

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

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

September 4, 2020

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

Re: Standley McCray
Aziza Homnick
SCI Case #: 2019-7257

Dear Chancellor Carranza:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that Paraprofessional Standley McCray (“McCray”) and Gym Teacher Aziza Homnick (“Homnick”), both New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) employees assigned to the Dr. Jacqueline Peek-Davis School (“Peek-Davis”) in Brooklyn, acted inappropriately when McCray grabbed a nine-year-old male student (“Student A”) by his neck and Homnick never reported the matter.¹

I. Investigation & Findings:

The investigation began when the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District (“SCI”) received a complaint from Peek-Davis Assistant Principal Latoya Garcia (“Garcia”). Garcia alleged that she and Peek-Davis Principal Shamika Watson (“Watson”) were advised by Peek-Davis Guidance Counselor Felicia Brown (“Brown”) that Student A’s mother (“Mother A”) reported that during lunch the day prior, McCray grabbed Student A by the neck and arm and forced him to the floor. Further, Mother A said that Homnick observed the incident but did not report it. Garcia stated that Mother A, who was present at Peek-Davis, called the New York Police Department (“NYPD”)’s 73rd Precinct, and that NYPD Officers Whalen and Parache responded to the school, but advised that the DOE should investigate the incident. Garcia then notified SCI.

¹ Neither McCray nor Homnick have active problem codes, and both remain employed at Peek-Davis.

SCI investigators met with Mother A, who advised that on the date of the incident, Student A returned home and told her that his neck hurt. Per Mother A, Student A recalled that when he was at lunch, an unknown individual – later identified by other parties as McCray – “squeezed his neck,” squeezed his hand, and caused Student A to fall to the floor. Student A said that a gym teacher came over to Student A and asked Student A what he had done to cause someone to squeeze his neck and hand, and was told that Student A was merely “looking for attention.” Mother A brought Student A to a medical center, where he was treated for a sore neck; the medical documentation stated that Student A was treated for “assault.” The next day, Mother A went to Peek-Davis, where she met with Brown, Watson, and Garcia.

SCI investigators also spoke with Student A, with Mother A present. Student A reiterated that during lunch, he got up from his table to talk to his friends when McCray squeezed his fingers, grabbed his neck, squeezed his fingers again, and then Student A lost his balance and fell to the floor. Homnick came to Student A and asked what Student A did to cause McCray to grab Student A by the fingers and neck, and McCray then said to Homnick that Student A just wanted attention.

A review of the footage taken from Peek-Davis security cameras showed that on the date of the incident, from approximately 12:00:50 p.m. until 12:02:55 p.m., someone (whose face was not visible) was holding Student A’s fingers, and Student A was trying to get away.

SCI investigators next met with Homnick, in the presence of her attorney. Homnick acknowledged that she was assigned to the lunch period from 11:30 a.m. through 12:20 p.m. for the students in detention.² She stated that while she was in the cafeteria, she did not see any physical contact between Student A and McCray, and had nothing to report to SCI. When asked if Homnick inquired what Student A did to have McCray squeeze Student A’s hand and neck, and if McCray stated that Student A was just looking for attention, Homnick – through her attorney – responded that she never spoke to Student A.

SCI investigators met with classmates of Student A. A 10-year-old male student (“Student B”), who was also visible on the security camera footage, said that McCray has held Student B by the back of his neck in the past but that McCray was “playing with you” and “laughing and having fun” when doing so. A 10-year-old female student (“Student C”), who also was visible on the security camera footage, said the unidentified person in the video’s name is “McCray,” and that she saw McCray holding Student A by the back of the neck in the cafeteria while McCray’s face “looked serious.”

Through his attorney, McCray declined to meet with SCI investigators, citing his Fifth Amendment rights.

II. Conclusion and Recommendation:

Upon review of the above facts, SCI substantiated that Standley McCray and Aziza Homnick failed to appropriately act with a nine-year-old student, Student A. McCray – who has repeatedly grabbed other students by the neck – is seen on video holding Student A’s fingers for over two minutes. Student A required medical attention, as a result of the interaction, with the medical facility describing his injuries

² It is unknown how many students in detention Homnick was supervising during that lunch period.

as the result of an assault. McCray provided no information or defense to SCI and, regardless of whether he has joked around with other students by grabbing their necks, his repeated conduct is inappropriate, dangerous, and anathema to the standards by which DOE employees operate. Therefore, the DOE should take significant disciplinary action against McCray, including but not limited to, termination. There is no place for a paraprofessional who physically assaults students (even in a joking manner).

Further, though Homnick stated that she did not witness the incident or make an inquiry as to what happened to McCray, her claim is contradicted by Student A's firsthand, candid account that she both witnessed McCray squeezing Student A's fingers and asked McCray why that transpired. Therefore, the DOE should take appropriate disciplinary action against Homnick, including, at a minimum, a requirement to review the Chancellor's Regulations regarding reporting student assaults.

Please respond in writing within 30 days of receipt of this letter as to any action taken or contemplated regarding this matter. We are sending a copy of this letter to the DOE Office of Legal Services. In addition, we are sending a copy of this letter to the New York State Education Department for whatever action they deem appropriate. We are also sending a copy of this letter to King's County District Attorney Eric Gonzalez, for whatever action he deems appropriate.

Should you have any inquiries regarding the above, please contact Jonathan Jacobs, the assigned attorney for this matter, at (212) 510-1423 or jjacobs@nycsci.org.

Sincerely,

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

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

AC:DS:JJ:lr

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