

November 28, 2006

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

Re: Gregory Michaelides  
Joyce Sticco  
Evelyn Carrillo  
Darlene Jones Hardwick  
Daphna Gutman  
SCI Case #2006-1242

Dear Chancellor Klein:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that 41-year-old Gregory Michaelides, a teacher at PS 345 in Brooklyn, inappropriately touched six female students ranging in age from six to twelve.<sup>1</sup> The investigation also substantiated that a number of teachers at the school failed to report inappropriate conduct, including touching, committed by Michaelides.<sup>2</sup>

This investigation began in April 2006, when PS 345 Principal Wanda Holt contacted the Office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation (“SCI”) and reported employee misconduct committed by Michaelides.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pending the outcome of this investigation, in April 2006, Michaelides was reassigned to the Region 5 Office.

<sup>2</sup> The teachers were not reassigned during this investigation.

In an interview with SCI investigators, Principal Holt explained that, on April 3, 2006, Teacher Barbara Cromartie, who was responsible for Conflict Resolution at PS 345, informed her and Assistant Principal Nelibeth Plaza that two female students (‘Student A’ and ‘Student B’) had complained about the way that Michaelides touched them.<sup>3</sup> Holt added that, on April 4, 2006, the mother of another female student (‘Student C’) reported that her daughter did not want to go to class because Michaelides was touching her inappropriately. According to Holt, she continued to become aware of other victims of and witnesses to Michaelides’s conduct. For example, Holt said that Benita Mackower, the school librarian, reported that Teacher Joyce Sticco had told Mackower that Sticco had observed Michaelides touching a female student in the library and was uncomfortable with the way Michaelides touched this student. Holt informed investigators that Mackower told her that Sticco claimed that it was not a sexual touch.

Cromartie informed investigators that, on April 3, 2006, in the hallway of the school, she was physically stopped by Student A who announced with a sense of urgency that she did not like the way that Michaelides made her feel when he touched her. Cromartie added that Student A then hurried to class. Cromartie continued that, soon thereafter, Student B approached her and said that she did not like it when Michaelides put his hands on her. Student B headed to class and Cromartie reported the allegations to Plaza and Holt.

Mackower informed investigators that, near the beginning of April 2006, she was in the library along with Sticco and Michaelides. According to Mackower, Sticco came over to her and said that Michaelides was “all over a female student.” Mackower added that she did not see Michaelides’s actions and Mackower believed that Sticco would deny making the statement because she would not want to get involved.

Mackower’s prediction proved to be accurate. SCI investigators interviewed Sticco who claimed that she had not witnessed Michaelides engage in any type of inappropriate behavior. In addition, she specifically denied speaking with anyone in the school library regarding Michaelides’s inappropriate touching of a female student.

Investigators re-interviewed Sticco who asserted that, during the prior interview regarding an incident in the library, she had been asked whether Michaelides had touched a female student in a sexual or inappropriate manner. Sticco maintained that she had answered that question honestly when she responded, “No.” Although Sticco now acknowledged speaking with Mackower about Michaelides’s contact with an unidentified female student, she claimed not to recall it as being “he was all over that student,” which she considered an exaggeration of her statement. Sticco explained that she observed

---

<sup>3</sup> Holt stated that this was when she first became aware of any inappropriate conduct on the part of Michaelides. The principal had Student A and Student B prepare written statements which she provided to SCI investigators.

Michaelides sitting next to an unidentified female student at a computer desk and she saw Michaelides manipulating the student's fingers "in a manner consistent with a bona fide teaching method for Math." Sticco stated that the student appeared to be uncomfortable. Sticco informed investigators that it was her own personal opinion that in today's teaching environment, teachers should avoid physical contact with students, especially when the students were female and the teachers were male. According to Sticco, that was why she said something to Mackower.

Investigators spoke with a six-year-old female student ("Student F") who said that she had observed Michaelides touching the hair of another female student ("Student D").<sup>4</sup> Student F added that Michaelides also touched her hair and she did not like it. Student F stated that Michaelides "[was] not supposed to do that" to her. According to Student F, a few weeks earlier, while she was in the library with Student D, Michaelides, who was also in the library, called Student D over to him.<sup>5</sup> Student F observed Michaelides touching Student D's hair and caressing Student D's upper arm. Student F said that when Student D returned to her, Student D had a "sad face." Student F asked Student D "What [was] wrong?" but Student D did not respond. Student F reported that she again asked Student D "What [was] wrong?" and Student D would not answer her.

Eight-year-old Student D told investigators that Michaelides frequently touched her on the upper back with his hand and also rubbed his hand across her hair.<sup>6</sup> Student D became visibly upset while discussing the teacher's conduct with investigators. Student D added that for Christmas in 2005, Michaelides gave her a "Barbie" doll and a "Barbie" backpack.<sup>7</sup> She said that the other students in the class did not receive that type of gift from him.

After Sticco admitted observing Michaelides in the library with a female student whom she could not name, investigators re-interviewed Student D in an attempt to identify the girl. Student D recalled that, in the spring of 2006, she was in the library with Michaelides and Student F as part of her Writing lesson. According to Student D, she was sitting at the computer desk with Michaelides and he was touching her hand and fingers for no apparent reason. Student D added that Michaelides was not teaching her Math at that time or at any other time. Student D stated that she was upset by Michaelides's touching.

---

<sup>4</sup> Student F has turned seven.

<sup>5</sup> This interview with Student F took place on April 10, 2006. Holt stated that Student D and Student F would have been in the library as part of a group whom Michaelides was tutoring.

<sup>6</sup> Student D has turned nine. Investigators interviewed Student D's mother who stated that, on two separate occasions during the school year, she observed Michaelides touching Student D's hair and caressing her arm.

<sup>7</sup> According to Student D's mother, Michaelides explained the gifts to Student D by saying that he "loved [Student D]" and that he loved her "because she [was] very intelligent."

Investigators were unable to determine whether the library incident described by Sticco was the same one described by Student D and Student F. If it was, then Sticco's contention that Michaelides was manipulating the student's finger in a manner consistent with a bona fide teaching method for Math has no bearing because Michaelides was not Student D's Math tutor. If it was a different incident in the library, then Michaelides touched the fingers of more than one student who exhibited displeasure with his conduct.

Eleven-year-old Student A informed investigators that Michaelides was her Writing teacher for a period on Mondays and her Math tutor for a period on Wednesdays.<sup>8</sup> According to Student A, starting in September 2005, Michaelides occasionally touched and rubbed her on the back and upper arm but, as the school year went on, Michaelides's unwanted touches became more frequent. Student A added that Michaelides touched and rubbed her back or her chest. Student A reported that Michaelides touched her on the area of her chest at least four times and she always tried to move away because she believed he would touch her breast. Student A described feeling uncomfortable and "icky" because of Michaelides's conduct. Student A also said that she had observed Michaelides touch Student B and Student C in the same manner.

Ten-year-old Student B told investigators that Michaelides was her Writing teacher.<sup>9</sup> Student B said that, on at least eight separate occasions during the 2006 spring semester, Michaelides subjected her to inappropriate touches by reaching over her left side with his right hand and rubbing her chest. Student B added that she had to grab Michaelides's hand and move it away because he was getting close to her breasts. Student B told Michaelides to stop touching her—but he not comply with her directive. According to Student B, she had not observed Michaelides touch male students, but had witnessed him touch Student A on the chest and Student C on the back.

Twelve-year-old Student C met with investigators and told them that Michaelides was her Writing teacher on Mondays. Student C reported that, on at least five different occasions, she observed Michaelides touch Student A by moving his hand across Student A's chest. Student C added that, on approximately five separate occasions, she saw Michaelides touch Student B on the back and shoulder. Student C also said that, when Michaelides would get near to her, she would get up and move away from him. When asked whether Michaelides said anything when Student C moved away from him, she answered that he did not say anything because, "He [knew] what he [was] doing [was] wrong."

---

<sup>8</sup> Student A has turned 12.

<sup>9</sup> Student B has turned 11.

Investigators interviewed a six-year-old female student ("Student E") who said that for the "Three Kings" holiday in January 2006, Michaelides gave her a two feet tall teddy bear because she was a "good girl" and was "special"<sup>10</sup>. She added that the other students in her class did not get teddy bears. Student E reported that Michaelides touched her hair and her upper arm, which bothered her and made her feel bad. According to Student E, on one occasion, Michaelides caressed the side of her face and commented: "You're a good writer." Student E said that she did not want to be in Michaelides' s class.

SCI investigators interviewed Teacher Evelyn Carrillo who stated that she had observed Michaelides engage in a pattern of conduct in which Michaelides touched the arms and hair of female students. Carrillo added that Michaelides gave Student E a large gift and Carrillo advised him that he could not single out a student and give that student a gift. According to Carrillo, Michaelides responded that Student E was "the best student."

During the investigation, Teacher Darlene Jones Hardwick called an SCI investigator to say that she had been in the classroom with Michaelides and described his interaction with students as "touchy-feely." Jones Hardwick said that she believed Michaelides's touches were "harmless," however she added that she had instructed him to be less physical with the students.

In an interview with SCI investigators, Teacher Daphna Gutman asserted that she never observed Michaelides inappropriately touch a student. According to Gutman, she had observed Michaelides touching the shoulders of male and female students and had observed him patting male and female students on the back. She described Michaelides as "affectionately physical" which was "unwise," but "not inappropriate." Gutman added that she had observed unidentified 5<sup>th</sup> grade male students pull away from Michaelides when he patted them on the back. Gutman said that, at a Parent/Teacher meeting on April 4, 2006, Student C complained that she was uncomfortable around Michaelides, but Student C was even more concerned about the way he touched Student A. Gutman stated that she reported Student C's allegations first to Cromartie and then to Assistant Principal Plaza. Gutman added that, the following day, Michaelides was reassigned pending the outcome of this investigation which had commenced as a result of Cromartie's report to Principal Holt.

SCI investigators attempted to interview Gregory Michaelides at the Region 5 Offices. Michaelides declined to answer questions until he conferred with his union and an attorney. Thereafter, through his attorney, Michaelides declined to be interviewed.

The statements of the children interviewed in connection with this investigation were consistent and gave a compelling depiction of a pattern of inappropriate touching on the part of Michaelides.

---

<sup>10</sup> Student E has turned seven.

It is the recommendation of this office that Gregory Michaelides be terminated from his employment with the Department of Education, that he be placed on the ineligible list, and that this matter be considered should he apply for any position in the New York City public school system in the future.

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

In contrast to the convincing accounts provided by the students, with the exception of Cromartie and Mackower, the statements of the educators interviewed indicated a disregard for the welfare of the children. These teachers completely ignored, overlooked, or minimized behavior on the part of Michaelides, which should have been reported. Each teacher interviewed observed some kind of touching by Michaelides, but did not report it. Then, when SCI investigators asked about Michaelides, they attempted to distance themselves from the impropriety of the situation. For example:

- Sticco complained to a colleague, but then retreated from her outrage. She told Mackower that Michaelides was “all over” a female student. Yet, when interviewed by SCI investigators the first time, Sticco denied that she witnessed any inappropriate behavior or that she even had a conversation with anyone. When interviewed a second time, she described seeing that the child appeared uncomfortable and acknowledged speaking to Mackower about it, but claimed that she did not recall making the comment to the librarian, which she described as an exaggeration.
- Carrillo observed Michaelides engage in a pattern of touching the hair and arms of female students. She also knew about the teddy bear gift, but merely told Michaelides that he could not single out one child for a gift.
- Jones Hardwick described Michaelides as “touchy-feely,” but termed it “harmless.” However, it was not so harmless that she did not find it necessary to instruct Michaelides to be less physical.
- Gutman described Michaelides as “affectionately physical.” She also said his conduct was “unwise,” but “not inappropriate” even though Gutman had observed male students pull away from Michaelides when he touched them on the back.

It is the recommendation of this office that appropriate disciplinary action be taken against Joyce Sticco, Evelyn Carrillo, Darlene Jones Hardwick, and Daphna Gutman.

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 Gregory Michaelides, Joyce Sticco, Evelyn Carrillo, Darlene Jones Hardwick, and Daphna Gutman. 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.