NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEWSDAY, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2001

11 Custodians Charged

Accused of getting kickbacks from contractors

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Eleven custodians were charged with making dirty deals when it came to cleaning school windows, investigators said yesterday.

The custodians, including three from Queens, received kickbacks from contractors to rig bids for window-cleaning services, State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and Schools Investigator Ed Stancik said.

In return for selecting the contractors, custodians raked in kickbacks ranging from $200 to $2,000, about 10 percent of the contract price, investigators said. One custodian received $62,000 in bribes in one year, they said.

The Board of Education's "gross mismanagement" allowed the 11 custodians freedom to disobey bidding rules and pocket bribes that topped $400,000 annually, investigators said.

"They failed; they get an F," Spitzer said.

Schools Chancellor Harold Levy said he plans to adopt recommendations made by Stancik and Spitzer to help weed out corruption.

"Custodians who accept kickbacks are cheating the children of the schools they were hired to safeguard," Levy said in a statement. "I have no confidence in the procedures that govern the work of the custodians, which is why I have demanded broad power to audit them."

The 11 custodians charged include a couple, Kurt G. Brunkhorst and Marilyn Brunkhorst of Monsey, who work at Public School 192 and PS 93 in Manhattan, investigators said.

Other custodians are Mario Arena of Howard Beach; John Barden of Middletown; Herbert Bradley of South Plainfield, N.J.; Daniel Donovan of North Salem; Anthony Franze of New Rochelle; John Kovelski of Carle Place; Rodney Lopez of Smithtown; John Nolan of Jamaica; and John Reid of Laurelton.

"They opened a window," Spitzer said. "A dirty window, into the corrupt world in which the custodians still operate, where public money is being wasted and there is an abject failure on the part of the Board of Ed to manage the school custodians properly."

Spitzer and Stancik said they received cooperation from board officials during their 18-month investigation, but chastised their records as a "wasteland."

The custodians, who hand out contracts for their own schools, abused the lack of any supervision, Spitzer said.

To avoid rules that require at least three bids for contracts in excess of $250, the custodians accepted phony bids from contractors, Spitzer said. In some cases, contractors offered bids from companies that did not exist or failed to wash the windows.

Stancik suggested several reforms yesterday, including a citywide bidding process opened to public scrutiny. He also suggested that bid requests be posted on the Internet and that the board spot-check the bids.

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