

manage.com%2ftrack%2fclick%3fu%3dd50d34c546d2940009bd618c7%26id%3dcf5109ab69%26e%3dbe8f3c3e3a&c=E,1,596d-JGcuKMvu-lG1zyxndfEI8O4q9-XIRazCQwq87fv9Fg6ckngwUg_J5XOfMAP3XWVrlieQJWRZhA0GHI2wEE5eUW3bl3tvUJsWRccTuMZQ,,&typo=1> will be expanding their air service with new routes to Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport from Albany, NY and Providence, RI. Earlier this year, Allegiant also announced four additional flights from Grand Rapids (MI), Niagara Falls (NY), Allentown (PA), and Portsmouth (NH).

Bluffton Named #4 Safest City in South Carolina

For the third year in a row, the Town of Bluffton has been listed in the top 10 of Safest Cities in South Carolina. This year, Bluffton is ranked #4 by HomeSnacks, a website that collects data from various sources to help understand what it's like to live in different communities across the country. Bluffton was named the 10th safest city in 2017 and 5th safest city in 2018 by the SafeWise Report. Some of the sources used in collecting data to determine the safest cities include the U.S. Census Bureau, FBI, and OpenStreetMaps. Read more.

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manage.com%2ftrack%2fclick%3fu%3dd50d34c546d2940009bd618c7%26id%3d8913b63e95%26e%3dbe8f3c3e3a&c=E,1,F7mQH74ys-MFoGC784XMEVs-xIJCLmRwD7k31PYAQ4Mnsk5-tpN__AyymjiK9FJU0THY129gLpZmPetBWqUo_Lbo7LxWdNZLXOSbZbBA2QYOQdk,&typo=1>
Old Town Bluffton Inn Now Open

January 15th marked the official opening of the Old Town Bluffton Inn

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manage.com%2ftrack%2fclick%3fu%3dd50d34c546d2940009bd618c7%26id%3d32534def92%26e%3dbe8f3c3e3a&c=E,1,jxq9GApS-PB7qn9aOEGXZu3SXuX7MoRcBJS8WFDixuUPQg-F6U2WILAb1Nli7qPDDPPuA9xTztgsqN0JfcGzZiho_yEhjbLqHiwpM0QyU0wK0EQ,&typo=1> in the heart of Bluffton's historic district. The vision of Larry Leary, the restoration of the building is the ultimate expression of his love for historic architecture. The Inn will hold their official ribbon cutting on February 27th at 4:30 p.m. with a reception to follow!

<https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2fHiltonHeadBlufftonChamber.us15.list-manage.com%2ftrack%2fclick%3fu%3dd50d34c546d2940009bd618c7%26id%3df311500155%26e%3dbe8f3c3e3a&c=E,1,CuOPT4pSzliHdmZ7KwZlPvfX_YsUSFEqvlh3c-aquwKaGIYD3P_AHRxau6l902q1E0xdC8wjsnrn0QXwzbjeNIJjGLSK0lrE9QWYyaXDCTYvZSYyx2G92oGEVA,,&typo=1>

Palmetto Bluff Recognized as South Carolina's Under-the-Radar Lowcountry Retreat

Paper City Magazine featured Palmetto Bluff, South Carolina, as the ultimate swanky Southern escape for porching, complete with outdoor excursions, foodie delights, and leisure activities, making it an under the radar luxury retreat in the Lowcountry. Read more.

<https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2fHiltonHeadBlufftonChamber.us15.list-manage.com%2ftrack%2fclick%3fu%3dd50d34c546d2940009bd618c7%26id%3dfc0eaac924%26e%3dbe8f3c3e3a&c=E,1,hp0zBk0jcOn-r9bzdKcLAYvQgBJzQ5Zoe9Ehl72HOzR8WbzET_5Ojr9VviZgjfh3s1INyIZU6xzeDCdcXeJ4_I_bBVYfNr-xrrwb9N7iizAJ0P4jF_5rTB&typo=1>

The Inn & Club at Harbor Town is one of "50 Most Romantic Hotels"

Readers Digest recently produced an article on the 50 Most Romantic Hotels in Every State. Hilton Head Island's own Sea Pines Resort The Inn & Club at Harbour Town was included.

"Whether your idea of romance is soaking in a heart-shaped tub, dancing under the stars, strolling arm in arm through a vineyard, or snuggling as you watch the Northern Lights, the right hotel will set the scene for romance. Situated on 5,000 oceanfront acres, Sea Pines the southern third of Hilton Head Island." Read more

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<<https://gallery.mailchimp.com/d50d34c546d2940009bd618c7/images/03b95416-9bc3-48fb-8052-39101f0a71bb.png>>

Vote for Hilton Head Island to be #1 Again!

Last year, Hilton Head Island was named #1 Island in the Continental U.S. for the third year in a row in Travel + Leisure World's Best Awards. Let's keep that winning streak alive in 2019.

When you vote by March 4th, you are also entered in a drawing to win a dream trip for two worth \$10,000, to be planned by a T+L A-List Agent. Three additional \$1,000 cash winners will be awarded. Be sure to answer that you've traveled to South Carolina.

Vote now!

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manage.com%2ftrack%2fclick%3fu%3dd50d34c546d2940009bd618c7%26id%3d7d430a6512%26e%3dbe8f3c3e3a&c=E,1,rWi9Vhbk251rU-

4zqPSiD9GLo7oia7BRdiPwOj41yBhVcYTnwr7Xlg756WiQZGUhh6q_cVK6g8JEB-

7wr4YXkWwEwZa_KV0pM4WF7d4GZnk2rPxS7TQ,&typo=1>

Help promote voting

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manage.com%2ftrack%2fclick%3fu%3dd50d34c546d2940009bd618c7%26id%3da1733e7e44%26e%3dbe8f3c3e3a&c=E,1,uJgiNzp7yuxCLeanWpOof4bl5nlaaWXq4Y41nqiHqN50npzYp8mGr7

ahs3mJ6rDmlzpZBNziLKTHu0EuTQZ7deuu3-coNI7_dJVb5CDJ70jrNeGqK6H5hA,,&typo=1> to

your customers and friends!

Upcoming Events

FEB 27 | 4:30 PM

Old Town Bluffton Inn Grand Opening/Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

1321 May River Road Bluffton 29910 -

Explore and celebrate Bluffton's new boutique hotel. A reception will follow!

FEB 28 | NOON

GETsmart Business Education Series: Human Resources 101

1 Chamber of Commerce Drive (HHI)

Learn about basic human resources concepts, human resources principles for a small business, the key processes in human resource management, and the various laws associated with human resources. Email HHorne@hiltonheadisland.org

<<mailto:HHorne@hiltonheadisland.org?subject=GETsmart%20Series%20Registration&body=Please%20register%20me%20for%20the%202%2F28%20GETsmart%20series.%0AName%3A%0ACompany%3A%0AEmail%3A%0APhone%3A>> to register!

MAR 1 | 10 AM

Business Golf Classic (Shamble Format)

Atlantic Dunes

The Sea Pines Resort

Spots are filling up fast. Register Today!

10 a.m. registration | Noon shotgun start | Reception follows play.

General Registration

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FtO1hfG24FIXboPjOR1e4BhGohwYzvW3KqxsqWNVtJaj2BOqoJujZZfPLnTPAPe1ljUV-
ID42VgcgmOTE5mNFUJRootbYjkKr6RI5Q,&typo=1>

Chamber Champion Registration

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manage.com%2ftrack%2fclick%3fu%3dd50d34c546d2940009bd618c7%26id%3d7ba1f73430%
26e%3dbe8f3c3e3a&c=E,1,OBQf9D23geUtY40kDzySaV00VP2le2RI4kZUEfT6_ssYcJtgqHUdLK2N
8usCZqe-8afNxoU30Dwg9WXziPIXQgFc6zGoUcXOOPOwM1HJyeUT&typo=1>

Want to promote your business or event through the Chamber?

Contact Susan Burnash by email

<<mailto:sburnash@hiltonheadisland.org?subject=I'm%20interested%20in%20learning%20more%20about%20promotion%20opportunities>> for more info.

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3XH58cpMpIXwJ0hrhcGSCNE29geXz4CPPy33isfYNUFR3bSt6Yh0P5bYxUYUmpktykeDrDJhQkcb
PldBjJA,,&typo=1> Share

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ORmmVYHTx1EZrMrJm3a2d34kdawe-68-tUmztDJwhkhgAe8VqwwwQihpZtcnLRlg,,&typo=1>

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<https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=http%3a%2f%2fus15.forward-to-friend.com%2fforward%3fu%3dd50d34c546d2940009bd618c7%26id%3d799f0b089c%26e%3dbe8f3c3e3a&c=E,1,YJT-_x3ZWcBPaaGPHipM8QRfhz_gw6vinre9CVnxUC_xnBDFXZ9JbEPIKK-GYS02Q9OI54tdndI_p5zA35YxtxvzAA3S86Jx_y1w3t9aXg,,&typo=1> Forward
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From: Orischak, Josephine A <Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us>
ent: Monday, February 25, 2019 1:06 PM
To: Orischak, Josephine A
Subject: Summary (approves island purchase)
Attachments: 11.28.17 Bd Mtg.pdf; ATT00001.txt

<http://beaufortschools.net/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=10582976>

From: Geier, Richard P <Richard.Geier@beaufort.k12.sc.us>
Sent: Monday, February 25, 2019 11:25 PM
To: Orischak, Josephine A
Subject: Re: RFP Meeting Examples (SFAA)

JoAnn,

I am unavailable tomorrow morning but available to receive your call anytime in the afternoon.

Looking forward to talking with you.

Dick

Sent from my iPad
Colonel Richard P. Geier USA (Ret)
Beaufort County Board of Education
District 5 Representative
Beaufort/Burton/Spring Island/Callawassie Island

On Feb 25, 2019, at 7:20 PM, Orischak, Josephine A <Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us> <mailto:Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us> wrote:

Rachel and Dick,

I am not certain why Board members have historically been involved in this process, but I suspect it is to provide checks and balances. It is my understanding that the inclusion of Board members on the RFP committee to vet auditors was in place BEFORE Dr. Moss became superintendent.

Please be reminded that the Finance Committee has received a directive from the Board chair to participate in this process, and as chair, I have respectfully accepted her directive. Additionally, the Board took action and accepted the Finance Committee's scope which includes our participation on the RFP committee. As such, we are currently bound to participate until otherwise determined by the committee and Board.

JoAnn Orischak

Beaufort County Board of Education
District 11
Hilton Head Island
C. (843) 338-1737

From: Orischak, Josephine A
Sent: Monday, February 25, 2019 6:41:48 PM
To: Geier, Richard P
Cc: Wisnefski, Rachel K
Subject: Re: RFP Meeting Examples (SFAA)

Dick,

I will call you tomorrow. What time works best for you?

JoAnn Orischak
Beaufort County Board of Education
District 11
Hilton Head Island
C. (843) 338-1737

From: Geier, Richard P
Sent: Monday, February 25, 2019 5:15:48 PM
To: Orischak, Josephine A
Cc: Wisnefski, Rachel K
Subject: Re: RFP Meeting Examples (SFAA)

JoAnn,

I returned my packet with the responses to Tonya today with the forms filed out from my telephonic interviews with referenced school districts. I mentioned to Tonya that when I was the VP at a community college my facilities director, the Student Services VP and I did the RFP selection review and selected our recommended contractor for a multimillion dollar performing arts center. We gave that recommendation to the College President she agreed and presented that recommendation to our Board of Trustees for final approval. When I was VP of a private university I went through the same process for the selection of an multimillion dollar enterprise software system.

I am mentioning this to you and Rachel because I don't really understand why any board members are involved in the selection process unless we don't trust the staff. I can understand why some might be distrustful based on the award of the contract for the construction that the FBI is interested in. However I believe the root cause of that distrust is the lack of trust in the former superintendent. I personally trust the staff and Dr. Berg to evaluate responses to the RFP and make a recommendation to the board that would be presented to the board for final approval in executive session with a vote to follow in open session. Please tell me why the board is involved in the initial RFP evaluation process.

Dick

Sent from my iPad
Colonel Richard P. Geier USA (Ret)
Beaufort County Board of Education
District 5 Representative
Beaufort/Burton/Spring Island/Callawassie Island

On Feb 25, 2019, at 1:35 PM, Orischak, Josephine A
<Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us <mailto:Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us> >
wrote:

Rachel and Dick,

Below is a link to the SC Procurement Services website and a few examples of how other public institutions around the state are approaching their meetings.

I have not received word from Tonya and/or the Board officers yet on if/how our auditor vetting process will proceed.

JoAnn Orischak
Beaufort County School District
District 11
Hilton Head Island
C. (843) 338-1737

<https://procurement.sc.gov/general/meeting-notices>

Sent from my iPad

From: Orischak, Josephine A <Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us>
Sent: Tuesday, February 26, 2019 9:36 AM
To: Wisniewski, Rachel K
Subject: Re: RFP Meeting Examples (SFAA)

Makes sense, Rachel....

JoAnn Orischak
Beaufort County Board of Education
District 11
Hilton Head Island
C. (843) 338-1737

From: Wisniewski, Rachel K
Sent: Tuesday, February 26, 2019 7:48:12 AM
To: Geier, Richard P
Cc: Orischak, Josephine A
Subject: Re: RFP Meeting Examples (SFAA)

JoAnn and Richard,

If I may, perhaps this issue of who/how participation should occur should be forwarded to the Ad Hoc Policy Committee for consideration in the updates that are in process? While this won't solve our current issue regarding participation, it can help to clarify and streamline the process for the future. In the interim, I look forward to proceeding in this process.

Warmest regards,

Rachel K. Wisniewski, PhD
District 7
Beaufort County Board of Education
Tel: 843.290.0557

On Feb 25, 2019, at 10:59 PM, Geier, Richard P <Richard.Geier@beaufort.k12.sc.us
<mailto:Richard.Geier@beaufort.k12.sc.us> > wrote:

JoAnn,

I understand that the chair directed that the finance committee participate in the selection process. However now that we are spending time deciding who should participate and how the participation should be conducted it seems to me that the FOIA requirements for board members are causing the delay. I don't believe the staff has the same FOIA restrictions to make staff recommendations. They can make RFP staff recommendations to the board just like they make hiring and firing recommendations. The board, in my opinion should not do the district's staff work. The board should make decisions based on their staff work and when dealing with competitive bids the board should make those decisions in executive session followed by announcement of the winner of the RFP in open session. Obviously it has not been done that way before but that does not mean that it is not an possible option.

It seems to me that we should look at all possible options when we make decisions and those options should include advantages and disadvantages and the option with the most advantages and the least disadvantages should be selected.

I only sent this to you and Rachel and of course I will follow your decision on how this process will proceed but I wanted to share with you my experience as a staff member dealing with RFP's in two educational institutions reporting to two different governing boards.

Frankly, I am becoming increasing frustrated that we as a board take so long to make decisions. Process is important as is responsiveness.

Respectfully,

Dick

Sent from my iPad
Colonel Richard P. Geier USA (Ret)
Beaufort County Board of Education
District 5 Representative
Beaufort/Burton/Spring Island/Callawassie Island

On Feb 25, 2019, at 7:20 PM, Orischak, Josephine A
<Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us <mailto:Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us> >
wrote:

The FP

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I am not certain why Board members have historically been involved in this process, but I suspect it is to provide checks and balances. It is my understanding that the inclusion of Board members on the RFP committee to vet auditors was in place BEFORE Dr. Moss became superintendent.

Pleas be reminded that the Finance Committee has received a directive from the Board chair to participate in this process, and as chair, I have respectfully accepted her directive. Additionally, the Board took action and accepted the Finance Committee's scope which includes our participation on the RFP committee. As such, we are currently bound to participate until otherwise determined by the committee and Board.

JoAnn Orischak
Beaufort County Board of Education
District 11
Hilton Head Island
C. (843) 338-1737

From: Orischak, Josephine A
Sent: Monday, February 25, 2019 6:41:48 PM
To: Geier, Richard P
Cc: Wisnefski, Rachel K
Subject: Re: RFP Meeting Examples (SFAA)

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I will call you tomorrow. What time works best for you?

JoAnn Orischak
Beaufort County Board of Education
District 11
Hilton Head Island
C. (843) 338-1737

From: Geier, Richard P
Sent: Monday, February 25, 2019 5:15:48 PM
To: Orischak, Josephine A
Cc: Wisnefski, Rachel K
Subject: Re: RFP Meeting Examples (SFAA)

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Dick

Sent from my iPad
Colonel Richard P. Geier USA (Ret)
Beaufort County Board of Education
District 5 Representative
Beaufort/Burton/Spring Island/Callawassie Island

On Feb 25, 2019, at 1:35 PM, Orischak, Josephine A
<Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us <mailto:Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us> >
wrote:

Rachel and Dick,

Below is a link to the SC Procurement Services website and a few examples of how other public institutions around the state are approaching their meetings.

I have not received word from Tonya and/or the Board officers yet on if/how our auditor vetting process will proceed.

JoAnn Orischak
Beaufort County School District
District 11
Hilton Head Island
C. (843) 338-1737

<https://procurement.sc.gov/general/meeting-notices>

Sent from my iPad

From: Orischak, Josephine A <Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us>
ent: Tuesday, February 26, 2019 1:33 PM
To: Orischak, Josephine A
Subject: Brantley Thomas, ex-Berkeley schools CFO, embezzled nearly \$1M, feds & AG claim | WCIV

<https://abcnews4.com/news/crime-news/brantley-thomas-charged-berkeley-fraud-embezzlement-money-laundering>

Brantley Thomas, ex-Berkeley schools CFO, embezzled nearly \$1M, feds & AG claim

MONCKS CORNER, S.C. (WCIV) —

<https://static-41.sinclairstoryline.com/resources/media/74a024aa-c2b9-430f-8bd6-353fb4e2c893-large16x9_brantley_photo.jpg?1512691174249>

Fraud, embezzlement, forgery, money laundering, credit card debt and 9/11.

Those charges and circumstances from federal court papers and state grand jury indictments unsealed Thursday seem more Law & Order than Lowcountry, but prosecutors claim they are real details from a near 15-year theft scheme by Brantley Thomas, former Berkeley County School District chief financial officer.

Thomas was fired by BCSD in February <<http://abcnews4.com/news/crime-news/berkeley-county-schools-cfo-brantley-thomas-fired-fbi-investigating>> amid a SLED and FBI investigation after admitting to stealing roughly \$355,000 from the district <<http://abcnews4.com/news/crime-news/fired-berkeley-schools-cfo-confessed-to-stealing-nearly-400k-says-board>> .

These newly unveiled court documents allege Thomas in reality stole nearly \$1 million from Berkeley County taxpayers over 14 years, starting on September 11, 2001.

Court records show Thomas has agreed to plead guilty in lieu of an indictment, and in doing so promises to help the federal government in its investigation and attempts to prosecute others in connection to the case.

Thomas's plea agreement shows that he has already paid \$247,251 in restitution to the government, but that he still faces fines of up to \$750,000 and as long as 40 years in prison.

It's unclear if Thomas has entered a plea in connection to the state charges against him levied by the S.C. Attorney General's office.

Berkeley County school officials say the charges by the AG's office are new revelations uncovered through BCSD's cooperation with state and federal investigators after Thomas's original admission of theft in February.

"Although today's announcement is a substantial vindication for this district, there are still further necessary steps we will take to vindicate past decisions and actions that were not taken in the best interest of the district," BCSD attorney Josh Whitley said in a statement Thursday. "We will continue to actively work with law enforcement on this ongoing criminal investigation."

Thomas, 61, had worked for the Berkeley County School District since 1993.

Read more about the federal and state allegations against Thomas below.

FEDERAL CASE

In a 20-count complaint filed in November, federal prosecutors say Thomas embezzled approximately \$450,000 in school district funds between 2012 and 2016.

Prosecutors say some the money came from deliberate overpayments Thomas made to vendors. When the vendors would pay back the extra money, prosecutors say Thomas would keep the money for himself.

Other money was from refund and rebate checks issued to the district by vendors and other agencies, which prosecutors say Thomas laundered by having converted to personal cashier's checks.

- * The refunds and rebates Thomas reportedly kept and laundered include:
- * Annual refunds from Berkeley Electric Cooperative;
- * Proceeds from tax anticipation notes issued by the S.C. Association of Government Organizations;
- * Money held in a Wells Fargo escrow account; and
- * An unspecified refund check from Kansas State bank.

Thomas was the chairman of the S.C. Association of Government Organizations (SCAGO) at the time he was fired by BCSD, and had been a member of the SCAGO board for years.

According to its website, SCAGO is a “non-profit” “formed with the primary objective of promoting financing and investment opportunities to benefit South Carolina's Public School Districts.” SCAGO’s board of directors is made up primarily of school district financial officers from around the state. Past members include Glenn Stiegman, former CFO for the Charleston County School District.

Copies of the SCAGO tax anticipation note proceed checks Thomas reportedly stole show some of the checks were made out to the school district, while others were made out to the district through care of Mike Gallagher at Columbia-based Compass Municipal Advisors.

A background check shows Gallagher is a relative of Thomas’s wife, Debra. Thomas resigned from the SCAGO board the day he was fired by BCSD,

Prosecutors say Thomas placed the money he stole into a personal Bank of America credit card account, from which he’d draw money and put in another personal account.

According to the prosecutors, Thomas used the stolen money for living and personal expenses, such as paying off car loans, a membership at a private club and foreign travel.

Federal prosecutors allege Thomas also made \$20,000 between 2013 and 2016 as part of a kickback fraud scheme to award school contracts to an insurance agency. The indictments do not name the insurance agency or agent.

Federal prosecutors are asking a judge order Thomas to forfeit property obtained through his actions, \$135,000 he has in a bank account, and to pay back a minimum of \$79,208 of the proceeds from his alleged crimes.

STATE INDICTMENT

In a 15-count indictment filed in October, the S.C. Attorney General’s office says Thomas embezzled approximately \$458,493, separate from the roughly \$450,000 federal prosecutors accuse him of stealing.

It all started on September 11, 2001, when the AG’s office says Thomas stole \$8,318 from the district under the guise of sending a refund check to the University of South Carolina.

At the time, the indictment paints Thomas as living beyond his means, with the AG's office alleging he began stealing from the school district at the same time he was buying land and building a home in Hanahan's Tanner Hall neighborhood.

In 2004, state prosecutors allege Thomas stole a combined \$99,458, which he deposited either in his personal account, or a joint account shared with another person not named in the indictment.

Then in 2005, with his joint account showing a balance of only \$61, prosecutors say Thomas deposited another \$29,452 he stole from the district.

Between 2006 and 2012, the state claims Thomas embezzled money 10 more times, primarily using it to pay down his own credit card debt.

Other embezzlements the state accuses Thomas of include:

- * 2006 - Deposited district fee payment into personal bank account (\$3,771)
- * 2007 - Deliberately overpaid BCSD vendor, kept refund (\$22,700)
- * 2007 - Used district money to pay down personal credit card bill (\$11,602)
- * 2008 - Used district money to pay down personal credit card bill (\$31,956)
- * 2009 - Used district money to pay down personal credit card bill (\$36,934)
- * 2010 - Used district money to pay down personal credit card bill (\$26,743)
- * 2011 - Deposited three district fee payments into personal account, used money to pay down personal credit card bill (\$98,349)
- * 2011 - Forged an invoice and had a school district vendor payment routed to personal account, used money to pay down personal credit card bill (\$26,743)
- * 2012 - Routed school district vendor payment to personal account, used money to pay down personal credit card bill (\$31,176)
- * 2012 - Routed school district vendor payment to personal account, used money to pay down personal credit card bill (\$21,288)

In all, the state has charged Thomas with 14 counts of embezzlement, and 1 count of forgery.

*Clarification (12/08/17): A previous version of this story said Brantley Thomas had pleaded guilty to allegations made by federal prosecutors. Thomas has agreed to plead guilty, but has not formally appeared before a judge to enter a guilty plea as of the publishing of this article.

*Clarification (12/07/17): A previous version of this story said Thomas had been indicted in federal court. Thomas avoided a federal indictment as part of a guilty plea agreement. Thomas was, however, indicted in state court.

Sent from my iPad

From: Orischak, Josephine A <Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us>
Sent: Tuesday, February 26, 2019 1:36 PM
To: Orischak, Josephine A
Subject: William Saunders

<https://www.postandcourier.com/content/tncms/live/>

Berkeley County Schools finance director fired after allegations of misappropriating funds

By Brenda Rindge brindge@postandcourier.com

<<https://www.postandcourier.com/users/profile/BrendaRindge>> Feb 8, 2017

The chief financial officer of Berkeley County School District has been fired in the wake of allegations of misappropriating funds, and school officials had little to say Wednesday about the amount of money involved or the potential impact on schools there.

Brantley D. Thomas III, who has worked for the district since 1993, oversaw all of the district's monies, including its nearly \$260 million general fund.

Superintendent Brenda Blackburn, Board Chairwoman Sally Wofford, Vice Chairman Mac McQuillin and district lawyers learned of an investigation into the district's finances during a Monday meeting with investigators from Wells Fargo and the FBI.

"We appreciate Wells Fargo and the FBI for promptly bringing this to our attention," Wofford said in a statement released Wednesday. "We ask the public's patience as we thoroughly investigate this matter and promise to take all appropriate actions."

Blackburn fired Thomas, 60, on Tuesday, according to a district press release. Thomas has not yet been charged because the investigation is ongoing.

Calls to Thomas' home went unanswered Wednesday afternoon, and his lawyer, Matt Hubbell, said he could not comment other than to say that Thomas is fully cooperating with authorities.

The release did not specify how much money was at issue. It said a review of all financial accounts and monetary transactions is underway.

The school board held an emergency meeting Monday to receive advice from district lawyer Josh Whitley on a criminal investigation. It voted immediately to go into closed session, which lasted about an hour, and then adjourned without comment.

Board members reached Wednesday refused to comment, citing the ongoing investigation. They would not say how much money is missing or how it might impact district operations.

The district also declined to comment. An acting CFO has not yet been appointed, officials said.

The district has come under fire in the last couple of years for some financial decisions, including large property tax increases in 2015 and 2016.

In addition, after a State Law Enforcement Division investigation into the district's \$198 million Yes for Schools building campaign, the district spent more than \$500,000 on salaries for indicted employees Rodney Thompson and Amy Kovach and lawyer's fees for the pair and Deputy Superintendent Archie Franchini, who was not indicted. Thompson and Kovach both pleaded guilty to ethics violations in connection with the 2012 referendum campaign.

In November, voters expressed their dissatisfaction with the board by electing four new members associated with the county's conservative Republicans. Three board members chose not to seek re-election and two incumbents, Chairman Jim Hayes and Julius Barnes, were defeated.

At its Jan. 10 meeting, the board received the results of an audit for its fiscal year ending June 30, during which Larry Finney of Greenville-based accounting firm Greene, Finney & Horton gave the district an "unmodified opinion," the best result possible.

The audit did not look at every transaction, but instead used a sampling technique, Finney said at the time.

"Those are the kinds of things that let me sleep at night," Superintendent Brenda Blackburn said upon hearing the favorable report.

Thomas, a Hanahan resident, is a 1975 graduate of Porter-Gaud and earned an accounting degree from Wofford College in 1979.

Until Tuesday, he was listed as chairman of the S.C. Association of Governmental Organizations, a nonprofit program created in 2002 to fund the building of school facilities through municipal bonds, according to its website. On Wednesday, Thomas' name was removed from the site, and Horry County accounting officer William Saunders was listed as acting chairman.

Thomas' brother-in-law, Mike Gallagher, director of Compass Municipal Advisors in Columbia, serves as the organization's financial adviser and program administrator.

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From: Orischak, Josephine A <Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us>
ent: Tuesday, February 26, 2019 1:38 PM
To: Wisnefski, Rachel K
Subject: Fwd: William Saunders
Attachments: attachment 1.doc

Rachel,

Here's the article where William Saunders is referenced.

J.

Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Orischak, Josephine A" <Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us
mailto:Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us> >
Date: February 26, 2019 at 1:36:03 PM EST
To: "Orischak, Josephine A" <Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us
<mailto:Josephine.Orischak@beaufort.k12.sc.us> >
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