

Local News

Local School for Deaf Children Closes Amid Funding Controversy — Rick Chambers Reports

KTLA television, Los Angeles, CA, March 1, 2013

MICAH OHLMAN (voiceover): A school board meeting turns ugly. Parents furious about the closing of a school for hearing-impaired children in Whittier. One man involved went to jail, but that's only the beginning of this exclusive story.

MICAH OHLMAN (anchor): Good evening, I'm Micah Ohlman. Cher Calvin is off tonight. That school has serviced the community for over 40 years. Now parents and ex-teachers are accusing officials of mismanagement and even theft—all culminating in the violent exchange you'll see only on KTLA. Rich Chambers, live in Whittier tonight with the exclusive. Rick?

RICK CHAMBERS: Yeah, Micah. For decades, as you mentioned, the Oralingua school for the deaf here in Whittier has dramatically been changing the lives of deaf children from all around the country, but in recent years they started having some money and personnel issues. Today the school closed its doors, and many tonight are blaming the people who ran it.

KAY SCHNEIDER: I loved the work and I loved the kids.

RICK CHAMBERS (voiceover): Kay Schneider was a teacher for 43 years at Oralingua school for the deaf here in Whittier. January 1st she quit her job along with 16 other instructors.

KAY SCHNEIDER: —inconsistent financial situation, and a very poor and hostile working environment.

RICK CHAMBERS: Drove you away.

KAY SCHNEIDER: Drove me away... Drove me away.

RICK CHAMBERS (voiceover): Linda Dinow was a longtime speech pathologist and principal at Oralingua.

LINDA DINOW: –and I decided to leave, because I felt it was being mismanaged, and the board was not supporting the teachers. – Teachers got paid late from four days up to 28 days late.

RICK CHAMBERS (voiceover): Some teachers and many of the parents claim that school management has misused funding for the children, which led to the school's closing today and a heated exchange between a parent and a school board member.

(Luis Ojeda:) He's a thief!

(Steve Nichols:) Don't be touching her! [slapping/scuffling sounds] Don't—Don't be touching her!

(Female voice, off camera): Hey! ... A thief! A thief!

RICK CHAMBERS (voiceover): Moments later the PTA president attacked our camera man.

[thumping sounds]

(Unidentified person:) I'm calling your news director! I'm calling Elizabeth Espinosa – Turn off your camera!

(Camera man, off camera:) Get off of me! Get off of me! Get off of me!

RICK CHAMBERS (voiceover): Over two million dollars was budgeted each year for Oralingua. This parent, who brought her child to the school three years ago from Colorado believes someone there has been cooking the books.

ARACELI FAUSTO: The mismanagement of the handling of the money. I think so.

RICK CHAMBERS: You think somebody's embezzling money at the school?

ARACELI FAUSTO: Very– yes. Yes, I believe [that], too.

RICK CHAMBERS (voiceover): But school board member Steve Nichols denies any wrongdoing.

STEVE NICHOLS: There are no improprieties, um, taking place here. There's, uh, an accountability in place for what happens here.

RICK CHAMBERS (voiceover): Luis Ojeda is out on bail tonight after allegedly assaulting Steve Nichols at today's meeting, and it hasn't dampened his passion for justice.

LUIS OJEDA: What I hope happens is these people go to jail for a long time.

RICK CHAMBERS (on location): And back here, live. The California Department of Education says tonight it'll be placing all of Oralingua's students in new schools. Meanwhile the parents here are calling for a forensic accountant to do an audit of the school. We're also being told by those parents that they plan now on contacting the [state] attorney general. In Whittier, I'm Rick Chambers. Micah, I'll throw it back to you.

MICAH OHLMAN (in studio):Rick, thanks. KTLA will continue to dig deeper on the Oralingua school closure and we will bring you any new information on this exclusive story.

VIDEO:

<http://ktla.com/2013/03/01/local-school-for-deaf-children-closes-amid-funding-controversy-2/#ixzz2MOI9yAHE>

Alternate link:

<http://tinyurl.com/oralingua-ktla>

[Transcript is unofficial]

SEE ALSO:

<http://twitter.com/TheRickChambers>

SEE ALSO:

http://www.whittierdailynews.com/news/ci_22701507/oralingua-shuts-down-sour-note-fight-breaks-out