

December 19, 2011

Dr. Carol Johnson
Superintendent
Boston Public Schools
26 Court Street
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Dr. Johnson,

We are writing to formally express our concerns regarding the events of the last week, which include an incident at the Harbor School in Dorchester, and your follow up investigation that revealed a prior incident at the King School, the latter of which was not reported by Principal Bolt either internally to BPS or to outside agencies.

We are disappointed by and disagree with your decision to impose a two-week suspension as the appropriate disciplinary measure for Principal Bolt's failure to report, in any manner whatsoever, an allegation at the King school last spring of an indecent assault and battery on a child under 14 years of age. While a two-week suspension may have been warranted for a failure to act on any type of abuse allegation, this case involves a failure to report an allegation of sexual abuse and the same employee victimized another student with special needs this past week.

Indeed, it was your personal investigation as our Superintendent and your direct contact with Principal Bolt following the incident at the Harbor school, which resulted in her disclosure of a previous sexual allegation involving the same paraprofessional. It is incomprehensible to all of us parents that a leader at one of our schools could receive a report of an allegation of sexual abuse and not immediately contact the Boston Police Department and the Department of Children and Families. It is indefensible that Ms. Bolt failed to follow the requirements on her as a 51A mandated reporter; failed to notify any of her supervisors including you as our Superintendent; and failed to document this sexual allegation in any manner as notice to other school administrators and leaders that such an allegation occurred (whether substantiated or not). Ms. Bolt made a unilateral decision that enabled an individual accused of sexual abuse of a child with special needs to continue working in our schools and have on-going access to our most vulnerable special education students.

If Ms. Bolt had taken the appropriate steps of informing your office, the police, and DCF, at a minimum the Harbor School would have had knowledge of the existence of a past sexual allegation, and Ms. Blake could have used that information in her decision-making process of hiring Mr. Hill and/or assigning him to a classroom with a student with special needs who is non-verbal.

The incident this last week at the Harbor School is devastating to our entire school community. The facts/evidence that one of our school principals decided to willfully disregard her legal obligations as a mandated reporter and her professional duties as an administrator and an employee of BPS, and this has resulted in irreparable harm to the trust that every parents has in our school system that the safety of our children is our first priority.

Ms. Blake is in her first year as principal of the Harbor School and she responded immediately by notifying all of the appropriate internal and external authorities to ensure the safety of the victim and all of her students. Ms. Blake did not hesitate to take all actions available to her and she has been working tirelessly to support students, parents and her school community. Ms. Bolt reportedly has over thirty years of experience in BPS. Ms. Bolt notified no one that an allegation of sexual abuse occurred at one of our schools in direct contravention of Superintendent's circulars; LGL-13 and SSS-17, and she allowed the accused paraprofessional to continue working with students.

While we understand it is your decision as the Superintendent of BPS to decide what action will be taken in response to a violation of protocols, we do not agree that the failure to report an allegation of sexual assault on a special needs student warrants any response less than an immediate termination. A special needs student was harmed this week, and no one within our school system was given access to information that could have avoided this despicable act. We cannot change what has happened but we can respond to the facts as they become available, and we can make it clear now and from this day forward that every allegation of abuse must be taken seriously, that it will be reported to the appropriate internal and external authorities, and no principal or other employee has the right or the decision-making authority to decide what will occur in these situations—if there is a teacher, principal or any other BPS staff member that is unwilling to accept this responsibility then they cannot work in our school system.

Sincerely,

Carolyn J. Kain
SpedPac Chair
On behalf of the entire Executive Board

(Attachments)