



COPPINS MONROE, P.A.

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

To:	Deana McAllister Assistant Superintendent Leon County Schools
From:	Steven E. Oole, Esq. Scott J. Seagle, Esq. Coppins Monroe, P.A.
Date:	July 2, 2026
Subject:	Teacher and Staff Complaints regarding Julie Lawson

I. Overview:

Coppins Monroe, P.A., was retained on April 6, 2026, to conduct an independent investigation into a complaint filed by Troy Yeomans, the bookkeeper at Kate Sullivan Elementary School ("KSES"), against KSES principal Julie Lawson ("Lawson"). Mr. Yeomans' complaint alleges retaliation, disclosure of private/personal information, political profiling, discrimination, requiring completion of tasks outside the scope of employment, improper training, and interference with an investigation, and bullying/harassment.

Thereafter, the undersigned investigator received three additional complaints against Mrs. Lawson. On or about April 24, 2026, former KSES Teacher Kristen (Hunter) Stephens submitted a 4-page grievance to Assistant Superintendent Deana McAllister, alleging retaliation, disclosure of private/personal information, improper training, interference with an investigation, bullying/harassment, safety issues, and accessing personal information for other uses. On or about April 25, 2026, KSES Teacher Camara (Tunsill) Sanders submitted a Report About Possible Bullying/Harassment Incident(s) with 4 pages of attached

information, alleging retaliation and bullying/harassment.¹ On or about April 28, 2026, Valencia Hargrett, LESPA President, submitted a complaint on behalf of Speech Therapy Assistant Jillian Cooper, alleging retaliation, interference with an investigation, and bullying/harassment.

On April 27, 2026, a conference was held with Leon County School Board ("LCSB") Superintendent Rocky Hanna, Assistant Superintendent Deana McAllister, Risk Manager Tod Stupski, and Employee Relations Coordinator Allison Halpin. In addition to the above complaints of misconduct against Lawson, allegations were raised that KSES paraprofessional Sam Hembree had made forcible physical contact with KSES student [REDACTED] and that Lawson may have downplayed the seriousness of the situation. Our investigation was expanded to include a review of all issues.

During the investigation, the undersigned investigator became aware of conduct by Lawson that compromised the integrity of the ongoing investigation, and an Interim Report was issued on June 16, 2026, to address these issues.

As detailed herein, this investigation substantiates various allegations against Lawson and finds others unsubstantiated or unfounded. Not every allegation, however, is addressed specifically. Allegations raised by the Complainants that are not specifically addressed were found to be unsubstantiated.

II. Evidence:

The following evidence was reviewed in the course of this investigation:

1. Complaint by Troy Yeomans (4/15/2026)
2. Troy Yeomans' April 16, 2026, correspondence as an addendum to the complaint
3. LCSB Intake Notes from April 22, 2026, interview with Troy Yeomans
4. Troy Yeomans' April 28, 2026, correspondence as an addendum to the LCSB interview
5. Complaint by Jillian Cooper (4/28/2026)
6. Julie Lawson's April 22, 2026, response to Troy Yeomans' complaint
7. Camara Sanders' Report About Possible Bullying/Harassment Incident(s) and related e-mail correspondence
8. Formal Observation of Camara Tunsil
9. Kristen (Hunter) Stephens Complaint
10. LCSB policy AP 1210 Employee Conduct
11. LCSB policy AP 1211 Whistleblower Protection
12. LCSB policy AP 8700 Fraud Investigations
13. LCSB policy PO 1210 Standards of Ethical Conduct
14. LCSB policy PO 1362 Anti-Harassment

¹ Ms. Sanders previously filed a Step-1 Grievance on December 16, 2025, and a Step-2 Grievance on January 27, 2026. These Grievances also allege disparate treatment and retaliation by Ms. Lawson.

- 15.LCSB policy PO 5517.01 Bullying and Harassment
- 16.LCSB policy 1380 Respect and Civility in Schools and District Offices
- 17.Rule 6A-10.081, F.A.C.
- 18.Collective Bargaining Agreement with Leon Classroom Teachers Association
- 19.Audio-Recorded Interviews and associated interview packets, including documents and evidence provided by interviewees:
 - a. Tara Williams
 - b. April Wetherington;
 - c. Sarah Silvey;
 - d. Troy Yeomans;
 - e. Camara Sanders;
 - f. Tara Lynch;
 - g. Cora Franklin;
 - h. Elana Tobrer;
 - i. Christie Owen;
 - j. Dylan Hutto;
 - k. Leslie Moore;
 - l. Kristen Stephens;
 - m. Jillian Cooper;
 - n. Julie Lawson;
 - o. Sam Hembree.
- 20.Non-recorded interviews and associated documents and evidence provided by interviewees:
 - a. Clayton Cloud.
 - b. Sunny Chancy
 - c. Deana McAllister
 - d. Allison Halpin
 - e. Wallace Knight
 - f. Justin Williamson
- 21.Additional written statement of April Wetherington
- 22.Timeline of events provided by Jillian Cooper (May 11, 2026)
- 23.Additional written statement of Jillian Cooper (May 13, 2026)
- 24.Deana Jackson Electronic Mail to/re Troy Yeomans
- 25.Facebook parent complaints
- 26.5-21-2026 correspondence from Troy Yeomans
- 27.5-23-2026 correspondence from Camara Sanders re: additional information
28. Julie Lawson correspondence provided by personal counsel
- 29.LCTA Step 1 Grievance Form – Camara Sanders and related correspondence
- 30.LCTA Step 2 Grievance Form – Camara Sanders and related correspondence
- 31.Correspondence from Julie Lawson to Deana McAllister regarding non-renewal of Camara Sanders
- 32.5-15-2026 Formal Observation of Camara Sanders
- 33.5-20-2026 correspondence from Tara Williams regarding destruction of personal property and photographs
- 34.5-23-2026 correspondence from Camara Sanders with additional information

- 35.6-9-26 correspondence from April Wetherington regarding additional actions by Ms. Lawson
- 36.6-9-2026 correspondence from Troy Yeomans regarding ongoing retaliation
- 37. Various LCSB files regarding prior allegations against Julie Lawson
- 38.6-10-2026 correspondence from Cari Molinaro
- 39.8-27-2014 Sworn Affidavit of Julie Lawson

Other evidence may have been gathered, collected, or considered during the investigation.

III. Methodology:

Standard investigative practices were used in this investigation, including in-person and telephonic interviews and the collection of relevant evidence. All persons formally interviewed were provided advance written notice of their interviews, given the opportunity for representation, given the opportunity to submit evidence, given written notice of Garrity and Weingarten rights, and advised that their interviews were recorded.

Prior to the investigation, District representatives made clear that no particular result or outcome was expected. In accordance with the principles of impartiality and integrity and consistent with the District's instructions, the investigation did not reach a predetermined outcome. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations herein are based solely on the testimony and evidence gathered during the investigation, applicable law, School Board policies, and the investigator's knowledge, experience, and judgment regarding witness credibility and the weight of the evidence. In weighing the evidence, the investigator applies a "preponderance of the evidence" standard. Each complaint is evaluated against applicable laws, rules, and School Board policies.

In evaluating the claims, this Report uses the following terms:

"Substantiated" means the investigation found sufficient evidence to establish that the alleged misconduct occurred and constituted a violation of law or policy.

"Unsubstantiated" means the investigation did not find enough evidence to prove or disprove the allegation. It does not mean the incident did not happen; only that it cannot be proven under the preponderance-of-the-evidence standard.

"Unfounded" means the investigation determined that the alleged act did not occur or was not supported by any credible evidence, or, alternatively, that the alleged conduct does not constitute misconduct even if it occurred.

In evaluating the claims, the investigator has the duty to assess the credibility of each witness and to weigh the evidence accordingly. While this Report includes citations to certain select examples of testimony and evidence, it cannot summarize or cite to all such testimony. The omission of a citation to testimony provided by a witness during the investigation should not be interpreted as an indication that such testimony was found to be not credible, as many were duplicative or simply omitted to reduce the expanse of this report.

IV. Background.

Lawson has a history of complaints related to the issues raised by the four Complainants. In 2018, while serving as the Assistant Principal at Deerlake Middle School ("DMS"), Board Member Alva Striplin filed a complaint alleging unethical and unprofessional behavior. Two additional complaints were filed by DMS teachers regarding Lawson's allegedly irrational and threatening behavior. Three additional teachers reportedly made similar statements, and other teachers and staff at DMS sought alternate employment.

Thereafter, DMS ESE teacher, Victoria Lightfoot, at the time, a 36-year teacher, filed a detailed complaint, making similar allegations to those raised in the current complaints of Yeomans and Stephens, alleging that "unprofessionalism has almost become characteristic of Ms. Lawson" among other concerning behaviors:

At first I was a little put off by the way she spoke so unprofessionally about her new colleagues. One of her first questions to me was, "Who was the aide with the big mouth that thought she knew everything?" Mrs. Lawson constantly made references about our acting principal being inefficient and not following through or taking care of things. She began to brag about all she was getting done, and how she was so much better than Mrs. O'Banner, her predecessor. These were some of the red flags that started to appear.

Unprofessionalism has almost become characteristic in Mrs. Lawson. One day while in her office working on trying to get one of my students into Success Academy, she told me to watch out for my husband at Chiles because Josie McDaniel was there now and she was not to be trusted around

married men. She went on to say that she knew Josie from SA and that Josie slept with her current husband while he was married and while she was pregnant and still married to her ex-husband.

Mrs. Lawson was very critical about the way she spoke to me about our Speech Language Pathologist, Jaime Sumner, and then I discovered she was saying the same thing about me to her. She would constantly ask me what Jaime did all day? Our ESE department didn't grow stronger by having someone with an ESE background, it weakened it. Mrs. Lawson began to take care of ESE situations without the input of the ESE teacher or the SLP. She began most of her conversations with, "Scotty and I decided" and when I would try to confirm that with Mr. Crowe, I realized that the things that she said were either untrue or taken out of context. Mrs. Lawson does not tell the truth.

Our relationship became even more unsettled when she sent an email to me that began with, "Rumor has it you are off-campus...." I was not off campus. I was in the computer lab and my contention then and now is; What kind of administrator speaks that way to a teacher? Rumor has it? When I attempted to talk with her about the email she blamed it on the other assistant principal and the dean of students, stating that they told her to do that. When I asked the gentleman about the accuracy of her statement they said that was untrue. Our relationship was so poor that Mr. Crowe had us sit down together to clarify some issues and see if we could smooth them over.

I began to feel like her words and her actions were personal attacks on me. I was dumbfounded and frustrated. As much as I hate to say it I do believe she has a serious personal grudge against me because of a previous relationship I had with her brother-in-law, Ricky Bell. Mr. Bell and I dated nearly 20 years ago. After our relationship ended I filed sexual-harassment charges against him in relation to an email incident.

I have examples of emails where I have requested student as peer tutors, requested help with the procedures, requested locations of policies, etc. and I get no support. I feel as though she undermines me with parents and has not shared information with me that was pertinent to my students' success. This past semester when I was seeking a scholarship for an autistic student of mine with a single mom, she replied, "I've driven past their house. I know where they live. If that mom can afford to live there she can afford to send in money for Disney World." When a committee was being developed for this year that was to focus on the support of the bottom 25% of our students, Mrs. Lawson, the SLP and I were having a conversation about some potential members. The person that I wanted and had co-taught with was someone Mrs. Lawson did not want. Instead of making specific points about the person strengths or weaknesses, she just blurted out, "Robyn Dillmore is just not a good teacher." When I asked what made her even think that, she said that every time she had been in Robyn's room she was always sitting down. First of all I've never had an administrator speak in such a derogatory manner about a fellow teacher. Second of all, I was, as was our SLP, taken aback because she seem to do it with such malice and intent. It was at this point that I told my principal that I never wanted Mrs. Lawson to evaluate me. I don't believe I would ever be treated fairly.

Whereas I initially considered the possibility that her behavior towards might be my own misperception, I no longer believe that to be true. I feel targeted and have actually started to avoid any dealings with her whatsoever. I know for a fact that she has mistreated and been unprofessional towards other educators at Deerlake, my son included. Even after she berated him in front of others in a meeting, for expressing a difference in opinion concerning a new class that was taking form and told him to leave, I continued to try and be professional towards her. I am shaken to the core by what I have seen this administrator do to my school, my friends and my family. I do not want to allow her to spread lies and negativity around my campus. It saddens me that the learning environment at Deerlake Middle School has deteriorated, Morale is down since she has arrived on our campus. Teachers

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won't speak up because they are intimidated by her. Anything that I have stated in this letter I do have examples of but I did not include everything because this letter is already so lengthy. I just feel that it's imperative that our superintendent and our area leaders know what a detriment Mrs. Lawson is to a wonderful school.

Thank you for your time.

Vicki Lightfoot

In a separate complaint, Lightfoot continued to complain about the environment created by Lawson:

I understand that this sweet boy has autism and that the others in the class have similar issues but this is not the class that I wanted to teach. I will go in there on Monday with a smile on my face and make each one of those children feel special, but I think that what was done to me by Julie Lawson is wrong. This is my second year of DROP and I can say unhesitatingly, that I think she is trying to run me out of that school. Is this information enough for me to file a formal grievance against her? I also want to request that she never, ever evaluates me. I have no respect for her professionally or personally. It makes me sick to my stomach that someone like this is in our education system.

Thanks for listening once again. You may call me at home at 445-9013. You may also try me at school 922-6545 before nine-thirty or after four.

Vicki Lightfoot

Lawson was appointed Principal of KSES in 2021. Since that time, Lawson has had eight Assistant Principals ("APs"), including Chris Gautney, Leslie Moore, Beverly Kerrison (5 weeks), Ashley Crowley (3 weeks), Brooks Sperling, Brian Dobie, Amy Bramblatt, and current AP Shannon Davis. This high turnover in APs is highly unusual for Leon County Schools.

On September 27, 2024, former KSES AP Beverly Kerrison filed a Charge of Discrimination with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, alleging age and race discrimination and retaliation. The records include a list of concerns from Kerrison's time at KSES:

Mr. Wallace Knight

Discussion Points (concerns as an assistant principal at Kate Sullivan)

1. It is unfair to me to work in an environment in which the principal's main (objective) goal is to get me to resign. I will not be subjected to harassment/intimidation/hostile working environment. Please refer to the Administrative Code, Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida.
2. Got a call from Anicia Robinson because I had not called her (principal) - I sent her an email stating that I was glad to be at Kate Sullivan and that I would call her that night. That day was extremely busy completing things for Everhart. Forgot to call her. I got a call from Anicia Robinson because I did not call the principal (Julie Lawson).
3. Florida Department of Education has in place Rule 6A-10.081, Florida Administrative Code, Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida, which stipulates that All employees and agents of a public school district, charter school or private school have an obligation and legal responsibility to report misconduct by instructional personnel and school administrators which can affect the health, safety or welfare of a student. This includes - Obscene language, Disparaging (fault-finding) comments, Physical aggression
4. Principals should always be aware of the importance of maintaining respect and dignity.
5. The principal made it clear that I was the APA - she sent job descriptions for each us displayed in a chart on May 30th.

Should be a fair treatment at the summit was so cruel - please - at the table

6. June 10th - First Day at Kate Sullivan, June 11th - was told that the district stated that this school (Kate Sullivan) is our (Ashley and I) last chance in the district before we are fired.
7. June 26th - Ashley told me that she heard Julie tell the secretary that her goal is to get rid of us. Ashley was physically upset.
8. July 3rd - Ashley and I received an email consisting of a list of things to do.
9. Her tone in emails is very hostile (subjective). Fault-finding comments are stated continuously in emails.
10. Evacuation maps in every room - Maps were placed in all rooms but some rooms did not have a map so I could not draw the route for evacuation in red.
11. Drills - emergency drills - fire prevention training
12. Kate Sullivan has had 3 different assistant principals for the last 3 years. Ms. Crowley and I started June 10th. Ms. Crowley resigned because of the principal's harassment (intimidation) efforts in person and in writing. Also, the principal made it clear that her goal was to get rid of both of us. Please look at the common denominator of the previous assistant principals.
13. It is very clear that the principal caused Ms. Crowley to resign.
14. Principal's tone in emails is very condescending which further confirms her attitude of getting me to resign. See emails concerning the drills, document on paraprofessionals way of work, evacuation maps, etc.
15. Email from principal, Sunday, July 28 at 8:18AM, stating that I had to attend an EDEP field trip on Thursday, August 1st because the director was taking some time off and

would not be going on the trip. Please note that this is the first day for teachers to return to work. An email was received on Monday, July 29th at 10:16AM stating that the director will be going on the trip so I do not have to attend.

16. Building Maintenance Supervisor - One of my responsibilities as a APA is to supervise the custodians. I met with the custodians as a group and individually. They were told to report absences and any concerns to the BMS and then to me and the principal. The principal has stated to me several times that the teachers do not like the BMS. I have personally heard teachers compliment her on the condition of the school. I have made it clear to the principal that Ms. Williams has been at this school for at least 20 years and the custodians are not afraid of her. Why is there such hostility towards Ms. Williams?

On May 1, 2024, Pineview Elementary Principal Carmen Conner complained about what she alleged was a calculated plan by the KSES administration to withhold behavior support services from students with documented service needs, creating an environment in which students with behavior issues would act out and be expelled from KSES. The very next day, Lawson submitted a Report About Possible Bullying/Harassment Incident(s) against Conner. The Report indicates that Lawson contacted Superintendent Hanna regarding the matter. After its investigation, LCSB determined Lawson's complaint was unsubstantiated.²

Lawson also filed a prior complaint against DMS Principal Stephen Mills, alleging many of the same claims now raised against her by the four Complainants, including social isolation/exclusion, public humiliation, rumor-spreading, threats, and denial of access. After

² We were unable to identify a determination by LCSB of the allegations raised by Principal Conner.

an investigation, none of the allegations were sustained. However, Lawson was found to have committed an ethics violation by using her Skyward Access to review teacher and administrator leave information for personal gain.

Although the above complaints are not part of this investigation, they provide relevant contextual background and support for a pattern of conduct consistent with both the current complaints and statements from multiple witnesses during the investigation. The history also documents a prior reprimand against Lawson and the level of behavior that Lawson herself considers bullying/harassment.

V. Investigative Narrative.

Due to the overlapping allegations, this Report addresses the allegations against Lawson in the following categories:

- A. Retaliation;
- B. Disclosure of Private or Personal Information;
- C. Political Profiling;
- D. Interference with an Investigation;
- E. Discrimination;
- F. Required Tasks Outside Scope of Employment;
- G. Improper Training;
- H. Coercive means;
- I. Safety Issues.

A. Retaliation.

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(15), F.A.C. prohibits reprisals against any individual who has reported any alleged violation of the Florida School Code or State Board of Education Rules as defined by Section 1012.795(1), *Florida Statutes*.

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(4), F.A.C. requires the educator shall not engage in harassment or discriminatory conduct which unreasonably interferes with an individual's performance of professional or work responsibilities or with the orderly processes of education or which creates a hostile, intimidating, abusive, offensive, or oppressive environment; and further shall make reasonable effort to assure that each individual is protected from such harassment or discrimination.

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(5), F.A.C. prohibits administrators from making malicious or intentionally false statements about a colleague.

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(6), F.A.C. prohibits administrators from making fraudulent statements.

The School Board's policies similarly prohibit retaliation and false statements, including Policy 1362 ("Anti-Harassment"); 8700 ("Anti-fraud"), and 1211 ("Whistleblower Protection").

i. Troy Yeomans

Mr. Yeomans raised allegations of retaliation following Lawson's learning of his desire to relocate schools and his subsequent filing of a complaint of retaliation. In relevant part, Yeomans complains that Lawson unfairly criticized his performance and work to District officials. While this Report does not make a determination as to whether Lawson's concerns about Yeomans' bookkeeping performance were legitimate, there is evidence supporting the need for Lawson to discuss bookkeeping issues with LCSB and to provide Yeomans with additional training. Ultimately, while the timing of Lawson's actions, together with other evidence gathered in the investigation, suggests that retaliation could have potentially played a role, the evidence is ultimately insufficient to sustain the claim, and the allegation is thus **UNSUBSTANTIATED**.

Yeomans complained of additional acts of retaliation following the filing of his complaint on April 15, 2026:

4-16-2026

"I have been informed by a district ESE personnel who was informed by two ESE personnel assigned to Sullivan that Lawson spent a lengthy amount of time during MTSS today discussing the conflict that she and I are currently having. This person[] said that Lawson did not hesitate to commit more defamation of character against me and my work."

4-28-2026

Lawson has continued to talk very poorly about me to staff members. She has held phone conversations on speaker where others could hear her talk about me, and has even went as far as calling other area superintendents to bash me in the event I seek employment with their district.

At this point, the blatant defamation of character is appalling, and I feel that I am left with no choice but to seek legal counsel.

This investigation, however, was unable to obtain statements from other superintendents and staff members who may have been contacted by Lawson to speak derogatorily about Yeomans. The allegations are, therefore, also **UNSUBSTANTIATED**.

However, on June 9, 2026, Yeomans informed the undersigned investigator that he had been reassigned to Woodville Elementary School (WES). He reported that Lawson had contacted WES Principal Cari Molinaro at least twice during this investigation to disparage him with the intent to harm him in his new position. Unlike the previous allegations, however, WES Principal Cari Molinaro confirmed to investigators that Lawson contacted her by phone on two separate occasions and by text to disparage Yeomans. Molinaro has provided the investigator with a written statement and copies of the text messages.

Lawson told Molinaro that Yeomans was "the reason that she had to get an attorney," and that she needed to give Molinaro "a heads up about him." Lawson critiqued Yeomans' job

performance and told Molinaro to "be careful because when [Yeomans] was at Kate Sullivan he was actively pursuing [your] teachers and that two of them had actually interviewed with [KSES]." Lawson also told Molinaro that Yeomans "was the reason her [Lawson's] son was arrested." Lawson's comments caused Molinaro to be "a little bit leery" of Yeomans. However, Molinaro also stated that she had "heard things over the years about [Lawson] and her track record with APs and employees so in the back of mind I didn't believe that what she said[.]" Molinaro decided to "drop a couple of comments to [Yeoman] to gauge his reaction," which made her feel better about the situation, but caused Yeomans to become upset.

This investigation finds that Lawson had no legitimate reason to contact WES Principal Molinaro to disparage Yeomans as described, and that the contact, made after Yeomans' complaint and during the pendency of this investigation, was intended to harm and punish Yeomans. This investigation further finds that Lawson's statement to Molinaro about Yeomans attempting to poach KSES employees and having her son arrested were knowingly and intentionally false or made maliciously to harm Yeomans without regard to the truth. Lawson's statements were retaliatory and intended to harm Yeomans. The complaint of retaliation is, therefore, **SUBSTANTIATED**.

ii. Camara (Tunsill) Sanders:

Ms. Sanders alleges that Lawson began retaliating against her after Sanders reported unprofessional conduct of a paraprofessional in November 2025. Sanders filed complaints against Lawson in December 2025, in January 2026, and finally in April 2026.

Prior to Sanders' complaints, Lawson had nothing but high praise for Sanders' abilities as a teacher:

confidence. She exudes compassion and dedication towards all students, working tirelessly to create innovative learning opportunities for her students. Ms. Tunsill fosters a rich educational environment where active learning takes place that encourages students to persevere, focus, grow and take ownership in their learning and their behavior. Ms. Tunsill thrives when asked to multi task and teach multiple grade levels and multiple subjects simultaneously, displaying a rare brilliance in all aspects of her teaching. Ms. Tunsill's work ethic and ability to impact students in a positive manner is unrivaled.

Ms. Tunsill is a once in a lifetime educator. Our Kate Sullivan crocodiles are lucky to have her as a teacher. I am honored to write this recommendation for Ms. Tunsill as her commitment to education is unrivaled and you will not find a more deserving candidate than Camara Tunsill.

On April 19, 2022, May 24, 2022, April 27, 2023, and May 7, 2024, Lawson conducted LEADS Teacher Professional Responsibilities Evaluations of Sanders. Each evaluation rated Sanders as "highly effective" (the maximum score of "5") across the board in all categories, and offered a glowing narrative of how well Sanders worked with students, was organized and prepared, supported her peers, and "consistently adhered to the school and district rules and policies." Lawson noted: "KSE is a better place because of you!"

After Sanders filed complaints against Lawson, however, things changed. Troy Yeomans explained that Lawson "began to build a case" to nonrenew Sanders:

During the month of February, navigating my duties and Lawson became more challenging. At the time Lawson was dealing with a grievance filed against her by a fourth-grade teacher. Lawson would spend a great deal of time in and outside of my office discussing every detail of this grievance, and her plan to build a case against this teacher so that she could not re-appoint her.

KSES Reading Coach, April Wetherington, stated that after five years with Lawson, she had come to recognize when Lawson would target a teacher:

Wetherington: There have been instances where I've realized, don't discuss it with her, but I've realized that she's targeted a teacher, and that teacher is most likely out the door at the end of the school year. There have been a couple of occasions where I have done my best to intervene because I felt like it was ...it wasn't fair. I know that's the way it worked there

Investigator: Which teacher did you intervene with to help?

Ms. Wetherington: The most recent one...would be Ms. Sanders....

Investigator: What behavior did you observe that made you want to intervene?

Ms. Wetherington: So at our Monday meetings, a typical topic would be teachers, and what teachers are doing in the classroom, what we're seeing in the classroom, what she's seeing in the classroom, and how can we help. And if there's a conversation someone's not doing well. I remember there were conversations about Ms. [Sanders] specifically about parent emails. And she's never received so many parent emails with Ms. [Sanders].

Investigator: ...Did Ms. Lawson, say or do anything else that you thought required you to intervene or step in?

Ms. Wetherington: It was just pretty constant. The negativity toward Ms. Sanders specifically was, was constant. She didn't like the way she teaches. She took time off....It was very, very focused on Ms. Sanders. And I do not know where the switch occurred. And that's pretty common at Kate Sullivan. You are a beloved member of the team, and then suddenly you are no longer a beloved member of the team. And a lot of times, in my opinion, there's nothing that happened in the middle. It's just like a light switch. And so you just learn to read people's habits. You learn to read, you read between the lines when they talk to you. And in Ms. Sanders case, even though Julie said she's received so many parent emails, I've never seen one.

Wetherington went on to explain that she had worked with Sanders and been in her classroom, serving students with behavioral issues, many times. She stated that Sanders "does an excellent job with the kids," and "her kids are always on task." She felt that Lawson's complaints about Sanders were "exaggerated," and explained:

I just feel like that's her. That's what [Lawson] does. If she wants there to be a problem, [Lawson] can create a problem. She can exaggerate it into a real problem...that's just how she works....But I know that [Lawson], from that point on, did not care for how [Sanders] ran her classroom.

Wetherington took issue with Lawson's final evaluation of Sanders—pointing out that Lawson had taken over the evaluation from another administrator who was scheduled to conduct it. Lawson went on to evaluate Sanders as a "3" ("Developing") in many categories and did not rate Sanders as a "5" in any category. Lawson's comments were also highly negative and judgmental—all a clear break from prior evaluations. Wetherington discussed the evaluation with Lawson and strongly disagreed with it based on her own observations of Sanders. Wetherington explained:

[Lawson] just does not care for her. And you could tell....[A]t some point [Lawson] decided she's not a good teacher. So there is literally nothing that that woman can do, right. There is no way for her to improve. So that's when [she's] going to seek out and look for bad things."

Former KSES Assistant Principal Leslie Moore confirmed that Lawson would utilize negative evaluations to remove teachers she didn't like.

If I was working for Julie Lawson and I got a negative evaluation, I would be thinking about her trying to get rid of me, because I've watched her do it before, and everybody at that school has watched her do it before...She's talking to the team about it. She's talking to other teachers about it. It's not going to be something quiet.

Using the negative evaluation, Lawson then moved to nonrenew Sanders' employment:

From: jenny.ford@leonschools.net
To: julie.lawson@leonschools.net
Subject: Camera Tunel
Date: Wednesday, April 15, 2026 8:14:44 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Hi Julie,

Is she being non-reappointed or is she resigning? The PAR has Other Termination, but there's no resignation letter attached. Thank you.

Jenny Ford
Leon County Schools
Staffing Services
(850) 487-7181

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From: julie-lawson@leonschools.net
To: jerry.lawson@leonschools.net
Subject: Re: Camera Tunstall
Date: Wednesday, April 15, 2026 8:56:58 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Sorry, she's being non-reappointed. Julie

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

In her interview, Lawson claimed Sanders had been "a fantastic ESE teacher," but said she struggled with fourth grade. While this could possibly explain some issues with the drop off in the evaluation, it does not reasonably explain Lawson's nonrenewal decision for a teacher she had previously so highly praised and evaluated.

As this investigation became active in April 2026, Sanders was formally removed from Lawson's chain of command:

Due to allegations of retaliatory conduct, Ms. Sanders is removed from your direct supervision and will report solely to Amy Bramblett. It is recommended you refrain from any conduct or communication which may be perceived as retaliatory against any of the complainants or any person interviewed or who may be interviewed by the independent investigator.

Lawson, nonetheless, continued efforts to nonrenew Sanders:

Sent: Tuesday, May 5, 2026 7:06 AM
To: McAllister, Deana <deana.mcallister@leonschools.net>
Subject: NON-REAPPOINTMENT

Good morning,

I have a non-reappointment letter for Mrs. Camera Tunstall (Sanders). This was on my non-reappointment list when submitted to the district prior to the deadline of 04/17. Per her contract she is to be notified prior to 05/14. Who would you like to give her the letter. Mr. Shively was aware of the non-reappointment.

Thank you,

Julie Lawson
Principal
Kate Sullivan Elementary School

Only after another teacher resigned did Lawson retract the nonrenewal and appoint Sanders to a position as an EBD ("Emotional/Behavioral Disability") teacher. Sanders claims this was also retaliation, and pointed out that her scores as a fourth-grade teacher were more than adequate:

Because Lawson intended to not reappoint me and was then forced to, she decided to reappoint me in a position she knows I would never return to in order to push me out anyway. Standardized testing scores came out right before reappointment and my scores were just as good as the team leader's

(57% proficient) and just a few points away from the other reading teacher (63%). The reading coach said my scores were good...yet, despite this, Mrs. Lawson is still determined to punish me.

Sanders appointment to a less desirable position was a tactic discussed by several employees. For example, Cooper confirmed that rather than confront someone directly, Lawson was known to change conditions or make circumstances undesirable to encourage a person to leave or quit. Former KSES Assistant Principal Leslie Moore also confirmed that Lawson would try to "make them feel bad [so] so they go away."

In light of her fear that Lawson's evaluation was retaliatory, and during the course of the investigation, Sanders requested and obtained a second Formal Observation. The observation was conducted by Lewis Blessing, Director of Professional Learning & Curriculum Services for Leon County Schools. Mr. Blessing completed a LEADS evaluation, which resulted in a Formal Observation report. The evaluation addressed six instructional areas. Sanders received two "Effective" ratings and four "Highly Effective" ratings—substantially more favorable than the rating by Lawson. The second Formal Observation report is consistent with the peer observations of Wetherington, Lawson's own prior reports, the prior reports of other administrators, and is in stark contrast to the negative report authored by Lawson.

This investigation finds that the allegations of retaliation against Sanders by Lawson are supported by the evidence. It finds that Lawson's evaluation of Sanders was unfairly negative, false, and retaliatory. It further finds that Lawson's non-reappointment of Sanders and the later reappointment of Sanders to a less desirable position were also retaliatory. The complaint of retaliation is, therefore, **SUBSTANTIATED**.

iii. Kristen (Hunter) Stephens

Ms. Kristen Stephens complains of retaliation by Lawson as follows:

When I applied for a position with the Florida Department of Education, Lawson provided a negative reference including the remark, 'When things get hard, she will leave just like she did her marriage.'

We attempted to interview those purportedly directly involved in these telephone conversations, Cari Cable-Miller, Chancellor of the Division of Early Learning, and Lylith Carroway. However, counsel for DOE prevented us from doing so.

Stephens' allegations that Lawson contacted DOE to make retaliatory statements, however, is confirmed by Troy Yeomans. Yeomans stated he was in Lawson's office when she called DOE and "bashed" Stephens after they requested a job reference. Lawson stated that when things get tough, she'll leave, just as she's leaving this job and her marriage. Then she said what a slut she was for being with a paraprofessional.

Tara Williams similarly confirmed that Lawson told her she had made phone calls to Stephens' employer (DOE) and told them not to hire Stephens.

Multiple witnesses also confirmed hearing Lawson make similar derogatory comments about Stephens. KSES Assistant Principal Leslie Moore, for example, heard Lawson talk about Stephens, saying Stephens was dumb for ruining her family. Lawson criticized her for going after a guy who, she said, had no real job because he was just a paraprofessional. Lawson talked more about who Stephens was as a person than about her professional work.

Tara Williams stated that Lawson made comments about Stephens cheating on her husband. Williams also confirmed that Lawson made comments about the person Stephens was dating, Dylan Hutto at KSES, and comments critiquing Stephens' teaching performance.

Dylan Hutto stated that Lawson came to talk with him about Stephens, saying he could "do better" than her and that he deserved better, critiquing Stephens as a person.

Camara Sanders also confirmed that Lawson talked about Stephens not being a good teacher and that Lawson intentionally created an issue between Stephens and another ESE teacher by telling each negative comments she attributed to the other.

Lawson's negative comment to FDOE is thus not only confirmed by multiple witnesses, but is consistent with a pattern of conduct confirmed by others. Thus, there is sufficient evidence to believe that Lawson retaliated against Stephens in an effort to harm her personally and professionally, and the complaint of retaliation is, therefore, **SUBSTANTIATED**.³

i. Jillian Cooper:

Jillian Cooper alleged that after she filed a report stating that Paraprofessional Sam Hembree had made forcible contact with the head of student E.B., Lawson retaliated against her by making comments suggesting that Cooper's report created "staffing difficulties" and the need to hire another paraprofessional, which Cooper alleged created a hostile and intimidating work environment in retaliation for the report. During her investigative interview, Cooper further alleges Lawson accused her of filing a "false report" about Sam Hembree in Hembree's presence and in the presence of others, including law enforcement who were investigating the event.

³ Lawson's commentary about Stephens' personal and professional life to others violates Section 7.16 of the Collective Bargaining Contract between the Leon County School Board and the Leon Classroom Teachers Association, which entitles teachers to work in "an atmosphere characterized by 'professional courtesy,'" and to be treated with "dignity and respect," and provides that: "No derogatory communications...shall be made by any employee to any employee." The Section further provides that: "No employee shall receive adverse comments from the site administrator, especially in the presence of students or faculty members, regarding performance evaluation. All comments regarding an employee's professional performance shall be communicated directly to the employee."

The allegation that Lawons retaliated against Cooper by suggesting that the investigation into Hembre created staffing difficulties is **UNSUBSTANTIATED** as an act of retaliation. The statement, if made, may reasonably be viewed as routine and, objectively, would not likely dissuade a reasonable employee from making a report. The allegation that Lawson falsely accused Cooper of filing a "false report" is also **UNSUBSTANTIATED** due to a lack of supporting evidence. Hembree and Lawson each deny the allegation, and attempts to contact law enforcement and the other allegedly involved witnesses were unsuccessful or prohibited by the scope of this investigation.

II. April Wetherington

Ms. Wetherington is not a complainant but participated in an investigative interview. On June 9, 2026, the undersigned investigator received correspondence indicating that Ms. Wetherington was being targeted by Lawson and, as a result, is contemplating resigning after 20 years in the District.

From: Wetherington, Meaghan <meaghan.wetherington@leonschools.net>
Sent: Tuesday, June 9, 2026 3:27 PM
To: Halpin, Allison <allison.halpin@leonschools.net>
Subject: Question

Good Afternoon,

We spoke on the phone regarding an investigation into J. Lawson at Kate Sullivan Elementary. Are you able to tell me if that is still an active investigation? The school year has now ended and I need to decide what my next step is. She continues to spread lies and create a hostile work environment. I will either take a leave of absence to seek out different jobs or just resign. After 20 years in this district, I am disgusted that this can continue. I have now moved from a witness to her behavior to a target of it. If the investigation has been closed then please let me know. If not I would like to update the information I provided.

Although this investigation makes no specific findings regarding Wetherington's allegations, the undersigned finds her allegations and expressed frustration and fear of Lawson to be highly concerning and consistent with the experiences of other employees serving under Lawson.

B. Disclosure of Private/Personal Information.

School Board Policy 1210.01 ("Code of Ethics") provides that all District administrators shall "value[] the worth and dignity of every person," "not play[] favorites," and "treat all persons with respect and to strive to be fair in all matters." The Policy specifically provides for "confidentiality" and states that: "Unethical conduct includes, but is not limited to, sharing of...personal confidences, health or medical information, family status and/or income[.]

Rule 6A-10.081(1)(a), F.A.C. provides that educators shall "value[] the worth and dignity of every person, the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence...[and] the freedom to learn and to teach and the guarantee of equal opportunity for all."

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(4), F.A.C. requires the educator shall not engage in harassment or discriminatory conduct which unreasonably interferes with an individual's performance of professional or work responsibilities or with the orderly processes of education or which creates a hostile, intimidating, abusive, offensive, or oppressive environment; and further shall make reasonable effort to assure that each individual is protected from such harassment or discrimination.

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(5), F.A.C. requires the educator shall not make malicious or intentionally false statements about a colleague.

Section 7.16 of the Collective Bargaining Contract between the Leon County School Board and the Leon Classroom Teachers Association entitles teachers to work in "an atmosphere characterized by 'professional courtesy'" and to be treated with "dignity and respect." It provides that: "No derogatory communications...shall be made by any employee to any employee."

Troy Yeomans described a pattern of Lawson discussing and disclosing the personal and private information of others in the performance of her duties:

I quickly learned Lawson's way of work was different from most principals and she had a disregard for keeping information private. However, until now this has never affected me personally.

[D]uring a training with a district staff member Lawson 04/15/2026 unlocked my door, barged in and decided to inform us that Cathy Shields with the ESE Dept had been having an affair.

[E]ven if my door was closed, [Lawson] would unlock it and enter to randomly discuss topics like our assistant principal's marriage, accuse my assistant principal of having an affair, or to start accusations of relationships between staff members- all while I would be at my desk attempting to focus on my work.

[T]his past Friday [4/10/2026], [Lawson] held a meeting with a staff member in my office where she informed him that he needed to find a new girlfriend and should get on dating apps because his current girlfriend only wants him when she's lonely.

[Lawson] then went on to ask what my boyfriend's current salary was and told me that I could just live off of him and my salary with LCS will support me just fine, because that is 'what she does.'

This past Friday [4/10/2026]...Lawson made a point to go into detail about her and the current superintendent's relationship and how they dated for two separate periods of time. She even went into detail about when she won coach of the year and how just the two of them went out for drinks and dinner

and one thing led to another. The timing of this conversation, just after completing a reference for me, did not sit well with me.

Additionally, several faculty members have informed me that they were told I am unable to perform my job duties and that, as a result, Lawson arranged for someone to sit with me. This has been both distressing and damaging to my professional reputation.

4-16-2026

"I have been informed by a district ESE personnel who was informed by two ESE personnel assigned to Sullivan that Lawson spent a lengthy amount of time during MTSS today discussing the conflict that she and I are currently having. This person[] said that Lawson did not hesitate to commit more defamation of character against me and my work."

Two witnesses confirmed Yeomans' claim. Dylan Hutto, a KSES behavior specialist, confirmed that Lawson "likes the drama" and "like[s] to stir the pot." "She does like that gossip," and "even if she's not middle, she'll find a way to the gossip." "She'll know somebody...has something in their life going on [and] she'll talk about it....Say a teacher has to, like, go on leave, or something. Don't tell Lawson about it. She'll tell people about it while they're on leave...[E]ven if it's something...somebody doesn't want going around, she'll go talk about it."

Hutto explained how he had been personally affected by this behavior when Lawson discussed his relationship with complainant Kristen (Hunter) Stephens in front of Yeomans:

[Lawson] tried to talk about her to my face, and I'm just like, why are you? This isn't your business. This has nothing to do with you. No correlation to you. Why are you?...I was filling out a time correction sheet, and she just randomly came in and was like, brought her up...and she said the words of, like: 'Don't think you... You deserve better?' 'You should do better than her,' and stuff like that. [I] was like, what? Why is this? [It] had nothing to do with her. And quite frankly, I don't enjoy talking to anybody at work about my personal life...It made me uncomfortable, because I did not, I don't care to hear anybody talk about her like that, so it was just very much like why are you? What is this? What are you saying this for? This is none of your business.

Hutto further explained how Lawson had discussed a pregnant teacher behind her back:

She likes to get her toes and everybody's water....A coworker who got pregnant, and that was the situation. [Lawson] went around just around saying it.

Deana Jackson, who works in the finance department, corroborated the claim that Lawson interrupted Yeomans' training to discuss personal information about another LCS professional and their marriage falling apart or cheating on people.

Indeed, a majority of the witnesses interviewed in this investigation identified Lawson's disclosure of personal information as a constant issue in the workplace. Several referred to Lawson as a "Mean Girl," in reference to the 2004 teen movie about a group of girls who wreak havoc on others.⁴

Ms. Cora Franklin, a retired LCS principal who came out of retirement to work as a secretary at KSES prior to Lawson's arrival, also confirmed this, noting that "whatever they said, [Lawson] repeated it....that's just her personality....[You] don't say anything, because if [Lawson] finds out about she'll tell everybody." Lawson "shares it with whoever's around... It's not normal." Franklin also confirmed that there was a "group of teachers" with whom Lawson met frequently to discuss gossip, which was then spread throughout the school:

[There is one teacher who] comes in, sits down in Ms. Lawson's office. Ms. Lawson does all the gossip for the day. [this teacher then] goes out, spreads it around the school, and then next day it starts over again.

Given her prior position as an administrator, her years of experience, and her time working in the KSES office under two principals, Franklin had unique insight and this investigation finds her to be truthful and highly credible.

The above information is consistent with the allegations of Kristen Stephens, who alleged:

[In the Spring/Summer of 2024], I experienced a serious and highly personal situation. Upon returning to work, I spoke privately with Lawson, requesting confidentiality and explaining the matter only so she would understand if I needed to leave work unexpectedly. I was assured the information would remain private.

Subsequently, a damaging rumor began circulating throughout the school and district. I informed Lawson that the rumor was false, yet it continued to spread, reaching even my family members who also work within the district. My former mother-in-law later informed me that an administrator from Kate Sullivan contacted her regarding this rumor; it is my understanding that this administrator was Lawson.

In summer 2024, I applied for a transfer to Canopy Oaks Elementary under principal Clayton Cloud, seeking a fresh start. When contacted for my release, Lawson reportedly stated to Mr. Cloud, "You can have her. She will sleep with all of your paraprofessionals." At the same time, she presented me with verbal assurances of leadership opportunities to encourage me to remain at Kate Sullivan. Based on these promises, and unaware of her comments at the time, I chose to stay.

⁴ IMDb Mean Girls plot summary.

After informing Mr. Cloud of my decision, he disclosed Lawson's remarks to me. Mr. Cloud had previously served as both my assistant principal and mentor, and learning of these statements was deeply distressing."

During the same period, Lawson made inappropriate and unprofessional personal comments regarding my private life. On one occasion, she joked about me dating her brother-in-law, starting 'age is just a number,' and commented that he enjoyed hunting and fishing, which she suggested would make us compatible.

Given the ongoing rumors, the highly personal nature of my circumstances at the time, and my repeated requests for professionalism and boundaries, these comments were unwelcome and contributed to further to a hostile and uncomfortable work environment. Such remarks were particularly troubling in light of Lawson's role as my direct supervisor and her prior assurances of confidentiality and support."

Several witnesses confirmed the comments Lawson made regarding Stephens. For example, April Wetherington confirmed:

[Stephens] started a relationship with someone that she worked with. And [Lawson] has shared that with other people. Shared that with staff members. Shared that with people who were looking for references for her. Shared that with Clayton Cloud when Kristen was thinking about going to Oak Ridge one year. I think it was last summer. Might have been the summer before. But sharing comments and saying using those words, I don't want to be in the room when that's necessarily happening, because I feel like I don't know if I can say something, but at the same time, if I don't say something, then now I'm being complicit, because I'm not standing up for somebody. So just avoiding stuff like that. Talking about [another teacher] being gay. I don't know if he's gay. I don't care if he's gay. He can be whatever he needs to be. Just putting that out there where people can hear. Those are the two examples that come on because those are the freshest....

I've been, you know, privy to like, some conversations or the end of a conversation where [Lawson], because [Stephens] is not on her good list, she talks to [Mr. Hutto] about what a bad person [Stephens] is. Has she let you meet her parents? No, that never happened. Has she done this? No, that never happened. She, you know, basically saying you need you could do better. You could do better. She's a bad person. You could do better. So I certainly walked in with tail end of those kinds of conversations.... This could very well be his girlfriend, and you are saying she is a bad person. She cheated on him, she'll cheat on you. She won't let you meet her parents. She says things like that."

Jillian Cooper similarly confirmed:

If you're a favorite [of Lawson], then she, you know, is nice, she's polite, she tries to help you out where she can. And if you are on her bad side, then she will go out of her way to make things hard....She had made rude comments about that ESE teacher [Stephens] in front of me. Saying, Oh, she's white trash. She will, you know, quit her new job, just like she'll quit her marriage, or just like she quit her marriage....When she was in my office, she would talk badly about [Stephens]....I don't remember exactly all the comments that she had made about [Stephens], just that they were all negative. And I remember being confused by them because I work with [Stephens], or worked with [her], and had never seen any issues with her.

Dylan Hutto similarly confirmed:

Lawson has mistreated Ms. Hunter. She has... it's just the gossip. That's the big thing. Is the gossip. The gossip is the bad part about that school. Like they just run their mouth and talk and talk and talk and talk, even if you don't want them to talk about it, to you, they'll talk....I mean, it's, it's like I said, it's not a bad school. I don't hate school at all. I don't hate I don't dislike anybody out there. It's just, I dislike the drama. The drama is ridiculous....You have to not only worry about your job, but then worry about staying under the radar...It's that drama. It's that drama....I don't think Lawson realizes people get negative because of her....I don't dislike Lawson. She's good [as a] principal. It's just the drama, like, it's not very professional at all.

Canopy Oaks Elementary School Principal Clayton Cloud confirmed that he had allocated a position at his school for Stephens and soon after received a call from Lawson. Although Cloud did not corroborate the exact statements other witnesses attributed to Lawson, he confirmed that Lawson "alluded to" similar statements, including that Stephens was "acting like she wasn't married anymore."

Lawson's commentary about others is not limited to the Complainants, as April Wetherington recalled that Lawson held inappropriate discussions about an allegedly gay employee.

Information was provided that at least two Complainants sought and received mental health counseling as a result of the actions alleged herein.⁵

Ample evidence thus confirms that Lawson violated the above Rules and Policies, and the allegations of misconduct are thus **SUBSTANTIATED**.

⁵ To preserve the confidentiality of the mental health information provided during the investigation, the Complainants are not being specifically identified.

C. Political Profiling.

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(3), F.A.C. requires that the educator "[s]hall not interfere with a colleague's exercise of political or civil rights and responsibilities."

Troy Yeomans raised the following allegations of political profiling:

I had never shared many personal details about my life with Lawson therefore I was very taken by surprise when last school year she sat me down in her office and told me she had a "very important question". This obviously worried me until Lawson blurted out "are you a republican or democrat? Because I like to know who I can align myself with around here." This caught me VERY off guard, and I did provide my party affiliation to her. After this interaction I confided in another front office staff member who then informed me that Lawson had been overwhelmed with concern as to what my party affiliation was, and had asked many individuals if they knew the answer.

It was then in the fall of this school year at a Skate World share night where Lawson stood with me and started listing the employees that she thought were either a Democrat or Republican, because according to her, it was important information for her to know."

She went on to task me with looking up the voter registration of various employees, specifically our reading coach, because "she wears rainbow glasses, I am sure she is a liberal.

Yeomans' allegations were corroborated by April Wetherington, who confirmed that politics played a role in interactions with Lawson and Yeomans' contemporaneous reporting of being tasked with politically profiling employees:

April Wetherington at 49:19: I think everybody knows she is very Republican. And she's, she makes comments, you know, political comments, which is not, you know, especially right now during this time, it's not appropriate...

Wetherington at 51:13: I think she's made comments about my rainbow, rainbow glasses. She wasn't sure where I fell politically because I wore rainbow glasses, so because I don't discuss politics, she was worried I might be a Democrat. She didn't say this to me. She said this to someone else who repeated it to me. That's fine. It's the norm for her behavior, and it wasn't I wasn't worried about it. I thought it was a stupid thing to say, but it's fine. I know she, she looks up, it's public record, but she does look up the political affiliations of her employees.

Investigator: How did you find that out?

Wetherington: There was an event, there was a Skate Night,

Investigator: Skate night, the one at Skate World?

Wetherington: Yes. Where she had Troy looking up certain people so that she would know, I mean, and he was texting me at the time he was doing it. Because, although he was participating, he was a little appalled. So he was just letting me know that all of these people were getting looked up, and she had made the comment then about my rainbow glasses. So I don't know if she assumes Troy repeats stories to me or not, but since then, there have been references to my rainbow glasses. It's not something that I was incredibly insulted about. It was just one more Julie story that I thought was inappropriate. Just one more. Just add it to the top, and there's, there's a bunch of them.

Stephens also confirmed the event, as was present at Skate World when Lawson began her political inquiry but became uncomfortable with the conversation and walked away.

Wetherington provided copies of the contemporaneous text messages sent by Yeomans from the skate night event:



This investigation finds sufficient evidence to believe that Lawson engaged in political profiling of her employees in a manner that could cause a reasonable person to fear differential treatment or retaliation (or to expect preferential treatment) due to their political beliefs in violation of Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(3), F.A.C. The allegation is accordingly **SUBSTANTIATED**.

D. Interference with an Investigation

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(1) and School Board Policy 1210.01 require that educators hall maintain honesty and integrity in all professional dealings.

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(b)(2), F.A.C., requires that an educator "[s]hall not intentionally distort or misrepresent facts concerning an educational matter in direct or indirect public expression."

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(8), F.A.C. requires that the educator "Shall not submit fraudulent information on any document in connection with professional services."

School Board Policy 8700 ("Anti-Fraud") defines "fraud" as an "intentional, false representation or concealment of a material fact in order to personally benefit or induce another to act to his/her detriment," and Administrative Procedure 8700 ("Fraud Investigations") provides that "[d]ue to the seriousness of fraud, the likely consequence is termination."

In addition to the above, when Lawson was interviewed on May 11, 2026, she confirmed her obligation to tell the truth and that any false answers could lead to disciplinary action:

 I understand that I am required to attend this interview and answer questions directly related to my employment with Leon County Schools. I am aware that refusing to answer or providing false answers may lead to disciplinary action.

I. Lawson mischaracterized reports of suspected physical abuse of a student to downplay the report's significance.

On January 30, 2026, KSES Behavior Specialist Elana Tober provided written notice that she witnessed Paraprofessional Sam Hembree⁶ "hit" ESE student, [REDACTED] on the arm with an open hand:

⁶ Ms. Sam Hembree is the daughter of Sarah Hembree, a former LCSB District employee and current LCS principal, whom Ms. Lawson described as someone she looks up to within the District. Ms. Sam Hembree is also the same paraprofessional who was twice credibly accused of making forcible physical contact with a student, and for which the undersigned's final report will conclude that Ms. Lawson acted to downplay and coverup.

On January 30, 2026 I was at special area with MS. Hunter's class, as normal. The special area for this day was Art. At the end of the period, at approximately 4:5, the class was cleaning up and putting away materials. The student, [REDACTED] attempted to put her drawing on the drying rack. MS. Hembree told [REDACTED] no, because she did not use paint. [REDACTED] attempted to hit MS. Hembree, however MS. Hembree grabbed her wrist and said "do you really want to go right now?" [REDACTED] then hit MS. Hembree successfully. MS. Hembree then hit [REDACTED] on the arm with an open hand and said "there". I redirected [REDACTED] to gathering her other papers and lining up to leave.

Elana Tober 11/30/26
Elana Tober, CBS

During an investigation of this event, Lawson reported to School Board officials that two teachers requested to interview about the matter had not witnessed the event. Lawson did not disclose that the event had been personally witnessed by Elana Tober. The officials report that they were left with the false impression that there were no witnesses to the event, and the matter was closed for lack of evidence. Hembree was permitted to return to work.

Just twelve days later, on February 11, 2026, Speech Therapy Assistant Jillian Cooper reported that she witnessed Hembree "hit" [REDACTED] in the head with her open hand. Cooper met with Lawson, Adeline Campbell, and Elana Tober, and confirmed to Lawson that she observed Hembree "hit" [REDACTED] with her open hand. Cooper apologized to Lawson, stating: "I'm sorry but this is something I have to report." Lawson responded with something similar to "Well not really. Now I'm going to have to find a new para." This conversation and interaction was corroborated by Elana Tober. Cooper followed up with a written report to Lawson, which confirmed that she has seen Hembree "hit" [REDACTED]

From: Cooper, Jillian <jillian.cooper@leonschools.net>
Sent: Wednesday, February 11, 2026 3:40:43 PM
To: Lawson, Julie <julie.lawson@leonschools.net>
Subject: Statement for 2/11/26

Hello Principal Lawson,

Here is my statement following the incident this morning.

On 2/11/26 at around 8:30 in the morning, Miss Sam Hembree used an open palm to hit a student on the head. A student by the name of [REDACTED] was sitting on the floor and moved her open hand which touched Miss Hembree. Miss Hembree then used an open palm to hit [REDACTED] on the head and stated "you dont need to hit me".

Hope this information is helpful,
Best,
Jillian Cooper SLPA

Lawson, however, sought to soften the language and downplay the event as gentle, playful, or insignificant.

Lawson called my office, asking me to come speak with her in her office. When I went down there, she kept talking about how, like if I kiss my hand like this and then touch a student's head. Well, someone could see that as child abuse and report me for doing that, even though I'm just telling them to kiss their brain. And I was very confused by this.

Contrary to Cooper's report that Hembree "hit" [REDACTED] Lawson ultimately reported that Cooper only saw Hembree "bop" [REDACTED] with "a gentle tapping on the head"—a material and significant downgrading of the event. Lawson also sought to cast doubt on Cooper's report, suggesting it was inconsistent with the earlier report of Elana Tober, who did not witness the event, but merely relayed Cooper's story to Lawson before Cooper had an opportunity to do so:

2/11 Tober emailed myself and Jimmy Williams at 3:18pm, stating it was reported to her on 2/10 that Hembree struck the student on the head and it was anonymous. I immediately talked to Tober in person and asked who the anonymous reporter was. Jill Cooper, walked by and said it was her and she would send me an email. Cooper told me what happened and demonstrated what happened, using the word to me "Bop" and showed a gentle tapping of the head. This interaction occurred in the main hallway of the school near the entrance to the media center. Jill Cooper stated she would also send the DCF report. Cooper stated she was from Massachusetts where you cannot even touch a student in a kind way and wanted to just make the report because of what had happened at another school in the district. Cooper and Lawson send in reports. Cooper and Tober's reports did not match, Cooper said it happened on 2/11 and Tober claimed it happened on 3/10. Cooper claimed it happened on 2/10 at 8:30am and reported it in person at 3:30pm and by email at 3:40pm. All of this information was shared with Robinson and McCallister.

During this investigation, Lawson confirmed that she had sought to cast doubt on Cooper's report by questioning its validity due to the alleged irrelevant discrepancy between Tober and Cooper as to when the event occurred:

Lawson: So these two reports do not align, right? One happened on that the 10th, and one happened on the 11th. Two separate reports. Ms. Tober says that this was reported to her, and it happened on the 10th. Ms. Cooper says this happened on the 11th. I provided that information to the district office. I said "Ms. McAllister, they, I'm not really sure they don't really align, because one saying this happened on one day, and one saying this happened on the next day." Coincidentally, Monday was the first day that Ms. Hembree came back. So when I got this information, I immediately called the district office. I said "Deana, I do not know what to do with this. I do not know if this is a valid report."⁷

⁷ When Lawson made the statement, she had already clarified the date of the incident and obtained a specific statement from Cooper in the presence of others.

Lawson further sought to downplay the event by claiming that Cooper doubted her own report, was being “overly cautious,” and described the event as a “boop” or “pat” on the head:⁸

4/21 I met with Day and Campbell the teachers who would have their paras switched. I talked to the paras- Frederick (in person) and Hembree over the phone. The student and her siblings are in attendance today. I called in Jillian Cooper to verify that she did make the DCF report back in February. She stated she did and had the email to prove it. Her response came in from DCF around the same time mine did. She again stated that she was from Massachusetts and was overly cautious and second guessed her reporting, also stating her second school is a school where there has been sustained allegations. She again demonstrated what she saw and used the word “boop” showing a pat on the head. I met with McAllister and reviewed my notes.

Although the School Board investigated this second event, Assistant Superintendent Deana McAllister confirms that no action was taken to discipline Hembree solely due to the information and description of the events *provided by Lawson*.

Cooper, however, expressly denies that she ever used such terms to describe the event and that Lawson was attempting to “change the narrative” and “downplay” the severity of the event:

I didn't see any booping. I saw [Hembree] hit [REDACTED] on the top of the head, but it kind of seemed like, in that conversation that she was trying to downplay the action.

Cooper's account is consistent with her written report and the testimony of Elana Tober, who witnessed Cooper's verbal report to Lawson. Although Lawson maintains that Cooper described the event as “a little bop to the head,” Lawson reports that after doing so she asked Cooper to “please put it in writing and get me a statement.” When Cooper did so, however, her written statement twice used the word “hit” to describe the event. Based on the totality of the evidence, this investigation finds Cooper's account credible and that Lawson's characterizations of the event—which she did not personally witness—are materially contrary to the eye-witness accounts and written reports of others and reflect an effort to downplay the event and protect Hembree, herself, and her school. This investigation thus finds that Lawson intentionally provided false information designed to downplay the serious allegations during both the previous investigations and the current investigation about the underlying events. Violation of the above rules and policies is thus **SUBSTANTIATED**.

⁸ It is reported that Lawson told law enforcement investigators that Cooper was coerced into making a “false report” by Elana Tober; this allegation, however, could not be verified.

- ii. Lawson failed to advise [REDACTED] parents that Hembree hit their child, and misrepresented doing so during the investigation.

Lawson admits that [REDACTED] parents were never notified of Cooper's February 11, 2026, report that Hembree had hit [REDACTED]

Investigator at 2:22:04: Were [the parents] advised of the second allegation?

Lawson: No, they were not advised of the second allegation.

Lawson claimed, however, that she did notify [REDACTED]'s father of the first event in January 2026:

Investigator at 2:19:52: When were the parents notified of these allegations?

Lawson: So, the first allegation, they were notified. I don't have the dates in front of me. I saw, I work the bus, or I call it the bus, but I work parent drop off in the before school, and [the father] walks his kids in every single day. There's three kids. He walks them in every day. I have conversations with him every day. So there was a day that [the father], I want to say it was shortly after January 30th. So I think I was waiting on the report to come back from DCF, and so I told him that there was an incident going on with [REDACTED] and that we were looking into improper behavior from a Para, and that's all I told him.

The parents of [REDACTED] however, expressly deny that they were made aware of this event until much later. The parent's filed a written complaint with the Florida Department of Education, Office of the Inspector General, in which they confirmed they did not learn of allegations until April 20, 2026, and expressed outrage that they had not been timely notified of the events and that Hembree was allowed to remain in the classroom until April 20, 2026:

What Happened?(Complaint Description)

Two incidents allegedly occurred in January 2026, or possibly later, involving a paraprofessional assigned to my autistic, nonverbal daughter. This information is extremely new to my wife and me, as we were not made aware of these incidents until April 20, 2026, during an unexpected visit from an investigator. We were informed that, in one incident, the paraprofessional struck my daughter on the arm due to a misunderstanding during art class. In another incident, my daughter was reportedly popped on the top of the head. We were also made aware of an additional concern that was reported to LCS by a former employee of Kate Sullivan. If the current policy allowed these incidents to occur without immediately notifying us, then that policy needs to be reviewed, reformed, and revised. As parents, we should have been informed immediately, especially given that these were separate incidents involving the same child. We were also told that DCF did not want to become involved with two separate cases involving the same victim, even though the cases were reviewed by two different DCF workers. As a result, the paraprofessional remained in the classroom with our daughter until April 20, 2026, when we requested that they be removed from any interaction with her for the remainder of the school year. Our concern is that we were not notified in a timely manner and that the paraprofessional was allowed to remain around our daughter despite multiple reported incidents. This raises serious concerns regarding communication, reporting procedures, student safety, and the protection of nonverbal students who cannot advocate for themselves. This violates Florida's Statutes 1002.20

The FDOE Office of Inspector General Complaint Form executed by [REDACTED] parents—refuting Lawson's claim that she notified them of the first incident—was affirmed and confirmed to be true and correct by the parents.

Rule 6A-10.081(2)(a)(9), F.A.C., provides that a Florida educator shall not discourage or prohibit parental notification of and involvement in crucial decisions affecting a student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being unless the individual reasonably believes the disclosure would result in abuse, abandonment or neglect as defined in Section 39.01, F.S.

By claiming to School Board officials that she had reported the event to [REDACTED] parents, Lawson interfered with and prohibited proper notification of the parents of important events involving the physical health or well-being of their child. This investigation further concludes that Lawson failed to maintain honesty in the investigation in violation of the above-identified Rules and Policies. The violation of these rules and policies are **SUBSTANTIATED**.

iii. **Lawson provided false information during the investigation by denying knowledge of Paraprofessional Sam Hembree's emotional breakdown and self-harm.**

Separate from Hembree's alleged abuse of [REDACTED] many witnesses described a highly concerning incident involving Hembree that occurred in front of students and staff shortly after she began working at KSES. In her interview, Hembree admitted to the incident and described it in detail. Hembree stated that she was working with students in P.E. when she became overwhelmed and had "a mental breakdown." She began biting herself, as she had during "bad mental breaks," and started crying uncontrollably. She was sitting on the ground in front of students and staff. After a couple of minutes, Hembree was still crying but was assisted to her feet. She was taken to the office, where she cried for approximately an hour. While there, she told Lawson and KSES Teacher Kristen Stephens that she had bitten herself. Regarding the bite marks on her arm, she explained that she had done it to herself so that no one would think one of the students had bitten her. Hembree explained to both Lawson and Ms. Hunter that she used to bite herself. They asked her if she needed a minute and discussed sending her to the classroom, even though she was still crying and shaking. Hembree stayed in the front office for another 30 to 60 minutes, then went home.

According to multiple interviewees, this was a very public and significant emotional incident involving self-harm in front of students, and the incident, including the self-harm, was specifically brought to Lawson's direct attention. In fact, Lawson was dealing with the incident that day and at least the following day, when she checked on Hembree. Despite this, Lawson failed to report the concerning incident. And during her interview as part of this investigation, she also denied having any knowledge of it:

Interviewer: So, if I understand correctly, pretty early in the school year, when Ms. Hembree had started as a paraprofessional, she had some sort of emotional issue in front of a class.

Lawson: I don't know about that. It wasn't reported to me.

Investigator: It wasn't reported to you...

Lawson (interrupting): No.

Investigator: ...that she was on the ground...

Lawson (Interrupting): No.

Investigator: ... biting herself and doing this in front of the kids?

Lawson: No.

Investigator: That was never reported to you?

Lawson: That was never reported to me.

Investigator: Okay,

Lawson: Never reported to me.

Investigator: If she was sent home for the day who would be the one to send her home?

Lawson: So, I might send her home, but I never knew that Ms. Hembree was on the ground and having a mental breakdown. If I sent someone home, or they left on their own for the day, which is very common, "I'm sick," and I go home for the day, and that happens all the time. But ... um...if someone's having, you know, like an emotional, they might just be like, I'm overwhelmed today. I never knew Ms. Hembree was biting herself and on the ground.

Investigator: You think if something like that happened...

Lawson (interrupting): I would know about it.

Investigator: ...you would know about it.

Lawson (continuing to talk over investigator) because I would offer EAP.

Investigator: What is EAP?

Lawson: Employee Assistance Program.

Investigator: Okay. Um... So, you were never made aware of that...

Lawson (interrupting): I was never made aware that Ms. Hembree was on the ground, biting herself. That was never told to me.

Investigator: Okay. Um..., but if you had known about that, you would have gotten her some sort of assistance.

Lawson: I would have; I would have gotten her EAP absolutely.

Based on the totality of the evidence, this investigation concludes that Lawson failed to maintain honesty in the investigation in violation of the above-identified Rules and Policies. The false statements are designed to downplay Lawson's knowledge of and responsibility for events affecting student safety, protect Hembree, herself, and her school. The violation is **SUBSTANTIATED**.

iv. Other false statements and obstruction of the investigative process.

While less significant, the undersigned finds that Lawson provided other untrue statements during her interview.

Near the end of her interview, Lawson complained that she was missing her son's senior-year baseball banquet, "because I'm here talking to you." Since it was only a few minutes after 5:00 p.m., the investigator responded, "I hope it hasn't started yet." Lawson responded that it had already started. Although the event had not been disclosed in advance, the interview was promptly concluded at 5:14pm to allow Lawson to attend. Two days later, on May 13, 2026, Lawson called Assistant Superintendent Dr. Sunny Chancy under the pretext of an issue concerning KSES. Ms. Chancy reported that shortly after the conversation began, Lawson abandoned discussion of the issue and instead criticized her interview and the interviewer. She then repeated her complaint that the interview took so long that she missed her son's baseball banquet. However, it was later confirmed that the banquet did not start until 6:30p.m.—an hour and fifteen minutes after the conclusion of Lawson's interview. It is difficult to understand why Lawson was untruthful about this verifiable event.

Lawson also claimed in her interview that she frequently relied on the input of former principal and KSES secretary, Cora Franklin. Ms. Franklin, however, expressly denies this, saying: "We just didn't talk...[and] when I say she didn't talk to me, she literally didn't talk to me."

Finally, multiple witnesses stated that Lawson frequently boasted of her ability to contact Superintendent Rocky Hanna directly outside the chain of command to get what she wanted, and that she used such statements to threaten and intimidate co-workers. Some witnesses reported observing this behavior or at least conduct that Lawson intended to convey she had made such a call. However, when asked about this behavior, Lawson denied directly contacting Superintendent Hanna before exhausting the chain of command. She stated that, over her five years as a principal, she could count on one hand how many times she contacted the Superintendent, and then only after exhausting the chain of command, calling the allegation "absurd."

While these statements are minor, the undersigned nonetheless finds that they are contrary to the evidence and that Lawson accordingly failed to maintain honesty during her investigative interview, in violation of the law and the investigation's express rules.

E. Discrimination.

During the investigation, there were comments attributed to Lawson related to religion, race, and sexual orientation. However, there were no corroborating statements related to discrimination based on any recognized protected class. Accordingly, such allegations are found to be **UNSUBSTANTIATED**.

F. Required Tasks Outside the Scope of Employment.

Troy Yeomans raised various issues with being tasked with assignments outside of the scope of his duties. LCS employees, however, are authorized to perform many tasks, including child supervision. Except as may be addressed otherwise herein, there are no corroborating statements supporting a finding that Lawson required an employee to perform tasks significantly outside expected job duties. This allegation is **UNFOUNDED**.

G. Improper Training.

Troy Yeomans raised the following allegations of improper training:

"During the transition [to bookkeeper] Lawson was ADAMANT that I not be trained by the outgoing bookkeeper. So much so, that the bookkeeper and I would meet after school hours and stay until 6 pm some afternoons to train as quickly as possible, without Lawson knowing as she did not approve."

"I then started this bookkeeper role rather blindly and mid-year. I attended district training and attempted to learn as much as possible. However, working next door to Lawson made it rather difficult, and affected my bookkeeper roles. Lawson has a habit of interrupting the work day and flow frequently and unfortunately the interruptions were rarely about job related duties."

"During my time as the bookkeeper I would receive emails from finance, and to the best of my ability try and rectify any issues. In addition, Lawson herself would have several conversations with the finance department and every time I asked if there were concerns or feedback, she would tell me no and downplay the conversation. The only time Lawson ever gave me feedback from finance was on March 3rd when she entered my office and claimed that Freida Linder had just called her and stated "tell Troy I am the bitch that he does not want to piss off". I was appalled by this statement and Lawson laughed and exited my office. Looking back at the situation, I believe this was a tactic done by Lawson so that I would be standoffish towards the finance

department and not develop a comfortable relationship with them, and instead only go through Lawson.”

Yeomans’ allegations are contradicted by numerous District representatives who confirm that training, supervision, and assistance were repeatedly offered to Yeomans regarding his bookkeeping duties. These offers and written feedback were provided via electronic mail and delivered to Yeomans, confirming that feedback was provided and assistance was offered. Accordingly, Yeomans’ allegations regarding improper training are **UNFOUNDED**.

Kristen (Hunter) Stephens also raised the following allegations of improper training:

Requested guidance from Lawson for effective supervision of paraprofessionals. This was denied. Lawson later included comments on my formal evaluation criticizing my use of paraprofessionals.

Requested assistance as 2 paraprofessionals would not assist students in bathroom and the majority of 12 students were not potty trained. No support was provided. Later, Lawson raised concerns regarding the amount of time I personally spent addressing student toileting needs.

Those interviewed did not provide corroborative statements. However, with the exception of Moore, the investigator was unable to speak to other APs at KSES. Accordingly, these allegations are **UNSUBSTANTIATED**.

H. Improper statements of having a relationship with Rocky Hanna to obtain personal benefit.

Nearly twenty years ago, during the 2005-2006 school year, Lawson (then Ms. Quinn) and Rocky Hanna were in a 4-month romantic relationship. Both were single and employed at Leon High School. Lawson was a first-year teacher, and Hanna was an administrator. In 2008, a couple of years after the relationship ended, Lawson was reassigned to a different workspace. She told a janitor that when you stop sleeping with your principal, you lose your classroom. Hanna addressed the comment with Lawson, and she claimed retaliation. In March 2008, Lawson entered into an agreement with the school district resolving all issues relating to the event and her employment with the District.

Six years later, in 2014, Lawson submitted an affidavit purporting to document events in her relationship with Hanna, allegedly for her personnel file. This investigation makes no determination regarding the purpose of the affidavit. However, the affidavit details the evening the relationship between Lawson and Mr. Hanna began, stating, in pertinent part: “When I arrived home Mr. Hanna followed me into my home and forcefully advanced himself on me, I believe he was so drunk he was unaware of his actions as the following day when we talked he made no reference to the night, however, we did develop a relationship.” This quote was neither expanded upon nor raised further. The affidavit goes on to detail their consensual relationship.

The 2014 affidavit prompted a district review by Dr. Kathleen Rodgers, the Assistant Superintendent, which concluded that the relationship was consensual, based on the statements of both parties. It also concluded that there was no wrongdoing on the part of Hanna. Apart from the 2014 district review, this investigator was unable to identify any subsequent investigation or other allegations regarding this encounter that were ever raised by Lawson. This includes a lack of any police report complaint filed with any authority.

During the investigative interviews, however, many witnesses discussed how Lawson continually brings up her (now long past) romantic relationship with Hanna. Some witnesses viewed her statements as bragging, interpreting them as an effort by Lawson to make herself seem more important. Most believed the statements were intended to constitute bullying and signal that Lawson was "untouchable" and give the impression of power over the Superintendent and within the District.

By way of example:

Tara Williams: [Lawson] called me to tell me that she had called Rocky. Personally. She calls Rocky for everything. If something doesn't happen and she doesn't like it, she called Rocky, okay, and that she called Rocky, she went over Anisha's head and called Rocky because she was going to fight for Caleb and shit, and he got to stay...I have heard straight from her that "I'll just call Rocky." "Well, I called Rocky." "I went over their head." "Oh, that doesn't work. Oh, I'll just call Rocky." "Rocky will do it for me." ... It was very known that she had a relationship with him....She did say she had dated him because she would say, "Oh, just Google it." And she told me that flat out: "Just Google it."

April Wetherington: She is...um...she's big on sharing who she knows, and, you know, sharing stories. And I think everybody's heard stories from the old days about things that have happened....She shares, you know, a lot of details...[such as] drunken nights and things that may have happened with the current Superintendent.

Troy Yeomans: For her, it's been more of an untouchable thing....And we all know her relationship with Rocky...She can call him and get whatever she wants...She not only says that, she acts upon it. Like if she wants something done, she trumps. She will tell you herself, I try to be good and do the chain of command. She'll give Anisha Robinson, her director, who's over elementary, she'll give her one chance to answer the phone. Then she goes to Rocky, Yeah.... She'll get anything she wants. We joke and say it's the power of the "P" because what she did 21 years ago....She will just randomly bring up conversations where she's talking about her and Rocky's previous relationship in the most random times. But you also leave there knowing why the hell would she just bring that up?

Leslie Moore: She's clear about [it]; 'I have the Superintendent's favor.'...If she had an issue with someone she would [say]: 'I'm just gonna go call Rocky.'...[She'll say] 'I just called Rocky this morning on my way to school.'

More concerning, Lawson has stated she was “raped” by Hanna, despite prior attestations over many years that the relationship was consensual and the lack of any police report. The specific incident recounted was an April 3, 2024, conversation between Lawson and Shannon Davis, the current Assistant Principal at KSES, which occurred between 1:00 and 2:30 pm. Lawson was seated with Shannon Davis, awaiting a meeting regarding a disciplinary matter against Lawson. Lawson informed Shannon Davis that Rocky Hanna raped her and, therefore, she was confident she would not be disciplined.

The above statements and behavior violate Rule 6A-10.081(2)(c)(6), F.A.C., and School Board Policy 1210 (“Standards of Ethical Conduct”), which each state that an administrator “shall not use coercive means or promise special treatment to influence professional judgments of colleagues.” The violation is **SUBSTANTIATED**.

I. Safety Issues.

Kristen Stephens complained about safety issues in the school during her pregnancy, including a lack of protection from an aggressive student who attempted to punch her in the stomach. Due to a history of such behavior, the student was suspended by Assistant Principal Brian Dobie for three days. Stephens also complains that a student requiring Emotional/Behavioral Disability (“EBD”) services was placed in her classroom without disclosures of his “criminal or violent tendencies.” The student behaved aggressively towards Stephens and other students, but Stephens was told the student could not be moved due to conflicts in the EBD classroom. The student was later Baker Acted and transferred to another school.

During the investigative process, no other KSES employee corroborated or provided evidence of alleged safety issues similar to those complained of by Stephens. Accordingly, this allegation is **UNSUBSTANTIATED**.⁹

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations.

In addition to the specific issues discussed above, the investigation revealed serious cultural issues at KSES. First, witnesses uniformly described how Lawson created a school divided into two groups. Those in the “in” group received her favor, her defense, and were included in her gossip and friendly discussions. The “out” group felt targeted and attempted to avoid her to protect themselves. Witnesses referred to Lawson and the KSES atmosphere as a “mean girls” situation. This view of the atmosphere at KSES is prolific. As KSES Assistant Principal Leslie Moore summarized: *“Julie has favorites, and she’s going to be on that person’s side, and she’s going to be nasty, ugly if you’re on the other side of that....So Julie plays favorites. She has people that she picks as her ‘These people are great!’ and if*

⁹ Carmen Conner alleged that Lawson would intentionally withholding behavior services to children in an attempt to create incidents allowing the children to be expelled. There is, however, insufficient evidence developed during this investigation to support such a claim.

somebody doesn't fit...what she expects, it's kind of like, let's talk about them to make them feel bad and they'll go away."

Second, witnesses uniformly described Lawson as acting "untouchable." They described her performing improper actions without apparent regard to potential consequences. Although unsubstantiated, it was reported that on the last day of school, Lawson told KSES employees she was only getting a "slap on the wrist" as a result of this investigation. Lawson leveraged her claimed influence over the Superintendent to amplify this effect.

Third, many witnesses interviewed expressed fear of retaliation by Lawson for participating in the investigation. One interviewee, who is no longer employed at the KSES, was on the verge of tears and tried to avoid providing recorded statements for fear of retaliation. The undersigned finds the expressions of fear genuine and credible and concludes that retaliatory threats and tactics were likely commonplace at KSES.

As Lawson has not been reappointed to a position within the District, this Report makes no recommendations for further action, beyond required reporting to FDOE of the violations found herein. It has come to our attention, however, that following the nonrenewal decision, others have come forward and offered to provide additional information supportive of the issues raised in this investigation. Such additional claims should be reviewed and responded to appropriately under the School Board's policies and procedures.

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