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January 26, 2024

Joe Ireland

RCW 42.56.250(1)(d) Public Employee Home Address

Re: Verbal Warning – Revised January 29, 2024

Joe,

As you know, we met on December 8, 2023, as a part of the District's investigation into a complaint about allegations you engaged in unprofessional, inappropriate, and uncivil comments in the workplace. At this meeting, you were provided with specific information about the allegations and had the opportunity to respond. Your Principal Ivan Corley, Employee Relations Director Laura Sumner, and your SEA Representative Katy Henry were also present. Following are the specific allegations and your responses:

1. It was reported by a practicum student in early October (10/2/23 or 10/03/23), you were looking out the window during lunch and saw some students taking pictures who were in photography class. It is alleged you said, "look at those f...ing dildos."

Response: You stated you do not usually use the word "dildo," so you would say no, you did not say this. You admitted you will swear often, but making this type of comment does not ring a bell. When asked if you have ever referred to students as "f...ing dildos" with other staff, you admitted you will refer to students as "dipshit" and "dumbass," but most of the time you are venting about some of your football players, things they did that were unwise, or their lack of effort. You stated you do not talk too much about classroom kids. When asked if you thought it was appropriate to refer to students or athletes as "dipshit" or "dumbass," you said you do not think so because it does not show a lot of class. When asked if you think a parent would be concerned if they learned that type of comment was being made by a coach or staff member about their child, you said they would probably be unhappy.

2. The same practicum student reported that the next week (10/9/23 and 10/10/23) you and your colleagues were talking about football during your lunch and were talking about the student players; it is alleged you and your colleagues referred to certain players on the team as "re*tards", actually saying the word.

Response: You denied this and said that is one of those words phased out of most vocabularies in our lifetime. You stated you do not know why the practicum student would "cherry pick" conversations over a span of two months and bring forward allegations that are not true. You added you will not be speaking to the practicum student moving forward. When asked if you thought calling students "re*ards" could be

insensitive and offensive to the special education community you said yes, it is slang for dumbass, and it got heightened due to the sensitivity of it. You shared when teachers are together, one of the common things you all do or bond over is venting about students, athletes, administrators, or colleagues, stating it is “par for the course.”

3. It was reported by several staff members that there is “locker room” talk between you and your colleagues during lunch in the conference room and the language can be vulgar. Specifically, using terms like “dick-slaps” and referring to female breasts as “fun bags.”

Response: You stated you have heard the term “locker room” talk. When asked what this means you said it is conversations using inappropriate language. When asked if you have engaged in conversations that are perceived as “locker room” talk or vulgar language you admitted sometimes you will use the term “slap-dick” and there is the PG version like “slappy,” and you said it is synonymous with being a dumb ass. You stated you have used the term “slappies,” but you have never heard slap-dicks in the reverse sequence of dick-slaps. When asked if you thought it was appropriate to have these types of conversations about students in the workplace you said probably not. When asked if you have referred to female breasts as “fun bags,” you denied this and said the only thing you would say is “we don’t talk about female breasts.” You stated the only time something came up about female breasts was when the practicum student shared a story about showing her breasts to men at the bars. You also shared the practicum student was sharing stories at lunchtime that were awkward and had made one of your colleagues uncomfortable.

4. It was reported that staff feel like you are the “ringleader” in the vulgar conversations, and it is you who will typically start the conversations.

Response: You admitted you will definitely swear, but said you are able to watch yourself when you are around students, and you will not swear in front of them. You feel comfortable swearing around the people you choose to eat lunch with. You stated you would be lying if you said you do not swear around athletes in your coaching position because it has happened.

5. It was reported there has been conversation in the physical fitness department regarding the department lead position. Specifically, two staff members were both up for department lead. It was alleged you and another colleague were “pissed” over who got the department lead position and you would go over the department lead’s head for things.

Response: You stated you were not part of the fitness department last school year. You and your colleagues wanted another colleague to be the co-lead and you thought staff were disappointed he did not get the co-lead position, even though he applied. You stated you would have liked your colleague to be a co-lead, but you realized he was not part of the master schedule, so it was more like “a bummer”. You felt your colleague got “hosed.” When asked if you have treated your department lead differently you said no; however, you said the two of you have had conflicts in the past, mostly over her choosing to send her son to Gonzaga Prep. When asked if you have engaged in retaliatory behavior toward your department lead because of this, you said no. The two of you had a conversation which she initiated about her sending her son to Gonzaga Prep and she told you it was none of your business; you responded and told her that was the way you felt, but at the end of the day you did not really talk to each other. You do not think you would have had a heated conversation had she enrolled her son at Lewis and Clark, you would like to think you have mended fences. When asked if you thought it is your department leads own personal decision to decide where she wants to enroll her son in school, you said yes, but you are entitled to your own opinions.

6. It was reported by the practicum student that your colleague told her that two other teachers have super contracts and that one of the teachers declined to give up one of her class periods and that

this upset your colleague. It is alleged you and your colleague will make fun of the teacher and will make jabs at her out of retaliation because she would not give up a class period.

Response: You denied this and said you do not even talk to the teacher. You stated you and your colleague have talked about the teacher having a super contract, which you disagree with because it potentially causes staff to be involuntarily transferred out of LC and that you both disagree with this.

7. It was reported on November 9, 2023, you went to two of your colleagues because you were upset that the practicum student made a report about your behavior and upset that your colleagues did not give you a heads up that a report about you was made.

Response: You denied this and stated it was one of your colleagues who came to you unsolicited. She told you that she was doing her due diligence and fulfilling her responsibility about reporting the concern and that you never approached her.

8. It was reported you told your colleagues “I am done with her,” referring to the practicum student, and proceeded to say, “I do not want anything to do with her” and stated she needed to be removed from your colleague’s schedule.

Response: You did say the practicum student needed to be removed from your colleague’s schedule to protect your colleague because you did not think it was in his best interest moving forward. You admitted you were unhappy about the reported concerns. When I shared the practicum student felt there was a perception that there was a clique between the football guys and it has created a negative culture towards the women in the health and fitness department, so much so, that there is fear of reporting anything because of fear of retaliation, you said you can understand that and can see why the district would be concerned if there was truth to the allegations. When asked if you thought staff have the right to work in a safe working environment you said absolutely, because that is where you go every day. You stated you do not think there was any tension in the fitness department and said, “just because some of us eat lunch together, call it a clique or whatever you want, but there are staff from different departments that spend time together.” When asked if you believed you were exercising good professional judgement, you said you obviously need to be more cognizant of the words that come out of your mouth and whose presence you are in.

Joe, I have considered all the information gathered, including the information shared by witnesses, and the information you shared during the District’s investigation. In conclusion, I find your comments were inappropriate, unprofessional, vulgar, and created an offensive environment. The District is very concerned about the climate and culture in the health and fitness department and your lack of exercising good professional judgment in relation to comments you have made about students in front of staff and student athletes. Finally, I find it more likely than not, at times, you have engaged in retaliatory behavior towards staff because of your difference in opinions. Although you are entitled to your own opinions and they may not align with others, it should never have an impact on how you treat staff and students.

Based on my above findings, I find you are in violation of District Policy 5161- Civility in the Workplace. Thus, I am issuing a **Verbal Warning** in response to this matter. In issuing this **Verbal Warning**, I wish to make it clear to you that future instances of similar behavior may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Spokane Public Schools believes that a safe, civil, professional, and inclusive environment is essential to high student and staff achievement. It is the District’s expectations, and you are directed as follows:

- Review and follow the District Civility in the Workplace Policy 5161 and Maintaining Appropriate Staff/Student Boundaries Policy and Procedure 5253. Copies are attached for your review and information.
- Do not engage in gossip behavior in the workplace.
- Always interact professionally with students, staff, and patrons of Spokane Public Schools.
- Be mindful of what you say and think about the possible/potential impact versus the intent before you say it. This includes using strategies of pausing and reflecting about what you say before you say it to determine if it could be offensive to a reasonable person and/or perceived as offensive in the workplace/educational environment.
- Cease all unprofessional comments, innuendos, oversharing of personal information, vulgar comments, profanity, etc.
- Exercise good professional judgment when interacting with others.
- Do not retaliate against staff because of your own personal opinions or beliefs.

In the event you have questions about this letter or the expectations herein, it is important that you contact me immediately. Additionally, as we discussed in our meeting, retaliation against anyone regarding this matter is not acceptable and would be cause for disciplinary action.

Consistent with the applicable provisions of your collective bargaining agreement, a copy of this letter will be maintained in district records and your supervisor's file as evidence of our handling of the matter and will not be kept in your personnel file.

Thank you.



Richelle Swartz, Director, Employee/Labor Relations
Human Resources

Attached: Policy 5161 and Policy/Procedure 5253
c: District Records
Supervisor's File