

February 4, 2014

Hon. Carmen Fariña
Chancellor
New York City Public Schools
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street, Room 314
New York, NY 10007

Re: Lawrence Scott
Natalya Sokolson
SCI Case #2013-4791

Dear Chancellor Fariña:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that 40-year-old Lawrence Scott, an investigator assigned to the Department of Education (“DOE”) Office of Special Investigations (“OSI”), engaged in a personal sexual text message relationship with 44-year-old Natalya Sokolson, a teacher assigned to PS 329 in Brooklyn, when Scott was handling OSI investigations into misconduct allegations made against Sokolson.¹ The investigation also found that Sokolson did not report the relationship when it occurred; in fact, she aggressively pursued the relationship, particularly during a period when Scott was attempting to finalize the OSI cases against her.²

This investigation began on October 1, 2013, when Sokolson contacted the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation (“SCI”) and lodged a complaint against Scott.

SCI investigators met with Sokolson who said that she was the subject of two or three investigations being handled by OSI Investigator Scott. Sokolson added that, beginning in November 2012, Scott began to send her flirtatious text messages which

¹ On the day he was interviewed by investigators from this office, October 4, 2013, Scott resigned from his employment at OSI. He remains eligible for work in the City school system.

² Prior to her complaint, Sokolson had been reassigned as a result of an unrelated matter. Sokolson is also known as Natalya Gordon and Natalya Sokolson Gordon.

became increasingly sexual over the next several months. Sokolson claimed that she began to respond to those text messages because Scott commented that he would be deciding whether or not she kept her job. Sokolson asserted that she continued to exchange text messages with Scott because she feared losing her job if she did not do so. Sokolson added that the text message exchanges occurred almost daily and she also sent Scott photos and videos of herself which depicted intimate areas of her body or different levels of undress. Sokolson reported that Scott sent her a photo of his penis. Sokolson said that she and Scott never engaged in a physical sexual relationship.

Sokolson continued that, on January 15, 2013, Scott met with her alone, in a room at PS 329, in connection with one of the investigations in which she was the subject. According to Sokolson, Scott behaved professionally until the end of the interview when he placed his hand on her inner thigh. Sokolson added that, as they left the room, Scott pushed up against her from behind and she could feel his erect penis on her buttocks. Sokolson had recorded the meeting with Scott and provided a copy of the recording to SCI.

Sokolson said that Scott broke off the text message relationship in February 2013. Sokolson asserted that she was reporting the matter now – 11 months after it began – because she was scared. Sokolson maintained that she recently had seen a vehicle near her residence and believed it belonged to Scott.

SCI personnel copied text messages between Sokolson and Scott which were stored on Sokolson's cell phone. Sokolson said that the text messages exchanged with Scott were incomplete. Sokolson claimed that most of the communications were lost when she deleted items to make room for storage on her phone. Sokolson added that, when she deleted pictures and videos, text message exchanges with Scott reappeared on her phone, but some were missing.

SCI investigators questioned Sokolson about her increasingly aggressive sexual text messages which, at times, she initiated with Scott. Sokolson responded that she was doing what she felt was necessary to keep her job.

A review of the contact between Scott and Sokolson confirmed that Sokolson sent photos to Scott and Scott sent Sokolson a picture of his penis. Although there were references to videos which Sokolson had sent to Scott, that material was not included in the content copied from Sokolson's cell phone. The messages – sent by both Scott and Sokolson – were sexually explicit and graphic. The review also revealed that Scott attempted to cool down the relationship for the period when he was closing his investigations of Sokolson, but she aggressively pursued him. Scott ended the relationship when his wife saw a text message sent to him by Sokolson on a weekend.

In an interview with investigators from this office, Lawrence Scott said that he had been employed by the DOE for three years as a confidential investigator at OSI; before that, he was a child protective specialist with the New York City Administration for Children's Services for 11 years.

Scott acknowledged that he handled two or three cases involving Teacher Sokolson and Principal Selma Marbury at PS 329. Scott added that his investigations of the allegations against Sokolson were unsubstantiated.

The messages retrieved from Sokolson's phone were placed on a laptop computer; the investigators had Scott review that material by scrolling through the messages. Asked whether he had sent the message to Sokolson, Scott responded: "Yes, I fucked up." Scott acknowledged that one of the messages contained the image of his penis. As the assigned SCI investigator continued to scroll through the messages, Scott asked him to stop. Scott said that he did not need to view the rest of the messages and added: "They're all mine." Scott admitted that he engaged in a relationship involving the exchange of sexual text messages with Sokolson and reiterated that Sokolson was the subject of at least two investigations he conducted. Scott asserted that the text relationship with Sokolson did not affect his investigations and he did not give preferential treatment to Sokolson.

Scott said that Sokolson sent him at least two videos which depicted her dancing. Scott added that he sent one video to Sokolson. Regarding its content, Scott responded: "I can't recall; maybe I was masturbating."

According to Scott, he did not touch Sokolson on her inner thigh. Scott said that, when he interviewed Sokolson alone at PS 329, Principal Marbury chose the room, and the door was left slightly ajar.³ Scott added that he and Sokolson stood during the interview because there were no chairs in the room. Scott denied that he pressed his penis against Sokolson.

Scott said that he and Sokolson did not date or engage in sexual acts; they once arranged to meet, but never did. Scott explained that "trouble" in his marriage contributed to his inappropriate conduct, but when he "realized" the "mistake" he was making, he "cut it off." Scott asserted that he did not tamper with any OSI investigation, including those involving Sokolson. Scott said that he did not know Sokolson's address and did not knowingly drive on her street.

A review of the taped interview, recorded by Sokolson, when Scott and Sokolson were alone in a room at PS 329, did not reveal any indication that Sokolson was displeased with or upset by anything which occurred during the meeting.

³ It is the practice at OSI for investigators to conduct interviews alone, without a partner.

SCI obtained the OSI case files maintained for the Sokolson investigations and the assigned SCI investigator examined them. There was no indication that Scott had tampered with the findings in any of the matters.

SCI investigators attempted to re-interview Natalya Sokolson who requested an attorney. Subsequently, through her attorney, Sokolson declined the opportunity to speak further with investigators from this office.

The assigned SCI investigator reviewed records, relating to Scott's cell phone, which revealed 1,776 contacts between Scott's number and Sokolson's cell phone number. The contacts included five telephone calls which were initiated by Sokolson between December 7, 2012 and January 23, 2013; the duration of the last call was 42 minutes and 45 seconds. The remaining 1,771 contacts were text messages which occurred between November 4, 2012 and February 2, 2013. Sokolson initiated at least 1,328 of those text messages.

The assigned SCI investigator also examined records, relating to Sokolson's cell phone, which revealed 1,722 contacts with Scott's cell phone number beginning on November 14, 2012, at 1:56 p.m., when a text message was sent from Scott to Sokolson. For the remainder of that day, Sokolson sent 292 text messages to Scott who sent her 126 text messages. Five of the messages that day, from Sokolson to Scott, were multi-media service ("MMS") messages. The contact between Scott and Sokolson took place on 26 days during the 80 day span which ended on February 2, 2013, at 11:56 a.m. Sokolson initiated the text message contact on 22 of those 26 days. The contact between Sokolson and Scott included 22 MMS messages; Sokolson sent Scott 21 of those messages.

There were three cell phone to cell phone calls, initiated by Sokolson and made to Scott, between December 7, 2012 at 10:28 a.m. and January 23, 2013 at 12:30 p.m. Sokolson's records confirmed the information in Scott's records; the duration of the last call was 42 minutes and 45 seconds.

Sokolson's records also showed 20 calls between her cell phone and Scott's assigned telephone number at OSI. The first of these contacts took place on November 19, 2012, when Scott initiated a call at 4:13 p.m. The final call was on March 12, 2013. Sokolson initiated 18 of the 20 calls.

It is the recommendation of this office that Lawrence Scott be made ineligible for work with the DOE and that this matter be considered should he apply for a position in the City school system, with one of its vendors, or in one of its facilities, in the future.

It is the recommendation of this office that Natalya Sokolson's employment be terminated, that she be made ineligible for work with the DOE, and that this matter be considered should she apply for a position in the City school system, with one of its vendors, or in one of its facilities, in the future.

We note that some of the conduct described here may violate the conflicts of interest provisions of the New York City Charter which is administered by the New York City Conflicts of Interest Board.

We are forwarding a copy of this letter to the Office of Legal Services. We also are sending our findings to the New York 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 Scott and Natalya Sokolson. 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: Courtenaye Jackson-Chase, Esq.
Laura Brantley, Esq.
Katherine Rodi, Esq.