

REPORT OF INTERNAL INVESTIGATION

Prepared for the Region One School District

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Report of the Investigation

I. Introduction and Summary of Findings

A. Introduction

The undersigned was asked to investigate the cause or causes of the sudden resignation of both the principal and assistant principal of Housatonic Valley Regional High School in August 2010. The task went beyond merely contacting the two individuals to ask them why they left, but to determine whether there were certain factors that either lead directly to their resignations or created a climate, likely to repeat itself, that would be harmful to the Region One School District. The investigation began in September and ended in November 2010. During the course of the investigation, at least 55 people were interviewed, some more than once. Of those interviewed 16 were teachers and 17 were administrators or administrative staff. I spoke to all six elementary school board chairpersons, five of the six elementary school principals, and five members of the Region One Board of Education. I spoke to several private citizens and several who had recently retired from Region One. Several people initiated contact with me. I received phone calls or emails from individuals who wished to speak to me almost every week, even into November. I deliberately determined not to speak to students as I felt it inappropriate to involve them in this matter.¹

All the people I spoke with seemed sincerely interested in the well-being of the schools that are within the Region One area and in providing assistance to the investigation. From the initial interviews onward, individuals were willing to identify people who they thought would have opposing views on what they considered to be the key subjects. All those contacted, with the exception of the two former administrators and one other, were willing to talk.

For every person who advocated one position, there was another person who took the opposite view. When possible, and it often was not, confirmation of one view or the other was sought through corroborating witnesses, documents or events in order to resolve conflicting opinions. The fact that there were divergent views was not surprising. One would anticipate that in any large group there would be divergent views, yet the divergence was also reflective of a schism or schisms within the school system. Many of the people I spoke to are looking for vindication of their point of view, hoping that their "side" prevails. This is of concern and again is reflective of a schism or schisms in the school district.

A significant number of the individuals who were interviewed desired to be interviewed off-site. A significant number were concerned that their comments might be a cause of subsequent retaliation. There are indications that in some instances that fear is not groundless. This is also of concern.

¹ I heard many stories of events or incidents. In most instances, if I could not confirm the event or incident through multiple sources, I discounted the event or incident. If the event or incident did not pertain to my investigation, I did not include it in this report. The investigation was significantly more time consuming than anticipated and took well over the budgeted hours.

Also telling, and initially surprising, was that the selection of the off-site location of the interviews had political implications, and that the selection of one location over another could impact how people viewed the results of this investigation. Accordingly, instead of accepting offers of off-site locations, the undersigned found an alternative site, not associated with one faction or another.

When my investigation started, I received many comments about the job performance of the former principal. Gretchen Foster Mosca was a lightning rod for opinions, particularly in her last year of employment, as she had both supporters and detractors. While people's perception of her job performance and how she was treated had a significant impact on the climate in the school, an evaluation of her job performance is not the purpose of this investigation. There were problem areas. From comments made, it appears that the faculty was hopelessly divided over her performance. Had she continued as principal, there would have been considerable tension and strife this year.

Once I determined that I was not going to evaluate the job performance of the former principal I turned my attention to two main areas: the high school faculty and the central office administration.²

What emerged from the investigation were several themes. This is a divided school district. There are divisions within the faculty. There is tension between the central office administration and the administrative staff. There are tangled relationships and interests, and crossing of boundaries that when things are going well present no problems, but when things are not going well, can present problems. Some value collegiality much less than the forceful expression of views. I saw assertiveness that at times crossed the line into rudeness. I saw bluntness that at times crossed the line into intimidation. Last year, largely because of issues involving the former high school principal and the divergent opinions of her performance, these issues became a problem.

As the investigation went on, I could not help but notice all the entanglements, histories, and perceived or actual conflicts of interest. A board member raised concern as to whether Ms. Goncalves, the assistant superintendent, had supervisory authority over a teacher with whom she has a friendship. (It would be an unusual school system where an assistant superintendent had direct authority over a teacher.) The board chairman's wife is a principal who reports to the Superintendent. There are teachers in some of the elementary schools that are on the school boards in other towns in Region One. As is often the case with small towns, people know everyone, and there are histories that impact current events, and impact how people react to current events in ways that are unpredictable.

² While the focus of the investigation was on the high school, comments received from individuals affiliated with the elementary schools were generally favorable toward the central office. Both the elementary school principals and elementary school board chairs were pleased with the support that they received from the central office. With few exceptions, they had no complaints about their dealings with the central office.

B. Summary of Findings

There are likely multiple causes for the resignations of the principal and assistant principal. One reason is particular to the situation, and that is the performance or perceived performance of the principal. Regardless of one's point of view, the controversy surrounding the principal was a dominant factor last year.

There are other reasons, however, that are reflective of on-going problems. These reasons have contributed to an unhealthy climate in Region One. Unless efforts are made to improve the climate, the system will continue to be buffeted by disputes. The continuing factors contributing to an atmosphere of discord include:

- 1) The division among the faculty. There are significant divisions among the high school faculty that will require repairing. One of the causes is the concentration of faculty power within the hands of a few. Another is the split that occurred over the performance of the principal.
- 2) Concerns over the actions of the central office which has at time been polarizing and at times intimidating. There is some alienation between employees at a variety of levels, and central office administration. There are some who fear retaliation of one form or another if they take a stand contrary to the position of the central office.
- 3) There was significant involvement by the central office in the high school last year. Whether by necessity or not, the involvement contributed to the discord.

In addition to the above, the relationships and histories between people, the interconnections and actual or perceived conflicts of interest all have contributed to the climate. Some of the individuals involved in some of these disputes show no inclination to back off, but to persist in whatever their particular campaign is, to the detriment of the school system.

II. Discussion and Analysis

A. The Resignations

The first issue I faced was whether the resignations of the former principal, Gretchen Foster Mosca, and the former assistant principal, Mary Ann Buchanan, were purely voluntary. Unfortunately, neither individual was willing to speak to me, so some conclusions had to be drawn from the information at hand.

There was controversy and concern over the performance of Ms. Foster Mosca. As set forth above, I do not think it important to this investigation to make a determination over Ms. Foster Mosca's performance. Ms. Foster Mosca was aware of the controversy and concern, and one has to assume that was a prime motivation for her to leave.

Ms. Buchanan is, however, a different story. She was not a target of controversy or concern. It seems likely that a prime motivation was for her leaving was the climate at Region One.

There is evidence that supports these conclusions. Each administrator responded to my letter asking to speak to them by referring me to their attorneys. An individual who is merely looking for a new job does not retain an attorney.³ Their attorneys both indicated that their clients had taken new jobs, had decided to put their Region One experiences behind them, and felt that to speak to me was not in their best interests. Hiring an attorney and declining to comment on their leaving clearly indicates that while they may have voluntarily left Region One, their leaving was due to their recent experiences at Region One, not better job opportunities. Had they both left solely for better job opportunities, they would likely have said so, and not refused to speak to me.

As described more fully later in this report, the incident involving a teacher's use of sick time during the February break is an indication of a deteriorating relationship between Ms. Buchanan and the central office, and of the climate as perceived by Ms. Buchanan. In addition, in reviewing documents, I came across a series of e-mails between the central office and Ms. Buchanan over a seemingly minor topic. The e-mails evidenced an icy tone. In one, Ms. Buchanan indicated she would not meet unless her lawyer could attend. This is clear evidence of a deteriorated relationship.

When I started the investigation, I was told that Ms. Buchanan had applied for several positions over the course of the past several years and had turned down at least one job offer. Accordingly, it was suggested that I would find it to be mere happenstance that the two administrators left at the same time. Since Ms. Buchanan did not speak to me I can neither confirm nor discredit that opinion. It appears, however, that the comments made to me were inaccurate and either disingenuous or ill-formed. Most reliable indications are that Ms. Buchanan left last summer because of her dissatisfaction with the climate at Region One.

B. The Faculty

The faculty can be divided into three groups. There is one group that could be loosely characterized as being comprised of many of the faculty leaders and those who were generally critical of the principal. While my figures are in no way precise, I was told, and tend to agree, that this is about one-fifth of the faculty. On the other side, and about the same percentage of faculty, is the group of teachers that were generally supportive of the principal. In the middle is the majority of the faculty.

The divisions that exist among the faculty were heightened because of issues involving the principal and her job performance. A principal who has served as principal for a number of years must bear some responsibility for the climate in the building. I did not find that Ms. Foster Mosca did much to diffuse the tensions that were building, and at times her actions or statements to various members of the faculty and central office exacerbated matters.

³ The attorneys that they retained were not local attorneys. Both attorneys are well known for representing school administrators.

The high school faculty exercises a great influence, more so than in most high schools, over educational issues and school governance. The school has had a long tradition of active faculty involvement in governance. The faculty has been largely stable and this has led to faculty members becoming entrenched in certain positions. It has left some with considerable power and others feeling alienated.

Union leadership and department chairs significantly overlap, and accordingly the individuals who hold both positions exercise an inordinate amount of power. This has resulted in a blurring of the distinction between what is properly a faculty issue and what is properly a union issue.

While the union leadership is not extreme, union leadership can be assertive. This makes it difficult for all, as one minute an individual can be assertive, and appropriately so, in protecting a teacher's rights, while in the next minute that same individual may need to be engaged in collegial discussion over educational policy. It is a difficult transition for both the faculty member and the administrator.

The excessive influence of several of the high school faculty who are both chairs and union leaders was noted, one way or the other, in virtually every interview that I had with high school faculty or central office personnel. The March 2007 NEASC report noted much the same thing. It stated: "Some of the department chairs have assumed major roles and responsibilities over time that make it difficult for the third year principal to carry out her role as the instructional leader of the school and to make changes where she believes they could help or enhance the school and its education program." NEASC report, page 4

The NEASC report also noted that leaders of the faculty council, the role of the council, and the lack of a clearly articulated decision-making process may be an impediment to the establishment of a clearly articulated vision of HVRHS. NEASC report, page 36. It recommended that the principal have the authority to lead the school. NEASC report, page 37.

Some of those I interviewed indicated that major roles were assumed by certain faculty because of perceived shortcomings of the principal. Other faculty members, who were supportive of the principal, felt that the actions of the others were inappropriate. Accordingly, the divisions among the faculty became exacerbated.

Certain faculty members are unduly assertive in pressing their views⁴. One would suspect that some faculty win some arguments by their assertiveness, regardless of the merits of the positions that they take.

Some of the actions of certain faculty were not appropriate. I heard of several instances

⁴ I was able to witness the "assertiveness" first hand. At one point, I asked to see the personnel files of certain teachers. I deliberately asked for more files than I was truly interested in. I received a phone call from one of the teachers whose file I asked to see. Interestingly, it was one of the "extras." The teacher demanded that I indicate why I wanted to see that person's file. He persisted and raised several arguments until I told him to quit badgering me. The teacher denied badgering me. If he truly felt that there was no badgering, he needs to reevaluate how he debates issues. That attitude was fine for dealing with me, but if that attitude and technique is used with other faculty, it is inappropriate.

where faculty members raised their voices either in private meetings involving the principal or in group meetings. Several times confrontations could be heard out in the hallways. In some of those instances, there was conflicting evidence as to whether the raised voices constituted personal attacks or attacks on policy. Certainly personal attacks should not be tolerated, but raising of voices, even when the dispute is over policy, strongly suggests a lack of respect for both the person and the office, and more importantly, a lack of collegiality or shared purpose. In at least one instance, if not more, one of the faculty leaders was heard yelling and perhaps swearing at the principal. In at least that instance, if reports are accurate, the faculty member should have been reprimanded for tone of voice and lack of respect or decorum but was not. In one instance, a faculty member walked out of a meeting. The fact that a teacher would walk out of a meeting is disturbing. The fact that he was apparently not reprimanded is equally disturbing.

I heard of faculty putting their feet up on the desk or table in meetings. While this can indicate certain informality, it also sends a clear message of disregard and condescension to the others present. It is likely that the latter was intended.

The creation of the teaching schedule impacts this report in two regards. One is the way that the central office handled issues in regard to the development of the schedule for 2010-2011. That issue is dealt with later in this report. The second has to do with who develops the schedule and the criteria used in developing the schedule.

In many schools, the development of the teaching schedule is an administrative function. In Region One, for many years the schedule had been developed by members of the faculty. Much like a teacher who is paid a stipend for coaching a sport, the scheduling coordinator was paid a stipend under the union contract. The position was among the highest paid extra-duty positions. To add to the situation, the scheduler was also a member of the union leadership and a department chair.

During the last union negotiation, the Board and the union agreed to remove the duty of scheduler from the union contract and make it an administrative responsibility. The task of developing the schedule last year for the current year was given to the principal. Unfortunately, the schedule was apparently not developed in a timely fashion, resulting in the removal of the computer containing the scheduling program from the principal's office in June. (That incident is described later in this report.)

Assigning the task of scheduling to a teacher is problematic. It provides the teacher, particularly if the teacher is also a department chair and union leader, with an inordinate amount of power. It also places that teacher in an untenable position. No schedule is perfect. More than several commented that there was or could be favoritism shown in the development of a schedule. Someone will be unhappy no matter how many times a schedule is refined. The scheduler will be subject to criticism no matter what he or she does. A faculty member should not be put in this position at this time.

During the last school year, the central office administrators spent significant time in the high school. Much of that time was spent with the faculty leadership. It created the appearance of collusion between the central office and a few teachers. Some felt it undermined the principal.

Several times there were private conversations going on between the central office and selected teachers, and other teachers who stumbled onto those conversation were made to feel like intruders. Many of these conversations may have been as a result of either actual or perceived issues with the high school administration. There may have been positive developments as a result of some of those conversations, but those conversations had negative consequences that contributed to the schism in the faculty.

One would not expect that the schism that developed over the past few years would miraculously disappear once the 2010-2011 school year started, and it has not. This is a schism that has the potential to be disruptive to the educational process. The faculty is too good and too committed to the improvement of the high school to allow this schism to harm HVRHS. The faculty, along with the new high school administration should take on the challenge of working to put this schism behind it.

C. Central Office

During my interviews two main topics involving the central office emerged. First, there were claims that the central office administration intimidated others. Second, there were concerns about excessive interference in the day to day affairs of the high school, and that both of these topics contributed to an overall climate that caused the high school administrators to leave. There is something to be said for both points.

At the outset it should be noted that there are employees who will feel intimidated whenever a superintendent or assistant superintendent addresses them. It should also be noted that there is apparently a distinct difference in personalities between the prior Region One assistant superintendent, Mr. Gatsford, and the current assistant superintendent, Ms. Goncalves. Ms. Goncalves is a more upfront person than Mr. Gatsford. She is more direct. As several people indicated, she makes it very clear where she stands on particular issues. While I could not confirm it, it does seem likely that she was brought in because of her personality and because some thought her bluntness was needed.⁵

I found several instances, described below, where actions by central office administrators could be seen as intimidating, regardless of the motivation of the participants, and of actions or comments following certain events that could be seen as intimidating or potentially retaliatory.

1) When my hiring was announced, one teacher (not a member of union leadership and an individual who had been identified as “pro Foster Mosca”) apparently put my contact information in the mailboxes of a select few teachers. The superintendent was concerned that only selected teachers were getting my contact information (most likely “pro Foster Mosca” teachers). The superintendent found out about it and called the teacher out of a class she was teaching. At the same time, the superintendent contacted the union to provide union representation for her. Under principles of labor law, union representation must be allowed

⁵ The undersigned was aware of the existence of a report from her last position in Orange, which some contended was highly critical of Ms. Goncalves and others said was not. It was determined that neither the report, nor opinions of others as to her performance in prior jobs was relevant. Accordingly the report was not reviewed, and any comments pertaining to prior jobs were not considered.

when the issue is a matter of discipline. Union representation is not appropriate when matters of educational policy are being discussed and not necessary when non-disciplinary matters are discussed. Calling a teacher out of the classroom during the middle of a class and providing the teacher with union representation is intimidating. The superintendent either knew or should have known that it would be perceived as an attempt to intimidate.

There further was no need to go to such extremes given the topic. All the superintendent had to do was to provide my contact information to all teachers, tell the union to provide my information to all teachers, or tell the acting assistant principal to provide my contact information. Instead, the superintendent chose the more confrontational and intimidating approach with a person known to be a Foster Mosca supporter.

This story does not end here, however. Subsequently, the teacher filed a grievance over this incident and has pressed it to the board level. Union representatives attended the hearing at the board level, but did not participate, indicating that the union felt that the matter either did not have significant merit or was not grievable. Nonetheless, the teacher pressed the grievance. One would assume that part of the motivation was to embarrass the superintendent. That the matter has come so far is indicative of the divisions that exist among faculty and between faculty and administration and an unwillingness to try to resolve those divisions.

The hearing before the board has also resulted in additional controversy between board members. Much of the controversy appears unnecessary. There are times that a board or committee of the board makes a decision that other board members disagree with. There may even be times when a board member feels that the decision is contrary to the language of board policy or contract, or even law. That does not mean, however, that it is that board member's responsibility to interpret the law and raise an issue. It should sometimes be left to the party who has been allegedly aggrieved by the decision to raise the issue.

Whether a board member should get involved in a particular issue is a difficult question that each board member must answer. Sometimes the overall good, and the duty of a board member to the board as a whole dictates that an issue be left to others. Sometimes the responsibility dictates involvement. What must be assessed is what public good is being served by whatever decision is made.

2) There was an incident involving a teacher who has an acknowledged friendship with the assistant superintendent who did not attend school either on February 11, 2010, a regular school day, or February 12, 2010, a professional development day. When school resumed after the long weekend, the teacher in question was heard talking about being in Florida visiting her cousin and assisting him in a humanitarian project, and then going on to Antigua for the rest of the time. The school's attendance records showed the teacher as taking two sick days.

The teacher apparently applied for personal leave for that Thursday, but as of the preceding Wednesday night, the principal, who had been out of school for approximately one week, had not approved the request. Since there had been no approval, unless something was done, a substitute would not have been procured to cover the teacher's absence. In order to assure the coverage of a substitute for that day, the teacher called in sick.

As she should have, the assistant principal inquired of the teacher as to why she was marked down for two sick days when it was known that she was in Florida on those two days. The union became involved and the controversy dragged on.

At some point during the controversy, Ms. Goncalves came in and told the assistant principal to “back off.” When I inquired of Ms. Goncalves, she indicated that she was concerned because there seemed to be a targeting of the teacher by the assistant principal. Ms. Goncalves asked Ms. Buchanan whether she was investigating the other teachers who were absent that Friday. When told by Ms. Buchanan that she was not, Ms. Goncalves told her to stop her investigation of the one teacher. Ms. Goncalves told me that she was upset about the targeting of the one teacher, and that if all teachers who were out that Friday were being investigated, she would feel differently, but that as only one teacher was being targeted, she felt it improper.

It is likely there was some push-back by Mrs. Buchanan in regard to this issue. Ms. Goncalves should have either let the issue run its course or should have asked the superintendent for assistance. In any event, she should not have inserted herself into the situation. Regardless of her motivation, it created the appearance of impropriety by Ms. Goncalves when she intervened to stop the investigation of a friend.⁶

3) Ms. Goncalves has engaged in behavior towards individual staff members that some consider intimidating. I am aware of one incident where a long-time employee had to leave work because of upset after a confrontation with Ms. Goncalves.

In another incident, apparently someone in the central office, when asked where a certain administrator was, made a flip remark about that individual’s whereabouts, implying that the individual is often not around. I am uncertain of the audience for that remark. If made to the public it was inappropriate. If made among co-workers it was a minor comment. Shortly thereafter, the person who was thought to have made the comment was brought into a room with that individual and Ms. Goncalves. The door was shut and the employee was berated. Ms. Goncalves allegedly pointed her finger at the employee and said that her name was “out there,” apparently meaning that she was thought to be disloyal.

The employee involved is a long term employee. The employee did not work directly for either the administrator or Ms. Goncalves. The matter was handled inappropriately. An appropriate course of action was for either the affected administrator or the employee’s direct supervisor to talk to, not confront, the employee involved. All that needed to be said was that flip remarks about the location of an administrator are inappropriate and could be misconstrued by those who may overhear the remark. If the offense was thought severe enough, a written warning would have been appropriate. It was not, however, appropriate for two administrators to meet with the individual, particularly since neither was the staff person’s direct supervisor. The

⁶ The teacher involved here is the same teacher who was involved in the “cheeseburger” incident last Spring. Apparently last Spring there had been a conversation in the cafeteria over a cheeseburger. I have heard characterizations of that conversation as bantering. I have heard others characterize it as arguing. Regardless of the characterization, it was clearly a conversation between two friends, and not of anyone’s concern. Friends can banter. Friends can bicker. This conversation was of no importance to the school community.

format could only have been designed to intimidate.⁷

After I heard of the above incident, I questioned central office administrators about it. In my conversations I was told that there were some work-place concerns involving that individual. Since that conversation, the staff person involved has received two memos concerning work issues. Neither memo was from the assistant superintendent. Neither memo pertained to the type of potential issues that I was told about. One wonders why the memos were sent, except to create a record for future discipline. It seems potentially retaliatory.

I am aware of another staff member who was approached by Ms. Goncalves over an issue. When the staff member indicated a disagreement with the point Ms. Goncalves was advancing, Ms. Goncalves supposedly leaned over her desk and pointed a finger at her. I heard of loud conversations Ms. Goncalves had with the high school administrators behind closed doors.

4) Ms. Goncalves sent a letter to the board chairman on March 29, 2010 arising out of the “cheeseburger incident” and her attorney sent a letter to the chairman on August 20, 2010 about this investigation that are concerning. While one can appreciate that Ms. Goncalves felt attacked by an earlier email sent by a board member about the cheeseburger incident that became public, her March 29 response can be seen as throwing the gauntlet down. Several of the issues she raised in that letter did not pertain to the issues raised by the earlier email. Her demand that a “conversation” take place between the board and one of its members was impertinent. The August letter from her attorney questioning the board’s ability to look into matters, was clearly designed to intimidate. Taken together, they seem calculated to create a chilling effect over those and future actions.

At times Ms. Goncalves has been unduly blunt in her dealings with some people. At times her approach seems to be designed to intimidate. One can be direct and assertive without being intimidating. An individual in a supervisory capacity must be cognizant of the atmosphere created by his or her tone and the setting. A more collegial approach would better serve the district’s interests, and she should be counseled to moderate her behavior.⁸

5) An issue that created some furor was the “taking” of a computer in Ms. Foster Mosca’s office that was used for scheduling. Some individuals interviewed felt that it was inappropriate to take “her” computer. Such feelings are misplaced. The computer was a school-owned computer, not Ms. Foster Mosca’s personal computer. The school system had every right to take the computer. Whether the matter could have been handled in a different manner is of course subject to conjecture. One cannot discount the possibility that the taking was done in the manner it was to make a point. Certainly staff members who were inserted into the dispute were placed in an awkward position, but hindsight is always easier than foresight.

⁷ During the course of the investigation several comments were made about the use of time off by the central office. Such was beyond the scope of this investigation, but from what could be learned, procedures for accounting for time off among central office personnel could be tightened and the possibilities of abuse should be eliminated.

⁸ It should be noted that there are those in all districts that feel that Ms. Goncalves has been supportive. I was told of one incident where an elementary teacher had made a mistake and was truly upset by it. Ms. Goncalves did not berate her, but was very supportive and worked with the teacher to rectify the situation.

6) One cannot help but note that the central office is located in the high school. The result is that the central office administrators are in the high school more frequently than in the other schools in the district. It is likely that central office administrators are in HVRHS more than the central offices in other districts are in their high schools.

Last year in particular, the central office allowed the high school faculty, particularly the faculty leadership, to deal with them directly rather than going through the high school administration. It may be argued that this occurred because of concerns over the leadership of the high school last year. If so, great care should be taken to ensure that the central office does not encourage the faculty to by-pass the new high school administration.

I heard concerns that the central office also seems to get involved in the minutia of the high school. Perhaps that occurred on some occasions, but if so, that can easily be dealt with in the future by the central office exercising more restraint. Greater separation and less day-to-day in person contact between the central office and the high school would be appropriate. Once new leadership at the high school is in place, this would seem to be a given.

7) I am aware of one incident involving the elementary schools and Title I teachers. Title I teachers are employees of Region One. I include it because the reaction to the incident, by some that I talked to, whether justified or not, has contributed to the sense of intimidation. Last year, the Sharon school district decided to eliminate its Title I teacher. While the cost of that teacher is attributed to the elementary district's budget, the teacher is a Region One teacher. The teacher whose position was eliminated had significantly lesser seniority than a teacher in another elementary school who was nearing retirement. There was also a non-tenured Title I teacher at the high school. Rather than transfer the teacher whose position was eliminated to the high school, it was decided to transfer that teacher to another elementary school, and transfer that second teacher, who had far greater seniority but no high school experience, to the high school. While within contractual rights, it appears that it was done so as to encourage the second teacher to take an early retirement. Ms. Goncalves was assigned to deliver the news. It is unlikely that the substantive decision was hers.

Several things are troubling about this incident. First, the teacher who was transferred had, at one time, been on the board of education of one of the schools when Mrs. Chamberlin was the principal. Second, the decision appears either arbitrary or designed to force the older teacher to retire. Either motivation sends a strong message to the faculty that they can be the subject of arbitrary action.

III. Conclusions/Recommendations

I was asked to determine why the principal and assistant principal resigned during the summer and whether there were certain factors that either lead to their resignations or created a climate, likely to repeat itself, that would be harmful to Region One. I believe that there is a climate that unless changed will result in continued controversy, schisms and divisions that are harmful to Region One.

There are several things at work here. First, both the faculty, or certain parts of it, and the central office last year operated in space that should have been that of the high school administration. Whether the cause was inadequate job performance by the principal or other factors is beside the point. The concentration of power in the hands of a few faculty, coupled with the significant amount of time that the central office spent in the high school last year speaking to the few contributed to the unhealthy climate. There will be continued problems if the faculty usurps the high school principal, if the central office usurps the high school administration, or if the central office works in conjunction with selected members of the faculty to the exclusion of the high school administration.

Second, there will be continued problems if the faculty divisions are not healed or at least minimized. One would assume that the faculty, working with a new high school administration, can lessen those divisions. It will require a greater sharing of responsibility among the faculty. It will require some faculty members to emphasize collegiality rather than assertiveness. It will require those that currently feel on the “outside” to come back in and work with all faculty members.⁹

One of the NEASC recommendations was to redesign the composition, role and responsibilities of the faculty council to include classroom teachers and student services personnel in addition to department chairs. NEASC report, page 40. If the membership of the faculty council has not been broadened, it should be considered.¹⁰ Other steps that would increase the number of faculty involved in the high school governance process should be considered.

While some schools have the faculty devise the schedule, it is suggested that in the absence of strong reasons to the contrary, the administration assume the scheduling responsibility.

Third, there needs to be less involvement by the central office in the daily life of the high school. While I am sure that having the central office in the high school has its advantages, this past year the disadvantages far outweighed the advantages. The central office should be given the benefit of the doubt when they indicated that much of the time that they spent in the high school was because of the issues surrounding the principal. As that reason has been eliminated, the central office administrators should make concerted efforts to limit their visits to the high school. Even social visits should be limited, as the appearance of administrators visiting select members of the faculty contributes to the division in the faculty.

Fourth, there is certainly tension between the central office staff and central office administration. The administration is concerned about loyalty and whether members of the staff

⁹ This report should not be read as being critical only of the faculty leaders. Other faculty members have also made significant “contributions” to the schism, and other faculty members must make equal efforts to resolving the faculty disputes, instead of contributing to them.

¹⁰ It is my understanding that the council membership is now comprised of more than just department chairs. Last year there seems to have been changes in the size of the council during the course of the year. Whether the council actually became smaller, or whether when it became time to work on the budget when only department chairs were needed at meetings, I am not sure. In any event, broader representation of the faculty would be helpful.

are providing information to outsiders. Staff should respect confidential material and the confidential nature of some conversations and recognize that not every event in the central office is grist for the outside world. Administrators should be aware that not everything that goes on in the central office needs to be kept confidential.

It is recommended that both staff and administrators step back and re-evaluate their attitudes towards each other. It is difficult to administer when there is no confidence in subordinates, yet it would be unfortunate for a staff person to lose his or her job because of retaliation.

Fifth, there are concerns over intimidation by the central office. While the concern is not limited to the assistant superintendent, Ms. Goncalves is as much a lightning rod for opinion and controversy as was the principal. She has been blunt. At times that bluntness has been excessive. Her manner at times can be intimidating and threatening. She should be counseled to moderate her behavior. The power of her office should allow her to give clear and direct guidance, without the need for intimidation. There are also clearly elements in the region that would like to see Ms. Goncalves leave. This can impair her effectiveness, much like her excessive bluntness has impaired her effectiveness. Whether she can be effective is a matter either for the Board(s) to decide, or for time to tell.

In future actions, the central office needs to take care to ensure that the course of action chosen is a proper one, a proper method is used to achieve a proper result, and the proper and accurate justification for the action is given.

Sixth, while I found on all levels people interested in the well-being of the schools, I also found that these same people are often distracted from working towards that end by personal concerns and agendas, and a desire to see their "side" triumph. It would be helpful if all could take actions that are in the best interest of the Regional School District, that they act with proper motives, and use proper methods.

Respectfully Submitted

/s/

Jeffrey C. Pingpank

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