

CITY OF NEW YORK
THE SPECIAL COMMISSIONER OF INVESTIGATION
FOR THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

October 25, 2024

Hon. Melissa Aviles-Ramos
Chancellor
New York City Public Schools
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street, Room 314
New York, NY 10007

Re: Daniel Matuk
SCI Case #: 2024-00359

Dear Chancellor Aviles-Ramos:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that then 42-year-old New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) Teacher Daniel Matuk (“Matuk”), assigned to William Cullen Bryant High School (“Bryant”) in Queens, behaved inappropriately toward a female former Bryant student (“Former Student A”).¹ The investigation uncovered that Matuk and Former Student A’s interactions and communications began when she was 15-years-old in 2020, and continued until she graduated in 2023, when she was 18-years-old.²

I. **Investigation and Findings:**

The investigation began in January 2024, when the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District (“SCI”) received an online complaint of misconduct against Matuk from [REDACTED].³ In his complaint, [REDACTED] reported that an 18-year-old male former Bryant student (“Former Student B”) said that Former Student A told him that Matuk “would take advantage of [his] friend by making her download an app

¹ Matuk was reassigned during the pendency of SCI’s investigation. There is a problem code associated with his personnel file.

² Students’ ages listed herein are as of the date when the investigation commenced.

³ [REDACTED] stated that the New York City Police Department (“NYPD”) was notified, and [REDACTED] was informed by two NYPD officers that Former Student A had to report the matter herself. [REDACTED] added that several voicemail messages were left for Former Student A.

called ‘signa’ where it deletes the chat.”⁴ Former Student B further reported that Matuk brought Former Student A inside his classroom whereupon he locked the door and covered the glass so no one could see inside. Former Student B continued that once inside, Matuk hugged Former Student A “tightly” and against her will. ██████ added that Former Student B provided a written statement about Matuk’s inappropriate behavior, along with several screenshots – one of which was dated December 27, 2022, and was an image of Matuk.⁵

The assigned SCI investigator spoke with ██████ who recounted that on January 19th, Former Student B told him and ██████ that while Former Student A was a student at Bryant, Matuk made her uncomfortable. After disclosing his allegations against Matuk, ██████ asked Former Student B to write a statement about the matter, and to contact Former Student A so that she could report Matuk’s misconduct. According to ██████ days later, Former Student B arrived at the school with Former Student A wherein she disclosed her “texting and interactions” with Matuk while she attended Bryant. Former Student A wrote a statement about what had transpired with Matuk and provided screenshots of her communications with him which began on October 27, 2020. Former Student A’s statement – which was almost three pages – and the screenshots were provided to the assigned SCI investigator.

In an interview with SCI investigators, Former Student A stated that she attended Bryant from September 2019 through June 2023, and during this time, Matuk was her Graphic Design teacher.⁶ Former Student A recounted that her interactions with Matuk began during COVID, when Matuk initiated contact and messaged her on Google Meet Chat. Former Student A continued that during their interactions, Matuk asked her to download the Signal App – which she did – although it was only used for a short time. Former Student A recounted that at the end of January 2024, ██████ contacted her because Former Student B had reported that while Former Student A attended Bryant, Matuk had been engaging in inappropriate communications with her. Former Student A subsequently reported the matter to ██████ and when she did so, she revealed that in a “joking” manner, Matuk occasionally referred to her as a “slut” and a “whore.” Matuk also referred to her as “baby,” “brown ass,” and “bitch.”

Former Student A further revealed that there were a “few occasions” when Matuk hugged her in his classroom which made her uncomfortable.⁷ Former Student A said that the hugs took place in his empty classroom, during fall semester in the beginning of her junior year. Former Student A described the hugs like a “bear hug,” and explained that she felt Matuk’s body pressed against her, but she did not feel his “private part.” Former Student A said that she never had any physical contact with Matuk besides the hugging she described. Former Student A said that she never attended any outside activities, such as

⁴ “Signa” is a misspelling of “Signal,” which refers to a “mobile application primarily focused on secure messaging with end-to-end encryption, allowing users to send texts, voice notes, photos, and videos privately with only the sender and recipient able to access the content; it’s considered a highly secure communication platform valued for its privacy features.” *Google*.

⁵ ██████ provided SCI with Former Student B’s statement and the screenshots he provided. When interviewed, Former Student A acknowledged that she shared her communications with Matuk with Former Student B.

⁶ In the first sentence of Former Student A’s written statement, she wrote: “I was taken advantage of by Daniel Matuk who was my graphic design teacher during high school while I was underage.”

⁷ In her statement, Former Student A said that Matuk “inappropriately” hugged her by purposely placing his hands on her lower waist.

going to the movies or dining out, with Matuk. Former Student A explained that there were never any sexual connotations with respect to her “dealing[s] with Matuk.” Former Student A added that there were approximately five instances when Matuk asked her to bring him coffee in the morning before school started and she did a “few times.”

Student A acknowledged that, a few months after she graduated from Bryant, she told Former Student B about Matuk’s behavior and her discomfort with his actions.⁸ Former Student A said that Former Student B told her that she should report Matuk and that he intended to do so.⁹

During the interview, Former Student A was shown the 34 pages of screenshots she provided that memorialized her years of interactions with Matuk – who was identified as “Deleted User” on most of the pages. Contained within the numerous exchanges was a photo of Matuk and three photos of Former Student A. A review of these messages revealed the following exchanges with the original syntax and diction in place.

November 22, 2022; 8:11 p.m.

Former Student A: “Hey I was wondering if you finished the letter of recommendation”

November 23, 2022; 5:08 p.m.

Matuk: “Oh sorry I didn’t see this. Never on here except to write parents.”¹⁰

January 4, 2023; 6:56 a.m.

Former Student A: “Hii goodmorning”
“I’m glad you liked da keychain

Matuk: “Yes”
“I did” (with two smiling emojis surrounded by hearts)
“And I like you for thinking of me”

January 6, 2023; 3:04 p.m.

Matuk: “I’m sorry did you want a hug or something?”
Former Student A: “No it’s okay”

January 8, 2023; 4:42 p.m.

Former Student A: “The chocolate was bewwy good”
Matuk: “oh good”
Former Student A: “Yes I fucked them up”

⁸ At the conclusion of her statement, Former Student A wrote, “I blocked Daniel Matuk ‘s number after graduation, but have been living with trauma because of what had happened.” Former Student A also said in her written statement that she did not disclose Matuk’s improper conduct sooner because she “felt shame to have let it happen and was scared.”

⁹ The assigned SCI investigator tried on numerous occasions to interview Former Student B but was unsuccessful.

¹⁰ This interaction was through iMessage.

Matuk: “good”
 “I have more for you”¹¹

January 31, 2023:9:23 a.m.

Former Student A: “Hii
 Matuk: “hey babe”
 “you ok”
 Former Student A: “I’m still sick no mask”
 “How are you”
 Matuk: “wtf you whore”¹²
 “keep your ugly distance”

Screenshot does not display the date or time of this interaction

Former Student A: “i will send it thru discord o em gee”¹³
 Matuk: “Closed account. Don’t bother”
 “Thank you”
 “I think things about your appearance”
 Former Student A: “Good or bad”
 Matuk: “You know good”
 “Always good”
 “Too good maybe” (thinking emoji)
 “So. Secret time. You keep your mouth shut ok?”¹⁴

SCI investigators further obtained the phone records of Former Student A from October 2020 through December 2023. The assigned investigator reviewed these records and found over 700 communications between Matuk and Former Student A during the period from November 2022 through March 2023.

Through his attorney, and citing his status as a tenured pedagogue, Matuk declined to speak with SCI investigators.

II. Conclusion and Recommendations:

Upon review of the above facts, SCI substantiated that Daniel Matuk behaved inappropriately and engaged in improper communications with Former Student A while she was a student at Bryant.

¹¹ Former Student A told the investigator that “no other students received chocolate.”

¹² There were other exchanges wherein Matuk greeted or responded to Former Student A and said: “whatsup little butt,” “welcome babes,” “hey slut ho,” and “of course babe.”

¹³ “Discord is an instant message and voice over internet protocol social platform which allows communication through voice calls, video calls, text messaging, and media.” *Wikipedia*. In her written statement, Former Student A noted that there was a time when Matuk instructed her to contact him through Discord instead of Google Chat. She further said in her statement that she and Matuk started “chatting almost daily on discord, but didn’t get ‘closer’ until sophomore year.”

¹⁴ In her statement, Former Student A wrote that Matuk told her not to tell anyone that they were talking which revealed to her that Matuk was aware “that what [he] was doing wasn’t okay.” Matuk also expressed to Former Student A that she hoped she did not put his contact under his real name.

Matuk’s misconduct – which began when Former Student A was only 15 years old, and continued for years – was not only unprofessional, but manipulative and predatory. His improper hugs, coupled with his preferential treatment and relentless attention, demonstrated a pattern of grooming. Moreover, Matuk recognized that his sordid behavior would imperil his position if revealed and as such, requested secrecy and the use of various mobile applications with secure messaging. Finally, it was only after Former Student A graduated from Bryant that she felt comfortable disclosing Matuk’s wrongdoing to her friend, Former Student B – the individual who initially reported the allegations. It is clear that Matuk has no place working in a school and around young adolescents. Therefore, it is the recommendation of this office that the DOE terminate Matuk’s employment, and that the problem code currently associated with his personnel file remain in place, and that this matter be considered should he seek future employment with the DOE or any of its vendors.

In addition, SCI offers the following Policy and Procedure Recommendation (“PPR”):

1. The DOE social media policy should be amended so that all DOE personnel or employees of its vendors are prohibited from contacting students using personal cell phone numbers, personal social media accounts, and other associated applications.¹⁵

Please respond in writing within 30 days of receipt of this letter as to what, if any, action has been taken or is contemplated regarding Daniel Matuk. We are forwarding a copy of this letter to the Office of Legal Services for whatever action they deem appropriate. In addition, we are sending a copy of this letter to the New York State Education Department for whatever action they deem appropriate.

Should you have any inquiries regarding the above, please contact Special Counsel Valerie A. Batista, the attorney assigned to the case. She can be reached at (212) 510-1417 or vbattista@nycsci.org. 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
Daniel I. Schlachet
First Deputy Commissioner

AC:DS:VB:lr
cc: Elizabeth Vladeck, Esq.
Karen Antoine, Esq.
Katherine Rodi, Esq.
Monica Davis-Thorne, Director

¹⁵ SCI has made similar recommendations to the DOE on numerous occasions.