



CARTERVILLE

Unit No. 5

Schools

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March 19, 2026

SUBJECT: Important Update from the Carterville District 5 Superintendent and Board of Education

On behalf of the entire Board of Education, I want to express our deep concern regarding the report made by a former student to the Williamson County Sheriff's Office of criminal sexual abuse by a Carterville Community Unit School District 5 staff member during the student's enrollment approximately 10 years ago (estimate based on the information that has been shared with the District at this time).

The safety and well-being of our students is our highest priority. We take any allegation involving inappropriate conduct with students extremely seriously, and we recognize the concern this situation has caused for our students, families, staff, and alumni.

Parents, families, staff and community must be engaged partners in the District's efforts to ensure that interactions and communications between students and their teachers, coaches and other staff members— both in-school or off-campus and out-of-school— are safe, respectful and maintain appropriate professional boundaries. **If you see or hear something that leads you to believe a student is at-risk, we are counting on you to report it.** You have our commitment that we will swiftly and thoroughly respond to concerns and complaints, including conducting our own internal investigation and notifying local law enforcement, the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) as appropriate.

And that's exactly what we did in this situation—when credible information was provided by law enforcement on February 20, the District acted immediately. We also contacted the Illinois State Board of Education to inform them of the criminal investigation of a District staff member and immediately placed the employee involved on administrative leave, prohibited them from accessing school property, and directed them not to contact current or former District students or families.

Update on Law Enforcement and ISBE Investigations/Request for Records

As we have from the beginning, the District is committed to fully cooperating with law enforcement in their ongoing investigation of this matter. We have received and will comply with requests from both the Sheriff's Office and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for the personnel and disciplinary records of John J. Wakey, who has been employed as a teacher and assistant football coach at Carterville High School since 2003.

The District has also been asked to provide the Sheriff's Office with academic records for additional former students who were taught or coached by Mr. Wakey during the same time period as the reporting student (between 2009 and 2018). The District has been informed by the Sheriff's Office of a report from a former student, but no evidence of inappropriate contact involving Mr. Wakey has been

shared with the district at this time, as this remains an active and open investigation. Of course, the District will fulfill our obligation to comply with this request upon receipt of a verified subpoena issued by a judge as required by federal privacy laws protecting student records.

Complaints Involving Mr. Wakey/New District Investigation

Our records indicate that, in 2009, the District received a complaint regarding unprofessional communication and conduct involving Mr. Wakey. The District's investigation of the complaint substantiated violations of Board policy, including inappropriate text messages with students, as well as inappropriate off-campus social interactions with and conduct in the presence of students (consuming alcohol and tobacco products). Following that investigation and with guidance from legal counsel, at a public meeting, the Board of Education took disciplinary action against Mr. Wakey, including a 10-day suspension without pay and a formal remediation plan outlining clear expectations for professional conduct moving forward.

Since the disciplinary action taken December 2009 until November of 2024, the District received no complaints of this current nature regarding Jake Wakey. In November 2024, as previously shared, the District was made aware of the anonymous FBI report. On February 4, 2025, the District received and conducted its own due diligence in response to two anonymous FriendWatch reports that Mr. Wakey had sent inappropriate text messages to students. The District contacted FriendWatch to see if they could provide additional details; they indicated that, as a confidential and anonymous reporting service, unless the reporting party shares their identity or contact information, FriendWatch does not have the ability to access or provide such information. The administration also asked if FriendWatch had the ability to reach out to the reporter(s) to encourage the reporter(s) to come forward with additional information. FriendWatch stated it did not have that ability. As a result, the District's investigation of this report was limited to speaking only to Mr. Wakey, who denied having sent such communications. Over the past 17 years, the District had not directly received any other formal complaints against Mr. Wakey.

Since the criminal investigation became public in February 2026, the District has received additional reports of two concerning text messages allegedly sent in March 2022 and November 2025 by Mr. Wakey to both a former and a current student, including one message that has been circulated on social media. While these reports are not within the known scope of the criminal investigation, the District has shared this information with law enforcement. Consistent with Mr. Wakey's due process rights as detailed in the Illinois School Code, we have initiated an internal investigation into these reports. If the findings of this investigation substantiate violations of current District policy and/or the professional conduct directives provided to Mr. Wakey in 2009, the Board will pursue appropriate disciplinary action.

Student Safety Protocols and Processes

We are also taking this opportunity to reinforce and strengthen the many protocols and processes our District has in place to protect the safety and well-being of our learning community—this is always our highest priority.

- As a part of our pre-employment process, we conduct an employment history review, criminal background checks, and cross-checks with federal and state sexual offender databases.
- All faculty and staff affirm in writing their acknowledgement of a duty to report any suspicions or knowledge of abuse or neglect of a student.

- All faculty and staff participate in annual mandatory training regarding the parameters of appropriate conduct with students, as well as other topics related to maintaining a safe school environment.
- At the direction of our superintendent, moving forward, biannual mandatory training on appropriate personal and professional best practices for social media use, which was last conducted in May 2025, will now be required on an annual basis.
- During staff meetings throughout the remainder of the school year, we will be reviewing and reinforcing our Board policies regarding the expectation of professional and appropriate employee conduct and prohibiting the use of personal technology for school communications.
- Consistent with the communications practices detailed in our school handbook and existing Board Policy 5:125, effective April 1, 2026, we will complete our transition to Aptegey Rooms as the District's only approved communications platform for text messaging between students, staff and families. Building leaders will review information about how to access and update contact information in Aptegey Rooms in the days to come.

As always, we thank you for your support of Carterville Community Unit School District 5 and our students, and for the care and concern that our school community has demonstrated for everyone impacted by this situation.

Sarah Barnstable, Superintendent
and
Carterville Community Unit School District 5 Board of Education