

## **School plan critic ousted from PTO position**

By Chris Gardner – Republican-American January 23, 2007

WOODBURY - A PTO officer who has criticized Region 14's planned elementary school reconfiguration was ousted Monday morning.

Pamela Racevicius said she will meet with her lawyer today to determine whether the executive board of the Mitchell Elementary School PTO violated her legal rights by removing her as vice president.

Racevicius said she was not told Monday why she was being ousted, but that fellow executive board members have warned her not to question the administration or Board of Education about the reconfiguration next year of Mitchell and Bethlehem Elementary schools.

"It was very predictable," said Racevicius, who was asked last week to take a leave of absence until next year, when the new grade configurations will be implemented. "I'm seeking legal advice on what to do."

At school board meetings and in the newspaper, Racevicius has spoken against the plan to put all kindergarten, first- and second-graders at what will become Bethlehem Primary School, and to have the newly named Mitchell Intermediate School house third-, fourth- and fifth-graders. She said she has never spoken as a PTO officer or member, only as a concerned parent.

She is also a member of the grassroots group Families for Region 14 Elementary, which is trying to sink the reconfiguration.

"I've been told it was my behavior outside of the PTO, and that I should understand that as an executive officer on the PTO board, I speak not as Pam Racevicius but as Pam Racevicius, vice president of the Mitchell School PTO," she said. "So, I'm not allowed to have an opinion. It's ridiculous."

Neither Natalie Catalano, PTO president, nor John Salatto, principal of Mitchell Elementary School, immediately returned calls for comment Monday.

Racevicius has alleged that Catalano, whose husband is on the school board, and Salatto orchestrated the effort to have her removed, but school board Chairman John Howard has denied the administration is involved.

Racevicius also is concerned that the minutes of a PTO executive committee meeting Jan. 11, when she was asked to step down, do not reflect what was said at the meeting.

Erica Barber, who heads Families for Region 14 Elementary, has alerted the state Attorney General's Office about the minutes, and in an e-mail Monday asked Howard to launch an internal investigation.

"I think it is quite evident at this point that a full inquiry needs to be made to assure parents like myself that there are still standards of behavior that must be followed, despite reconfiguration," she wrote.

Racevicius has been on the Mitchell PTO for seven years, and has helped raise tens of thousands of dollars for the school through a holiday bazaar, catalog fundraiser and other efforts.

"I'm a volunteer. I do things for the children and for the school," she said.  
"Who do they think they're hurting?"