

June 20, 2012

Hon. Dennis M. Walcott
Chancellor
New York City Public Schools
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street, Room 314
New York, NY 10007

**Re: William Abreu
Arelis Candelario
SCI Case No. 2011-3119**

Dear Chancellor Walcott:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that William Abreu, a 42-year-old Department of Education (“DOE”) assistant principal assigned to Progress High School for Professional Careers (“Progress High”) in Brooklyn, made inappropriate sexual remarks to three 15-year-old female students at the school.¹ Abreu asked the three students, who met with him individually to apply for summer jobs at the school, if they were sexually active. He asked one of the girls (“Student A”) if she would perform oral sex on him and told her that he treats his female employees like “second wives.” He asked another student (“Student B”) if she ever performed oral sex on her boyfriend, and suggested to her that she engage in anal sex. Arelis Candelario, a school aide at Progress High who solicited the three students to apply for the jobs which led them to the meetings with Abreu, lied to and misled investigators concerning her involvement in this matter.²

In June 2011, Lindsey Martinez, Associate Supervisor of School Security at Progress High, contacted the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation (“SCI”) and stated that Level 3 School Safety Supervisor Wanda Gonzalez reported that Abreu made inappropriate sexual comments to three identified female students at the school.

SCI investigators interviewed Gonzalez, who stated that while at her church, she was approached by Student A, whom she knew. The student informed her that she and

¹ Abreu was not reassigned, and is now 43 years old. The three students have turned 16.

² Candelario was not reassigned.

Student B and a third 15-year-old female student (“Student C”) applied for summer office jobs at Progress High and met with Abreu in the process. According to Gonzalez, Student A said that in the course of a 25-minute interview, Abreu made explicit sexual remarks. The student reported that the assistant principal also informed the student that she should be prepared to perform sexual favors, and should dress provocatively. For the investigators, Gonzalez repeated Student A’s detailed description of Abreu’s vulgar remarks. Student A also told Gonzalez that Student B was subjected to similar treatment in her meeting with Abreu.

SCI investigators interviewed Student A on three occasions. Student A provided additional details to what she reported to Gonzalez. In June 2011, Candelario, a worker in the school cafeteria, approached Student A, Student B and Student C as they were leaving the cafeteria and asked if they were interested in obtaining jobs.³ Student A said that she had met Candelario during the previous school year and often spoke with her. Candelario told the students that Juan Martinez (of Progress, Inc., an after-school program at the school) had asked her to find three girls who wished to work. The three students responded affirmatively, and Candelario brought them to Martinez’s office. Student A said that she met with Martinez, who asked her to write a “biography” of herself, and to include contact information for herself and her parents. According to Student A, Student B and Student C told her that they had received the same instructions from Martinez, and the three students returned to his office the following day after school. Martinez collected the three students’ biographies and directed them to Abreu’s office to be interviewed.

Student A said that Abreu’s “secretary” informed the three students that he would meet with them individually. Student A volunteered to go first, and entered Abreu’s office where he was alone, seated at his desk. The assistant principal directed Student A to close the door, telling her, “I don’t want the others to hear.” After Student A did so, Abreu told her that he was going to ask her “personal questions.”⁴ According to the student, Abreu asked her age, if she had a boyfriend, and whether her mother was aware of a boyfriend. Abreu asked her if she had “sexual relations” with a boyfriend. Student A became upset, and said to the assistant principal, “Why are you asking me that?” Abreu replied that he “need[ed] to know” about her life. Student A said that Abreu pointed toward the door and said, “See the woman outside at the computer? She has a nice big ass.”⁵ Abreu continued, “All of these employees are like my second wives.” Student A was uncomfortable, and told investigators that she believed that this was

³ The three students (separately) identified Candelario, a school aide, to SCI investigators using a yearbook photograph.

⁴ Student A, Student B and Student C speak Spanish and English. Each of the three students told the SCI investigators (including a Spanish-speaking investigator) that she and Abreu conversed in Spanish. Each student described in Spanish as well as in English what Abreu had said to her.

⁵ Student A said that her view was blocked by the closed door, and that she could not see to whom Abreu was referring.

apparent to Abreu, who laughed and told her that it will “be the same if you work for me.” Student A said that Abreu took a telephone call, and when it was completed asked her, “Have you ever sucked your boyfriend off?”⁶ The student responded, “Why are you asking me that?” Abreu replied, “That’s the way it is; that’s the way I want my wife to be.” The assistant principal continued, “If you want to work here, it is decent work. You have to come to work looking sexy, so I can see how pretty you are.” According to Student A, Abreu said that he “plays with women like they are [my] wives.” The student said that Abreu used “dirty words” and asked: “Would you suck my balls for me? That’s the things you have to do to succeed.” Abreu added that he had to have “relations” with an assistant principal (whom he did not identify) in order to succeed. He then asked the student, “Are you willing to do anything to succeed?” Student A said that she did not answer. Finally, Abreu told Student A: “Don’t tell anything to your friends. I have a good life. I will be out of here soon.” He directed her to return the following Monday. Student A, “angry” and “in shock,” then left Abreu’s office after almost 35 minutes. She said that as she left, Student B (who had been waiting with Student C) entered Abreu’s office, and the door was closed behind her.⁷ Student A was unable to hear any conversation from inside.

Student A, accompanied by Student C, then went to the bathroom. According to Student A, she told Student C that Abreu made her uncomfortable, and she recounted his comments to her. The students returned to Abreu’s office. Student B exited his office, and Student C entered, and the door closed behind her. Student A said that Student B’s eyes were “watery” and that she appeared to be “confused.” Student A reported that Student B told her that Abreu had asked her “personal” questions concerning her boyfriend and anal sex. Student B told her classmate that Abreu said that she would be his “second wife.” Student B also reported to Student A that Abreu directed her not to tell her parents or anyone else, stating, “What we say in this room stays in this room.” When Student C emerged from Abreu’s office a short time later, the three students walked to the train together and discussed their encounters with Abreu. Student A did not return to Abreu on Monday as he had requested. On the following Tuesday, Student A attended a program at her church, where Gonzalez was a volunteer counselor. Student A informed Gonzalez about Abreu’s comments at that time.

Student A told investigators that when she returned to school in September 2011, Candelario approached her and asked whether she had spoken to “her parents” or “told anybody” about what Abreu said to her.⁸ Student A did not respond. The student recalled that Abreu told her that he exchanges text messages with Candelario. Student A said that she told Student B about Candelario’s inquiry and warned her classmate to not

⁶ Student A cried as she recounted this to investigators.

⁷ Student A said that she did not see Abreu with her biography while in his office.

⁸ By this time, SCI investigators had interviewed Candelario (in August 2011) and Abreu (on September 1, 2011) concerning this matter.

speaking with her. According to Student A, on the following day, Student B told her that Candelario had asked her about her interview with Abreu.

SCI investigators interviewed Student B on three occasions about her encounter with Abreu. She described being with Student A and Student C when they were approached by Candelario, who told the group, “Mr. Martinez wants to speak to you.” Student B said that Candelario then escorted them to Martinez’s office. Student B said that Martinez appeared to be expecting the students, and he spoke of “summer work.” Student B’s account essentially comported with what Student A told investigators. Student B prepared a written essay for Martinez, per his request, and on the following day, accompanied by Student A and Student C, returned to his office and submitted it to him. Student B said that while they met with Martinez, Abreu appeared, and Martinez asked him to interview the three students.⁹ They followed Abreu to his office. Student B said that Student A entered Abreu’s office and he shut the door. According to Student B, Student A remained in Abreu’s office for “a long time,” and that no one entered or left the office during their meeting. When Student A emerged, she came close to Student B and said, “This man’s crazy.” Student B told investigators that Student A appeared to be “worried, serious and shocked.” Student B responded to her classmate that it “can’t be that bad.” Before Student A could respond, Abreu summoned Student B into his office and shut the door.

Student B told investigators that Abreu told her, “I have seen you around the hallway with your boyfriend.” He then asked: “How’s your relationship? Have you ever had sex with him?” Student B responded that she had not. Abreu asked Student B why, to which she replied that she was “waiting until her wedding night.” According to Student B, Abreu then said: “You don’t have to wait for your wedding – you can still have sexual relations from the back and stay a virgin.” Student B said that it was clear to her that Abreu was referring to anal sex. She reported that Abreu then asked her, “Have you ever sucked your boyfriend off?” When Student B replied in the negative, Abreu told her that when he was a teenager, he had “go[ne] to bed” with someone who could provide for him so that he could “go up the ladder.” Student B understood Abreu to mean that this person provided him with financial aid for his education. Abreu told the student that she was going to be his “second wife” and that she “will come in looking real pretty.” Student B told investigators that Abreu did not mention specific jobs, and she did not ask him about employment because his comments made her anxious to leave. Abreu asked her to return the following Monday, and she left his office after about 30 minutes.

Student B told investigators that she was “upset and shocked” by Abreu’s comments.¹⁰ As she left Abreu’s office, Student C went inside. Student A was waiting

⁹ Student B said that she did not know if Martinez gave Abreu the students’ essays.

¹⁰ Student B was visibly shaken as she described her encounter with Abreu to investigators. There were tears in her eyes and her voice cracked.

outside the office, and speaking softly so that the school secretary would not overhear, Student B told her classmate about Abreu's sexual remarks. Student A told her of Abreu's similar comments to her. Student B did not return to Abreu on Monday as he had requested.

Student B said that in September 2011, Candelario asked her what had happened with Abreu, and tried to get information concerning their meeting. Student B said that she did not respond. Candelario told Student B that the job prospects that they had discussed were intended for the students' parents, not for Student B and her classmates. This was contrary to Student B's clear understanding.

SCI investigators interviewed Student C three times concerning her encounter with Abreu. She said that Candelario often spoke with her and Student A and Student B, and that the aide approached the three students and said: "You want to work? You can go to Martinez. I got three positions. Mr. Martinez needs three students to work for him." Student C essentially corroborated her classmates' accounts of Candelario's referral of the students to Martinez, the essays, and the order of the students' interviews in Abreu's office. When Student A emerged from her meeting with Abreu, she told Student C that he had asked "uncomfortable questions," including whether she had sex. Student C reported that Student A told her that Abreu was "coming on to" Student A, and he said that "to achieve things, you have to do sexual favors." According to Student C, Student A reported that Abreu told her that she "has to dress sexy and pretty to keep her job." Student C told investigators that Student A's description of her meeting with Abreu caused her to be very concerned, but she entered his office when he summoned her because she wanted a job. Student C closed the door per Abreu's direction. Abreu asked Student C for her name and address, which she gave to him.¹¹ He asked Student C if she "ever had sex," whether she "had a boyfriend," and whether her employment would cause problems between her and the boyfriend. Student C replied in the negative to these inquiries. Student C said that Abreu then said that he wanted her to come back on another day without Student A and Student B. According to Student C, Abreu repeatedly looked at her chest. Student C said that her meeting with Abreu lasted approximately 10 minutes.

Student C joined her two classmates and walked to the train station. She told investigators that Student B told her that Abreu asked if she had "ever sucked off her boyfriend." When Student C got home, she told her mother about Abreu's comments. Student C said that she followed her mother's directive to stay away from Abreu thereafter. Student C told investigators that in September 2011, Candelario approached her as she held a mobile telephone in her hand and asked, "What happened with Abreu? What happened with the investigation?" Student C said that she did not reveal anything to Candelario.

¹¹ Student C said that she did not see her essay, and that Abreu did not appear to be reading any documents as he spoke with her.

SCI investigators interviewed Juan Martinez. He said that he was the founder of Progress High, but was not a DOE employee. He described his affiliation with the school as that of a volunteer, and that he helped with parent outreach and community needs. Martinez stated that in June 2011, DOE School Aide Candelario referred Student A, Student B and Student C to Martinez. According to Martinez, he asked the students if their parents were able to be more active within the school, and if the students were interested in summer jobs. They expressed interest in employment, and Martinez had the students write down their names, addresses, and a short paragraph regarding their goals for the future. Martinez then told them to contact Abreu to arrange job interviews. Martinez said that Abreu is the “campus manager” of Progress High, and that he worked with the after-school programs and non-DOE agencies at the school. Martinez said that he was unaware of what transpired after he referred the students to Abreu.

After interviewing Martinez, SCI investigators returned to Candelario, who previously told them that she did not recall discussing summer jobs with Student A, Student B or Student C, and that she was unaware of such job possibilities. In the second interview, Candelario said that she “now recall[ed]” discussing summer jobs with the three students in the school cafeteria. However, Candelario claimed that Student A, Student B and Student C came to her and inquired about jobs, contrary to their accounts that Candelario initiated the discussion. Candelario acknowledged that she directed the students to Martinez, whom she knew hired students for summer jobs. In a third interview with investigators, Candelario continued to maintain that the students approached her about jobs, rather than the reverse. She acknowledged that she escorted the students to Martinez’s office. Candelario told investigators that she “misspoke” when she previously stated that Martinez hired students for summer jobs, and that she meant to say that “kids go [to Martinez] to get applications for jobs.” Candelario acknowledged that she (and other school aides) had Abreu’s mobile telephone number which, she said, was used for school-related purposes.

Contrary to the accounts of Student A, Student B and Student C, Candelario claimed that she did not speak with any of these students in September 2011 regarding Abreu.

From a school yearbook photograph, Student A, Student B and Student C separately identified School Aide Carmen Diaz Luyando as the woman seated outside Abreu’s office during their meetings with the assistant principal. SCI investigators interviewed Diaz Luyando, who confirmed that she worked outside Abreu’s office, and that he conducted job interviews – always of female students – for Martinez. Diaz Luyando said that she was unable to identify any of the job applicants, and that she could not hear any of the interviews from her work space.

SCI investigators interviewed Abreu, who was accompanied by a union representative. He stated that he dealt with many community-based organizations (“CBOs”) regarding job opportunities, and that Student A, Student B and Student C were referred to him by Martinez. Abreu confirmed that he met separately in his office with the three students, who presented him with short essays stating their future goals. He said that he read each of the essays during these meetings, but did not interview the students. Abreu denied that he said anything inappropriate to any of the students, or that he asked any personal questions of them. He said that he did not offer jobs or internships to any of the three students. Abreu stated that as an assistant principal, he enforced the rules and regulations in the school, and that this may be why Students A, Student B and Student C made what he claimed were false allegations against him. He acknowledged, however, that he never disciplined these three students.

In a second interview with SCI investigators, Abreu (accompanied by the same union representative) denied that he dealt with CBOs concerning jobs. He acknowledged stating the contrary in his previous interview (with a different SCI investigator), but said that he did so because he felt under duress. Abreu said that in June 2011, he was “very busy” with graduation plans in addition to his regular duties when he received a telephone call in his office from Martinez who said that he was “sending three girls” to him. According to Abreu, Martinez asked him to review job applications letters written by the students. Abreu agreed to the request, but acknowledged to the investigators that he could not explain why he did so when he was extraordinarily busy, and that he could have referred the matter to a teacher.

Abreu claimed that he met with each of the students for “two to three minutes” and that their conversations were mostly in Spanish, and that his door remained open. Abreu said that the first student’s letter had grammatical errors, and that he directed the girl to the English assistant principal for help. He said that letter concerned a nighttime job in a restaurant, and that he told the girl that she should get her parents’ approval before taking such a job. According to Abreu, the second student’s letter referred to a job in a dental office, and that he directed her to meet with a teacher to help her with grammatical errors. He said that while meeting with the third student, he observed grammatical errors in her letter. Abreu claimed that he was interrupted by a telephone call summoning him to the auditorium regarding graduation preparations. He said that he then left, and directed the third student to return to Martinez. Abreu again denied that he said anything inappropriate to the students. He said that he believed that Student B made false allegations against him, and that she was motivated by a jealous reaction to advice Abreu had given to her boyfriend. According to Abreu, the boyfriend confided to him that he had impregnated a former girlfriend, and Abreu encouraged him to take responsibility for the former girlfriend and his child.

We credit the accounts of the three students. William Abreu, an assistant principal, made inappropriate sexual comments and inquiries to three 15-year-old female students at his school. He asked the students if they were sexually active. He asked one student if she would perform oral sex on him, and asked another student if she performed oral sex on her boyfriend. We recommend that Abreu be dismissed from his employment, be made ineligible for work, and that this matter be taken into account should he apply for any position with the DOE or its affiliates in the future.

Arelis Candelario, a school aide, lied to investigators and sought to mislead them concerning her communications with the three students, whose consistent accounts flatly contradict Candelario. We recommend that Candelario be dismissed from her employment, be made ineligible for work, and that this matter be taken into account should she apply for any position with the DOE or its affiliates in the future.

We are referring this matter to Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes for whatever action he deems appropriate.

We are also forwarding copies of this report to the New York State Education Department and to the DOE Office of Legal Services.

Should you have any inquiries regarding the above, please contact Deputy Commissioner Gerald P. Conroy, the attorney assigned to the case. He can be reached at (212) 510-1486. Please notify Deputy Commissioner Conroy within 30 days of receipt of this letter of what, if any, action has been taken or is contemplated concerning William Abreu and Arelis Candelario. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

RICHARD J. CONDON
Special Commissioner
of Investigation for the
New York City School District

By:

Gerald P. Conroy
Deputy Commissioner

RJC:GPC:gm

c: Courtenaye Jackson-Chase, Esq.
Theresa Europe, Esq.