

December 11, 2007

Hon. Joel I. Klein
Chancellor
New York City Schools
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street, Room 314
New York, NY 10007

Re: Lawrence Siegel
SCI Case #2007-1975

Dear Chancellor Klein:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that 56-year-old Lawrence Siegel, who had been an Assistant Principal assigned to IS 72 on Staten Island, received massages from a 12-year-old female student ("Student B").¹ We also found that Siegel asked Student B to give investigators false information about his conduct and, as a result, she lied during her initial interview.

This investigation originally began in May 2007, when Parent Support Coordinator Zulma Cruz contacted the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation ("SCI") and reported a complaint that had been lodged with 311. The mother of a female student ("Student A") had alleged that her daughter and other students were called down to Siegel's office to give him rub downs.

On May 18, 2007, in an interview with SCI investigators, Student A said that she had never massaged Siegel, but had witnessed other students doing so. Student A reported that, in April 2007, as she was passing by Siegel's office, she observed Student B standing behind Siegel, and the girl was rubbing his shoulders. According to Student A, after that, she was in Siegel's office for disciplinary reasons and again witnessed

¹ Initially, Siegel was not reassigned; however, when additional information caused this investigation to be re-opened, he was reassigned to the District office. Siegel retired on August 27, 2007. He remains eligible for employment. Student B has turned 13.

Student B massage Mr. Siegel's shoulders. Student A added that this took place in the presence of two other students ("Student D" and "Student E"). Student A also informed investigators that she saw another student ("Student C") massaging Siegel's shoulders on two or three occasions when she passed his office.

On June 6, 2007, 14-year-old female Student C denied rubbing Siegel's shoulders and said that she had not witnessed any other student doing so. Student C added that Siegel always acted in an appropriate manner in her presence.

On June 6, 2007, 13-year-old female Student D informed investigators that students gravitated toward Siegel. Student D added that, from the hallway as she passed his office, she witnessed Student B rubbing Siegel's shoulders. Student D said that Siegel favored Student B, with whom she did not get along.

On June 6, 2007, 13-year-old female Student E asserted that she did not witness any student massaging Siegel's shoulders. She added that she never saw Siegel act in an inappropriate manner.

On June 8, 2007, in an interview with SCI investigators, Student B acknowledged that, on occasion, she was in Siegel's office because of disciplinary problems, but denied massaging his shoulders. Student B also said that she had not witnessed any other student massaging Siegel's shoulders. Student B asserted that Student D did not like Siegel and was making a false allegation about him.

On June 8, 2007, in an interview with SCI investigators, Lawrence Siegel denied ever receiving a shoulder massage from any student. Siegel maintained that he was never alone in his office with any student and left his door open at all times. Siegel added that he often reminded teachers to keep their distance from students. According to Siegel, some students resented him because he handled disciplinary actions at the school. He speculated that the allegations were a result of those duties.

At that time, we closed our investigation as unsubstantiated.

Later in June 2007, Principal Peter Macellari spoke with the assigned investigator and provided additional information which resulted in the re-opening of the investigation. Macellari said that Siegel had come to him on June 22, 2007, and reported that Student B's mother was coming to the school to have a meeting with Siegel. Because of the prior allegations against Siegel, Macellari said that he would be present at the meeting.

That afternoon, in the principal's office, Macellari and Siegel met with Student B's mother who alleged that Siegel had called Student B at home and pressured the girl to lie to SCI investigators when interviewed during our initial investigation. Macellari said that the mother also asserted that Siegel had offered to pay her money if she did not report Siegel to school authorities. At that point, Macellari ordered Siegel from his

office. The mother then added that she had met with Siegel on approximately six occasions and possessed tapes to verify her allegations. Macellari told investigators that he was unaware of Siegel's meetings with the mother.

Macellari continued that Siegel called him at home that evening and asked for help. Siegel admitted calling Student B at her home, and that he had been meeting with her mother for about two weeks, but added that Student B's mother was blackmailing him.

In an interview with SCI investigators, Student B's mother said that, on June 6, 2007, Student B had not gone to school because she was not feeling well and was at home. At approximately 9:30 a.m. on that date, the mother received a call from Siegel who asked to speak to Student B about a problem he had with another student at the school. The mother informed the assistant principal that Student B was sleeping and he said that he would call back later. According to the mother, she had a feeling that something was not right, so she placed a recording device on her phone and taped the subsequent conversation between Siegel and Student B. The mother B added that she then listened to the tape and learned that Siegel had told Student B that "somebody squealed on us" and encouraged Student B to lie to SCI investigators when she was interviewed.²

The mother continued that, on June 8, 2007, she visited Siegel in his office at the school. According to the mother, during the ensuing conversation, Siegel denied touching Student B in an inappropriate manner, but offered to help pay private school tuition for Student B if he was guilty of inappropriate behavior with Student B. The mother responded that if he was guilty, then he would pay, and a figure of \$120,000 was discussed as being the tuition to the Staten Island Academy.

According to the mother, she returned to the school on June 11, 2007, for a second conversation with Siegel. This time, she concealed a tape recorder in her blouse. The mother said that Siegel again denied touching Student B inappropriately, but the mother played the telephone conversation between Siegel and Student B that she had recorded on June 6, 2007. The mother reported that, after listening to the tape, Siegel told her that he was a sick man and offered to get help through counseling. She added that, when Siegel asked what he could do to rectify the situation, she reminded him about his offer to pay for Student B to attend a private school, and told him that she intended to hold him to his offer. The mother said that Siegel offered to change Student B's grades and asserted that he would do anything to prevent her from reporting him to the authorities. Siegel then asked the mother to come back to the school before June 22, 2007.

The mother informed investigators that, when she returned to IS 72 on June 21, 2007, she advised Siegel that he would indeed pay for Student B's private education, that

² A review of the taped conversation confirmed that Siegel made the "squealed" statement to Student B.

she wanted \$60,000 immediately, and \$60,000 later. The mother B told Siegel that she would be back the next day. According to the mother, this conversation was not taped.

The mother confirmed that she returned to the school on June 22, 2007, and met with Siegel and Principal Macellari. The mother acknowledged that, upon her report of the allegations against Siegel to the principal, Macellari ordered Siegel from his office.

A review of the taped conversation between Siegel and Student B on June 6, 2007, revealed that the assistant principal extracted a promise from Student B to lie to investigators. Siegel advised that she could admit being in his office, but instructed the girl to "keep quiet" about the massages and to say that she never touched him and he never touched her. He told her: "They spoke to a lot of people already and everybody stuck up for me." Siegel also promised: "[Student B], if you do this for me, I will take care of you for life." At the end of the conversation, Siegel said: "If anybody asks you, did I speak to you, what's the answer?" Student B responded with the answer: "No." Before she gave the telephone back to her mother, Siegel told Student B: "Okay, thank you, sweetheart. I love you. Let me talk to Mommy."

The conversation taped by the mother on June 11, 2007, was essentially unintelligible.

In a second interview with SCI investigators, Student B explained that she became friendly with Siegel as a result of a disciplinary matter in October 2006, and she began skipping classes and hanging out in his office on a regular basis. Student B added that when she was in Siegel's office, he occasionally asked her to massage his shoulders, and she complied with his requests. Student B said that the office door always was open and usually there were other students present. Student B maintained that the massages were the extent of her physical contact with Siegel and that he never touched her in an inappropriate manner.

Student B confirmed that she was not truthful during her first interview with investigators because she felt a sense of loyalty toward Siegel. Student B acknowledged the telephone conversation with Siegel in which he asked her to lie to investigators. Student B added that she now realized that Mr. Siegel's actions were inappropriate.

SCI investigators conducted a second interview with Lawrence Siegel, this one occurring after he had retired. Siegel maintained that he never allowed Student B to massage his shoulders and he never touched Student B in an inappropriate manner. Siegel said that he allowed Student B to cut classes when she had a substitute in an assigned class. Siegel added that he also allowed other students to cut classes when they were assigned substitute teachers.

Siegel acknowledged that on June 6, 2007, he called Student B's residence and asked her mother if he could speak to Student B about a school related problem, but the

girl was sleeping. Siegel said that, when he called again later that day, he advised Student B that he was being investigated and that investigators were going to be speaking to her. Siegel admitted instructing Student B to tell investigators that he never touched her and that she never touched him. Siegel asserted that he used "poor judgment" in advising Student B about what to say to investigators, but did so because he "panicked."

Siegel continued that, after his conversation with Student B, her mother came to the school and was irate. According to Siegel, the mother suspected that there was an inappropriate relationship between him and her daughter and she demanded that he pay for Student B's tuition to a private school. Siegel claimed that he did not recall telling the mother that he would pay for a private school. Siegel then contradicted that statement and asserted that he told the mother he did not have the money to pay for a private school. Siegel confirmed that, after this conversation with the mother, he reported it to Principal Macellari.

It is the recommendation of this office that Lawrence Siegel be made ineligible for employment with the Department of Education and that this matter be considered should he apply for any position in the New York City school system in the future.

We are referring our findings to Richmond County District Attorney Daniel M. Donovan, Jr. for whatever action he deems appropriate.

We are forwarding a copy of this letter and of our report concerning this investigation to the Office of Legal Services. We also are sending our findings to the State Education Department for whatever action it deems appropriate. Should you have any inquiries regarding the above, please contact First Deputy Commissioner Regina Loughran, the attorney assigned to the case. She can be reached at (212) 510-1426. Please notify First Deputy Commissioner Loughran within 30 days of receipt of this letter of what, if any, action has been taken or is contemplated regarding Lawrence Siegel. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

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

By: _____

Regina A. Loughran
First Deputy Commissioner

RJC:RAL:gm

c: Michael Best, Esq.
Theresa Europe, Esq.