



NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY



NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

TO: DR. ILINE TRACEY
FROM: TARYN R. BONNER
SUBJECT: LAURA ROBLEE INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY
DATE: APRIL 6, 2021
CC: LISA MACK

Date investigation was opened: March 31, 2021

Investigator's name: Taryn Bonner

Name, title and department of accused: Laura Roblee, Principal of Brennan-Rogers School

Description of the allegations:

It's alleged that Roblee used a racial epithet to her subordinate staff on two separate occasions, March 16, 2021 and March 19, 2021.

Date: March 16, 2021

Location: Teacher's office at Brennan-Rogers School

Description: Roblee reportedly entered a teacher's office, seemingly upset, and asked to speak with the teacher and another teacher who happened to be present in the office.

Roblee wanted to process something amongst "white women". Roblee was concerned with the term "whiteness" that was used during a DELT training on or about March 8, 2021. Roblee reported, "I wasn't understanding it and was taking it personal", regarding the term whiteness.

During the conversation with the teachers, Roblee is reported to have said: *if I said ni****, we would have a problem.* Roblee expressly used the "n-word" while speaking to the teachers.

Date: March 19, 2021

Location: Brennan-Rogers School

Description: The two teachers reported their March 16, 2021 interaction with Roblee to the Assistant Principal. According to the Assistant Principal, the teachers specifically shared they were uncomfortable with Roblee's use of the "n-word" during their conversation.

The Assistant Principal met with Roblee to discuss the teachers' concern. Roblee was upset and loud in her response to the information shared by the Assistant Principal. Reportedly, Roblee denied ever saying the "n-word" to the teachers. However, in her denial, she reportedly used the "n-word" at least twice directly to the Assistant Principal.

Interview timeline:

March 28, 2021- Spoke with the Director of Human Resources & Labor Relations to receive the initial details of the matter involving Roblee.

March 29, 2021- Spoke with Teacher's Union Representative by telephone to gather more information.

March 29, 2021- Met with Assistant Principal to gather information about the allegation.

March 29, 2021- Received written statement from Roblee and another staff member.

March 30, 2021- Received written statement from staff member directly involved in the matter.

March 31, 2021- Received written statement from a witness to the March 19, 2021 incident.

April 1, 2021- Received written statements from two teachers at Brennan-Rogers School.

April 5, 2021- Held a fact finding interview via video conference with Roblee and a SAA, union representative.

Summary of the evidence:

Charge: Use of a racial epithet to two teachers: FOUNDED

Two teachers confirmed that Roblee used the "n-word".

Roblee also admitted in her March 29, 2021 statement that she said the "n-word" to the teachers. Specifically, Roblee's statement provided: *"The conversation went on and I stated something to the effect that if I said blacks or nig*** we would have an issue with it."*

In addition, during the April 5, 2021 fact finding interview, Roblee admitted that she said the “n-word” when speaking to the teachers on March 16, 2021.

Roblee said the “n-word” to the teachers in confidence as she wanted to process the DELT training and the term “whiteness” that was troubling her. Roblee compared her feelings about the term “whiteness” to the “n-word”. Roblee further reported that the “n-word” “just came out,” it was not “pre-meditated,” she is not sure why she used the term.

Roblee felt betrayed by the teachers as she thought she was having a confidential conversation with the teachers about her personal feelings.

Charge: Use of a racial epithet to Assistant Principal: DISPUTED

The Assistant Principal reported verbally on March 29, 2021 and in writing on March 30, 2021 that Roblee used the “n-word” during their March 19, 2021 meeting.

When asked, Roblee indicated she “did not recall saying” the “n-word” during the meeting on March 19, 2021. Roblee did admit to being upset and louder than normal when she was informed of the concern.

There were no other individuals present during this meeting. However, through the investigation, it was determined that another teacher at Brennan-Rogers School heard part of the exchange between Roblee and the Assistant Principal. The teacher was unable to confirm if Roblee ever said the “n-word”. However, the teacher confirmed hearing “hysterical shouting” and “slamming on the desk,” which the teacher attributed to Roblee.

Although there are no other witnessed to corroborate the allegation, the allegation is consistent with the behaviors previously exhibited by Roblee.

Discussion:

As a leader, it was careless of Roblee to use such racially charged hurtful language with her subordinates in the workplace. Her actions, in this context are inexcusable.

Through her actions, Roblee caused hurt, confusion and disdain amongst her staff. She offended her Assistant Principal who reported she identifies as an African American woman.

During the fact finding interview, Roblee shared she participated in several trainings on race, ethnicity and cultural competency. She also highlighted the work and training she has participated in with her school on anti-bias and anti-racism, over the past several months.

Roblee is a veteran educator who has worked with New Haven Public Schools since 2001. Upon further review of her employment record, Roblee has not had any disciplinary action taken against her. There is no evidence of any other complaints or labor matters against her. When asked, Roblee proudly reported that prior to this incident, she has not had a poor evaluation and that she has a clean disciplinary record.

Applicable policies:

BOE Policy 2300: Statement of Ethics for Administrators
New Haven Public Schools' Policy for Race & Equity

Policy Violations/Findings:

The Board of Education Policy 2300: *Statement of Ethics for Administrators* states:

The administrator assumes responsibility for providing professional leadership in the school and its surround community. This responsibility requires the administrator to maintain standards of exemplary professional conduct.

New Haven Public Schools' Policy for Race & Equity affirms the district will *ensure systemic equity* and cites *culturally relevant leading* as a critical pillar.

Roblee's conduct in this incident violates the aforementioned policies because she failed to maintain standards of exemplary professional conduct and to lead in a culturally relevant manner when she used such racially sensitive language with her subordinate staff on district while at work.



NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

POLICIES

Administration

Statement of Ethics for Administrators

An educational administrator's professional behavior must conform to an ethical code. The code must be idealistic and at the same time practical, so that it may be reasonably applied to all educational administrators. The administrator assumes responsibility for providing professional leadership in the school and its surrounding community. **This responsibility requires the administrator to maintain standards of exemplary professional conduct.** Recognizing that need, the Board hereby establishes the following statement of ethics, to which every district administrator is expected to adhere:

The educational administrator:

1. makes the well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision making and actions;
2. **Fulfills professional responsibilities with honesty and integrity;**
3. Supports the principle of due process and protects the civil and human rights of all individuals;
4. Obeys local, state and federal laws and does not knowingly join or support organizations that advocate, directly or indirectly, the overthrow of the government;
5. Implements the governing Board of Education's policies and administrative rules and regulations;
6. Pursues appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies and regulations that are not consistent with sound educational goals;
7. Avoids using positions for personal gain through political, social, religious, economic or other influence;
8. Does not knowingly misrepresent academic or professional credentials;
9. Maintains the standards and seeks to improve the effectiveness of the profession through research and continuing professional development; and
10. Honors all contracts until fulfillment or release.

(c.f. Charter of the City of New Haven, Art. XXXVII, Code of Ethics)

Legal References: *Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-221*
 Charter of the City of New Haven, Art. XXIX, § 150

Drafts – 11/13/2017, 12/11/2017, 1/11/2018, 2/2/2018

Revised – 9 March 2018, 6/26/2020 Draft

New Haven Public Schools' Policy for Race & Equity – Page 1

Purpose

New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) students deserve respectful learning environments in which their racial and ethnic diversity is valued and contributes to successful academic outcomes. Through addressing racial equity, we affect the larger idea of diversity (Singleton).

This policy confronts the institutional racism that results in predictably lower academic achievement for students of color than for their white peers. Continuously working to eliminate our district's institutional racism will increase achievement, including on-time graduation, for all students, while narrowing the gaps between the highest- and lowest-performing students.

NHPS acknowledges that complex societal and historical factors contribute to the inequity within our school district. Nonetheless, rather than perpetuating the resulting disparities, NHPS must address and overcome this inequity, institutional racism and bias, providing all students with the support and opportunity to succeed.

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy the following terms shall have these meanings:

- A. "Educational equity" means (1) raising the achievement of ALL students, (2) narrowing the gaps between the lowest and highest performing students, and (3) eliminating the racial or cultural predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories (e.g. academic achievement, discipline, graduation rates). (Singleton)
- B. "Institutional racism" refers to the policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor, or put a racial group at a disadvantage. Poignant examples of institutional racism can be found in school disciplinary policies in which students of color are punished at much higher rates than their white counterparts, in the criminal justice system, and within many employment sectors in which day-to-day operations, as well as hiring and firing practices can significantly disadvantage workers of color (Aspen Institute).
- C. "District staff" includes all employees, consultants, contractors, and vendors of New Haven Public Schools.
- D. "District partners" includes students, their families, and community partners of New Haven Public Schools.
- E. "Diversity" includes characteristics of persons including, but not limited to race, culture, color, Creed or religion, national origin, gender, mental and physical ability, age, marital status, family structure, citizenship status, sexual orientation, sexual expression or identity, economic status, veteran's status, and any other protected class in conformance with federal, state, and local laws.
- F. "District Equity Leadership Team" or DELT is a panel committee of district members and partners who are tasked with developing a Race and Equity Policy for New Haven Public School District and ensuring its implementation and progress monitoring.
- G. "District Equity Leadership Team Advisory Group" or DELT-Advisory is composed of members from various stakeholder groups in New Haven Public School District (e.g. Board of Education,

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Central Office, Administrators, Teachers, Staff, Students, Parents, Community, Clergy) and is tasked with reviewing the policies and actions of the DELT prior to and during implementation, in order to provide feedback to the DELT.

General Statement of Policy

1. ELIMINATE SYSTEMIC DISPARITIES

To interrupt systems and behaviors that perpetuate inequities, NHPS will:

- A. Invite and include people from all races and ethnicities to examine issues and find adaptive solutions, which address the root causes and systems, rather than technical solutions, which provide one-time, situational fixes;
- B. Develop the personal, professional, and organizational skills and knowledge of its employees to enable them to address the presence and role of racism; and
- C. Eliminate practices resulting in predictable differences in success (e.g. academic, discipline, attendance, standardized test scores, college enrollment) for any student racial group compared to peers.

2. ENSURE SYSTEMIC EQUITY

NHPS will implement and lead from a system-wide racial equity plan that stands on four critical pillars: Students at the Center; Culturally Relevant Leading, Teaching & Learning; Equitable Alignment of Resources, Systems & Structures; and Family & Community Engagement.

- A. **Students at the Center** – We will align all district priorities and resources to achieve equitable outcomes for all students by:
 1. Intentionally seeking and including students' multiple racial perspectives in the development and implementation of culturally appropriate and relevant curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and
 2. Ensuring a positive and academically rigorous school environment that engages all students.
- B. **Culturally Relevant Leading, Teaching & Learning** – We will ensure that racial equity guides all employee actions and leads to improved academic results for a racially and ethnically diverse and changing student population by:
 1. Attracting, recruiting, employing, supporting, retaining, promoting, and continuously developing a workforce of racially conscious and culturally proficient administrative, instructional and support personnel;
 2. Collaborating as teachers and administrators to ensure culturally proficient instructional practices, and culturally relevant curriculum and assessments;
 3. Eliminating practices that lead to the over- or under-representation of any student racial group (e.g. Advanced Placement courses); and
- C. **Equitable Alignment of Resources, Systems & Structures** – We will ensure that racial equity guides the alignment and allocation of resources, systems, and structures across

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the district by:

1. Modeling racial equity in business practices;
2. Replacing inequitable operational practices with systems that support implementation of this policy; and
3. Focusing accountability systems and metrics on racially equitable results.

D. Family & Community Engagement – We will develop and implement equitable practices for and with our students, their families, and our community by:

1. Engaging family and community members with staff and students, district-wide and at school and program sites, in the development and implementation of culturally appropriate and effective partnerships between home and school; and
2. Inviting and including community members to bring multiple cultural perspectives to examining and solving issues that arise.

3. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The Board directs the Superintendent and the District Equity Leadership Team to develop and implement a system-wide racial equity plan with clear accountability and metrics, which will result in measurable academic improvements for NHPS students. The Superintendent shall regularly report progress on the plan and outcomes.

LEGAL REFERENCES

U.S. Const. amend XIV, § 1 (Equal Protection) 20 U.S.C. § 1703 (Equal Educational Opportunity) 42 U.S.C. § 2000c et seq. (Desegregation) 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq. (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2 (Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) 25 U.S.C. § 452 et seq. (Johnson-O'Malley Act)

Connecticut General Statutes

46a-60 Discriminatory employment practices prohibited.

10-15c Discrimination in public schools prohibited. School attendance by five-year olds. (Amended by P.A. 97-247 to include "sexual orientation" and P.A. 11-55 to include "gender identity or expression")

10-153 Discrimination on account of marital status.

17a-101 Protection of children from abuse.

Connecticut State Board of Education "Position Statement on Culturally Responsive Education," adopted May 4, 2011

Title VII, Civil Rights Act, 42 U.S.C. 2000e, et seq. 29 CFR 604.11, EEOC Guidelines on Sex Discrimination.

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq. 34 CFR Section 106.8(b), OCR Guidelines for Title IX.

Definitions, OCR Guidelines on Sexual Harassment, Fed. Reg. Vol 62, #49, 29 CFR Sec. 1606.8 (as) 62. Fed Reg. 12033 (March 13, 1997) and 66 Fed. Reg. 5512 (January 19, 2001)

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20 U.S.C. 7905 (Boy Scouts of America Equal Access Act contained in No Child Left Behind Act of 2001)

Meritor Savings Bank. FSB v. Vinson, 477 U.S. 57 (1986)

Faragher v. City of Boca Raton, No. 97-282 (U.S. Supreme Court, June 26, 1998)

Gebbs v. Lago Vista Indiana School District, No. 99-1866, (U.S. Supreme Court, June 26, 1998)

Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education, No. 97-843, (U.S. Supreme Court, May 24, 1999.)

The Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Act of 1974, as amended, 38 U.S.C. 54212

Title II of the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008

The Americans with Disabilities Act as amended by the ADA Amendments Act of 2008

Public Law 111-256

Meacham v. Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory 128 S.Ct. 2395, 76 U.S.L.W. 4488 (2008)

Federal Express Corporation v. Hollowecki 128 S.Ct. 1147, 76 U.S.L.W. 4110 (2008)

Kentucky Retirement Systems v. EEOC 128 S.Ct. 2361, 76 U.S.L.W. 4503 (2008)

Sprint/United Management Co. v. Mendelsohn 128 S.Ct. 1140, 76 U.S.L.W. 4107 (2008)

Sources

Singleton, Glenn. *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*. 2nd Ed., Corwin, 2014.

Saint Paul Public Schools. Racial Equity Policy (101.00). Saint Paul, MN. 2008.

CABE Policy Services. Equity and Diversity Policy Sample (0523). Wethersfield, CT. 2015.