



MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR EDUCATION

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY | CASE 24-0006-I

Findings Regarding the Alleged Misuse of Authority and Prestige of Office by a Dorchester County Public School - Board of Education Member.

The Maryland Office of the Inspector General for Education (OIGE) initiated an investigation after receiving a complaint alleging that the Dorchester County Public Schools - Board of Education (DCPS BOE) President persuaded other BOE members to vote for the removal of all DCPS media specialist positions and divert the use of those funds by entering into a contract with Vision Quest (VQ), an alternative school vendor. The complaints further alleged that the BOE President had ties to the vendor and served as VQs former director. The complaints alleged the funds would cost the county over one million dollars and serve approximately 30 students.

The OIGE interviewed all BOE members except one member, Dr. Theresa Stafford, who passed away on December 14, 2023. When asked if the BOE President actively participated in discussions about VQ during open and closed-session meetings, all BOE members stated that the BOE President did not participate in such discussions. Furthermore, the BOE members denied that the BOE President attempted to influence their decision to vote in favor of the contract with VQ. The BOE President was advised that upon advice from the BOE General Counsel, they recused themselves from conversations about VQ and did not send any emails about VQ.

When asked about a potential conflict of interest, BOE members stated they were uncertain whether the potential conflict of interest was presented to the Ethics Panel and didn't believe it was necessary because the BOE President did not participate in the discussions about VQ.

The OIGE obtained a copy of the Financial Disclosure Statement (FDS) the BOE President submitted to DCPS on January 11, 2023. The OIGE found that on page 10 of the FDS, under Schedule E – Officers, Directorships, Salaried Employment, and Similar Interests, the BOE President responded “yes” to the question, “During the reporting period, did you or any member of your immediate family (spouse or dependent child) have any salaried employment or hold any office or directorship with an entity that did business with the Board of Education?” They listed Vision Quest LTD as the business entity and a family member as the director.

The OIGE reviewed the BOE BoardDocs recordings for the open session meetings on September 21, 2023, and June 13, 2024. In both meetings, the BOE President abstained from voting for or against the contract with VQ on September 21, 2023, and from voting to terminate the contract for convenience on June 13, 2024.

Finally, the OIGE verified through BOE interviews and the BOE President's interview that they did not participate in discussions about VQ, did not utilize their position to influence the decision to engage in business with VQ, and abstained from voting on business decisions related to VQ. As the only vendor to submit a Request for Proposal (RFP), there was no competition. The BOE President was not present for discussions where confidential information about VQ was discussed, removing the opportunity to share it with their family member.

After reviewing all related documents, videos, and interviews, the OIGE could not substantiate the allegations that the BOE President swayed other BOE members to vote against proposed staff funding and failed to disclose personal information regarding a family member's relationship when considering the selection of an alternative school for DCPS.

The OIGE has completed its investigation.

Unless otherwise noted, the OIGE applies the preponderance of the evidence standard in determining whether local school agency personnel have committed misconduct.