

CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Wiscasset School Committee
FROM: Kim Andersson, Superintendent
RE: Recommendation for Dismissal of Principal, Gina Stevens
DATE: November 13, 2023

The purpose of this memorandum is to recommend that the School Committee dismiss Gina Stevens from her employment as the Principal of Wiscasset Middle High School (WMHS) for cause pursuant to 20-A M.R.S. § 13304. The basis for my recommendation is set forth below:

Findings of Fact

1. Ms. Stevens has been employed as the Principal of WMHS since July 1, 2023. Prior to that, she was the interim principal between February 21, 2023, and June 30, 2023.
2. As a new principal, Ms. Stevens met with me and our Administrative Team on a bi-weekly basis once I became the Superintendent in July. She never asked for help or advice about her job during these meetings. She has only asked me for advice about her job on one occasion.
3. The job of a principal requires making decisions that are legally compliant and supportive of all staff and students. A principal must be honest, exercise good judgment, be accountable, and communicate early and often with the superintendent about situations that could give rise to potential legal liability or when the principal is unsure of how to do their job.
4. As described below, Ms. Stevens has been dishonest, shown poor judgment, failed to communicate with me, demonstrated a lack of accountability, and contributed to unnecessary legal risks for the School Department. Moreover, she has not been supportive of all students and staff.
5. Student Removal
 - a. In March 2023, as the interim principal, Ms. Stevens authorized a student to be indefinitely removed from school without following applicable law or process.
 - b. Ms. Stevens should have known that students cannot be removed from school for more than ten days without an expulsion hearing, even if they have an IEP.
 - c. The student's mother, who is a staff member, has since filed a complaint with the Department of Education.

- d. When I asked Ms. Stevens about this situation, she said she was simply following the recommendation of the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) committee, of which she is a member. She did not recognize that it was her responsibility to ensure that all student removals complied with the applicable law and policy.

6. Hidden Camera

- a. On September 29, 2023, Ms. Stevens sent an email stating as follows:
 - i. *The last time we spoke about installing a concealed camera in Room 111 B you mentioned it would not be too difficult. We really need to install one now. I know you plan on coming in tomorrow and I can provide access to the room. Would it be possible to take this time to place one in the ceiling with a focus on the food pantry door? With no one else in the building it would be an opportune time. Please let me know.*
 - ii. The email's subject line was "hidden camera."
- b. The next day, Ms. Stevens confirmed that she had received visual confirmation of the camera's hidden location and how to access its recordings.
- c. Ms. Stevens did not notify the staff who worked in Room 111 (a teacher and an ed tech) about the installation of the hidden camera. Neither of these staff members requested the installation of a camera.
- d. There was no plan to install hidden cameras in WMHS and there was no plan to install a camera in Room 111. My predecessor, Bob England, did not authorize the installation of any cameras in any classroom or closet in WMHS (or anywhere else).
- e. Ms. Stevens never spoke to me about installing a hidden camera in Room 111 (or anywhere else).
- f. On October 3, 2023, Ms. Stevens first mentioned the hidden camera to me when she called to report that students had changed their clothes in a closet where a hidden camera had been installed. Ms. Stevens did not tell me that she had sent the "hidden camera" email or had authorized the installation of that camera.
- g. Instead, Ms. Stevens suggested that the classroom teacher and/or ed tech were somehow responsible for it, including the possibility that students had been

recorded changing their clothes. Her primary concern was that these staff members had defied her orders in an email that Ms. Stevens sent to all staff saying that students were prohibited from changing their clothes anywhere other than a bathroom stall.

- h. In subsequent conversations, Ms. Stevens repeatedly told me that the classroom teacher had requested a hidden camera. She also told this to an investigator whom I had engaged to determine how the hidden camera came about. I did not learn about the “hidden camera” email until it was provided by the recipient as part of that investigation.
- i. Even after being presented with her “hidden camera” email and the investigator’s report, Ms. Stevens repeatedly denied that she authorized/requested the installation of the hidden camera. She repeatedly said the teacher was responsible for it and she also said it was a group decision.
- j. Ms. Stevens has never accepted any responsibility for the hidden camera issues.
- k. I am concerned that Ms. Stevens may retaliate against staff and/or students who were witnesses in the investigation because she told me that she questioned one of the witnesses and would love to know who made allegations against her.

7. Mistreating Staff

- a. On October 4, 2023, I emailed the teacher in Room 111 that the hidden camera would be removed, but when that had not happened by the middle of the day, the teacher did it themselves. Consequently, it was not there when the person who installed it went to retrieve it.
- b. Ms. Stevens learned of this and called the teacher to a meeting and accused them of lying when they mentioned my email about the camera’s removal. Ms. Stevens became agitated when the teacher said they had removed the camera.
- c. Ms. Stevens then stood and yelled at the teacher while pointing her finger at the teacher in front of another staff member.
- d. The teacher began crying but Ms. Stevens continued speaking in a loud tone and repeating the same questions in an accusatory tone.

- e. The teacher eventually left the room because they felt intimidated and uncomfortable. They told me they were thinking about leaving their job to avoid future interactions with Ms. Stevens.
- f. When I asked Ms. Stevens about this incident, she did not recognize that her conduct caused distress for the teacher -- she said they were just upset with themselves for misinterpreting my email.

8. Mistreating Students

- a. On September 29, 2023, a student reported to the WMHS office assistant that something smelled funny in a bathroom. The assistant went to the bathroom to see if any students were vaping (Ms. Stevens was in a meeting). The assistant did not find any evidence of vaping (no odor or paraphernalia). However, after she left the bathroom, two students exited. The assistant thought this was suspicious because she had only seen one stall occupied, so she brought the two students to see Ms. Stevens.
- b. The assistant informed Ms. Stevens of the student's report, and that she did not find any evidence of vaping, but that the two students had been in the same stall.
- c. Ms. Stevens separately accused each student of vaping in the bathroom and questioned them about vaping, even though there was no evidence of this.
- d. Ms. Stevens searched one of the students (pockets and pants) and kept repeating the same questions about vaping, which the student had already denied. The student eventually broke down crying.
- e. Both of the students avoided using the bathroom the next school day, which is why they ended up changing their clothes in the closet of Room 111 on October 2, 2023 (as Ms. Stevens reported to me on October 3, after she had authorized the installation of the hidden camera).
- f. When I asked Ms. Stevens about her questioning of the students about vaping, she told me the students were being "ridiculous" and that she did what any administrator would do.

9. Communication Failures

- a. In addition to her failure to communicate with me about the hidden camera and improper student removal, Ms. Stevens has failed to communicate with me about other important issues.
- b. For example, Ms. Stevens did not tell me about a staffing vacancy when she knew about it. When I asked her about a teacher leaving their position, Ms. Stevens denied having any knowledge about this, even though she had written their recommendation for another job two weeks earlier.
- c. This was a special education teacher and a position that needs to be filled as soon as possible.

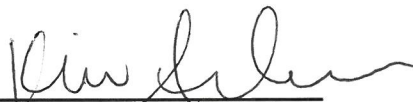
16. Ms. Stevens has refused to take any responsibility for her behavior as described above.

17. Ms. Stevens's above behavior toward staff and students was in contravention of her responsibilities and obligations as the Principal of WMHS and demonstrates her repeated dishonesty, poor judgment, lack of responsibility, and communication failures. As a result, she can no longer be trusted to do her job in a professional manner or to support all students and staff. The continuation of Ms. Stevens's pattern of misbehavior is highly likely given that she still refuses to admit any wrongdoing or take responsibility for her behavior, which presents an unacceptable risk of liability for the School Department and potential harm to its students and staff if she continues to be the principal.

Conclusion

Based on the above facts and reasons, I charge that it is not in the interest of all staff and students for Ms. Stevens to continue as the Principal of WMHS, that her conduct negatively affects her ability and fitness to perform the necessary duties as the Principal, and that cause exists to terminate her employment immediately pursuant to 20-A M.R.S. § 13304.

Date: _____



Kim Andersson
Superintendent