



New Haven School Change

NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Iline Tracey
From: Taryn R. Bonner
CC: D. Aiello; K. Hannans
Date: October 2, 2019
Subject: Aiello Complaint Investigative Write Up

On July 22, 2019, the Office of Talent Management received a written complaint from Donna Aiello, Assistant Principal. In short, Aiello's complaint sighted intimidation, harassment and retaliation toward her by Assistant Superintendent, Keisha Redd-Hannans.

To appropriately address Aiello's, complaint, an investigation into her claims was carried out. I took on the handling of the investigation into her complaint which included the following:

- Review of emails dated July 3, 2019 and July 22, 2019 from Aiello;
- Review of district policies 4101 & 4104;
- Review of email dated June 21, 2019 from Hannans;
- Review of information collected from an investigatory hearing with Aiello on August 15, 2019;
- Review of information collected from an investigatory hearing with Margaret-Mary Gethings, Principal on August 19, 2019;
- An interview with Lisa Mack, Director of Human Resources on or about August 20, 2019;
- Review of information collected from an investigatory hearing with Hannans on August 26, 2019;
- Review of Aiello and Hannans personnel and other investigative files;

DISCUSSION:

Through Aiello's complaint the following was reported:

- it is alleged during a meeting on July 8, 2019 Hannans
 - attempted to intimidate Aiello by reiterating Aiello could be involuntarily transferred;
 - attempted to intimidate and further harass Aiello by giving her feedback on an email she had sent to Hannans regarding her "willingness to meet";
- it is alleged Hannans retaliated against Aiello because she voted against a recommendation to transfer several teachers, which was the recommendation of the Superintendent's executive leadership team, which is inclusive of Hannans, in an effort to mitigate the 2019-2020 fiscal year budget;

- it is alleged Hannans harassed Aiello by calling her in for a meeting during the 2018-2019 school year, to discuss alleged complaints submitted by parents without being provided evidence of the complaints;
- it is alleged Hannans harassed Aiello by treating her unfairly during the hiring process for the position of Principal of W. Hooker School, last year.

Aiello further reported that Hannans' conduct toward her over the past year or more has been intimidating and overall different from their relationship previously (when Hannans was a member of the administrator's union). She stated she has never been treated or been spoken to so poorly in all of her years as an employee of New Haven Public Schools.

FINDINGS:

Through the investigation, the concerns noted by Aiello regarding the filling of the Principal position last year at W. Hooker School have been reviewed. Aiello was a candidate for the position but she did not advance as a finalist in the search process. After considering internal candidates, the candidate pool was extended to include both internal and external candidates. Once external candidates were considered for the position, Hannans was asked to lead the hiring process along with Mack, as the Director of the Office of Talent Management.

Both Hannans and Mack supported the notion that the process was followed appropriately and in accordance with the newly implemented guidelines for hiring principals. These new guidelines included having multiple stakeholders involved in the process of selecting a Principal to lead any school in the district.

Hannans denied treating Aiello unfairly during the hiring process or having any biased influence on if Aiello were to advance or not. From discussion, it appears the majority of the hiring process was executed by the School Planning & Management Team. This team was responsible for several steps of the hiring process including the selection of the finalist. Decisions were made on the School Planning & Management Team by majority vote in an effort to make the process as democratic as possible.

With regard to a meeting between the parties during the 18-19 school year, Hannans recalled the meeting she had with Aiello where they discussed the concerns of several parents as well as the overall climate of the school. It's been reported that former Administrator's Union President, Cheryl Brown was present during the meeting. Brown was not interviewed in this investigation because she has since retired. However, it is undisputed that Hannans shared with Aiello that there had been concerns raised by parents as feedback for Aiello's own professional growth and reflection.

According to Hannans, she could not confirm if the complaints/concerns raised were true or not and that "as a professional" she "wanted to let her [Aiello] know". Therefore, there wasn't a need provide copies of the complaints to Aiello and Brown during their meeting as no discipline or adverse action was taken.

Aiello felt she had been “verbally reprimanded” for these alleged complaints. The parties did discuss Aiello’s feelings as it relates to the parent complaints at a later date and time. During that conversation, Hannans again responded that she shared the information with her as feedback, but Aiello’s perception of being accused of wrongdoing remained unchanged.

Additionally, in her complaint, Aiello mentioned the transfer of “54 teachers”. It appears Aiello sat as a member of the Budget Mitigation Committee as a representative of the Administrators Union. During the budgeting process, the former Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Carol Birks and her leadership team, put together a recommendation in response to the budget deficit which included the involuntary transfer of several teachers. Aiello was vocal in the process and offered her opinion based on her experiences in the district but ultimately voted against the recommendation. Hannans was present during the meeting in which Aiello voted against the plan.

Hannans shared she had only one concern with Aiello’s actions during the committee meeting which was not pertaining to Aiello’s vote. Her concern was related to a comment Aiello made about principals. Hannans recalled the comment suggested that principals had official complaints about the process of selecting teachers to be transferred. Hannans later addressed her concern by sending a clarifying email to the Administrators union about the process of submitting a complaint so they are logged and properly addressed, investigated, and ideally remedied.

From the investigation, it appears nothing ever came of the email Hannans sent following the committee meeting.

In early July, another meeting took place between both Hannans and Aiello. During the meeting, among other topics the two discussed the possibility of Aiello transferring from her current assignment at W. Hooker School to another assignment and an email Aiello had sent to Hannans about her being willing to meet.

Regarding the transfer discussion, Aiello shared she did not request a transfer as she was really happy at her school and believe it was a great fit. Hannans shared the transfer discussion was a follow up to a conversation Aiello and Hannans had in November regarding Aiello’s professional aspirations within the district. Hannans shared she wanted to get a sense of Aiello’s aspirations, her comfort working at the school under new leadership, as a new principal had been appointed and not to offend or adversely impact Aiello in any way.

Aiello felt threatened by the transfer conversation and specific language used during the conversation. Unfortunately, there were no other witnesses to the conversation as the two parties met alone.

With regard to the email Aiello sent on July 3rd, she sent the email in response to Hannans meeting request. From a review of the email, it appeared positive and appropriate. However, Hannans expressed some concern with the language in the email and shared that with Aiello during their meeting. Aiello’s intent for the email was not to cause strife but to clear any ill

feelings and move forward. While both parties agree the email was a topic of discussion during their meeting, it appears the implied meaning or perception of the email differs between the parties.

Finally, a review of both Hannans and Aiello's work history, personnel file and other work records was carried out. It appears neither Aiello nor Hannans has had any previous discipline. From a review of their employment records, no concerning information or complaint history was found.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the investigation, interviews with other employees and a review of existing records, the allegations brought forth against Hannans are unfounded. There is no conclusive evidence to support that Hannans retaliated, harassed or threatened Aiello through this investigation.

I recommend the parties sit down with a third party to mediate and restore their professional relationship. From meeting and speaking with the parties, I do not believe their professional relationship is beyond repair. I believe if the parties are open to having honest conversations than trust can be reestablished.

During our interviews, both parties mentioned a few instances when both Hannans and Aiello worked together in a collaborative and productive nature. Hannans was supportive of the work Aiello has done in a couple instances; Aiello reported she indeed felt supported by Hannans in relation to those specific instances.

Hannans also mentioned she was a little taken aback when she received the details of the complaint as she believed her and Aiello had a positive working relationship.

Often times, it is challenging for former colleagues to find a balance and effectively work together when one is promoted to a supervisor position. Finding the balance for the subordinate and most importantly for the supervisor is imperative in order for a productive professional relationship to continue.

TRB