

*Boys & Girls Clubs official faced suit from fired worker*

**Verdict stuns others on KC school board**

By JOE ROBERTSON

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When it comes to race relations, Kansas City School District leaders said Monday, board President David Smith has played the role of centrist, a consensus builder.

Many said they were stunned to learn of Friday's jury decision that Smith, as president of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Kansas City, wrongfully fired a vice president who had said his hiring practices were racist.

"That's not the David Smith I know who heads the board," school board member Harriett Plowman said. "I support him wholeheartedly."

The Boys & Girls Clubs board, which oversees Smith, issued a statement Monday voicing its "overwhelming support," saying that it thinks Smith has followed the organization's principles and that it is considering appealing the ruling.

The Jackson County jury agreed with former Boys & Girls Clubs vice president Tameka Bryant, who said Smith fired her over a hiring dispute. Bryant said she wanted to hire a white woman and a Hispanic man for two positions, and she said Smith told her he wanted those positions filled by people who were black. Both Smith and Bryant are black.

Boys & Girls Clubs board chairman Robert Firnhaber said the organization has helped thousands of kids under Smith's leadership.

"We still know this guy," Firnhaber said. "We know who he is. We looked at our own policies and how we do things and we wouldn't change anything."

Kansas City school board members and parent leaders said either that they did not expect the verdict to weaken Smith's ability to lead the board, or that it was too soon to tell.

"It's between him and his board with the Boys & Girls Club," school board member Marilyn Simmons said. School business, she said, will go on with Smith.

The school district is in the early stages of a nationwide search for its next superintendent, and school board member Duane Kelly worried that the verdict might raise a concern with candidates.