

# CHICKASHA INVESTIGATION

Findings summary

Recommendations

9/11/2017

Recommendation Follow Up

12/19/2017

## SUMMARY:

On 8/14/2017, RAO Ryan Pieper and Mat Luse visited Chickasha to assist with “missing grades” from a teacher. When they arrived, they spoke with Dave Cash and Michelle Pontikos along with several other teachers that expressed a displeasure of the Self Paced Learning Center (SPLC) at Chickasha High School. The RAO’s returned with a number of documents as well as a complaint from Pam Huggins and Yohance Brown. Our team at the agency reviewed the documents and compiled some questions to be sent to Mr. Cash and Michelle Pontikos. Those questions were asked in a second RAO visit on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August. Following a conversation with Todd Loftin (ED of SPED) and Matt Holder (DS) it was determined a visit was appropriate to communicate SDE concerns. Todd Loftin (ED SPED), Jason Pittenger (ED Accred), Mark Everhart (SPED) and Kurt Johnson (SPED) visited Chickasha on 8/30/2017 from approximately 1:00 to 2:30 pm. An additional investigative visit with the principal and assistant principal occurred on Tuesday, September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Special education files were viewed along with additional documents tied to attendance.

## FINDINGS SUMMARY:

### **Allegation#1**

“Pettijohn left the district due to the fact that Michelle Pontikos, HS Principal, changed her curriculum by removing lessons, quizzes and tests.

**Findings:** Evidence suggests that curriculum was modified. The method of modification would possibly include the removal of tests, quizzes, and lessons. There are inconsistencies in the numbers of units for different students in the same class with grades assigned to each student. If the curriculum was modified due to an IEP, no evidence was found that IEP’s were accessed and discussed with anyone in Special Education, nor was an IEP meeting held to inform the parents of the modification. It appears that the SPLC teacher was given extreme latitude in IEP’s to modify any and all curriculum, even to extreme circumstances where 95% of the curriculum could be “modified” by removal. This is completely in the purview of the SPLC teacher without required notification of anyone else when modified. There was no evidence of an “access to records” page tied to the actual IEP files, which is customary best practice, allowing transparency in who views files for modifying curriculum.

### **Recommendations:**

- Curriculum content, expectations for completion, grading rules, and processes for curriculum modification should be documented and communicated prior to classes beginning. These processes should be consistent with Core Traditional HS expectations and outlined in the syllabus for each course.
- The process to modify curriculum should be clear, concise and involve the classroom teacher, special education teacher and administration. This process should be documented and communicated prior to the beginning of classes. Access to records pages should be added to the IEP files to aid in transparency of the IEP *team* concept.
- Any modifications should be aligned with IEP goals and specific to the student’s disability.
- Single individuals should not have free reign to modify curriculum any time for any reason. This should be an IEP team decision. Discretion given to any teacher should be limited to parameters specific to the child’s disability. “Modifying units” should be more specific for example: “limiting test distractors” for a child with Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Modifications should be communicated to the IEP team when made.

## **Allegation#2**

Students not attending classes, students getting credit at different rates for different amounts of work and students cheating”.

**Findings:** Attendance data was not included in the documents shared with SDE. In conversations with Mr. Cash about attendance and SPLC, he stated that support personnel log the time each student arrives and works in the SPLC. Mrs. Pontikos stated there has been a “timeclock” type of app that has been used to clock kids in and out of SPLC. It was shared that 9 teachers and 2 support personnel monitor the SPLC and ensure the attendance is given to the attendance secretaries. Each student has a “mentor” teacher that is paired by the administration. There is a “course completion pacing guide” that mentors encourage SPLC students to keep pace with.

### **Recommendations:**

- Attendance must be kept by a certified teacher of record. It must be recorded accurately and timely.
- Reasonable efforts must be made to ensure adequate supervision of students and accurate record keeping of attendance.
- Weekly monitoring of SPLC attendance requires administrative oversight to ensure the teachers are taking accurate and timely attendance.
- Accurate, certified teachers of record for SPLC must be documented in the accreditation application, just like other core curriculum areas. If teachers are adjuncted for SPLC, the school district must inform SDE-Accreditation prior to coursework being assigned to students.
- Reasonable efforts must be made to ensure teachers of record are accurately reflected anywhere documentation is kept.

## **Allegation#3**

“Transcripts were changed and credits were added to many, but not all of the students”.

**Findings:** Evidence suggests that credits were added to several transcripts from June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017 to June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017. This could have resulted from students finishing coursework following the end of the regular semester. There are inconsistencies between the Odysseyware grade books and transcripts for classes. It was shared that when SPLC teachers submit grades, they typically send an email with those grades to the counselor and copy the administration. Anyone with administrative rights including counselors have access to make changes in the SIS. There is no evidence to ensure processes are in place to provide transparency in transcribing grades.

### **Recommendations:**

- The process for transcribing grades must be documented, transparent and involve the teacher of record, student information personnel and administration. Local policies should be investigated and developed to provide for clear processes to transcript grades that involve more than a single individual.
- Current inconsistencies must be addressed and corrected. The teacher of record maintains the official grade book and performance indicators for the course. The transcript must reflect the grade book from the teacher of record listed in the accreditation application.
- Course rounding rules for grade calculations must be documented, consistent from course to course and followed.
- The responsibility for consistency between grade books and transcripts ultimately belongs to the site principal.

- The superintendent should request the ability to create reports with their SIS to allow for monitoring of changed grades, transcripts and attendance. If this feature currently exists, it should be monitored at the end of each semester.

#### **Allegation#4**

████████████████████ attendance had been changed so that she did not have to take a final in her Ag class”.

**Findings:** Evidence of attendance was limited in the documents shared with SDE. During the visit with Mr. Cash on 8/30, a letter was shared with SDE from the Ag teacher indicating that the student earned an “A” in the course and was not altered to his knowledge. It did not reference the completion of a final. Following a phone call from SDE to Mr. Tillinghast, he conferred that ██████████████████ took her final in Ag. No evidence was present to the actual final, her score, or answer sheet.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Attendance record keeping procedures should be in policy and consistent between traditional courses and SPLC courses. Policies outlining the reasons for changing attendance should also be present and fall within the attendance policy. Multiple individuals should be aware of these changes to provide for transparency in recordkeeping.
- Teachers, parents, and students should all be familiar with these processes as outlined in board policy.
- Changing attendance and grades in the student information system should be monitored by central office administration to ensure transparency and adherence to the process outlined in policy.
- Consider filing the semester exams and answer sheets of students in the high school for a year.
- Develop a grade appeal process to be submitted to the local school board for approval.

#### **Allegation#5**

“SPLC students are not participating in 6.5 hours daily”.

**Findings:** Following the visitation to the high school by RAO’s seeing the SPLC, there was no clear evidence that students were engaged in off task behavior. With 2 support personnel and 9 teachers monitoring the learning environment, it should reflect one of rigor. There appeared to be no evidence of a process to inform school administration of concerns in the classroom.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Clear processes should be developed and communicated to all stakeholders about the appropriate avenues to share concerns about teaching and learning within the sites at Chickasha public schools.
- Walk through and evaluations with all SPLC teachers should be consistent with the other teachers and programs within the High School.

#### **Allegation#6**

SPLC students are not being required to complete the same amount of curriculum as students on the traditional side and not even the same amount as others within the SPLC.

**Findings:** There was little evidence to suggest that curriculum was modified in accordance with specific learner disabilities. Blanket modifications and accommodations were more the norm than individualized plans for learning. IEP teams should be making decisions regarding goals, modified curriculum, and assessment. Each and every member of the IEP team should be attending meetings and signing the IEP.

Evidence suggested inconsistencies in administrative attendance to IEP meetings. If curriculum is modified, it should be communicated to the IEP team the amount of work (unit exams, quizzes and other grading categories) necessary to complete the course and be eligible for a grade indicator, reflective of the mastery of work completed.

**Recommendations:**

- All IEP team members, including an administrator, and regular education teacher must be present at all IEP meetings.
- IEP teams must be making decisions regarding goals, modified curriculum, and assessment.
- If curriculum is modified for a student, evidence of that modification should be communicated to the team and documented in the student's IEP file.
- Parents should be made aware of curriculum modifications.
- The course units necessary for completion should be clear to all IEP team members for IEP students and non IEP students.

**Allegation#7**

Some students are being given unearned credits

**Findings:** Inconsistencies in units required for a grade were clearly evident. Although IEP students were included in this data sample, there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that requirements were specifically tailored for learning disabilities.

**Recommendations:**

- Any modifications should be aligned with IEP goals and specific to the student's disability.

**Allegation#8**

SPLC Students are cheating on assignments

**Findings:** Inconsistencies are apparent from teacher to teacher regarding academic dishonesty.

**Recommendations:**

- Develop a cheating policy to be submitted to the local school board for approval.

**Allegation#9**

SPLC students are taking tests in the evenings

**Findings:** It is apparent that students have access to assessments in oddeseyware at home. Evidence suggests that the content teacher "unlocks" assessments for students to complete while in the online vendor.

**Recommendations:**

- Provide for rules and regulations outlined in the syllabi for each SPLC class that ensures the integrity of all assessments. This should be clearly communicated to parents and students.
- Exams should be proctored during class time and weighted such that students' grades would accurately reflect their performance on proctored assessments.
- Reasonable measures should be taken to ensure integrity in content delivery, completion and assessment.

**CONCLUSION:** The recommendations listed in this document must be evidenced by November 1st. Documentation to demonstrate compliance with these recommendations will be inspected and monitored by the RAO assigned to the school district. In addition, the office of accreditation will be available to answer any questions regarding implementation, monitoring, and analysis of improvement regarding findings in this document. This report relates to the allegations made to the SDE on or near August 14, 2017. Subject to the receipt of additional information, the SDE reserves the right to modify its findings provided herein.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason Pittenger", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOW UP 12/19/2017

### **Allegation#1**

#### **Recommendations:**

- Curriculum content, expectations for completion, grading rules, and processes for curriculum modification should be documented and communicated prior to classes beginning. These processes should be consistent with Core Traditional HS expectations and outlined in the syllabus for each course.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

An individual syllabus for multiple SPLC courses was presented as evidence. In those syllabi, the grade category weights were outlined and OSDE was assured they were relatively consistent with other regular courses of the same content in the high school. It was explained that meetings occur between the teachers in the SPLC program and the students where curriculum requirements are discussed, potential for modification base on IEP's as well as other expectations including attendance. These processes now appear to be consistent with Core Traditional high school expectations. There also appears to be consistency between SPLC and traditional course syllabus structure.

- The process to modify curriculum should be clear, concise and involve the classroom teacher, special education teacher and administration. This process should be documented and communicated prior to the beginning of classes. Access to records pages should be added to the IEP files to aid in transparency of the IEP *team* concept.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

The district Special Education director Pam Huggins has conducted professional development to address needs tied to improvements with IEP implementation. The principal documented communication to her staff regarding the access to records for IEP students. Moving forward, evidence should exist of team meetings and team decisions according to IDEA law that documents curriculum modification.

- Any modifications should be aligned with IEP goals and be specific to the student's disability.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

Moving forward, evidence should exist of team meetings and team decisions according to IDEA law that documents curriculum modification that is tied directly to the student's specific learning disability.

- Single individuals should not have free reign to modify curriculum any time for any reason. This should be an IEP team decision. Discretion given to any teacher should be limited to parameters specific to the child's disability. "Modifying units" should be more specific for example: "limiting test distractors" for a child with Generalized Anxiety Disorder. Modifications should be communicated to the IEP team when made.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

With the addition of the *access to records* page for each IEP, along with the meetings at the beginning of the school year for SPLC students and compliance with IDEA law, the modifications for each student in their specific content area should be easy to identify, along with the members of the team responsible for the decision. Clarity in the IEP outlining existing data to support the modifications to curriculum and the accommodations tied to the specific learning disability was discussed at length. Moving forward, clarity in the verbiage of the IEP should be expected.

## **Allegation#2**

### **Recommendations:**

- Attendance must be kept by a certified teacher of record. It must be recorded accurately and timely.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

Attendance registers for SPLC were presented on the follow up visit. Students clock in and out for their attendance in the SPLC. Teachers monitor the attendance. A support person for the SPLC program transfers that attendance into the student information system (Powerschool) for each student in the SPLC program. Reports are printed for the assistant principal. There is a clear expectation for teachers to record timely and accurate attendance.

- Reasonable efforts must be made to ensure adequate supervision of students and accurate record keeping of attendance.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

Students are monitored by both certified and support personnel in the SPLC program. There is a clear expectation for both certified and support personnel to accurately record attendance and provide supervision.

- Weekly monitoring of SPLC attendance requires administrative oversight to ensure the teachers are taking accurate and timely attendance.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

The monitoring process of certified personnel recording attendance has been assigned to an assistant principal in the high school. The attendance logs are verified with the records entered into Powerschool.

- Accurate, certified teachers of record for SPLC must be documented in the accreditation application, just like other core curriculum areas. If teachers are adjuncted for SPLC, the school district must inform SDE-Accreditation prior to coursework being assigned to students.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

Teachers of record for the SPLC program are listed on the unofficial master schedule for the classes they teach. Those same teachers are listed in the accreditation application with co-teachers as necessary.

- Reasonable efforts must be made to ensure teachers of record are accurately reflected anywhere documentation is kept.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

The principal shared various communications to her staff to ensure documentation was a priority. Ultimately, it will be the principal's responsibility to make sure her employees are documenting student records such as grades and attendance accurately and timely.

## **Allegation#3**

### **Recommendations:**

- The process for transcribing grades must be documented, transparent and involve the teacher of record, student information personnel and administration. Local policies should be investigated and developed to provide for clear processes to transcript grades that involve more than a single individual.

#### FOLLOW UP

The principal shared a document that would serve to provide evidence of grade changes that included signatures for the principal, teacher of record, and counselor to ensure transparency. Although no policy was evident, the process involving the document that was shared addressed this issue.

- Current inconsistencies must be addressed and corrected. The teacher of record maintains the official grade book and performance indicators for the course. The transcript must reflect the grade book from the teacher of record listed in the accreditation application.

#### FOLLOW UP

**Transcripts and grade books will be audited along with the annual statistical report in April / May of 2017.** Inconsistencies, if identified, will result in deficiencies for the high school.

- Course rounding rules for grade calculations must be documented, consistent from course to course and followed.

#### FOLLOW UP

It was shared with OSDE that future meetings between teachers of shared curriculum are scheduled to address consistent grade calculations, rounding rules, as well as grade category weights for identical classes among different teachers. Evidence of previous team meetings were also shared with OSDE.

- The responsibility for consistency between grade books and transcripts ultimately belongs to the Site Principal.

#### FOLLOW UP

Ultimately, it will be the principal's responsibility to make sure employees are documenting student records such as grades and attendance accurately and timely. Audits in the spring will examine teacher grade books and transcripts.

- The superintendent should request the ability to create reports from Powerschool to allow for monitoring of changed grades, transcripts and attendance. If this feature currently exists, it should be monitored at the end of each semester.

#### FOLLOW UP

The interim superintendent shared that she was currently working to establish contact with their vendor to develop and access change reports. Considering the nature of these working relationships, additional time is within reason to develop this reporting feature. **This will also be a part of the spring audit.**

#### **Allegation#4**

##### **Recommendations:**

- Attendance record keeping procedures should be in policy and consistent between traditional courses and SPLC courses. Policies outlining the reasons for changing attendance should also be present and fall within the attendance policy. Multiple individuals should be aware of these changes to provide for transparency in recordkeeping.

#### FOLLOW UP

Changes to the attendance policy were being considered. The principal did share the monitoring process her administration uses to verify SPLC attendance and explained how it is entered into their student management system. Although a process was shared for changing grades that worked to ensure transparency, we did not find a similar system for attendance.

- Teachers, parents, and students should all be familiar with these processes as outlined in board policy.

#### FOLLOW UP

The board policies are currently not online according to the interim superintendent. She stated the district is working to place those policies online for the community to easily access.

- Changing attendance and grades in the student information system should be monitored by Central office administration to ensure transparency and adherence to the process outlined in policy.

FOLLOW UP

Again, changes to the attendance policy were being considered. The principal did share the monitoring process her administration uses to verify SPLC attendance and explained how it is entered into their student management system. Although a process was shared for changing *grades* that worked to ensure transparency, we did not find a similar system for attendance. It is ultimately the responsibility of the site principal to ensure strict adherence to school board policy.

- Consider filing the semester exams and answer sheets of students in the high school for a year.

FOLLOW UP

Maintaining semester exam documents for at least a semester after the exam is good practice. The school already requires teachers to submit semester exam copies with an answer key. They stated moving forward, copies of semester exam answer sheets would be kept for at least a semester to address grade change allegations.

- Develop a grade appeal process to be submitted to the local school board for approval.

FOLLOW UP

The grade change appeal process in policy is being considered according to both the principal and interim superintendent.

**Allegation#5**

**Recommendations:**

- Clear processes should be developed and communicated to all stakeholders about the appropriate avenues to share concerns about teaching and learning within the sites at Chickasha public schools.

FOLLOW UP

It was stated that community meetings were held prior to the implementation of the SPLC program. Concerning the current climate, it was suggested that a formal complaint policy be considered and shared with the community to allow for avenues of communication between the district and the community. This policy development is under consideration but not developed.

- Walk through and evaluations with all SPLC teachers should be consistent with the other teachers and programs within the High School.

FOLLOW UP

Walk through and evaluation documentation was shared with OSDE. It appeared consistent with programs inside and outside of the SPLC.

**Allegation#5**

**Recommendations:**

- All IEP team members, including an administrator, and regular education teacher must be present at all IEP meetings.

FOLLOW UP

Multiple IEP's were checked for compliance. Feedback was given as to the improvements that could be made with language, documentation, and development of the IEP. **Additional spot checks will be part of the spring audit.**

- IEP teams must be making decisions regarding goals, modified curriculum, and assessment.

#### FOLLOW UP

It was assured to OSDE that teams would be signing the access to records pages on the IEP files and collaborating to make decisions in the best interests of the student.

- If curriculum is modified for a student, evidence of that modification should be communicated to the team and documented in the student's IEP file.

#### FOLLOW UP

Although no formal process was shared with OSDE, the special education director has conducted training with special education teachers to review processes and procedures to ensure compliance with IDEA.

- Parents should be made aware of curriculum modifications.

#### FOLLOW UP

Again, although no formal process was shared with OSDE, the special education director has conducted training with special education teachers to review processes and procedures to ensure compliance with IDEA.

- The course units necessary for completion should be clear to all IEP team members for IEP students and non IEP students.

#### FOLLOW UP

It was shared with OSDE that meetings between students, parents and teachers in the SPLC program review content expectations prior to the beginning of the semester. This includes a conversation about the units necessary for completion, modifications and accommodations to the curriculum, attendance expectations and grading procedures. Additional curriculum-wide meetings mentioned earlier should assist in the consistency between SPLC and traditional courses.

### **ALLEGATION #7**

#### **Recommendations:**

- Any modifications should be aligned with IEP goals and specific to the student's disability.

#### FOLLOW UP

Although no formal process was shared with OSDE, the special education director has conducted training with special education teachers to review processes and procedures to ensure compliance with IDEA.

### **ALLEGATION #8**

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop a cheating policy to be submitted to the local school board for approval.

#### FOLLOW UP

Although it has been communicated to staff that cheating is strongly discouraged, no formal policy was available.

### **ALLEGATION #9**

#### **Recommendations:**

- Provide for rules and regulations outlined in the syllabi for each SPLC class that ensures the integrity of all assessments. This should be clearly communicated to parents and students.

#### FOLLOW UP

Syllabi for SPLC courses were documented to include rules for the integrity of assignments.

- Exams should be proctored during class time and weighted such that students' grades would accurately reflect their performance on proctored assessments.

FOLLOW UP

Although it is uncertain that *every* syllabus limited exams to be taken in class while under teacher supervision, there was a clear intent to ensure exams were proctored as stated in the course syllabi that were examined.

- Reasonable measures should be taken to ensure integrity in content delivery, completion and assessment.

FOLLOW UP

Ultimately this is the responsibility of the teacher of record and consequently, the site principal. It is apparent that measures have been taken to ensure the integrity of the content delivery, completion, and assessment.

**In Conclusion,**

It appears evident that Chickasha Public Schools is working to implement / continue execution of recommendations provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. This report relates to the allegations made to the SDE on or near August 14, 2017. Subject to the receipt of additional information, the SDE reserves the right to modify its findings provided herein.

Respectfully,



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