

**CONFIDENTIAL ATTORNEY WORK PRODUCT
ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGED COMMUNICATION**



REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

for

**Dr. Brad Saron,
District Superintendent
SUN PRAIRIE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT**

October 18, 2024 - Conclusions Reviewed with
Principal Renee Coleman

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I. INTRODUCTION

On or about August 28, 2024, Sun Prairie Area School District (the “District”) Employee A made a verbal report to the human resources department that East High School Principal Renee Coleman engaged in untoward behavior in a press box during the August 27, 2024 convocation. Following Employee A’s verbal report, written statements were taken from Employee A, Employee B, Employee C, and Employee D. In a written statement, Employee A reported that Principal Coleman stated, in referring to District students performing a dance: “look at them running around in a circle looking like a bunch of retards” and, about one student performer, “she is not even that good and should just sit down.” According to Employee A’s statement, Employee E laughed at Ms. Coleman’s statements and bragged about Ms. Coleman being the principal of their school. Employee C reported in a statement that Employee C heard Principal Coleman comment to Employee F: “here’s your sign” language and raise her middle finger at Employee F. In Employee D’s statement, Employee D described talk by East High School employees in the press box during the convocation about: “scrubbing their breasts” and describing in detail how they do it, making fun of everyone presenting on the stage, calling an East High School student that was presenting a retard and saying that: “if the bitch don[’]t know her shit she shouldn’t be out there,” talking through the national anthem, flipping off Employee F, calling Employee B a “fat ass,” bragging about how they get away with “shit,” bragging about using school funds to purchase food for themselves, and that: “th[e]y can’t fire [Principal Coleman] because im (sic) black.” Finally, in Employee B’s statement, Employee B reported that Employee B was in the press box next to the one occupied by Ms. Coleman and that based on the volume of laughter coming from that box, Employee B entered it and stated that they were creating a distraction. Employee B recalls for certain that Ms. Coleman and Employee E were present in the box. Following receipt of Employee A’s complaint and the written statements, the District then engaged MWH Law Group LLP (“MWH”) to investigate the matter for the purpose of ascertaining the facts and providing legal advice to the Sun Prairie Area School District regarding the import of the factual findings and possible steps to be taken in light of those findings.

II. INVESTIGATION

All witnesses were interviewed once except Employee G and Employee E who were interviewed twice. Witnesses interviewed and an assessment of their credibility are as follows:

- Employee A (credible)
- Employee B (credible)
- Employee C (credible)
- Employee D (credible)
- Employee E (not forthcoming and not credible in many areas of inquiry)
- Employee F (lacking credibility; lack of recall)
- Employee G (lacking in credibility; pat answers)
- Employee H (credible to an extent; seemingly selective recall)
- Employee I (credible)

- Employee J (generally not credible)
- Renee Coleman (not credible)

Relevant documents were also reviewed.

III. FINDINGS OF FACT

The allegations raised by Employees A, B, C, and D in their written statements were largely substantiated by MWH's investigation. The employees who were interviewed who were not a part of Principal Coleman's staff provided credible statements regarding the events which transpired in the press box during the convocation.¹ These witnesses were forthcoming and responsive to questions that were asked by the investigators and did not speculate as to alleged statements or occurrences that they did not hear or see. Further, at no point during the investigation – including during questioning of Principal Coleman and Employees E, G, H, and J – were there *any* possible explanations presented as to why the employees who raised the complaints would be motivated to fabricate the information they offered regarding the statements and conduct they reported. Indeed, Principal Coleman expressly stated during her interview that she has no issue with Employee A or Employee A's spouse who is a District employee. By contrast, Principal Coleman and Employees E, G, H, and J who were with her in the press box during the convocation, were found to generally lack credibility relative to many of the statements and actions reported by Employees A, B, C, and D regarding the convocation. Principal Coleman did not face us during her interview instead showing her profile, nor even make eye contact, was abrupt, and generally denied that anything untoward was said or done during convocation. Employee E was standoffish, hostile, and evasive when questions were asked about the complained of events. Employee G was also evasive and provided pat answers. This conclusion is further bolstered by virtue of the obvious incentive that Principal Coleman and Employees E, G, H, and J have to deny the actions and statements attributed to them. For those statements and actions are clearly violative of the District's policies and grossly inconsistent with the standard of conduct expected of any District employee.

The investigation established the following facts:

- Principal Coleman engaged in inappropriate discussion and commentary throughout the convocation, including during the National Anthem, student performance, and speeches.
- Principal Coleman made inappropriate comments about District Superintendent Brad Saron.
- Principal Coleman made fun of students performing a dance routine during the convocation and referred to them as "retards."

¹ Employee F was not forthcoming with us during Employee F's interview. Employee F engaged in unprofessional banter with Principal Coleman and her direct reports regarding hygiene and other topics.

- Referring to one of the students performing a dance routine during the convocation, Principal Coleman stated that the “bitch” does not know her shit, should not be out there, and should just sit down.
- Principal Coleman participated in a discussion with certain members of her staff involving an employee needing to lift her boobs to wipe off sweat and conducting personal hygiene in private bodily areas.
- Principal Coleman raised her middle finger to another employee in mockery of the need for sign language interpreters.
- Principal Coleman referred to an employee as a “fat ass.”
- Principal Coleman stated that she could not be fired because she is Black, that she would not get into any trouble for her bad behavior, and that she has gotten away with bad behavior in the past.

A. Convocation – General

The day of the convocation was extremely hot and humid with the bleachers wet from the humidity. The convocation took place outdoors at the District stadium. There are three press boxes at the stadium. Employee A keyed into the door to the middle airconditioned press box. It was empty at the time. All witnesses interviewed except Employee B made their way into this press box prior to or just at the start of the convocation. Principal Coleman entered the press box while the national anthem was playing and talked with a combination of Employees E, G, H, and J while the anthem was playing. Principal Coleman and Employees E, G, H, and J were on one side of the press box, Employees A, C, D, F, and I were on the other, and the box is small enough that everyone was in close proximity to each other. Everyone was standing except Principal Coleman who was perched on a table in front of the press box window facing inward toward Employees E, G, H, and J. Employee B was handling the sound for the event in a press box next to this press box.

B. Comments About Students Performing

Students performed a dance routine during the convocation. Principal Coleman, speaking with Employees E and G, called the students performing retards for running around in a circle. Employee G responded that some of the kids were theirs, meaning East High School students, and pointed out a particular student. Principal Coleman said that bitch does not know her shit, should not be out there, and should sit down. Employee G bragged that they engaged in that kind of behavior all the time and pointed out that Renee Coleman was the principal. Employee G and Principal Coleman talked about how the kids performing were not very good, literally running into each other, were very scattered, did not look rehearsed, and performed badly.

C. Personal Hygiene

Employee G talked about sweating in uncomfortable places, sweating under his/her boobs, having to lift his/her breasts to wash off the sweat under them, as well as needing to clean every crevice and crack, including his/her butt crack. Principal Coleman said to Employee F that Employee F could probably understand Principal Coleman lifting her boobs up to wipe off sweat and Principal Coleman laughed along with Employee G and Employee E. Employee F participated in the banter. Principal Coleman said that Brad Saron in his long-sleeved shirt and pants was going to go home right away after the convocation and shower stating what does he do anyway to which Employee G and Employee E agreed and laughed.

D. Sign Language Interpreter

Employee C commented to Employee F that there was no one interpreting the event in sign language this year. In response to a comment made by Employee F that was not recollected by witnesses, Principal Coleman raised her middle finger to Employee F and said here is your sign language, or this is the only sign language you know, or something to that effect. Ms. Coleman's response was witnessed by Employees C, D, and I.²

E. Employee B's Notification of Too Much Noise from the Press Box

Based on the level of laughter coming from the press box, Employee B opened the door and informed its occupants that they were being too loud and drawing their own audience. After Employee B retreated and closed the door, Principal Coleman, Employee G, and Employee E engaged in denigrating conversation about Employee B saying that Employee B did not know who they were, nobody likes Employee B, and calling Employee B a fat ass.

F. Principal Coleman's Belief That She Cannot Be Fired

Following Employee B's exit from the press box, Principal Coleman made the statement that Brad Saron cannot fire her and that she has done worse things [than what she was doing that day] and never been in trouble. Principal Coleman said fuck him [Employee B], the District cannot fire me, they tried. Either Employee E or Employee G said we are going to get in trouble and Principal Coleman said no, they cannot fire me anyway, I am Black. Principal Coleman also talked about having pre-determined excuses about why she is in the press box in the first place and said that we get in trouble all the time always getting away with it.

² Employee F, the recipient of the verbiage and gesture, only vaguely recalls something of the sort sounding familiar but has no specific recollection.

IV. POLICY REVIEW FINDINGS

It was determined that conduct engaged in by Principal Coleman, Employee G, Employee E, and Employee F violated District policy. Specifically, the following Sun Prairie Area School District mission, values, and policy violations occurred:

A. Mission, Values and Commitments

i. Mission

Principal Coleman violated the District's Mission of inspiring and preparing every child by providing innovative learning experiences through making fun of the students' dance performance at the convocation, referring to the students as retards, and calling one a bitch. Employee G and Employee E violated the Mission by engaging in this untoward conduct with Principal Coleman.

ii. Welcoming Climate

Principal Coleman violated the District's commitment of providing a welcoming, safe, nurturing, and collaborative environment for its students through making fun of the students' dance performance at the convocation. Employee G and Employee E violated the commitment by engaging in this untoward conduct with Principal Coleman

iii. Relationships; Equity; Diversity; Respect and Dignity

Principal Coleman violated the District's commitment to positive strong relationships with students and staff, commitment to equity and providing resources aligned with student's needs, belief in the strength of diversity, and commitment to treatment of all staff and students with value and dignity by making fun of the students' dance performance at the convocation, referring to the students as retards, calling one a bitch, her disrespect for disabilities requiring sign language interpreters for communication, raising her middle finger at Employee F, participating in conversations about breasts, sweating and cleaning under breasts, and cleaning in cracks and crevices, including butt cracks, due to sweat, speaking disrespectfully of Superintendent Saron and Employee B. Employee G and Employee E participated with Principal Coleman violating the same tenets. Employee F violated these commitments through his engagement in the banter about the need for sign language interpreters and the need to clean certain bodily areas due to sweat.

B. Sun Prairie Area School District All Employee Handbook

1.03 Respect and Dignity

Principal Coleman violated the District's policy that all students and staff be treated with respect and dignity through her denigration of the students' performance at the convocation, calling students "retards," calling a student a "bitch," her disrespect for disabilities requiring sign language interpreters for communication, engaging in conversation about breasts, sweating and cleaning under breasts, and cleaning in cracks and crevices, including butt cracks, due to sweat, the raising of her middle finger to Employee F, and her remarks about Superintendent Saron and Employee B. Employee G and Employee E violated the policy through participating with Principal Coleman in the banter. Employee F violated the policy through participating in the banter regarding the need for sign language interpreters.

5.01 District Expectations

Principal Coleman violated the District's expectation that employees maintain a professional and courteous attitude towards students through her denigration of their performance at the convocation, calling students "retards," calling a student a "bitch," and disrespect for disabilities requiring sign language for communication. Principal Coleman violated the District's expectation of a professional and courteous attitude towards other District employees through her disrespect for disabilities requiring sign language for communication, participation in discussion about hygiene of personal body parts, raising of her middle finger to Employee F, and her untoward comments about Superintendent Saron and Employee B. Employee G and Employee E violated the policy through participating with Principal Coleman in the banter. Employee F violated the policy through participation in the discussion about personal body parts hygiene and the need for sign language interpreters.

C. 5.44 Teamwork

Principal Coleman violated the District's Teamwork policy through her failure to show leadership and respect to students and staff during the convocation as well as creating a less than pleasant atmosphere.

V. USER GUIDE FOR THE EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS SYSTEM REVIEW FINDINGS

Through her conduct at the convocation of making fun of the student dance performance, referring to the students as retards and one as a bitch, disrespect of hearing disabilities requiring sign language communication, showing her middle finger to a District employee, engaging in talk about breasts and sweat in private areas, denigration of Superintendent Saron and other District

staff, and disrespect for the national anthem and convocation in general, Principal Coleman violated the following:

Domain 2: Leadership Actions

The Leadership Actions domain focuses on actions that set the stage for improved teaching and learning. Effective principals model professional and respectful personal behavior, facilitate a collaborative and mutually supportive working environment focused on the achievement of each learner, and manage resources and policies to maximize success on the school's instructional improvement priorities.

2.1 Personal Behavior

Effective principals model professionalism by exhibiting ethical and respectful behavior that is displayed in the interactions with students, staff, parents, and the community. Effective principals also maximize time focused on student learning and use feedback to improve personal performance and student achievement.

2.2 Intentional and Collaborative School Culture

Effective principals establish a climate of trust and collaboration among school staff, students, and the community while creating conditions that foster an inclusive, culturally responsive, and learning-focused school environment. They build positive relationships and a shared commitment to change through effective communication and collaborative decision making.

VI. PRINCIPAL JOB DESCRIPTION REVIEW FINDINGS

Through her conduct at the convocation of making fun of the student dance performance, referring to the students as retards and one as a bitch, disrespect of hearing disabilities requiring sign language communication, showing her middle finger to a District employee, engaging in talk about breasts and sweat in private areas, denigration of Superintendent Saron, and disrespectful comments about Employee B, Principal Coleman failed to adhere to the following requirements of her position as a District Principal:

- A.** Essential responsibility of working with stakeholders to develop a positive climate and culture where all students can thrive;
- B.** Duty to respond to and value the District's diverse community in alignment with the District's core values;
- C.** Duty to act with integrity, with fairness, and in an ethical manner;
- D.** Duty to establish strong lines of communication with and among teachers, staff, students, and parents; and
- E.** Duty to adapt leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and be comfortable with dissent.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On October 21, 2024, Sun Prairie Education Association school representative Employee A filed a complaint alleging that on August 27, 2024, Renee Coleman, the East High School Principal, misgendered Employee B. According to the complaint, Employee B uses they/them pronouns and is referred to as Name 1 in the classroom. Employee A stated that Employee B had previously spoken to Principal Coleman about misgendering Employee B, calling them Name 3 (a derivative of their legal name that they had expressed that they did not want to be called) and using he/him pronouns. Despite speaking with Principal Coleman, during a meeting with educators Principal Coleman repeatedly called them Name 4 (another derivative of their legal name that they had expressed that they did not want to be called) and misgendered them despite being corrected by a colleague. Following receipt of Employee A's complaint, the Sun Prairie Area School District (the "District") engaged MWH Law Group LLP ("MWH") to investigate the matter for the purpose of ascertaining the facts and providing legal advice to the District regarding the import of the factual findings and possible steps to be taken in light of those findings.

II. INVESTIGATION

All witnesses were interviewed once. Witnesses interviewed and an assessment of their credibility are as follows:

- Employee A (credible)
- Employee B (credible)
- Employee C (credible)
- Employee D (credible)
- Employee E (credible)
- Employee F (credible)
- Renee Coleman (not credible)

Relevant documents and policies were also reviewed.

III. FINDINGS OF FACT

The allegation raised by Employee A that Principal Coleman has repeatedly misgendered Employee B by using he/him pronouns instead of the preferred they/them and referred to them as Name 3 or Name 4 despite knowledge that they want to be referred to as Name 1 by students and Name 1 or Name 2 by District staff is substantiated by MWH's investigation. Initially, it is found that Employee A has no personal knowledge of the matter in that Employee A did not witness Principal Coleman misgender Employee B nor call Employee B Name 3 or Name 4. As school representative at East High School, Employee A authored the complaint based on Employee B speaking to Employee A about Employee B's concerns with Principal Coleman and, per Employee A, Employee B's concerns about retaliation should Employee B directly file a complaint.

While Employee B's gender identity is non-binary and Employee B uses they/them pronouns, Employee B's primary concern is with being referred to as Name 4 by Principal Coleman despite Principal Coleman's knowledge of the preference of being referred to as Name 1 or Name 2 by school staff. The first time that Employee B informed Principal Coleman of their preference of being referred to as Name 1 was during a one-on-one meeting around September 1, 2023. In this instance, during a whole staff meeting occurring in the library, Principal Coleman referred to Employee B as Name 4 in asking them to join her for a meeting. Employee B responded that they prefer Name 1, not Name 4. Principal Coleman acknowledged Employee B's request.

Following this meeting, Employee B and Principal Coleman would pass each other in the hallway and Principal Coleman would greet Employee B in passing with pleasantries such as "good morning Name 4" to which they would respond that it is "Name 1." Because it was in passing and both continued down the hallway, it is not known if Principal Coleman heard Employee B's correction of her address of them on these occasions.

The next occasion of Principal Coleman misgendering Employee B occurred in an email from Principal Coleman to Employee B on January 19, 2024, that she addressed to "Name 4." In response Employee B stated: "I find it hurtful that after a semester here you are still calling me [Name 4]. This, along with the tenor of yesterday's conversation, is making the workspace feel unwelcoming and unsafe to me. We have had several conversations about my gender identity and the fact that I go by [Name 1] in the classroom space and use they/them pronouns. As we move forward, I would appreciate it if you could address me as [Name 1], or [Name 2]." There was no response from Principal Coleman to this email.

There was no substantive interaction between Employee B and Principal Coleman from January 19, 2024 until approximately May 20, 2024. On or about that date, Principal Coleman approached Employee B, apologized for having previously referred to them incorrectly, and then asked Employee B if their mandatory teaching observation by Principal Coleman could be put off until the next school year resulting in Employee B's belief that the apology was insincere.

The final known instance of misgendering of Employee B by Principal Coleman occurred on or about August 28 or 29, 2024. On this occasion, Employee B and Employee D were discussing a furniture swap that required the approval of Principal Coleman. Principal Coleman arrived at Employee B's classroom to discuss the swap and in the presence of Employee D, Principal Coleman called to "Name 4" to get their attention. While Employee B did not hear Principal Coleman say Name 4, Employee B did hear Employee D correct Principal Coleman by saying that it is "Name 1." In addition to referring to Employee B incorrectly, Employee D heard Principal Coleman misgender Employee B with incorrect pronouns twice. In the first instance, in response to Principal Coleman's use of "him" or "his," Employee D responded with a sentence modeling the correct pronouns. The second time Employee D responded by saying that Employee B uses they/them pronouns to which Principal Coleman responded "okay," or something to that effect.

Principal Coleman's assertion that Employee B had told Employee C that they wanted to be referred to as Name 4 and that is why Principal Coleman was using Name 4 is not credible. Employee C did not have a conversation with Principal Coleman about how Employee B wants to be referenced and did not tell Principal Coleman that Employee B wants to be called Name 4. However, there was an occasion when Principal Coleman referred to Employee B as Name 4 when speaking with Employee C.

Principal Coleman's assertion that she referred to Employee B as "Name 3" on at least three occasions is credible. However, Principal Coleman's assertion that she referred to Employee B as "Name 3" without correction on an occasion at Employee B's classroom, in the presence of Employee F, is not credible. Employee F is aware of Employee B's preferences and, as is consistent in the District, knows there is a sign at the front of Employee B's classroom stating the preference of being called Name 1 and use of they/them pronouns, and Employee F has no recollection of Principal Coleman referring to Employee B as "Name 3" on this occasion.

Principal Coleman's assertion that Employee E was present when Principal Coleman apologized to Employee B for misgendering them and said that it was her understanding from Employee C that they wanted to be called "Name 4" is not credible. In the meeting between Principal Coleman, Employee E, and Employee B on November 3, 2023, Principal Coleman referred to Employee B as "Name 4." She was not corrected by Employee E nor Employee B. There was no apology or discussion about Employee B's gender identity or preferences in the meeting that occurred in the fall of 2023. Principal Coleman also did not apologize to Employee B during their last triad meeting on June 3, 2024. Employee E has also never told anybody that it was acceptable to call Employee B "Name 3" or "Name 4."

Principal Coleman is aware of the District's policy to adhere to teacher gender preferences and refer to teachers as they prefer. Principal Coleman's refusal to refer to Employee B as Name 1 or Name 2 instead of Name 3 or Name 4 and use they/them pronouns for Employee B does not appear to be malicious but rather derived from a place of an inability to adhere to the District's policy or gross incompetence.

IV. POLICY REVIEW FINDINGS

It was determined that Principal Coleman violated District policy by misgendering Employee B. Specifically, the following Sun Prairie Area School District values and policy violations occurred:

A. Core Values and Commitments

Relationships; High Expectations; Equity; Diversity; Respect and Dignity

Principal Coleman violated the District's commitment to positive strong relationships with students and staff, commitment to equity, belief in the strength of diversity, and commitment to treatment of all staff with value and dignity through repeatedly failing to honor Employee B's preferences that they be referred

to as Name 1 in the presence of students, or Name 1 or Name 2 outside of students' presence, with use of they/them pronouns.

B. Sun Prairie Area School District All Employee Handbook

1.03 Respect and Dignity

Principal Coleman violated the District's policy that all staff be treated with respect and dignity through her repeated failure to refer to Employee B as Name 1 in the presence of students, and Name 1 or Name 2 outside of the presence of students, with use of they/them pronouns.

5.01 District Expectations

Principal Coleman violated the District's expectation that employees maintain a professional and courteous attitude towards other District employees through her repeated failure to refer to Employee B as Name 1 in the presence of students, and Name 1 or Name 2 outside of the presence of students, with use of they/them pronouns.

5.44 Teamwork

Principal Coleman violated the District's Teamwork policy through her failure to show leadership and respect to Employee B and creating an unsafe and unwelcoming work environment for Employee B.

C. Policy GBA Employee Discrimination and Harassment (Equal Employment Opportunities)

Principal Coleman likely violated the District's anti-harassment policy through her repeated misgendering of Employee B.

V. PRINCIPAL JOB DESCRIPTION REVIEW FINDINGS

Through her conduct of failing to adhere Employee B's preferred pronouns and choice to be referred to as Name 1 or Name 2, Principal Coleman failed to adhere to the following requirements of her position as a District Principal:

- A. Essential responsibility of ensuring that teachers and staff are aware of the most current practices of learning and making the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture;
- B. Essential responsibility of collaboratively leading the school community in a school improvement plan that provides high accountability by establishing goals and metrics to measure progress to positively impact student achievement for all students;

- C.** Essential responsibility of willingly and actively challenges the status quo; an innovative disruptor;
- D.** Essential responsibility of working with stakeholders to develop a positive climate and culture where all students can thrive;
- E.** Essential function of establishing strong lines of communication with and among teachers, staff, students, and parents;
- F.** Essential function of inspiring and leading new and challenging innovations;
- G.** Essential function of having quality contact and interactions with teachers, parents/guardians and students;
- H.** Leading the development, communication, implementation, and monitoring of a vision for learning; shared and supported by the school community;
- I.** Modeling lifelong learning as a visionary and self-reflective learner who develops a high trust level with all stakeholders;
- J.** Advocating and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
- K.** Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment
- L.** Being highly collaborative with staff members, peers, families and community members
- M.** Duty to respond to and value the District's diverse community in alignment with the District's core values; and
- N.** Duty to understand, respond to, and influence the larger political social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts of the school.