

MEMORANDUM

TO: Brad Saron, Superintendent
Board of Education

FROM: Lori M. Lubinsky

DATE: April 9, 2021

RE: Investigation Synopsis
Our File: 22637.82227

The purpose of this Memorandum is to outline my investigative findings regarding the events that occurred at Patrick Marsh Middle School ("PMMS") on February 1, 2021.

The Sun Prairie Area School District ("District") retained me to conduct an independent employment investigation into allegations that were raised on February 1, 2021, by a student's parent concerning a sixth grade social studies lesson that was presented to students. As part of my investigation, I conducted multiple interviews of the teachers involved. I obtained information from Administration and reviewed a number of documents. Based on my investigation, I offer the following factual findings, conclusions, and summary of the resolution of this investigation.

I. FACTUAL FINDING.

Three teachers at PMMS collaborated on a social studies lesson relating to Ancient Mesopotamia. The general topic of Ancient Mesopotamia is contained in the textbook used in the classroom. However, the teachers collaborated to create their own lesson to be used with the students to supplement the District-curriculum. The lesson created was originally created by the teachers approximately two to three years ago. None of the three teachers could recall exactly how this lesson was developed but they all acknowledged that it appeared to be identical to a lesson that was available on a website known as Teachers Pay Teachers.

The assignment included highly offensive questions. One of those questions included the following scenario: "A slave stands before you. This slave has disrespected his master by telling him 'You are not my master!' How will you punish this slave?" The assignment included other offensive questions.

A parent of one of the students of these three teachers reached out directly to one of the teachers asking to have the assignment removed due to its inappropriate and sensitive nature. The teacher initially refused the request. The PMMS Principal was contacted by the same parent shortly after the parent contacted the teacher, and the Principal immediately went to the teachers' classrooms and directed that the assignment be removed. It was then removed and no students were required to complete the assignment.

The evidence showed that all three teachers collaborated with regard to the slide deck that included the offensive questions. The questions were intended to have students answer questions using Hammurabi's Code to make judgments upon the case/scenario. In other words, the students were put in a position of being a slave master at a time in history and in a similar position of power with respect to the other scenarios.

All three teachers acknowledged that, upon reflection, the questions were inappropriate and never should have been given. They also acknowledged the significant impact these questions have had both on students and the community as a whole. All three teachers expressed remorse for their errors of judgment. That said, none of them could explain why they did not consider how the assignment could be interpreted by students and others. Simply stated, they just did not appreciate, understand or evaluate how the questions could be interpreted by others. By all accounts the questions were inappropriate and inconsistent with the District's vision and mission.

This teacher-created activity was not part of the District's curriculum at any level, nor was it approved or endorsed by any level of leadership (building or District level). Again, while it appears clear that the activity was generated from a for-profit company, none of the three teachers could conclusively remember how they obtained the slides that were used in the slide deck.

II. CONCLUSIONS.

The activity presented by the three teachers failed to comply with the District's policy, procedure, process and protocols. More specifically, these teachers' actions violated Board Policy IIAC entitled "Selection of Classroom Instructional Materials and Resources" and Procedure IIAC-R(1) entitled "Procedures for the Selection of Classroom Instructional Materials/Resources."

Likewise, the activity is inconsistent with the District's approved Curriculum. It is inconsistent with the District's Equity Framework. It is also inconsistent with the many training opportunities that District staff have been afforded that address racial equity.

It is my conclusion that the teachers' actions, while not intentional, were isolated to their classrooms but were egregious in terms of the impact on students and the community. The impact of their failure to comply with the District's policies and procedures had a significant impact on the District as a whole including, but not limited to, the students who received the assignment, their parents, the entire PMMS staff and students, and the entire community.

III. RESOLUTION.

After discussions with the three teachers and their representatives, the three teachers were permitted to resign through voluntary separation agreements wherein the teachers remain on paid leave for the remainder of this school year and will not be working for the District in the future. This obviated the need for the District to proceed with any further action against the teachers of a disciplinary nature up to and including termination and/or non-renewal. The District is working to address the impact of these teachers' actions on the District students, staff and community. As the employment matter has now concluded, my investigation is now closed.