

Embattled Newton mayor says he was pressured out of Newark teaching job

Updated: Jan. 30, 2019, 9:39 a.m. | Published: Mar. 06, 2018, 10:02 p.m.

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By [Rob Jennings | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

The Newton mayor who was [censured and urged to quit](#) by his colleagues says he lost his Newark public school teaching job as payback for challenging how the state allocates school funding.

Wayne Levante brought up his departure from Newark in January, four months after starting a new job as a math teacher, before the Town Council

asked him to step aside as mayor Monday night.



Newton Mayor Wayne Levante at a Town Council meeting, March 5, 2018

Levante, who rejected the request to step down from the appointed mayoral position and is seeking re-election to the council in May, drew scrutiny after sharing to his Facebook page debunked "crisis actor" conspiracy theories about a 17-year-old survivor of the Parkland, Florida, mass shooting Feb. 14.

During a contentious, 2-and-a-half hour special council meeting Monday night, Levante announced he left his Newark job one week after speaking in Trenton in support of Newton's state school aid challenge.

"I was retaliated by the Newark public schools and had an ordeal with them where I had to resign," Levante said, without further elaborating.

A spokesperson for the Newark school district confirmed he worked as a math teacher from September until January, but did not provide additional information.

The Newton school district is the lead petitioner among 10 school districts in seven counties named in the appeal to the state education commissioner.

Four municipalities, including Newton, are also backing the challenge, which asserts that 96 school districts in N.J. are leaving less state aid than they are due under the 2008 School Funding Reform Act, and as a result have been overtaxing local residents.

Levante previously was a public school teacher in Paterson.

In an interview last summer, Levante said he worked in Paterson for nine years, leaving in 2012, and had been hired as a seventh- and eighth-grade math teacher in Newark starting in September.

His biography on Newton's official website says he holds five state certifications in teaching and administration.

None of the four other council members responded to Levante's remarks about his former job.

[PHOTOS: Newton censures mayor, asks him to resign](#)

Levante was named mayor by the council without opposition July 1. His one-year term as mayor, and four-year council term, both run through June, and he is among seven candidates seeking three council seats in the May 8 municipal election.

He has frequently spoken out on education since becoming mayor, most notably in support of [an unprecedented proposal](#) to eliminate all 25 local school districts in Sussex County and establish a single, county-wide school district.

He opposed an \$18 million school construction referendum, supported by Newton Superintendent Ken Greene, that was resoundingly defeated by voters Sept. 26.

Yet Levante found himself on the same side as Greene four months later when Newton took the lead on the state school aid funding appeal.

"After being jilted by Trenton for eight years, at a cost of 30-plus million dollars, with no one willing to do anything, I stood alone at the capitol building, in Trenton, to issue the lawsuit against the state department of education, and there was no other council members there," Levante said.

He appeared with Greene and others in Trenton Jan. 12. One week later, he was out of a job in Newark.

As for what he is currently doing, Newton's website describes Levante as "the owner and operator of an Internet based small business dealing in the sales of vintage electronics."

Before being censured Monday night, Levante took issue with an assertion in the resolution that, in addition to referencing his Parkland posts, accused him of worsening the municipal government's relationship with the school district.

"To claim that I have not been working with the board of ed is just not accurate," said Levante, who cast the lone dissenting vote against the censure and a related no-confidence motion.

However, Levante received no support at Monday's meeting from Ray Morris, a Newton school board member.

Morris said that some defending Levante's free speech rights over his Facebook posts had criticized his right, as a school board member, to "do things like comment on the questionable school consolidation issue" that the mayor supports.

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