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JIMMY ATKINS
President

DANA T. BEDDEN, Ed.D.
Superintendent

JOE L. SCOTT
Vice-President

November 24, 2008

John Thomas Barksdale


RE: Letter of Reprimand

Dear Mr. Barksdale:

As you may be aware, an email was sent to the Superintendent of Schools and to all Board Members dated September 23, 2008, alleging certain improprieties had occurred at Spirit Creek Middle School during the 2007-2008 school year. The allegations were that certain staff members had engaged in personal relationships, including verbal and text messaging communication as well as physical activities at school and during school work hours. The original email was very specific and led to a string of emails that added depth and detail to the allegations. As the information asserted that the events and encounters described had occurred at or on school property and during school time, an investigation was initiated through the Internal Affairs Division of the Public Safety Department of the Richmond County School System. The investigators were instructed that the strictly personal lives of employees were of no concern to the School System; however, any nexus between the alleged activities and the school or employment duties and professional expectations of the named individuals was a matter of valid concern.

You were initially named in the investigation through email communication sent to the Superintendent and Board Members by Denise Ogden, a former teacher, and Ms. Collins, the wife of former Public Safety Officer Ronnie Collins, in which Ms. Ogden alleged that you had inappropriate relations with the principal while at school and during school hours. As a result of this allegation you provided a statement in which you admitted that you often ate lunch in the office of the principal, would leave campus to purchase lunch for the principal and yourself which you then ate in the principal's office with the principal, and that the principal referred to you as "eye candy." Other allegations were made by staff members that you "touched" or "smacked" the principal on her buttocks and touched her breast. Two secretaries reported they witnessed you touch the principal as mentioned above.

To resolve matters, you agreed to take a polygraph examination. During a polygraph pre-test interview on October 21, 2008, you reported that you did indeed "smack" the principal on the buttocks in her office during the 2007-2008 school year. Moreover, you confirmed to System Administrators in an interview that the principal referred to you as "eye candy" on school grounds and during working hours. In the interview, you related that you were requested by the principal to pick up lunch during a time period when you should have been working.

The above summary is the known limit of the evidence establishing your participation in misconduct which occurred on school grounds and during school hours during the 2007-2008 school year. You also received information from former Public Safety Officer Ronnie Collins that he was involved at school in a heated discussion with Jeffrey Alston, a teacher, involving Coach Morgan, a P.E. teacher. While there were other rumors, those are not currently substantiated by any corroboration and; therefore, have not been considered in this letter.

The School System appreciates your candor and willingness to cooperate during this entire investigation. You have reported that you chose to become a Graduation Coach as you have determined to make education your career and hope one day to advance to the administrative level as a principal of a school. It goes without saying that your goals are lofty and will require on a continuous basis not only a solid employment record, but an impeccable record of personal conduct on the job. Employees are expected to be collegial, but professional. The School System compensates you to interact with students by assisting them in developing academic and test-taking skills that will enable them to be productive and successful students. You have the unique opportunity to be a mentor to these students, and being a mentor requires that your personal conduct toward or around students and at the school exemplifies character traits that school employees are required to impart to our students. It goes without saying that your conduct and remarks in this instance were not appropriate, were personal, were not job-related and had no place in a school setting. Additionally, such behavior diminishes the time available to carry out official duties assigned by the School System. Under those circumstances, neither students nor the School System is receiving full value of your services.


Therefore, I am issuing this formal letter of reprimand, admonishing you for engaging in the personal activities described above. For purposes of this letter, it is recognized that you were directed by a supervisor to leave campus to pick up lunch. This letter also assumes that the limit of your involvement appears as described in this letter. If any additional facts are revealed, I reserve the right to revisit this entire matter.

You are reprimanded for a failure to demonstrate conduct, as to the matters described above, that follow generally recognized standards. You are expected to perform your duties as a Graduation Coach for the entire workday while on school property or at school activities. You are not compensated or permitted to enter into workday deviations for personal reasons or gratification. It is my hope that given the directives of this letter, and as exhibited by your cooperation that you have learned a valuable lesson and repeat of this conduct should not be forthcoming. You have the opportunity to become a productive employee; this opportunity, however, will require your attention and your willingness to comply with the rules and regulations that govern the School System and the standards of conduct expected and required of its employees while they are engaged in performing their duties. As you are currently a classified employee without a

written contract for a definite term, any appeal rights you have are found in Board Policy GAE-1, a copy of which is enclosed. Because you hold a license similar to a paraprofessional, the Professional Standards Commission will be notified of this matter as required.

If you should exhibit similar inappropriate behavior as outlined herein in the future, further and stronger discipline will result up to and including the possibility of suspension or termination.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dana T. Bedden", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dana T. Bedden, Ed. D.,
Superintendent of Schools

cc: Norman Hill
Dr. Virginia Bradshaw
Leonard O. Fletcher, Jr.