

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

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LUNG CHIU, CIG, CPA
INSPECTOR GENERAL

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Chair and Members of the School Board
Dr. Donald E. Fennoy II, Superintendent
Chair and Members of the Audit Committee

FROM: ^{KLC}
Lung Chiu, Inspector General

DATE: June 1, 2018

SUBJECT: Transmittal of Final Investigative Report
Case # 18-741 Title Fraud/Abuse of Power

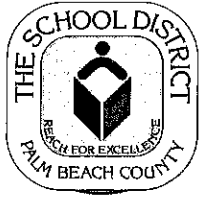
In accordance with School Board Policy 1.092 we hereby transmit the above-referenced final report.

The report addresses allegations:

1. Teachers at Palm Beach Gardens High School were instructed by Principal Larry Clawson to remove low students grades from their gradebooks so that students would pass their classes and schools' graduation rate would remain high.
2. Music Teacher Leanora Wilkinson of Palm Beach Lakes High School gave the complainant's child an "A" for the third nine-week grading period even though the student was only enrolled in the class for two days

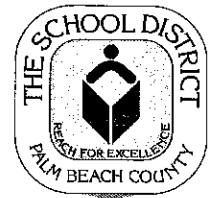
The OIG concluded that all allegations were *Unsubstantiated*.

The report is finalized and will be posted on the Inspector General's website; www.palmbeachschools.org/inspectorgeneral.



Dr. Donald E. Fennoy II
Superintendent

**SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PALM BEACH
COUNTY
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**



K. Lung Chiu
Inspector General

INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

Case Number:
18-741

Date of Complaint:
March 1, 2018

Complainant:
Daniele Garson, Parent

Subjects:
Larry Clawson, Principal, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Leanora Wilkinson, Music Teacher, Palm Beach Lakes High School

Witnesses:
David Alfonso, Principal, Palm Beach Lakes High School
Marjorie Barbato, U.S. History Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Nila Ibarra-Bent, Spanish Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Jae Bryan, Vocals Ensemble Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Loretta Carter, Math Teacher, Palm Beach Lakes High School
Catalina Champion, Spanish Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Claudia Maslan-Mahan, Intensive Reading, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Angela Mazzocco, Guidance Counselor, Palm Beach Lakes High School
Linda Mitchell, Science Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Sarah Pratico, Spanish Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Lucas Seidman, English Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Kiara Slaton, Digital Info Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Yvonne Tabon, Theater Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School
Elena Villani, Assistant Principal, Palm Beach Lakes High School
William Williams, Naval Science Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School

Type of Report
FINAL

AUTHORITY

School Board Policy 1.092 provides for the Inspector General to receive and consider complaints, and conduct, supervise, or coordinate such inquiries, investigations, or reviews, as the Inspector General deems appropriate.

This investigation was conducted by Senior Investigator Robert Sheppard in compliance with the *Quality Standards for Investigations, Principles, and Standards for Offices of Inspector General*, promulgated by the Association of Inspectors General.

INTRODUCTION

On February 23, 2018, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) received a complaint that was forwarded by the Florida Department of Education, Office of Inspector General. The complainant, Daniele Garson, alleged that the Palm Beach County School District (District) Administration instructed principals to give directives to teachers to remove low student grades to ensure the school and county graduation rate remains high.

ALLEGATIONS AND FINDINGS¹

1. Teachers at Palm Beach Gardens High School were instructed by Principal Larry Clawson to remove low student grades from their gradebooks so that students would pass their classes and the school's graduation rate would remain high. *Unsubstantiated.*
2. Music Teacher Leanora Wilkinson of Palm Beach Lakes High School gave the complainant's child an "A" for the third nine-week grading period even though the student was only enrolled in the class for two days. *Unsubstantiated.*

GOVERNING DIRECTIVES

- School Board Policy 1.014 Responsibilities of Principals
- School Board Policy 1.092 Inspector General
- School Board Policy 3.02 Code of Ethics

BACKGROUND

Palm Beach Gardens High School is a District school located at 4245 Holly Drive, Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33410. The school's total enrollment is 2,502, with a 17:1 Student-Teacher-Ratio.

Palm Beach Lakes High School is a District School located at 3505 Shiloh Drive, West Palm Beach, FL 33407. The school's total enrollment is 1,881 with an 18:1 Student-Teacher-Ratio.

ALLEGATION 1: EVIDENCE & TESTIMONY

Allegation: Teachers at Palm Beach Gardens High School were instructed by Principal Larry Clawson to remove low student grades from their gradebooks so that students would pass their classes and the school's graduation rate would remain high.

Testimony of Daniele Garson, Complainant

Ms. Garson stated she received information from an anonymous source that teachers at Palm Beach Gardens High School were directed by Principal Clawson to remove the failing grades of any student from their gradebooks to improve student grades and keep the school's graduation rate high. Ms. Garson refused to disclose the name of the anonymous source. Ms. Garson said she

¹ The OIG findings were determined using the standards that appear on the signature page at the end of this report.

does not know if all teachers at Palm Beach Gardens High School were instructed to remove failing grades from their gradebooks. Ms. Garson stated her child received an "A" grade in a class, but according to the District's Edline program, her child earned C's and D's throughout the grading period.

Testimony of Larry Clawson, Principal, Palm Beach Gardens High School

Mr. Clawson stated he did not receive any directive from the Superintendent or any other District senior leadership staff to change student's grades who were academically performing poorly. Mr. Clawson denied giving a directive to his teachers to change student grades. Mr. Clawson stated teachers could allow students to make-up overdue class assignments within a nine-week grading period.

Testimony of Jae Bryan, Music Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School

Ms. Bryan stated it is a teacher's discretion to allow a student to submit an overdue class assignment with or without a penalty during a grading period. Ms. Bryan said she does not remove low grades from her grade book to improve a student's grade and has never been asked to do so.

Testimony of Catalina Champion, Spanish Teacher, Palm Beach Gardens High School

Ms. Champion stated it is a teacher's discretion to allow a student to make up an overdue assignment. Ms. Champion said students in her class who turn in overdue assignments receive a 50% credit for the overdue assignment. Ms. Champion stated she did not remove low grades for the complainant's child and has never been asked to do so.

Investigative Review

A review of the District's Student Information System (SIS) revealed that the complainant's child was enrolled at Palm Beach Gardens High School for the first nine-week grading period of the 2017/2018 school year. The student transferred from Palm Beach Gardens High School to Palm Beach Lakes High School on November 3, 2017.

The OIG interviewed eleven teachers from Palm Beach Gardens High School that taught the child. The teachers collectively denied that Principal Clawson gave them a directive to remove low grades from their gradebooks. The teachers stated they did not remove grades from their gradebooks for the complainant's child. The teachers denied that leadership staff gave them a directive to remove failing grades from their gradebooks. The teachers stated the class grade the complainant's child received from their classes was the grade she earned.

Eleven teachers and the Principal denied the issuance of an order directing teachers to remove student grades. Based on the testimony obtained, the OIG determined that the allegation that teachers at Palm Beach Gardens High School were instructed by Principal Larry Clawson to remove low student grades from their gradebooks so that the students would pass their classes and the school's graduation rate would remain high was *Unsubstantiated*.

ALLEGATION 2: EVIDENCE & TESTIMONY

Allegation: Music Teacher Leanora Wilkinson of Palm Beach Lakes High School gave the complainant's child an "A" for the third nine-week grading period even though the student was only enrolled in the class for two days.

Testimony of Daniele Garson, Complainant

Ms. Garson stated that her child currently attends Palm Beach Lakes High School. The child was enrolled in a Math for College Readiness class and received twenty-four "F's" for not completing classroom assignments. On March 19, 2018, her daughter was re-assigned from the Math for College Readiness, a core class to the Music Ensemble-3, an elective class. The child received an "A" for classroom participation even though she was not enrolled in the class for the full grading period.

Testimony of David Alfonso, Principal, Palm Beach Lakes High School

Mr. Alfonso stated he has never received any directive from the Superintendent to change student grades who were academically performing poorly. He denied giving teachers a directive to change student grades.

Mr. Alfonso stated he received an email from the complainant on March 19, 2018, in regards to teachers falsifying grades. On March 20, 2018, Mr. Alfonso responded and told the complainant he would look into her concerns when staff returned from spring break.

Mr. Alfonso stated he forwarded the information to Assistant Principal Elena Villani. Mr. Alfonso explained that, Ms. Villani determined that the staff at the school tried to accommodate the child's request for a schedule change. The attempted schedule change caused a delayed transfer of student grades from the District's SIS system to the Edline system. Mr. Alfonso stated that teachers input student grades into the SIS program and the SIS program transfers the grades to the Edline program. Mr. Alfonso opined that a delayed transfer of student grades from SIS to the Edline occurred at the same time the complainant reviewed her child's grades. Mr. Alfonso said that Edline showed that the complainant's child was withdrawn from Math for College Readiness and enrolled in Music Ensemble-3. Mr. Alfonso added that Edline currently reflects the correct schedule for the complainant's child.

Mr. Alfonso stated he spoke with the complainant on March 26 or 27, 2018, and explained the discrepancy. The parent thanked him for explaining the discrepancy and addressing their concerns.

Testimony of Elena Villani, Assistant Principal, Palm Beach Lakes High School

Ms. Villani stated the child was not withdrawn from Math for College Readiness and enrolled in the Music Ensemble-3 class. Ms. Villani said that Guidance Counselor Angela Mazzocco attempted to change the core class period to another class period so that the student could enroll in the advanced music class while simultaneously remaining in the Math for College Readiness class. The student was never removed from Math for College Readiness.

Ms. Villani stated the child was initially assigned to Ms. Carter's 4th period Math for College Readiness class, and a 5th period Theater class. The child requested to drop the Theater class to enroll in the Music Ensemble-3 class. The child was moved from Ms. Carter's 4th period Math for College Readiness class to Ms. Clarke's 5th period Math for College Readiness class. The child was enrolled in Ms. Wilkinson's 4th period Music Ensemble-3 class. Guidance determined they could not make the schedule adjustment without changing the child's math teacher so they returned the child back to Ms. Carter's 4th period Math for College Readiness class and the original 5th period Theater class.

Ms. Villani stated she understands why the parent may have been confused about their child's grades on Edline. When the parent reviewed her child's Edline account, the child had an "A" grade in the Music Ensemble-3 class because the student participated in class for three days. As a general rule, students are given an "A" grade on Edline as a placeholder and the final grade will be posted later to replace the temporary "A" grade. The student did not remain in the class for the entire grading period, and no grade was ultimately given. The Edline program was delayed in updating the correct schedule adjustments.

Testimony of Loretta Carter, Math Teacher, Palm Beach Lakes High School

Ms. Carter stated the child was enrolled in her Math for College Readiness class for the entire grading period. The child earned and received an "F" for the grading period.

Testimony of Leanora Wilkinson, Music Teacher, Palm Beach Lakes High School

Ms. Wilkinson stated she approached the child's guidance counselor, Ms. Mazzocco, to request a possible schedule change to her Music Ensemble-3 class. The child had a Theater class at the same time as the Music Ensemble-3 class so she assumed the transfer would be acceptable. Ms. Mazzocco reviewed her request and made the schedule change. Ms. Wilkinson stated the student attended her class for two days, before being returned to previously scheduled classes. Ms. Wilkinson said she did not give the child a grade for the grading period.

Testimony of Angela Mazzocco, Guidance Counselor, Palm Beach Lakes High School

Ms. Mazzocco stated Ms. Wilkinson asked her to enroll the child in her Music Ensemble-3 class. In an attempt to adjust the schedule, she had to remove the child from Ms. Carter's Math for College Readiness class and transfer her to Ms. Clarke's Math for College Readiness Class. The class schedule change was in effect for about 2 to 3 days. The child did not want to change Math teachers, so another schedule change was done to enroll the student back into Ms. Carter's Math for College Readiness class. The child did not receive a grade from the Music Ensemble-3 class.

Investigative Review

A review of the District's SIS program shows the child was enrolled in Ms. Carter's Math for College Readiness Class at Palm Beach Lakes High School, and received an "F" for the third nine-weeks grading period.

The child was withdrawn from Ms. Carter's class on February 1, 2018, and reassigned to another Math for College Readiness teacher (Aretha J. Clarke). On February 5, 2018, the child was removed from Ms. Clarke's class and reassigned back to Ms. Carter's class. The student was never removed from the Math for College Readiness course.

The District's SIS program shows the complainant's child was enrolled in the Music Ensemble-3 class on February 1, 2018, and dropped from the class on February 6, 2018. The child was not enrolled in the Music Ensemble-3 class for the entire grading period. According to the SIS program, the child did not receive a grade for the Music Ensemble-3 class.

Based on the testimony received and a review of the information contained in the District's SIS system, the OIG determined that the school attempted to accommodate the child by moving the child from a Theater class to Music Ensemble-3. The schedule change required that the child change teachers for the Math for College Readiness class. The child did not wish to change math teachers so the child was returned to her original class and schedule. The schedule changes were delayed in appearing in the Edline system leading to the complainant's concern of her child being moved from a core class to an elective class and receiving an "A" for that class instead of an "F" for the Math for College Readiness class. The OIG confirmed through the SIS system that the child did in fact received an "F" for Math for College Readiness and did not receive a grade for Music Ensemble-3

Based on the information obtained during this investigation, the OIG determined that the allegation that Music Teacher Leanora Wilkinson of Palm Beach Lakes High School gave the complainant's child an "A" for the third nine-week grading period even though the student was only enrolled in the class for three days was *Unsubstantiated*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that no further action be taken regarding this matter.

AFFECTED PARTY NOTICE

In accordance with *School Board Policy 1.092 (8)(b)(iv)*, on May 2, 2018, Larry Clawson and Leanora Wilkinson were notified of the investigative findings and provided with an opportunity to submit a written response to these findings.

On May 7, 2018, Larry Clawson responded via email concurring with the findings of the investigation (Exhibit 1). No response was received from Ms. Wilkinson.

DISTRIBUTION

Dr. Donald E. Fennoy II, Ed.D., Superintendent
Palm Beach County School Board Members
Audit Committee Members
Inspector General Mike Blackburn, FDOE
OIG file

Investigation Conducted by:

Robert Sheppard, CIGI, Senior Investigator

 6-1-18
Date


Investigation Supervised by:

Oscar Restrepo, CIGI, Director of Investigations

 6/1/18
Date

Investigation Approved by:

K. Lung Chiu, CIG, Inspector General

 6-1-18
Date

The evidentiary standard used by the School District of Palm Beach County OIG in determining whether the facts and claims asserted in the complaint were proven or disproven is based upon the preponderance of the evidence. Preponderance of the evidence is contrasted with “beyond a reasonable doubt,” which is the more severe test required to convict a criminal and “clear and convincing evidence,” a standard describing proof of a matter established to be substantially more likely than not to be true. OIG investigative findings classified as “substantiated” means there was sufficient evidence to justify a reasonable conclusion that the actions occurred and there was a violation of law, policy, rule, or contract to support the allegation. Investigative findings classified as “unfounded” means sufficient evidence to justify a reasonable conclusion that the actions did not occur and there was no violation of law, policy, rule, or contract to substantiate the allegation. Investigative findings classified as “unsubstantiated” means there was insufficient evidence to justify a reasonable conclusion that the actions did or did not occur and a violation of law, policy, rule, or contract to support the allegation could not be proven or disproven.



Robert Sheppard <robert.sheppard@palmbeachschools.org>

Case No. 18-741

2 messages

Larry Clawson <larry.clawson@palmbeachschools.org>

Mon, May 7, 2018 at 6:54 AM

To: Lung Chiu <lung.chiu@palmbeachschools.org>, Robert Sheppard <robert.sheppard@palmbeachschools.org>

Cc: Joseph Lee <joseph.lee@palmbeachschools.org>

Good morning Inspector General Chiu and Investigator Sheppard.

This is my written response to Case No. 18-741. Thank you for the thorough investigation conducted by your office. Inspector Sheppard was very professional throughout the investigation. **I concur with his findings.**

I must say that I am very disappointed that this complaint was filed. After 30 years in this district and giving everything I have to help students, my integrity has never been questioned.

If there is anything else I need to complete to finalize this case, please let me know.

Larry Clawson

Larry Clawson, Principal
Palm Beach Gardens High School
(561) 694-7372 PX 27372

Oscar Restrepo <oscar.restrepo@palmbeachschools.org>

Mon, May 7, 2018 at 9:04 AM

To: Robert Sheppard <robert.sheppard@palmbeachschools.org>

Robert,

Here is Principal Lawson's response for your report.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Lung Chiu** <lung.chiu@palmbeachschools.org>

Date: Mon, May 7, 2018 at 8:54 AM

Subject: Fwd: Case No. 18-741

To: Oscar Restrepo <oscar.restrepo@palmbeachschools.org>, Angela Feaman <angela.feaman@palmbeachschools.org>

Cc: Elizabeth McBride <elizabeth.mcbride@palmbeachschools.org>

[Quoted text hidden]

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Oscar Restrepo
Director of Investigations
Office of Inspector General
Palm Beach County School District