

Military 'Area Office' Re-created

By George N. Schmidt

Two months before Chicago Schools CEO Arne Duncan told the City Club that the Board of Education faced a \$328 million "deficit" for the 2006-2007 school year, he quietly re-created one of the area offices he had supposedly closed the previous summer — at a cost of more than \$1 million in salaries and benefits to that office's 14 staff.

On November 16, 2005, Duncan proposed that the Board of Education appoint Rick Mills, whose title had been "Director ROTC, to the position of "Military Area Officer" at a salary of \$113,000 per year. In addition to Mills, the Military Area Office, which became one of the city's "area instructional offices," has 13 staff members. Their salaries range from \$33,000 per year to \$90,000 per year.

Four months before his November 2005 action, Duncan had told the public and press that he had "reduced administration" at CPS to reduce a previous "deficit" in part by eliminating two area offices. By Christmas 2005, he had reinstated both of those offices, without notice to the press or public. The Board of Education approved the November 16 Board Report submitted by Duncan without discussion. Because the action dealt with a "personnel matter," it did not appear on the Board's public agenda, so the public had no advanced notice of the pending reinstatement or its budget impact.

According to a response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the following people work in the Military Area Office under Mills:

- Dorothy Green (Office Manager) at a salary of \$60,275 per year.

- Paul Stroh (Acting Management Support Director) at a salary of \$78,992 per year.

- Ardis Relf (Assistant Director of Programs and Budget) at a salary of \$82,736 per year.

- LTC Kim Harrell (Director of Army Instruction) at a salary of \$91,800 per year.

- SFC Kenneth Corbett (Senior Administrative Assistant) at a salary of \$76,845 per year.

- MAJ Steven Green (Assistant Director of Operations/Plans) at a salary of \$84,860 per year.

- MSG Wayne Simpson (Senior Administrative Assistant) at a salary of \$76,845 per year.

- SFC Richard Newton (Senior Administrative Assistant) at a salary of \$62,176 per year.

-- MAJ Melvin Watanabe (Assistant Director of Logistics) at a salary of \$90,243 per year.

-- Francisco Lopez (Warehouse Supervisor) at a salary of \$42,898 per year.

-- Shaward Singleton (Military Property Custodian) at a salary of \$33,212 per year.

-- Edward Flores (Military Property Custodian) at a salary of \$36,639 per year.

The Chicago Board of Education refuses to provide Substance with copies of the resumes, curriculum vitae or other background information on any of its administrative employees. It is impossible to know what qualifications, licenses and credentials these individuals – including Mills — bring to the jobs they are now holding. In answer to a request for the resumés, work histories, or curriculum vitae of management level employees, the Board of Education has stated: “The curriculum vitae is exempt [from the Freedom of Information Act] pursuant to 7(1)(b) of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) – ‘Information that, if disclosed, would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy...’”

The Military Area Officer and some of his subordinates have administrative and supervisory responsibilities far above those of most Illinois school principals and many Illinois school superintendents. Under Illinois law, superintendents, principals, and even assistant principals (in most cases) are required to possess an Illinois Type 75 administrative certificate.

According to an October 25 memo from Chief High School Officer Don Pittman to Arne Duncan, the Military Area Officer will have significant responsibilities. “The Military Area Officer will supervise all academy superintendents (principals) of the Chicago Public Schools Military Academies. The responsibilities include Military Academies and JROTC...” Additional duties are also outline in the Pittman memo.

The expansion of military programs in Chicago’s public schools has also resulted in the creation of two layers of administration at local schools which are called military “academies.” One of these layers also exists at schools that house significant JROTC programs. At “military academies”, the school has both a principal and a “Commandant.” At the Rickover Naval Academy at Senn High School, for example, the principal (called “superintendent”) Michael Biela is budgeted this year at a salary of \$100,541. The Rickover Naval Academy also has a Commandant, Christine Jensen, whose salary this year is \$90,493. Farragut’s ROTC has a Commandant. The total salaries of all ten Commandants in the city’s public school system this school year is more than \$800,000. The Board of Education refuses to provide the public with the curriculum vitae of these individuals. Arne Duncan has refused to be interviewed by Substance on this and other matters.