

City of New York
THE SPECIAL COMMISSIONER OF INVESTIGATION
FOR THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

80 Maiden Lane, 20th Floor
New York, New York 10038

Anastasia Coleman
Special Commissioner

Telephone: (212) 510-1400
Fax: (212) 510-1550
www.nycsci.org

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

August 25, 2020

Hon. Richard A. Carranza
Chancellor
New York City Public Schools
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street, Room 314
New York, NY 10007

Re: Mary McConnell-Sosa
Barbara Carlson
Dominique Mahoney
SCI Case #: 2018-1459

Dear Chancellor Carranza:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) Office of School Support Services (“OSSS”) Food Service Workers Mary McConnell-Sosa, Dominique Mahoney, and Senior Lunch Helper Barbara Carlson, assigned to Queens Vocational High School (“QVHS”), submitted timecards for unapproved overtime or without requisite supervisors’ signatures. The excess compensation paid to the three employees for this unapproved or unverified overtime totaled nearly \$30,000.¹

I. Investigation and Findings:

a. The Initial Complaint:

In February 2018, the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District (“SCI”) received a complaint from [REDACTED] who noticed inconsistent timecard signatures and excessive overtime payments for McConnell-Sosa, Mahoney, and Carlson.

¹ McConnell-Sosa is currently assigned as a school lunch helper at the Lexington School for the Deaf in Queens. Carlson retired effective March 1, 2018, and Mahoney retired effective October 10, 2018. There are no problem codes associated with Carlson or Mahoney.

SCI investigators spoke with ██████ who said that beginning in February 2018, she and ██████ were assigned responsibility for ██████. In early February, ██████ received a call from ██████ who questioned ██████ about the overtime submitted by McConnell-Sosa, Carlson, and Mahoney (before ██████ was assigned to oversee overtime). ██████ told ██████ that when the overtime was submitted, Carlson handled timekeeping and McConnell-Sosa was the acting office manager and in charge of approving overtime submissions.

██████ told investigators that all overtime was to be approved by a supervisor. After ██████ call, ██████ reviewed the timecards for the two food service workers and senior lunch helper. ██████ discovered that all three had identical handwritten overtime entries for December 26, 2017.³ This discovery led to a larger audit of the employees' overtime submissions.

██████ informed SCI investigators that he and ██████ shared the responsibility for approving overtime and managing timecards. ██████ confirmed ██████ account that McConnell-Sosa, as assistant office manager, previously handled these responsibilities from May 2016 through February 2018.⁴

SCI investigators spoke with ██████ who said that in a February 8, 2018 email, ██████ advised her that there were Food Service employees who received excessive overtime. ██████ then directed ██████ and ██████ to audit their employees' timecards and overtime submissions. The inquiry revealed inconsistencies in record keeping and large amounts of overtime for McConnell-Sosa, Carlson, and Mahoney. ██████ then separately met with the three employees. When questioned, Carlson had no explanation as to why her overtime was necessary. McConnell-Sosa's stated rationale for overtime before her scheduled shift was that it was necessary to arrive early "to get better parking." McConnell-Sosa had no explanation for her overtime submitted for July 13, 2017 through August 11, 2017, while she was on vacation. Mahoney admitted she received unearned overtime pay, and asked ██████ whether she could reimburse the DOE in work hours or money. After these interviews, ██████ directed ██████ to arrange for ██████ to issue the three employees gross misconduct letters and transfer their employment to other schools.

██████ told SCI investigators that ██████ and ██████ in their capacity ██████ were responsible for ██████. Describing the process, ██████ said that employees signed their timecards; a supervisor then reviewed, signed and forwarded the timecards to the School Food Service Manager, who verified the actual time worked, including overtime, before signing and submitting the timecards for payroll processing. ██████ said that McConnell-Sosa was the acting school food service manager at the pertinent time, May 2016 through February 2018. It was ultimately

² ██████ and ██████ told investigators that they did not receive any training on proper timekeeping practices and procedures prior to assuming these duties.

³ ██████ stated that normal business hours were 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.; however, the timecards were punched between 5:30 and 6:30 a.m.

⁴ Prior to McConnell-Sosa taking over these responsibilities, ██████ handled the task. In May 2016, ██████ left on medical leave.

the responsibility of the supervisors to assure compliance with the procedure; they must authorize overtime prior to the employee’s workday.

b. Failure to Follow Appropriate Overtime Procedures:

SCI investigators reviewed McConnell-Sosa, Carlson, and Mahoney’s timecards from January 2017 through February 2018.⁵ There were multiple handwritten entries on all three sets of timecards. According to the DOE OSSS memo regarding the Instructions for Preparation and Submission of Hourly Time Cards and Annual Time Cards, circulated to all School Food Service employees, for “any handwritten entries, each entry must be initialed by the [School Food Service Manager] and/or Associate School Food Service Manager.”

Custodial employee timecards indicated that ██████████ was on duty when McConnell-Sosa clocked in for overtime before her regular shift. ██████████ told SCI investigators that his regular shift was 5:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., and that he rarely let people into the building before business hours unless they had a permit. Investigators asked about McConnell-Sosa, Carlson, and Mahoney, ██████████ was not familiar with them. ██████████

██████████

██████████ were available to let employees into the building.

SCI investigators then spoke with ██████████ who stated that on four separate occasions during the period he was covering for ██████████ he let a female food service worker into the building around 5:15 a.m.⁶ Though ██████████ did not personally know McConnell-Sosa, Carlson, or Mahoney, he was able to identify McConnell-Sosa out of a group of eight pictures, as the woman he let into the building.⁷

After McConnell-Sosa told SCI investigators that she was let into the building by a front office employee ██████████ the investigators identified and interviewed ██████████ She reported that her work hours were from 6:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. According to ██████████ however, she normally arrived around 5:30 a.m., and was let in by the custodian. ██████████ stated that once she entered the building, she did not let anyone in prior to 6:00 a.m. There were occasions, however, when ██████████ arrived at the same time as McConnell-Sosa, and the custodian let them in the building.⁸

c. Interviews with McConnell-Sosa, Carlson, and Mahoney:

SCI investigators interviewed McConnell-Sosa who said that she was unaware that her timecard was being punched in and out during her 10-day vacation.⁹ Investigators showed McConnell-Sosa copies of the time cards and she acknowledged that there was no signature for the period ending August 8, 2017, and confirmed that it was her signature for the period ending August 22, 2017. McConnell-Sosa also

⁵ There were no security cameras positioned to capture images as employees clocked in and out of work.

⁶ ██████████ was unable to provide investigators with the precise dates.

⁷ SCI investigators learned of a security camera at the entrance of the building. By subpoena, the investigators obtained and reviewed the captured video images from the pertinent times and were unable to identify McConnell-Sosa, Carlson, or Mahoney entering the building.

⁸ ██████████ ██████████ also stated that she did not know Mahoney and Carlson.

⁹ ██████████

confirmed that although her regular hours were 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., on occasion she would come in “a little before 6:00 a.m. to set up.” McConnell-Sosa said that on such days she was let into the building by people who worked in the front office. McConnell-Sosa also confirmed that she did not work on weekends.

In addition, McConnell-Sosa confirmed that from May 2016 to February 2018, she was the acting manager for school food service at QVHS, and that among her functions was completion and submission of the food service payroll and overtime for certain food service employees. According to McConnell-Sosa, Carlson oversaw the office payroll, including approving her own overtime. In addition, McConnell-Sosa claimed that when she planned to arrive early, ██████ alerted the main office ahead of time to arrange for her to be let in by a custodian, front office employee, or security guard.

McConnell-Sosa was shown her timecards for the pertinent period. She confirmed that she was compensated for all the overtime submitted. However, when questioned about the numerous timecards without signatures, McConnell-Sosa had no explanation for the omissions. Regarding the timecards dated January 24 and November 28, 2017, and January 9 and 23, 2018, McConnell-Sosa claimed that she did not sign the timecards, and that the signatures on the cards were forgeries. She gave no explanation for why these signatures were forged, or by whom.

SCI investigators spoke with Carlson who said that there were instances when she arrived at work an hour early. According to Carlson, she was admitted by security or custodial staff. She said that ██████ approved these overtime hours and that he called the front office the day before to alert them of Carlson’s early arrival. Carlson was responsible for tallying the hours of cooks and lunch workers, which were then entered into the payroll program by McConnell-Sosa. Carlson claimed that she never signed another employee’s timecard. Carlson also reviewed her own timecards and verified she was compensated for all the hours entered. Like McConnell-Sosa, Carlson had no explanation for the missing signatures.

SCI investigators interviewed Mahoney, who confirmed that she occasionally arrived early to work, but she claimed that it was always at the request of her direct supervisor, McConnell-Sosa. On Mahoney’s early shifts, McConnell-Sosa had her complete additional office tasks, such as photocopying, or preparing the kitchen for deliveries. Mahoney stated that she was admitted to the building on her early shifts by security guards, custodial staff, or front office staff. Mahoney also reviewed her timecards and said that she, in fact, worked during the recorded periods. Mahoney claimed that she was unable to confirm her signature on the timecards dated February 21, July 11, and December 26, 2017. Nor could she explain the timecards that lacked her signature. Finally, Mahoney stated that she spoke with both ██████ and ██████ about her overtime assignments, but that those conversations were not documented.

According to ██████ DOE Field Office Supervisors, School Food Service Managers (“SFSM”) and field staff were advised of appropriate time keeping procedures in an annual email at the beginning of the school year.¹⁰ Specifically, employees “cannot enter or verify their own time.” In addition, “programs should be expressly detailed on the timesheet.”

¹⁰ Policies included common sense procedures such as a SFSM’s responsibility to verify and sign for hours and submit to the payroll secretary. SFSM’s were also obligated to audit timekeeping records before they were submitted to the field office. The

II. Conclusion and Recommendations:

McConnell-Sosa, Carlson, and Mahoney submitted unauthorized overtime claims. The overtime hours were in the early morning, prior to their assigned shifts, during which they performed their primary regular workday tasks. Many of the timecards were submitted without proper signatures. The overtime submitted by the three employees amounted to nearly \$30,000. As Carlson and Mahoney have retired from the DOE, it is the recommendation of this office that a problem code be added to their files as a bar to future employment with the DOE or with any of its vendors. It is also the recommendation of this office that the DOE take appropriate disciplinary action regarding McConnell-Sosa. In addition, the DOE should seek to recover all compensation paid to the three employees to which they were not entitled.

Further, as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] expressed that they lacked sufficient training in tracking and verifying overtime, the DOE should provide such training to them and any other employees in similar positions.

We are sending a copy of this letter to the Office of Legal Services. Should you have any inquiries concerning this matter, please contact me at (212) 510-1418 or dschlachet@nycsci.org.

Please notify SCI in writing within 30 days of receipt of this letter of what, if any, action has been taken or is contemplated with respect to Mary McConnell-Sosa, Barbara Carlson, Dominique Mahoney. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

ANASTASIA COLEMAN
Special Commissioner of Investigation
for the New York City School District

By: */s/ Daniel I. Schlachet*
First Deputy Commissioner

AC:DS:MC:lr

c: Karen Antoine, Esq.
Katherine Rodi, Esq.

field office was also responsible for discussing discrepancies with the supervisor, correcting any discrepancies, and eventually entering them into EIS. In addition, employees were prohibited from sharing their user identifications and passwords.