



**HAMILTON
COUNTY
SCHOOLS**

April 11, 2024

Nathan Dawson
827 Kay Circle
Chattanooga, TN 37421

Mr. Dawson,

Beginning February 27, 2024, you were suspended without pay in accordance with Board Policy 5.200, pending investigation into allegations that you demonstrated unprofessional conduct as defined in Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-5-501(3). Specifically, you are alleged to have misrepresented facts pertaining to an HR investigation.

HCDE commenced investigating this matter. This investigation consisted of reviewing concerns raised about you by the parent of a former student, interviewing the former student in question, and interviewing you.

Human resources received a tip on February 2, 2024, that alleged that you had an inappropriate relationship with a former student and further alleged that your relationship with the student began while the student was still an HCS student during the 2022-23 school year, during which time you were a teacher at Central High.

Human Resources interviewed you on February 5, 2024, regarding the allegations. During that interview, you admitted that the former student in question was your student at Central High School, but you denied having an inappropriate relationship or engaging in any inappropriate communication with the former student. You were instructed in that meeting to notify HR if you were contacted by anyone associated with the case.

Human Resources interviewed the former student in question via telephone on February 13, 2024, and, during that conversation, she shared that she had contacted you via text and by phone a few days before her meeting with HR. She stated that she got your personal contact information directly from you. This former student also provided Human Resources with her phone number.

In a follow-up interview with HR and your HCEA representative on February 22, 2024, you were asked if you had any contact with the former student in question since the initial meeting on February 5. You replied, "no." You also said you received a text from an unknown source, and HR asked you to submit that text message for review. You subsequently did so via your HCEA representative. The screenshot you provided was dated February 12 and showed a handful of text messages between you and another



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individual. It appeared that there was more to the text exchange that continued after the screenshot ended.

Because Human Resources had the phone number of the former student, upon receipt of the screenshot of text messages from you, Human Resources personnel were able to confirm that the phone number of the other person you were exchanging text messages with was the former student in question. As noted above, you were thereafter suspended pending investigation on February 27, 2024.

On March 6, 2024, Human Resources met with you again to discuss the text messages you submitted to HR and why you denied communicating with the former student in question during your interview on February 22. You admitted not being honest with HR regarding your communication with the former student in question and apologized for not being truthful. You offered that you think that you were confused and were mainly still thinking about the allegation that you had an inappropriate relationship with this student and, as a result, you were not thinking clearly during the February 22 meeting. You represented that you initially thought the February 12 text messages were from someone else. You also stated that, after exchanging these texts with the former student, you called her later that night.

Based on the information gathered during this investigation, I have concluded that your misrepresentation and concealment of facts pertaining to this investigation amounted to unprofessional conduct as defined in *Tenn. Code Ann.* § 49-5-501(3). You were asked directly on February 22 whether you had recently communicated with this student, and you denied having done so, when you were aware that the opposite was true. Not only did you text with this former student on February 12, you also spoke with her on the phone. Failure to disclose this relevant information risked impeding Human Resources' investigation. Further, as a professional, you are expected and obligated to be honest at all times.

Given your unprofessional conduct, I have determined that a three-day unpaid suspension is warranted in accordance with *Tenn. Code Ann.* § 49-5-512(d). The official documented days of your suspension will be February 27, 2024 – February 29, 2024. You will receive back pay for the other days you were out.

Pursuant to *Tenn. Code Ann.* § 49-5-512(d)(1), enclosed with this letter are copies of the documents reviewed in the course of the investigation and relied upon in reaching this disciplinary decision.



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Pursuant to *Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-5-512(d)(2)*, you have a right to meet with me to discuss this suspension. If you wish to exercise this right, you must contact Shirley McCallie (mccallie_s@hcde.org) within five (5) days of receiving this letter. During this conference, you may offer any explanation, rebuttal, or other information you wish for me to consider. I will record this meeting for our benefit, and you may have counsel or other representation present if you so desire. If you elect to have such a meeting and to bring counsel, let Shirley McCallie know in advance so we may have the Board attorney in attendance as well.

While HCS was ultimately not able to definitively determine whether you had an inappropriate relationship with the former student while she was at HCS, you are reminded to create and maintain appropriate and professional boundaries with students and to always adhere to the Teacher Code of Ethics. Further, all communications with students should either take place in school-based or school-facilitated settings or via school-managed communication channels.

Please note that retaliation against any student or HCS employees will not be tolerated. Should we receive an allegation that you have retaliated against any students or employees, disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or termination, may be warranted.

If you have questions about your suspension or any aspect of this letter, please contact the Human Resources Department at 498-7048.

Sincerely,

Dr. Justin Robertson
Superintendent

Cc: Personnel File

Dr. Le Andrea Ware, Principal
Elaine Harper, Community Superintendent
Dr. Saunya Goss, Director, HR Business Partners