

Neblock assaults Strommer

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Culbertson conference room where the school board had convened.

Saying he has "strong feelings" about the summer school issue, he looked at Strommer and said: "For my little — you have my apologies."

Strommer replied: "That's not enough, sir."

Later, however, Strommer said he probably would not report the incident to police, although he described it as an "assault."

"It was a pretty firm grasp. I could've lost consciousness," he said. "There's no excuse for that."

After the scuffle, Neblock and Strommer sat down at opposite ends of a 10-foot-long conference table for a board meeting that was scheduled as a closed-door session. Amid growing concern that too much school business is being conducted in private, a majority voted against going into "executive session."

School district attorneys then

provided an update on a variety of issues related to desegregation. Several times, attorneys advised board members to shy away from public discussion of certain issues.

"That's not the point," board member Patti Delugas responded. "I'm just concerned that we won't be able to get the information we need."

After about 30 minutes, Neblock asked for a recess. The board then voted 5-2 to have a closed-door discussion about the court case. Strommer and Bell voted no. The executive session lasted about two hours.

Throughout the 8-year-old desegregation fight, relations on the school board frequently have been strained and tempers have run high. But nobody can recall seeing the tension turn to violence before.

Neblock was elected school board president Nov. 10 by a slim 4-3 majority that included Strommer.

Former board President Judy Picus, who chose not to seek re-election this month, said board mem-

bers sometimes have trouble containing their frustration.

"You have to find another way to work out the stress," she said.

At a special retreat this summer, the board focused on ways of trying to build an atmosphere of cooperation.

Nancy Sylvester, a consultant who has coached Rockford school officials on team-building, said she thought board members were making progress. She had not heard about Friday's incident, but she said it shows that much work remains.

"Oh, God, that's sad," she said.

Alice Saudargas, another member elected to the school board this month, said after witnessing Friday's clash between Neblock and Strommer, she wonders if board members are capable of working together harmoniously.

"That is something you don't expect from an elected official," she said. "We have a lot more serious issues."