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**

March 18, 2024

Hon. David C. Banks
Chancellor
New York City Public Schools
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street, Room 314
New York, NY 10007

Re: Troy Donaldson
SCI Case #: 2023-9041

Dear Chancellor Banks:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that 35-year-old New York City Department of Education ("DOE") Teacher Troy Donaldson ("Donaldson"), assigned to Bronx High School for Writing and Communication Arts ("BHSWCA") engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a 17-year-old female student ("Student A").[1]

## I. Investigation and Findings:

The investigation began on October 30, 2023, when the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District ("SCI") received an online complaint of misconduct against Donaldson from [redacted] In her complaint, [redacted] stated that Student A's father ("Father A") had reported that Donaldson had met his daughter at the Yonkers train station at 6:45 a.m. that morning to give her a ride to school. [redacted] continued that Donaldson and Student A had been communicating with one another, and he had pictures of them together.

[redacted] further reported that Father A stated that on October 3rd, he was contacted by a staff member from the school because Student A was absent. When Father A called Student A, she claimed she was in

[1] Donaldson was reassigned during the pendency of SCI's investigation. There is a problem code associated with his personnel file. Student A's age listed herein was as of the date the investigation commenced.

school and placed Donaldson on the phone to speak with Father A to confirm her presence at BHSWCA. However, records revealed that Donaldson was absent from work on October 3rd.

In an interview with SCI investigators, Father A stated that he, along with Student A and her stepmother ("Stepmother A"), currently resided in Yonkers after moving from the Bronx several months prior. Consequently, Student A was taking public transportation to school – which involved taking a bus and a train. According to Father A, Student A took the bus to the Tuckahoe Road Metro North train station, and then rode the train to school. Father A added that he subsequently began driving Student A directly to the Tuckahoe Road Metro North train station.

Father A continued that on October 30th, he drove Student A and Stepmother A to the Tuckahoe Road station, where he dropped off Student A. Father A explained that he then proceeded to drive Stepmother A to a different train station further down the road so that she could go to work. According to Father A, after driving "less than a minute down the road," he and his wife decided to turn around and return to the Tuckahoe Road Metro North station because it was raining, and the weather made it difficult to drive. Father A said that approximately 30 seconds later, Stepmother A contacted him and said that she had just observed Student A in a car with her male teacher at the station. Father A said that by the time he returned to the station, the teacher was gone.

Father A stated that when he contacted Student A to explain the situation, she responded that she had called her teacher Troy to ask him for a ride to school because it was raining. Father A then demanded Donaldson's phone number and contacted him. Upon answering the phone, Donaldson immediately stated, "I don't want to lose my job over this." When Father A asked Donaldson whether this was the first time he had picked up Student A from the train station, he began "stalling and refusing to answer the question," before he hung up the phone. After Father A returned home, he again called Donaldson who claimed that he "wanted to help [Student A]," and that there was "nothing going on." Father A added that he asked Donaldson where he lived and learned it was about 40 minutes away from the train station.

Father A continued that when Student A returned home from school, he questioned her further about the matter. Student A told him that the male in the car was her teacher, Professor Troy Donaldson, and there had been only two or three occasions when she asked him for a ride. Father A said that he subsequently obtained Student A's phone records from T-Mobile and upon reviewing them, he learned that there were "hundreds of phone calls" between Student A and Donaldson. Father A then confronted his daughter again and this time, she said that she was friends with Donaldson. Student A insisted that their relationship was not sexual – it was just a "friendship," and Donaldson had been helping her with schoolwork. Father A said that Student A also said that Donaldson frequently picked her up from the train station and drove her to school and often dropped her off a few blocks from her home. Father A provided the assigned SCI investigator with photographs of Student A and Donaldson by his vehicle, a white Tesla.[2]

Father A explained that he was reminded of an occasion when he was contacted by a staff member from BHSWCA and was informed that Student A was absent from school. Father A, who had driven his daughter to the train station that morning, immediately contacted Student A. According to Father A,

[2] The assigned SCI investigator subsequently conducted a database check on the vehicle's license plate which confirmed that the car was registered to Donaldson.

Student A insisted she was not absent and claimed that she bought breakfast on her way to school and therefore, she was late.[3] Student A told her father that she was in the classroom and had Father A speak with her teacher – who introduced himself as "Professor Troy." Father A said that "Professor Troy" assured him that Student A was in class.

In an interview with SCI investigators, Stepmother A recounted what occurred on October 30th, the morning when she observed Student A with Donaldson. Stepmother stated that after Father A dropped off Student A at the Tuckahoe Road train station at approximately 7:00 a.m., she and Father A proceeded to travel to a different station. They decided to turn back, however, because of the weather. Stepmother A continued that after she returned to Tuckahoe Road station, she observed Student A standing near a white Tesla and speaking with an adult male. Stepmother A immediately took several photographs and then approached the vehicle and asked Student A what she was doing. Student A, who was now seated in the passenger seat of the Tesla, responded that the male adult was her professor, and he was giving her a ride to school. Stepmother A ordered Student A out of the car and took a picture of the license plate of the vehicle before Donaldson drove away. Stepmother A phoned Father A and told him what had transpired.

SCI investigators interviewed Student A who stated that she first met Donaldson during the 2022-2023 school year, when she was in the eleventh grade. Student A explained that she had a class during first period that she did not want to attend, and a friend of hers advised that Donaldson let students "skip class" and sit in the back of his classroom. Consequently, Student A began visiting Donaldson's classroom three to four times a week – alone or with other students – and she formed a friendship with him. She and Donaldson began speaking with one another and got to "know each other." They discussed their personal lives, and their "likes and dislikes." Student A said that when she told Donaldson that she was moving from the Bronx to Yonkers, he offered to drive her to and from school. Student A said that Donaldson lived a long distance from the school, however, her house was on the way to the school, so it was not an inconvenience. They subsequently exchanged phone numbers and began routinely communicating with one another. According to Student A, they talked on the phone multiple times throughout the day, for long periods of time, and often occurring late at night. Student A said that Donaldson frequently spoke about his wife and the struggles and disagreements they had in their marriage. Student A explained that Donaldson told her his wife was mad at him because she knew he was speaking with other women, and she thought he was cheating on her. Student A told investigators that although she knew their conversations and interactions were "inappropriate between a teacher and a student," she did not believe Donaldson wanted to be more than friends. Student A added that Donaldson never made any physical advances or romantic gestures towards her.

Student A continued that Donaldson was her teacher for her twelfth-grade English class, and at the beginning of the year, he drove her to and from school. According to Student A, Donaldson was well aware that he could "get in trouble" if people knew he was driving Student A, so they decided to meet at the Tuckahoe Road train station at 7:00 a.m. After arriving at BHSWCA, Donaldson would then drop her

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[3] When interviewed, [redacted] confirmed that on October 3rd, Student A was not present at school the entire day and therefore, was marked absent. Further, DOE Employee Information System records confirmed that Donaldson was absent that same day because he took a "personal day."

off outside the pharmacy which was around the corner. Prior to entering the school building, Student A purchased breakfast or a beverage from Dunkin Donuts. At the end of the school day, Student A met Donaldson at the same location, and he drove her to "the hill" near her home because he did not want to be seen with her and cause any "drama" with her family. Student A then walked approximately 10 minutes to her house. Student A told investigators that Donaldson drove her "basically every day," unless the traffic was bad or for some other unforeseen reason.

Student A recounted that on October 3rd, Donaldson informed her that he could not give her a ride because he was not going to work that day. Student A said that she took the train to school, however, she was late and "stressed," so she bought breakfast at Dunkin Donuts before going into BHSWCA.[4] Student A claimed that due to her late arrival, a staff member had already contacted her father and told him she was absent. Student A said that it was a mistake and insisted she was already present in school when Father A called and asked her to explain her whereabouts. Student A said that she then contacted Donaldson on a three-way call with her father. According to Student A, Donaldson told Father A that Student A was present in his classroom – and although this was a lie because Donaldson was absent – Student A insisted she was not with him. When asked why she did not have another teacher or someone from administration contact her father, Student A explained that she was having a "bad day" and wanted to speak with Donaldson anyway. As such, she figured it would be a "good way," to talk with Donaldson while also letting Father A know she was in school. In response to the assigned SCI investigator's statement that the school attendance records documented her as absent for the entire day, Student A maintained that she did not spend the day with Donaldson. Student A added that since his reassignment, she contacted Donaldson on one occasion because she felt guilty about the situation and that he was "possibly going to get in trouble."

The assigned SCI investigator obtained the phone records of Donaldson and Student A for the time period from September 2022 through January 2024. Upon review, the assigned investigator found over 1400 communications between them during the period from January 9, 2023, through November 2, 2023. Specifically, Student A initiated 856 communications and Donaldson contacted Student A on 566 occasions. Further, many of their phone calls were late at night and lasted hours – with the longest recorded call being eight hours. Additionally, the records revealed that Father A contacted Student A on October 3rd at 10:16 a.m., 10:19 a.m., and 10:26 a.m., and during none of those times did Student A contact Donaldson for a three-way call with Father A as she contended.

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

## II. **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

SCI substantiated that Troy Donaldson engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Student A. Not only did Student A recognize that their friendship was "inappropriate between a teacher and a student," but Donaldson, too, knew his interactions with Student A were improper, unprofessional, and would imperil his position if revealed. In addition to their numerous and extensive communications for hours

[4] It is worthy of mention that Student A had previously stated that she routinely went to Dunkin Donuts prior to entering the school building.

late at night, Donaldson intentionally dropped off Student A and picked her up at a pharmacy around the corner from school in a calculated effort to conceal their improper relationship. It is clear that Donaldson has no place working in a school and around young adolescents. Therefore, SCI recommends that the DOE terminate Donaldson's employment, that the problem code currently associated with his personnel file remain in place, and that this matter be seriously considered should he seek future employment with the DOE, within any of its facilities, or with any of its vendors.

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

1. The DOE should amend its guidelines regarding employee – student interactions to prohibit communications with students using personal cellphone numbers.[5]

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 Troy Donaldson. 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 vbatista@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

[5] SCI has made similar recommendations to the DOE on numerous occasions.