



INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS

Complaint Regarding Dr. Sarah Pritchett

Seattle Public Schools

Trish K. Murphy
Northwest Workplace Law

February 27, 2025

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ethics Office of Seattle Public Schools retained Trish Murphy of Northwest Workplace Law to conduct an independent investigation. It was alleged that Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Dr. Sarah Pritchett violated the District's Ethics Policy.¹ A preponderance of the evidence did not support the allegations.

II. INVESTIGATION SCOPE

The following allegations were investigated:

- Dr. Pritchett invited a number of District employees to her August 2024 wedding and sought gifts of cash through her wedding registry, in potential violation of the "Gifts and Gratuities" and/or "Misuse of Position" provisions of the Ethics Policy.
- Dr. Pritchett's friendship with District employee Anitra Jones created a conflict of interest and Dr. Pritchett failed to properly manage the conflict, in potential violation of the "Conflicts of Interest" provisions of the Ethics Policy. The complainant alleged that Dr. Pritchett proactively worked to protect Ms. Jones from any repercussions that may have resulted from misconduct.
- Dr. Pritchett's friendship with District employee Katrina Hunt created a conflict of interest and Dr. Pritchett failed to properly manage the conflict, in potential violation of the "Conflicts of Interest" provisions of the Ethics Policy. This allegation focused on Dr. Pritchett's role in the hiring process for the Regional Executive Director of Schools (REDS) positions.
- Dr. Pritchett misused her position by arranging to have Katrina Hunt's 2023-24 evaluation replaced with a letter of non-evaluation, in potential violation of the "Misuse of Position" provisions of the Ethics Policy.²

The complainant also alleged that Dr. Pritchett managed Katrina Hunt, who managed Anitra Jones. However, evidence established that Dr. Pritchett does not manage Ms. Hunt, and Ms. Jones is not in Dr. Pritchett's line of reporting.

The scope of this investigation only included allegations related to Board Policy 5251 – Ethics. It did not include personnel-related allegations. The complainant raised other issues that were not found to be in scope for this investigation. Determinations of what allegations were in scope were made solely by the Ethics Officer; this investigator did not have discretion to add additional claims.

¹ The complainant requested anonymity.

² This claim was raised during the investigation by someone other than the original complainant.

III. INVESTIGATION PROCESS

A. Interviews

Individuals interviewed about the allegations included³:

- Complainant
- Chris Carter, Regional Executive Director of Schools
- Misa Garmoe, Executive Director of Employee and Association Relations
- Dr. Robert Gary, Principal and former Co-President of Principals' Association of Seattle Schools (PASS)
- Jon Halfaker, Director of Labor Relations
- Rainey Hartford Swan, Executive Director of PASS
- Joseph Helt, former Director of Labor Relations
- Justin Hendrickson, Principal Coach and former Co-President of PASS
- Ted Howard, Accountability Officer
- Dr. Brent Jones, Superintendent
- Demetrice Lewis, Human Resources Manager
- Mike McCarthy, Regional Executive Director of Schools
- Dr. James Mercer, Regional Executive Director of Schools
- Tim Moynihan, Regional Executive Director of Schools
- Fred Podesta, Chief Operations Officer
- Dr. Sarah Pritchett, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources
- Bev Redmond, Chief of Staff
- Dr. Mike Starosky, Assistant Superintendent of Academics
- Dr. Rocky Torres-Morales, Associate Superintendent of Student and School Support

Interviews were conducted by videoconference and were not recorded.⁴ This investigator explained her role as a neutral fact finder. The expectation for interviewees to answer questions truthfully and completely was communicated to each of them. Interviewees were reminded that allegations are just allegations until proven otherwise. As part of the conclusion of interview sessions, interviewees were invited to add any additional information that had not already been discussed. Interviewees were further invited to contact this investigator after the interview was concluded with any supplementary

³ This investigator attempted to interview a former District employee who participated in multiple rounds of the 2023 Regional Executive Director of Schools hiring process. They initially agreed and later declined. This investigator also spoke with a few individuals who did not offer first-hand information relevant to the allegations in scope for the investigation.

⁴ A few interviews were conducted by phone for the convenience of the interviewee.

information they considered relevant. Some individuals were interviewed multiple times, as needed.

B. Documentary Evidence

Documentary evidence reviewed included:

- Board Policy 5251, Ethics
- Org charts for Seattle Public Schools and Human Resources
- Complaint documentation, including information relating to Dr. Pritchett's wedding and documents created by the complainant
- Puget Sound Educational Service District's June 2024 report titled, "Seattle Public Schools Rainer View Elementary School Process Review"
- Seattle Times coverage relating to Rainer View Elementary School and Anitra Jones
- District employment histories for Dr. Pritchett, Anitra Jones, and Katrina Hunt
- Public Employment Relations Commission Hearing Examiner Decision, *Seattle School District*, Decision 13982 (EDUC, 2024) 13983 (PECB, 2024)
- 2015 Facebook photo of Dr. Pritchett and Katrina Hunt, provided by the complainant
- Evaluations for two Regional Executive Directors of Schools for 2023-24
- Documentation about evaluations for non-represented employees
- Non-represented employee grievance procedure
- Documentation related to the REDS hiring process and the District hiring process generally
- Class specification for the REDS position
- Sorority information for Dr. Pritchett
- List of people invited to Dr. Pritchett's wedding

- List of people who attended Dr. Pritchett's wedding
- September 27, 2024 report of external investigation of allegations against Ms. Jones (discrimination in student discipline, insufficient interpretation/translation services, and failure to provide religious accommodation) and related documents
- Various email messages

C. Evidentiary Standard

The analysis and findings are based on a preponderance of the evidence, commonly defined as "more likely than not."

D. Independence

Consistent with the role of an independent investigator, the Ethics Officer allowed this investigator full discretion to conduct the investigation as she determined to be necessary and to exercise her independent judgment to make findings based on the evidence developed in the investigation. This investigator was given access to all requested employee witnesses and documents. No person interfered with or attempted to influence the findings or content in this report.

E. Evidence and Credibility Determinations

In reaching the findings, this investigator carefully considered the perspectives, observations, and information contained in all evidence. It should go without saying that if interviewees do not disclose information they are questioned about, the investigator cannot use it to make findings.

Where necessary, in resolving factual disputes this investigator utilized credibility factors such as direct or indirect corroborating evidence, lack of corroborating evidence, motivations of parties and witnesses, plausibility of events, consistent and inconsistent evidence, material omissions, proximity in time, and articulated rationale for actions or decisions.

IV. BACKGROUND

Dr. Sarah Pritchett is Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources for the District. She has held this position since 2022. She has worked for the District for a total of approximately 26 years.

Dr. Pritchett was married in August 2024. Some of the invitees worked for the District.

District employees Anitra Jones and Katrina Hunt are personal friends of Dr. Pritchett. Both attended her wedding. Ms. Hunt served as Dr. Pritchett's matron of honor.

In the spring of 2023, seven Director of Schools positions were replaced with five Regional Executive Director of Schools (REDS) positions. Dr. Pritchett facilitated the REDS hiring process. Ms. Hunt was one of five people hired as a REDS.

While serving as Principal of Rainier View Elementary, Ms. Jones was the subject of various complaints. In April 2024, Ms. Jones transferred to a special assignment at the District's Central Office.

V. RELEVANT POLICY LANGUAGE

This Section includes applicable language from Board Policy 5251, Ethics.

Section 3. Definitions (in pertinent part)

"District action" means (i) a decision, determination, finding, ruling, order, grant, payment, award, license, contract, transaction, sanction, approval or denial, or other similar action, or (ii) any proceeding, application, submission, request for a ruling or other determination, contract, claim, case, or other such matter that the District employee believes, or has reason to believe, is or will be the subject of District action; or is one to which the District is, or will be a party; or is one in which the District has a direct and substantial interest.

"Participate" means to personally and substantially consider, investigate, advise, recommend, approve, disapprove, decide, or take other similar action.

Section 4. Conflicts of Interest (in pertinent part)

*All District officers and employees must **disqualify** themselves from participating in District actions in which they have a conflict of interest, and **disclose** when it could appear that they have a conflict of interest.*

A district officer or employee may not:

...

c. Participate in a District action when it could appear to a reasonable person, having knowledge of the relevant circumstances, that the District

officer or employee's judgment is impaired because of either (i) a personal or business relationship not covered under subsection a or b above, or (ii) a transaction or activity engaged in by the District officer or employee. This section c shall not apply if the employee or officer has, before participating, fully disclosed in writing the circumstances to the Superintendent and the Ethics Officer. The Superintendent, upon receiving a written disclosure from a District employee, may disqualify the employee from participating in the action.

...

A District officer or employee who recuses himself or herself from participating in a district action in accordance with this section should notify the Ethics Officer in writing of his or her decision to do so as soon as possible.

Section 5. Misuse of Position (in pertinent part)

To promote public confidence, District employees and officers may not misuse their positions or District property for private gain.

A District officer or employee may not:

- a. Use or attempt to use his or her official position for a purpose that is, or would to a reasonable person appear to be, primarily for the private benefit of the District officer or employee or any other person, rather than primarily for the benefit of the District;
- b. Use or attempt to use, or permit the use of any District funds, property, equipment, or personnel, for a purpose which is, or to a reasonable person would appear to be, for other than a District purpose. However, employees may make limited use of District equipment or facilities for personal purposes if there is a negligible cost to the District and if the use does not interfere with the employee's official duties or with another employee's performance of official duties. Examples of acceptable personal uses are (i) limited use of telephones for personal calls; (ii) limited use of computers; (iii) limited use of e-mail; and (iv) limited use of copiers. District employees may not use District vehicles, tools or similar equipment for personal use.
- c. Except in the course of official duties, assist any person in any District action in which that person has a financial interest. This subsection c shall not apply to any District officer or employee appearing on his or her own behalf in any District action, or on behalf of any business entity solely owned by the District officer or employee, if not otherwise prohibited by this or any other District policy;

d. Influence or attempt to influence a District decision to contract with, or the conduct of District business with, a person in which any of the following has a financial interest:

- i. the District officer or employee;
- ii. a family member of the District officer or employee;
- iii. an individual residing with the District officer or employee;
- iv. a person the District officer or employee serves as an officer, director, trustee, partner or employee;
- v. a person with which the District officer or employee is seeking or has an arrangement concerning future employment.

Section 6. Gifts and Gratuities (in pertinent part)

To promote public confidence, District employees and officers generally must not accept gifts or gratuities from people who may have an interest in District actions.

A District employee or officer may not solicit or receive any gift or gratuity from any person if the intent is, or would to a reasonable person appear to be, to seek or obtain special consideration or influence in any District action in which the employee or officer participates.

The following are examples of situations in which a reasonable person would not normally conclude a gift was given or received with the intent to influence an employee's or officer's actions:

- a. a gift from a member of an employee's school community or an individual coworker valued at no more than \$50, or no more than \$100 in aggregate in gifts from any one person in any one school year.
- b. a collective gift from an employee's school community or coworkers given in recognition of infrequently occurring occasions of personal significance such as marriage, illness, the birth or adoption of a child, retirement or transfer away from a school, or the end of the school year, provided that no individual employee, or student, or his or her family may contribute more than \$50 to any individual gift.

VI. ALLEGATIONS, EVIDENCE, AND FINDINGS

A. Allegation: Dr. Pritchett invited a number of District employees to her August 2024 wedding and sought gifts of cash through her wedding registry.

Two sections of the Ethics Policy potentially applied: Gifts and Gratuities (Section 6) and Misuse of Position (Section 5). The information gathered did not support this allegation.

Based on records provided by Dr. Pritchett, approximately 21 District employees were invited to the August 2024 wedding, and at least 17 attended.⁵ The records showed that District invitees constituted just a fraction of the total people invited to the wedding.

Dr. Pritchett's wedding website included a registry page titled, "Our Wish List." Two "cash funds" were shown: "Backyard of our Dreams" and "Honeymoon Fund."⁶ Under each fund, the page said, "Gift any amount." The page listed cash amounts one might choose, starting at \$0-49.

Eight of the individuals interviewed for this investigation attended Dr. Pritchett's wedding. None of them indicated a concern about her wedding registry.⁷ Neither did any of them say that they were aware of others with concerns.

The investigation did not identify evidence that Dr. Pritchett required, expected, or actively solicited wedding gifts. The registry webpage did not state or imply that guests were expected or required to provide a gift.

The investigation did not find evidence that Dr. Pritchett distributed or discussed a registry link at work or with people she did not invite to the wedding. Neither did the investigation identify evidence that Dr. Pritchett used District resources to solicit gifts. Dr. Pritchett said that she gave only paper invitations to people invited to the wedding.

Dr. Pritchett provided this investigator with Outlook messages showing that her Executive Assistant had attempted to hold a bridal shower for her at work. Dr. Pritchett stated that she directed the cancellation of the shower, and she provided Outlook documentation of the cancellation. She said that she ate lunch in a conference room with some other employees, but it was not a celebration or shower.

Under District policy, soliciting or receiving a gift is problematic when the intent is, or appears to be, to seek or obtain special consideration or influence in any District action in which the employee participates. In regard to Dr. Pritchett's wedding registry, the information gathered did not reflect an intent or appearance of pursuing special consideration or influence in any District action.

Neither did the information gathered suggest an attempt to use an official position for private benefit. Gift registries associated with weddings have been common for decades. By 2024, registries with cash funds were not unusual. And after a total of 26 years at the

⁵ The numbers are approximate, because some of the couples listed as attendees may have included more than one person who worked for the District.

⁶ As of the date of this report, the page could be found at <https://www.theknot.com/us/sarah-pritchett-and-tim-goodman-aug-2024/registry>.

⁷ Two interviewees volunteered that they opted to give Dr. Pritchett a gift other than cash.

District, it should not be surprising that Dr. Pritchett would invite some work friends and colleagues to her wedding. Inviting 21 District people did not seem in any way excessive, particularly when they comprised only a fraction of the invitees.

For these reasons, for this allegation a preponderance of the evidence did not establish a violation of Section 5 or Section 6 of the Ethics Policy.

B. Allegation: Dr. Pritchett's friendship with Anitra Jones created a conflict of interest, and Dr. Pritchett failed to properly manage the conflict.

These alleged facts potentially could violate Section 4 of the Ethics Policy, "Conflicts of Interest." The evidence was insufficient to support this allegation.

The following facts were not in dispute:

- Dr. Pritchett and Ms. Jones are personal friends.
- While Principal at Rainier View Elementary, Ms. Jones was the subject of various complaints from parents and District employees.
- On or about April 1, 2024, Ms. Jones was transferred to the District's Central Office. She remained in a principal job classification.
- In early February 2025, Ms. Jones transferred to Rainier Beach High School to serve as Assistant Principal.⁸

It was alleged that Dr. Pritchett proactively worked to protect Ms. Jones from any repercussions that may have resulted from misconduct. As the head of Human Resources for the entire District, Dr. Pritchett potentially could have a conflict of interest if she was involved in making decisions involving Ms. Jones. That is to say, it might appear to a reasonable person that Dr. Pritchett's judgment was impaired in such decisions because of her personal friendship with Ms. Jones.

The allegations were based on assumptions about Dr. Pritchett being involved in decisions involving Ms. Jones, rather than on specific facts. The investigation did not find evidence to show that Dr. Pritchett made any decisions about discipline of Ms. Jones. Moreover, the information gathered did not support a finding that Dr. Pritchett made or influenced the decision to move Ms. Jones to work at the Central Office from April 2024 through January 2025.

⁸ A District representative indicated that the official title for Ms. Jones at this time is Principal on Special Assignment.

1. Discipline decisions

This process investigated what role Dr. Pritchett played in decisions about discipline of Ms. Jones. When interviewed, Dr. Pritchett stated that while the Human Resources office oversees grievances, she was not involved.⁹ She said that grievances involving Ms. Jones at Rainier View were investigated by Ms. Jones's supervisor.

Dr. Pritchett denied that she had been involved in making discipline decisions regarding Ms. Jones. She explained that, while there had been various grievances and complaints about Ms. Jones, there had not been any adverse findings. She indicated that for this reason, she was never in a position to weigh in on such decisions involving Ms. Jones.

This investigator interviewed a Human Resources leader and an individual who supervised Ms. Jones for three years. Both indicated that they had involvement with the grievances and complaints involving Ms. Jones. Her former supervisor described personally looking into a number of allegations, including ethics and retaliation issues.

Consistent with what Dr. Pritchett stated, these witnesses said that there had not been findings against Ms. Jones,¹⁰ so there was no occasion for Dr. Pritchett to be involved in a disciplinary decision for Ms. Jones. They did not identify any situations where Dr. Pritchett had been involved in the grievance and complaint processes for Ms. Jones.

Whether the complaints and grievances were handled appropriately or whether Ms. Jones engaged in wrongdoing were questions outside the scope of this investigation. Here, the inquiry was limited to whether Dr. Pritchett was involved in making decisions where a conflict of interest existed.

In addition to the complaints and grievances, Ms. Jones was the primary focus of an unfair labor practice (ULP) charge that Seattle Education Association filed with the Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC). ULP charges are filed directly with PERC, not with the employer. Thus, Dr. Pritchett was not a decision maker on the ULP allegations, and Dr. Pritchett said that the District's Employee and Labor Relations staff handled the ULP. While the outcome of the ULP was not favorable to Ms. Jones, a review of the hearing examiner's decision did not reflect any findings that Dr. Pritchett was involved in the situations giving rise to the allegations.

⁹ She added that she may do an outcome letter where she adopts someone else's findings.

¹⁰ This information is consistent with the June 2024 Puget Sound Educational Service District's report titled, "Seattle Public Schools Rainier View Elementary School Process Review," which stated that the complaints against Ms. Jones did not result in adverse findings.

For all of the foregoing reasons, the evidence did not support a finding that Dr. Pritchett made or was involved in decisions about discipline of Ms. Jones. Thus, no Ethics Policy violation was found for this allegation.

2. Transfer to Central Office

The information gathered did not support a finding that Dr. Pritchett made or influenced the decision to move Ms. Jones to work at the Central Office from April 2024 through January 2025.¹¹ While this investigation did not find a violation of the Ethics Policy, the combination of the following facts generated speculation:

- Dr. Pritchett is head of Human Resources for the District.
- Dr. Pritchett works in the Central Office.
- Following a number of complaints against Ms. Jones, Ms. Jones received an assignment to the Central Office that other principals had not received, and her duties were not publicized.

While some people may have perceived Ms. Jones's Central Office assignment as a promotion, the evidence reflected that she was not promoted and remained a principal.¹² As of the beginning of February 2025, Ms. Jones began a special assignment as Assistant Principal of Rainier Beach High School.

When interviewed, Dr. Pritchett stated that she was not involved in the decision to move Ms. Jones to the Central Office or the discussion about it. She also indicated that she was not charged with providing or creating a position. She said that Dr. Jones made the decision to place Ms. Jones on special assignment.

Dr. Pritchett explained that while she was not involved in the conversation, she assumed that the decision was preceded by a group discussion between Dr. Jones and three senior

¹¹ In relation to this allegation, the complainant also claimed that Ms. Jones was treated better than some other principals who were not transferred to the Central Office. If this investigation found that Dr. Pritchett made decisions about Ms. Jones, that allegation may have been investigated. However, because the evidence did not show that Dr. Pritchett made decisions about Ms. Jones, the treatment of other principals was not relevant to the issues in scope for this investigation.

¹² The complainant asserted, "Superintendent Brent Jones and Dr. Pritchett have lobbied hard with the Principals Association and others to promote Anitra Jones to one of two positions: Executive Director of Schools or Principal Coach." When interviewed, Dr. Jones denied that this was accurate. He stated that he did not think Ms. Jones was entitled to be a Principal Coach or an Executive. Neither did Dr. Pritchett provide support for this assertion. She emphasized that the superintendent would be the one to have the final say on a principal's assignment.

leaders whom she identified.¹³ She shared that after Dr. Jones talked to Ms. Jones on a Friday, on the following Monday an email announced that Ms. Jones was transferring to the Central Office and would be reporting to two individuals, neither of whom was Dr. Pritchett.

Dr. Jones agreed that he made the decision to assign Ms. Jones to the Central Office. Two other senior leaders confirmed that Dr. Pritchett was not involved in the decision or related discussions.

Additionally, it was not in dispute that while Ms. Jones worked out of the Central Office, Dr. Pritchett never supervised her. In interviews, two individuals described supervising Ms. Jones in her special assignment at different times. They each detailed the duties assigned to Ms. Jones.

For the reasons detailed above, the information gathered did not support a finding that Dr. Pritchett made or influenced the decision to transfer Ms. Jones to work at the Central Office. Accordingly, no Ethics Policy violation was found for this allegation.

C. Allegation: Dr. Pritchett's friendship with Katrina Hunt created a conflict of interest and Dr. Pritchett failed to properly manage the conflict.

These alleged facts potentially could violate Section 4 of the Ethics Policy, "Conflicts of Interest." The evidence was insufficient to support this allegation.

It was alleged that Dr. Pritchett hired her friend Katrina Hunt into a Regional Executive Director of Schools (REDS) position, despite other candidates having more experience and better qualifications. Dr. Pritchett potentially could have had a conflict of interest if she was involved in making decisions involving Ms. Hunt. Specifically, it might appear to a reasonable person that Dr. Pritchett's judgment was impaired in such decisions because of her personal friendship with Ms. Hunt.

The investigation did not find evidence to show that Dr. Pritchett made or influenced decisions involving Ms. Hunt, including the decision to hire Ms. Hunt into a REDS position. While this investigation did not find a violation of the Ethics Policy, the combination of the following facts generated speculation:

- There was a common perception that the REDS positions were essentially the same as the former Director of Schools positions that the REDS replaced.
- There was a common belief that Directors of Schools had to reapply and compete for the same positions they already held.

¹³ One no longer works for the District.

- Out of the seven former Directors of Schools, only four received offers for REDS positions.¹⁴
- Ms. Hunt was the only successful REDS candidate who had not previously served as a Director of Schools.
- It was widely known that Dr. Pritchett and Ms. Hunt are personal friends.
- Dr. Pritchett facilitated the hiring process for the REDS.¹⁵

The discussion that follows explains the reasons an ethics violation was not found.

1. Background: the REDS interview process

Three rounds of interviews were held, with the number of candidates decreasing with each round. Interviewers included school leaders, people from the Central Office, and senior leaders.

In the third round, three senior leaders interviewed six candidates. Five of the six candidates moved on to interviews with Dr. Jones. Each of these five finalists received an offer.¹⁶

This investigator interviewed eight people who participated in the REDS hiring process as interviewers.¹⁷ This included all three interviewers in the third round, as well as Dr. Jones, the ultimate decision maker.

2. Regional Executive Directors of Schools v. Directors of Schools

The evidence gathered did not establish that the REDS positions were the same as the former Director of Schools positions. Significantly, the supervisor of the REDS for 2023-24 and 2024-25 did not agree that the positions were the same. They stated, “It is a different job.” The supervisor explained that they had been working with REDS to

¹⁴ One former Director of Schools withdrew from the REDS hiring process before it was concluded. Another made it to the final round of interviews. A third was eliminated before the second round of interviews.

¹⁵ At the time of the REDS hiring process, Dr. Jones had not announced who the REDS would be reporting to.

¹⁶ Dr. Jones said that he met with the five candidates in regard to their knowledge, skills, and abilities. He stated that he wanted to hear them for himself, in part to determine whether the hiring process was clean.

¹⁷ This investigator also attempted to interview a former District employee who participated in multiple rounds of the 2023 Regional Executive Director of Schools hiring process. They initially agreed and later declined.

understand the differences. They said that at times they would have to reinforce what the REDS job is and the fact that there are different expectations now. The supervisor noted that from their perspective, this topic was important enough to go in some of the REDS' evaluations.

Dr. Jones confirmed that it was his decision to change the Director of Schools positions to REDS. He emphasized that the positions were "changed fundamentally."

3. Ms. Hunt's qualifications

Some individuals interviewed for the investigation opined that Ms. Hunt was unqualified for the REDS position or was less qualified than other candidates. While people are entitled to their own opinions, the investigation did not support a finding that Ms. Hunt was unqualified for the position. At the outset of the REDS hiring process, minimum qualifications were set, and Ms. Hunt met those qualifications.

In the hiring process, after candidates met the minimum qualifications, they were scored exclusively based on interview performance – not the interviewer's outside knowledge of the candidate or their resume. This gave Ms. Hunt the same opportunity for success as the other applicants who met the minimum qualifications.¹⁸

4. Information from Dr. Pritchett

When interviewed, Dr. Pritchett recalled that Dr. Jones wanted to revamp the Director of Schools positions. She said that he asked her to design and facilitate the hiring process for the REDS.¹⁹ She shared that her involvement in the interviews included ensuring that interviewers followed the protocol for conducting interviews, kept on topic, and did not bring in extra information. Dr. Pritchett explained that while she facilitated the hiring process, she did not score interviews, influence the scoring, or make the decision to hire Ms. Hunt.

Dr. Pritchett stated that she told Dr. Jones that she and Ms. Hunt are friends. When asked if she had disclosed this information to the Ethics Officer, she said she had not, because she was not involved in the decision making for the position.

¹⁸ Any question of whether the minimum qualifications were appropriate or whether this was the optimal approach to hiring fell outside the scope of this investigation. This process was limited to investigating whether Dr. Pritchett failed to appropriately manage a conflict of interest.

¹⁹ Dr. Jones confirmed that he gave Dr. Pritchett the responsibility of being the "process steward."

5. Interviews and scoring

This investigator thoroughly reviewed the scores from the three rounds of interviews, including situations where an interviewer adjusted a score. No discrepancies or aberrations were identified. Notably, for the third round, when scores were totaled, Ms. Hunt received the second highest number of points in that round.

Consistent with Dr. Pritchett's representations, the evidence did not support a finding that Dr. Pritchett scored interviews or influenced the scoring in favor of Ms. Hunt. No one said that Dr. Pritchett attempted to influence them in their scoring to advantage Ms. Hunt. Neither did anyone offer evidence that she tried to manipulate the process to benefit Ms. Hunt.

6. Ms. Hunt's application

One interviewee expressed concern that Ms. Hunt should have been screened out before interviews. This interviewee described having knowledge of Ms. Hunt's original NEOGOV submission containing a document referencing the wrong school district. They indicated that they saw this error after the posting had closed on a Friday. This interviewee stated that when they looked at Ms. Hunt's application again on the following Monday or Tuesday, it had been changed to say Seattle Public Schools.

The interviewee said that they spoke to the Human Resources employee responsible for processing applications for the 2023 REDS posting. According to this interviewee, the Human Resources employee said they had opened the posting and then closed it back down. The interviewee said that the Human Resources employee did not say who directed them to do that.

When interviewed, the Human Resources employee initially addressed the situation in general terms. This employee said that after a posting closed, they could re-upload something like a cover letter for an applicant. They said that this would need to occur before the applications were being screened. This employee indicated that re-uploading was not routine, but it could be done so long as it would not disadvantage another candidate.

This investigator asked about correcting a mistake such as stating the wrong employer in a cover letter. The employee said that in such a situation, an application would not necessarily have been screened out. This employee indicated that this was not that big of an error.

In regard to the 2023 REDS recruitment, they stated that the position was posted from April 19, 2023 through April 28, 2023. They said that there was not a request to re-post the position.

At this investigator's request, the employee reviewed the records for Ms. Hunt's application. They reported that Ms. Hunt had submitted a replacement document for uploading. They said:

In reviewing the file, I noticed that the updated cover letter was dated April 26, 2023, and I uploaded it on May 1, 2023. I'm not certain if the update request was received before I uploaded it on May 1. It's possible that I received the request earlier but didn't have an opportunity to upload the document until later.

While the employee said that they did not remember the specifics of the situation, they emphasized that they were the one to handle the request and uploading. They did not implicate Dr. Pritchett in any way.

7. Finding

The Ethics Policy prohibits a District employee from participating in a District action when it could appear to a reasonable person, having knowledge of the relevant circumstances, that the District employee's judgment is impaired because of a personal relationship. Here, a reasonable person could believe that Dr. Pritchett's judgment was impaired because of her personal friendship with Ms. Hunt.

However, the Conflict of Interest section of the Ethics Policy indicated that it only applied if the District employee participated in a District action, such as a decision. The evidence reflected that Dr. Pritchett's facilitation of the REDS hiring process did not involve making a decision about which employees would be hired. The information gathered showed that she coordinated the process but did not score interviews, influence the scoring in favor of Ms. Hunt, or choose which candidates received job offers.

Because the evidence demonstrated that Dr. Pritchett did not make a decision in the REDS hiring process, the Conflict of Interest prohibition did not apply. Thus, the information gathered did not support a finding that Dr. Pritchett violated the Ethics Policy in regard to this allegation.

As for the requirement that a District employee fully disclose in writing the circumstances of a Conflict of Interest to the Superintendent and the Ethics Officer, the information gathered did not support a finding that such disclosures were necessary for the REDS hiring process. These disclosures must be made where a District employee

participates in a District action, and it could appear to a reasonable person, having knowledge of the relevant circumstances, that the District employee's judgment is impaired because of a personal relationship. As explained above, the evidence demonstrated that Dr. Pritchett did not participate in a District action by making a decision in the REDS hiring process. Consequently, the Ethics Policy did not require Dr. Pritchett to make disclosures in this context.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that some interviewees expressed a high level of discomfort around the friendship between Dr. Pritchett and Ms. Hunt, including concerns about preferential status or treatment. Regardless of whether these employees' perceptions are accurate, the relationship potentially could create an ongoing distraction.

D. Allegation: Dr. Pritchett misused her position through her involvement with the replacement of Ms. Hunt's 2023-24 evaluation with a letter of non-evaluation.

One section of the Ethics Policy potentially applied: Misuse of Position (Section 5). The evidence gathered did not support this allegation.

Regional Executive Director of Schools Katrina Hunt complained about the performance evaluation her supervisor gave her for the 2023-24 school year. Ms. Hunt's supervisor was on leave from late July 2024 until December 9, 2024. On December 19, 2024, Ms. Hunt's supervisor received an email from Dr. Pritchett notifying them that the evaluation had been replaced with a letter of non-evaluation:

I am writing to provide information regarding evaluations you completed during the 2023-24 school year. Two of your direct reports submitted requests to have their evaluations reviewed/contested. [Former Human Resources employee] received letters from both individuals, reviewed the requests, and did a preliminary examination of the evaluations. Upon initial review, the evaluations appeared to share several similarities in wording or exact wording in multiple places.

In your absence, a formal review was not conducted. Instead, as a resolution, the evaluations in question were replaced with a letter of non-evaluation for both employees. The individuals who requested the review and disputed their evaluations are [name redacted] and Katrina Hunt. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or require further clarification.

After receiving the message, Ms. Hunt's supervisor raised a concern that in light of Dr. Pritchett's relationship with Ms. Hunt, Dr. Pritchett may have misused her position to determine or influence the outcome of the evaluation review.

In an interview, Ms. Hunt's supervisor acknowledged that Ms. Hunt's and the other employee's evaluations contained some similar language. They emphasized that that should not be surprising in light of the fact that the two employees were in the same job classification. Ms. Hunt's supervisor also explained that there was language and data specific to each employee in their evaluations; they were not duplicates. Upon reviewing the evaluations, this investigator confirmed that the documents contained some similar language as well as language and data specific to each employee.

The former Human Resources employee referenced in Dr. Pritchett's email agreed to participate in an interview for this investigation. He acknowledged he was aware that Dr. Pritchett and Ms. Hunt are friends. The former employee said that Ms. Hunt and another employee in the same job classification had contested their evaluations. He stated that he worked on a review of them, possibly in September 2024.

The former employee recalled that both employees had several concerns, although he said he did not remember details. He stated that if Ms. Hunt's supervisor had not been on leave, the challenges to the evaluations would have been processed through the non-represented employee grievance procedure.

The former employee said that he made the decision to issue a letter of non-evaluation. He denied that Dr. Pritchett had attempted to influence him or that she had been involved in any way. Consistent with the decision being his own, the former employee explained reasons for his decision to replace the evaluations with the letter of non-evaluation. He said:

- This was not his first experience with issuing letters of non-evaluation to non-represented employees.
- When he was in his former position at the District, he was involved in any challenge to an evaluation, and letters of non-evaluation were "pretty common."
- He reviewed the contested evaluations and was disappointed with their quality. He recalled seeing "copy and paste" of the same or similar language in some places. He had reviewed Ms. Hunt's supervisor's evaluations in the past, and the quality had been better.
- The evaluations had contained ambitious goals, and he found the assessment "a little harsh." He did not think there was sufficient evidence for the ratings.
- As part of his process, the former employee reviewed the evaluations of the other individuals who held Ms. Hunt's same position and the evaluations of other

employees who reported to Ms. Hunt's supervisor. He did so to look for a broad perspective and to see whether there were similar issues for others.

- The District does not report non-represented employee evaluations to the State. The approach to them tends to be more lax. When there is controversy with evaluations, they tend to "toss them out."

In sum, information from the former employee reflected that the decision to issue a letter of non-evaluation was his own decision and not Dr. Pritchett's. He provided a lengthy explanation of his reasoning for replacing the evaluations with a letter of non-evaluation, and he denied that Dr. Pritchett had been involved in the decision or attempted to influence the outcome.

When raising concerns about the situation, Ms. Hunt's supervisor pointed out to this investigator that Ms. Hunt's contested evaluation could have been handled differently. For example, the process could have been placed on hold until Ms. Hunt's supervisor returned from leave. However, this investigator was unable to weigh the merits of this argument, because any assessment of the appropriateness of the decision to issue a letter of non-evaluation fell outside of this investigator's purview.

This investigator's scope was limited to determining if Dr. Pritchett misused her position through involvement in deciding whether the evaluation should stand. Because the information gathered indicated that Dr. Pritchett did not play a role in the decision to replace the evaluation with a letter of non-evaluation, a preponderance of the evidence did not support a finding that Dr. Pritchett violated the Ethics Policy.

VII. CONCLUSION

Accordingly, based on the above, a preponderance of the evidence was insufficient to establish that Dr. Sarah Pritchett violated the Ethics Policy with regard to:

- The registry for her August 2024 wedding;
- The handling of discipline for Anitra Jones and the transfer of Ms. Jones to the Central Office;
- The hiring of Katrina Hunt into a Regional Executive Director of Schools position; and
- The replacement of Ms. Hunt's evaluation with a letter of non-evaluation.