing.

“I take strong issue with Rev.
Jemison’s statements that McKinley is
‘our’ school,” Conradi said. “The school
belongs to all of us. We need to put away
the rhetoric and loud speeches and how
long these people have known Breda.
This is not going away.”

“You have the evidence,” Millican
snapped. “Do you think it’s enough . . .
?”

“There’s no doubt in my mind that he
should have a hearing,” Conradi replied.

However, Robinson said before the
board voted that it was unfortunate the
issue had come to a tenure hearing vote.

“This incident and these allegations
could have been handled
administratively had the

superintendent been allowed to,”
Robinson said. “Perhaps it’s too late and
we have no choice now, but that wasn’t
true before. I think these allegations are
the kinds of things that you can go to any
school and find.”

“It’s set our efforts back 10 or more
years. We let a simple matter get out of
hand, and I’ll never do it again,” said
Robinson.

Millican asked Arveson whether he
knew of all the allegations before he
reported to the board, why he listed
allegations that already had been
handled administratively, and whether
he would recommend a hearing.

Arveson then requested a five-minute
recess to talk with board attorneys.
After the recess, he said he was acting at
the board’s request.

“In our judgment, the proper way to
clear the air is to hold a tenure hearing,”
Arveson said. “That would result in
either having the principal cleared or
have the board determine that some or
all of the allegations are true and decide
what appropriate action to take.”

Millican maintained that the
situation had been handled wrongly
from the beginning and that justice
could not be served.

Some of the audience members said
that if Breda, a strong disciplinarian, is
removed from the school, violence and
unrest may result. Some mentioned that
gang activity may pick up in the area.

NAACP President George Eames
said after the meeting that he will ask
his executive board to allow him to
conduct a parishwide boycott of all
white merchants.

“We need this to restore the dignity of
black folks and to tell the white folks
that they can’t keep doing this,” Eames
said.

The school system must now wait at
least 20 days before setting a date for
the tenure hearing. It is up to Breda
whether the hearing is public or private.
Either way, officials must give proper
public notice of the hearing.

If the board finds Breda guilty of any
or all of the allegations, the board may
vote to dismiss, demote, reprimand or
transfer him, and Breda would be able
to appeal through the legal system.

The only way that a tenured teacher
can be dismissed is if there is
dishonesty, incompetence or willful
neglect of duty. When asked if the
allegations against Breda would fall
into those categories, board attorney
Bob Hammonds said that the
allegations involve the last two
categories.