

RICHMOND COUNTY



BOARD OF EDUCATION

864 Broad Street
Augusta, Georgia 30901-4295
(706) 826-1000 – Fax: (706) 826-4633

MR. JIMMY ATKINS
President

DANA T. BEDDEN, Ed.D
Superintendent of Schools

VIRGINIA C. BRADSHAW, Ph.D.
Executive Director
for Middle Schools

November 24, 2008

Christina N. Morgan


LE: Letter of Advisement

Dear Ms. Morgan:

As you may be aware, an email dated September 23, 2008, was sent to the Superintendent of Schools and to all Board Members, alleging certain improprieties had occurred at Spirit Creek Middle School during the 2007-2008 school year. The general allegations were that certain staff members had engaged in personal relationships, including verbal and text messaging communication and 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 this 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 interest 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 and Ms. Collins, the wife of former Public Safety Officer Ronnie Collins, in which Ms. Ogden alleged that Officer Collins stated you paraded around in his office in your underwear. Additionally, Ms. Ogden reported that Jeffrey Alston, a teacher, had a very heated conversation regarding you with Officer Collins at Spirit Creek Middle School, during the 2007-2008 school year. Similarly, Officer Collins in a written statement reported that Mr. Alston accused him of flirting with you. Mr. Alston, according to Officer Collins, referred to you as "my girl." When confronted with this information, Mr. Alston gave a written statement that "a fellow teacher" (you) indicated to Mr. Alston that you were talking to Officer Collins on a regular basis, but did not have a relationship with him.

According to Mr. Alston's statement he told Officer Collins that "he needed to leave my girl (you) alone." You have also admitted in your statement that a heated conversation took place between Mr. Alston and Officer Collins in your presence referencing you. Therefore, there is no question that Officer Collins and Mr. Alston had heated words relative to Officer Collins' interactions with you at school. While no one corroborates Ms. Ogden's allegation that you paraded around in your underwear in Officer Collins' office, this allegation nevertheless raises a concern, when coupled with additional and direct information that surreptitious activities may have occurred.

Additionally, a written statement from a staff member reports students saw you in the bleachers sitting between the legs of Mr. Alston. The students reported this incident to a teacher. Secretaries reported that students also reported this to the principal. Whether the appearance generated on the bleachers was or was not innocent, the perception generated to students was that the conduct was, to say the least, not in good taste. One staff member also reports you were sitting in the dark in the classroom with Mr. Alston during the school day.

For purposes of this letter, it is agreed that there is currently no corroboration to indicate that you had an inappropriate relationship with any faculty member and no corroboration that you were in your underwear in Officer Collins' office. Nevertheless, the heated discussion between Mr. Alston and Officer Collins relative to you which was witnessed by several persons, coupled with the witness accounts of you sitting between the legs of Mr. Alston in the bleachers, and the report of your sitting in a darkened classroom with Mr. Alston provides sufficient information for me to admonish you.

While the total extent of your involvement in and full knowledge of the circumstances outlined in this letter is unclear, the fact remains these are serious allegations made relative to your actions at Spirit Creek Middle School. If true, these allegations would form a substantial basis for significant discipline. However, the facts currently reported, standing alone, do not allow me to conclude that you were partially undressed in Officer Collins' office; nevertheless, his eye witness account does provide a firsthand assertion that such could be the case. On the other hand, there is no question that the heated conversation between Officer Collins and Mr. Alston was directly related to you and was a conversation that received certain notoriety as did the bleacher incident. You were present during the altercation.

If any additional or corroborating information comes forward, I would consider strong disciplinary action. In this connection, I reserve the right to revisit this issue should additional evidence come to light.

Given all of these considerations, and the current facts, I have decided to issue you this strong, but informal, letter of advisement to remind you that the relationships exhibited at school and at extracurricular school activities with your peers must be grounded by professional standards that exemplify an educator totally committed to serve as an impeccable role model for students. Students see teachers as role models. Any actions by a teacher that give even the appearance of impropriety are unacceptable. In this instance, your relationship, to whatever extent it existed, with Officer Collins, was personal rather than professional. The discourse you had with Officer Collins was sufficiently personal that two adult males engaged at school in a heated exchange in

front of other persons relative to Officer Collins' contact with you. In fact, Mr. Alston, one of the participants, referred to you as "my girl." In an interview with administrators, he explained that the reference to "his girl" was that he was protecting you in a big brother fashion. However, that explanation in and of itself unwillingly makes the very point that concerns me, i.e., his conduct towards Officer Collins was protective of you for personal reasons. If there were a legitimate concern between you and Officer Collins, it should have been reported to the office as a matter of harassment to be dealt with through established professional guidelines, policies and channels, not left in the hands of a fellow teacher to engage in an impromptu public heated exchange on a personal level.

It is also of earnest concern that you sat in the bleachers with Mr. Alston in a manner that indicated to certain witnesses and students that you were casually sitting between the legs of a colleague. While it may be possible that the circumstances were misconstrued by those who viewed you and Mr. Alston sitting on the bleachers, the weight of the reports are that the witnesses were concerned enough to report what was observed. You are admonished that such casual conduct may reasonably lead students and peers to form an inaccurate conclusion. You are expected while attending school activities to not allow yourself to be placed in a position that could be deemed to be personal, as opposed to professional.

Last, it goes without saying that you should never be in a darkened classroom with a colleague at school.

A report of this letter will be sent to the Professional Standards Commissions.

As this is an informal letter of advisement, it will not be placed in your personnel file. It is, however, a matter of public record and will be released if requested. This incident alone and the evidence that currently supports these allegations is not serious enough to warrant a suspension or formal reprimand. However, if similar behavior or incidents reoccur, I will recommend further stronger discipline, including the possibility of suspension or termination. You are being given the opportunity to rehabilitate and to prove yourself. Please make the most of this opportunity.

Yours truly,

Virginia C. Bradshaw

Dr. Virginia C. Bradshaw,
Executive Director of Middle Schools

cc: Leonard O. Fletcher, Jr.
Norman Hill
Dr. Dana T. Bedden