



Vision

We will build the foundation for all children to be their best, achieve their dreams, and make the world a better place.

November 1, 2023

Anthony Downer - Coordinator of Equity

Incident:

Mr. Downer sent an email "Celebrating Cultures" on Thursday, October 26, 2023 at 9:14 am, but at the bottom of the email reads, "We must continue to educate ourselves following the attack by Hamas and during the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Here are some resources to explore and share with the rightsholder you work with. See the CSD equity website for more". The listed resources were not on the approved resource list on the Equity website. The email was sent to CSD Wilson Center Staff and the Cabinet members.

CSD Policy Violation/Protocols and Procedures:

Protocols and Procedures: Handbook pg. 15

Conflict of Interest

All employees of the City Schools of Decatur shall avoid actual conflict of interest and shall make all reasonable efforts to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest. Employees shall not participate in or influence transactions or proceedings where they have an actual conflict of interest or that could result in the appearance of a conflict of interest. An actual conflict of interest exists when an individual's private interest interferes with the impartial discharge of public duties.

GAPSC: The Code of Ethics for Educators:

Standard 9: Professional Conduct - An educator shall demonstrate conduct that follows generally recognized professional standards and preserve the dignity and integrity of the education profession. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to a resignation that would equate to a breach of contract; any conduct that impairs and/or diminishes the certificate holder's ability to function professionally in his or her employment position.

Insubordination:

Failure or refusal to obey a supervisor's instructions or directive.

Policy IFBG: Internet Acceptable Use:

Technology resources must be in support of education and research and consistent with the educational mission, goals, and objectives of the school system.

Meeting with Anthony Downer, Thursday, October 26, 2023 at 3:56 pm - 4:05 pm

Attendees:

Adena Walker - CHRO

Mr. Mari Banks - Director of Equity

Dr. Lillie Huddleston - Associate Superintendent of Equity and Student Services

Shekinah Parker - HR Generalist

Jana Johnson-Davis

Chair

James Herndon

Vice Chair

Tasha R. White

Board Member

Carmen Sulton

Board Member

Hans Utz

Board Member

Meeting Transcription

AW - Email was not considered "student focused"

AW - "We are not a political organization, but an educational one"

AD - "Can you be specific about the concern?"

AW - "Concerns from rabbis were received asking, "is this what the district stands for?" "The email information was one sided".

(AD wanted to know how the information got out and AW informed him that she was not sure)

The outcome of the meeting:

AD was placed on Administrative paid leave until further notice (Thursday, October 26, 2023).

End of meeting.

Meeting with Anthony Downer, Friday, October 27, 2023 at 1:05 pm

Attendees:

Anthony Downer - Coordinator of Equity

Shekinah Parker - HR Generalist

Alphia Price - Coordinator of Audits and Investigations

Meeting Transcription

AP - "Do you know why we are here?"

AD - "There is an investigation into why I shared some resources regarding Gaza and Israel."

AP - "Who authorized you to send this email?"

AD - "No one" (AD advised that he was given approval to send emails out without them being reviewed before they went out by his supervisor, Dr. Mari Banks)

AP - "Did you think that the email would cause discord?"

AD - "No. My belief is that there were multiple perspectives. I did not think multiple perspectives would cause an issue."

AP - "We are not an institution of political views, how did this help the learning process by adding see CSD Equity for more? You have blatantly said these are the views of CSD."

AD - "I am not endorsing any side. It was not my intent to endorse anything or speak on behalf of this office or district. I give people multiple perspectives with multiple sources." (AD says that he did not share the links that were already approved because they had been already shared).

AD - "There was no written training process or procedure for approvals, the process was informal, "Professional Judgement".

AD - "Multiple perspectives from multiple sources, it is all for educational purposes".

AD - "My goal is to educate. I think the context was more triggering than the content and for that I do apologize".

AD - "Which part of the email or the resources shared seemed insensitive?"

AP - "I just need to make sure, so you're saying you never presented your supervisor with this email?"

AD - "No, ma'am"

(AD was asked to write a statement, but when received, it was all about the great things he has accomplished with the district since he began and how he would like to continue working with the district).

AP - "Did you have a conversation with anyone about what was going on in Gaza, Palestine, or Hamas before you wrote the mail and sent it out?"

AD - "I don't recall, but could have".

AP - "Do you think your personal bias is shown in your communications?"

AD - "I can't speak to people's perception"

AD - "Do you think it's bias or passion?"

AP - "I think it could be passion, however, it comes across as bias and you have to know your audience".

AP - "Who is your supervisor?"

AD - "Dr. Banks"

AP - "How often do you do training?"

AD - "There are monthly opportunities and there is one coming up in Texas next week."

AP - "Anything else you want to add?"

AD - No, ma'am"

AD - Their feedback (teachers and students) drives how I approach this role. This was not in the interest of personal opinion."

End of meeting.

Meeting with Dr. Banks, Friday, October 27, 2023 at 2:19 pm - 2:55 pm

Attendees:

Dr. Banks - Director of Equity

Shekinah Parker - HR Generalist

Alphia Price - Coordinator of Audits and Investigations

Meeting Transcription

AP - "Did you see the email before it was sent?"

DB - "I never saw the email."

AP - "AD states that he was given authorization to send out communications without authorization."

DB - "He was given permission to send out emails to the equity team and Wilson Center without having to get permission, but we had a conversation about how this year things were different and that other departments may need to be involved like legal."

End of meeting.

Meeting with Dr. Whitaker, Monday, October 30, 2023 at 8:15 am

Attendees:

Shekinah Parker - HR Generalist

Dr. Whitaker - Superintendent

Alpha Price - Coordinator of Audits and Investigations

Meeting Transcription

DW - "Dr. Huddleston wanted Dr. Whitaker to meet with her team. In this meeting Dr. Whitaker discussed the following: The shift of student equity would be "student focused." "For example, we have students who don't necessarily come to school, let's find out why." "Let's identify barriers. Define equity at a student level." "We discipline black students more than we do any other race. How do we fix that? We have to determine why?"

DW - "We talked about how equity would be used going forward, it is to be used student focused."

DW - "Mr. Downer asked when he would be able to meet with her again. Dr. Whitaker said that he wouldn't because she is a believer in the chain of command."

AP - "Did Dr. Banks said she saw the email or reviewed it?"

DW - "She told me she didn't see the email before it went out."

End of meeting.

Telephone conversation with Anthony Downer, Monday, October 30, 2023 at 9:15 am

Attendees:

Shekinah Parker - HR Generalist

Alpha Price - Coordinator of Audits and Investigation

Anthony Downer - Coordinator of Equity

AP - "Do you remember the meeting you had with Dr. Whitaker, Dr. Banks and Dr. Huddleston?"

AD - "Yes."

AP - "She discussed the equity team going into a new direction and being student focused. Did you have any follow-up questions?"

AD - "Yes, I did. Dr. Banks and I were both unclear about Dr. Whitaker's directives after the meeting."

End of conversation.

Facts and Findings:

When Mr. Downer sent this email out, he failed to use professional judgement. His lack of professional judgement caused discord within the district and within the community. This case was found to be Substantiated for the following reasons;

- **Conflict of interest** - Because this is an institution of learning and CSD does not share his views politically on the conflict, Mr. Downer's personal opinion or bias was not part of the student focused learning process.
- **GAPSC: Standard 9** - Mr. Downer failed to demonstrate conduct that follows generally recognized professional standards and failed to preserve the dignity and integrity of the education profession.
- **Insubordination** - Mr. Downer had a meeting with the Superintendent and his supervisor (Dr. Banks) outlining the directions the equity team would be moving towards, which is "student focused" and he failed to follow the directive that was given to him.
- **Policy IFBG: Internet Acceptable Use** - Mr. Downer did not use the technology resources in support of education nor was it in line with the mission, goals, and objective of the school system.

Recommendation(s):

1. **Mr. Downer should be released from his current position. If he is to remain in the position, he would need to be given clear guidance and directives on how the Equity Team will align with the "student focused" agenda that has been set forth by the Superintendent. If there are any areas that are unclear given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions.**
2. **Mr. Downer should be assigned a (5 - 10) suspension.**
3. **Any communications sent by Mr. Downer need to be reviewed and only approved resources used.**

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Alpha Price at alpha.price@csdecatour.net.

Regards,

**Alpha L. Price
Coordinator of Audits and Investigations**

