

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMPLIANCE
SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

EDISON TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS
LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
ALLEGED NJ ASK 4 BREACH
OFAC CASE #INV-144-12

INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

JUNE 2015

**EDISON TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS
LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
ALLEGED NJ ASK 4 BREACH**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance (OFAC) conducted a follow-up review of a self reported test breach involving the administration of the 2012 New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge Grade 4 (NJ ASK 4) at Lincoln Elementary School (Lincoln School) in the Edison Township Public Schools (district).

On August 31, 2012, a parent of a fourth grade student, reported to Jill Cavuto, Principal of Lincoln School, the NJ ASK 4 may have been compromised due to teacher misconduct. The parent stated Naheed Alvi, fourth grade teacher and NJ ASK 4 examiner, told her child to change two answers on the NJ ASK 4. Ms. Cavuto informed Richard O'Malley, Superintendent of Schools, of the allegation and under his recommendation, Ms. Cavuto requested the parent write a formal statement.

Dr. O'Malley initiated a district internal investigation. Twelve students, Sandra Reid, District Test Coordinator, and Michele Blum, School Test Coordinator, were interviewed. Dr. O'Malley also interviewed Ms. Alvi in the presence of Jeff Bowden, her union representative, Ms. Alvi denied the allegations. At the conclusion of the interview, Dr. O'Malley suspended Ms. Alvi with pay pending further investigation. On October 17, 2012, Dr. O'Malley notified the New Jersey Department of Education Office of Assessments (OA) of his findings.

On November 28, 2012, Samuel Stewart, Interim Executive County Superintendent (retired), Middlesex County Office of Education (county), conducted a County Office Preliminary Investigation of a Security Breach in the Statewide Testing Program (preliminary investigation) regarding the alleged breach that occurred during the NJ ASK 4. The county verified the statements gathered by the district. According to the student statements, 10 of the 12 stated Ms. Alvi walked around the room checking students' answers and tapped on desks stating to re-check the answers. One student stated that Ms. Alvi didn't help anyone, and one student was out of the country and was not interviewed. At the conclusion of his investigation, Mr. Stewart submitted the preliminary investigation to the OA, and the case was subsequently referred to OFAC for further investigation. The OFAC follow-up investigation involved reviewing the preliminary investigation, along with statements of the individuals involved, reviewing documents relevant to testing, and conducting interviews with individuals thought to have knowledge relevant to the incident.

As a result of the investigation, the OFAC concluded Ms. Alvi interfered with and influenced examinees' responses by providing feedback to indicate the correctness of the response during the test, thereby breaching the security of the NJ ASK 4. The remainder of this report contains an investigative summary, a conclusion, recommendation, and a referral to the State Board of Examiners for its determination.

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY

An allegation of a test breach was lodged against Naheed Alvi, a fourth grade teacher who served as an examiner, during the 2012 fourth grade New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK 4) in the Edison Township Public Schools (district) at Lincoln Elementary School (Lincoln). The investigation was prompted after a parent spoke to Jill Cavuto, Principal, expressing concern the NJ ASK 4 may have been compromised due to teacher misconduct.

In August of 2012, a parent informed Ms. Cavuto that Ms. Alvi, fourth grade teacher and NJ ASK examiner, told her child to change two answers on the test because they were incorrect. Ms. Cavuto notified Richard O'Malley, Superintendent of Schools of the allegation. He initiated an internal investigation. Sandra Reid, District Test Coordinator (DTC), Michele Blum, School Test Coordinator (STC), Ms. Alvi, and twelve students were interviewed. At the conclusion of the investigation, Dr. O'Malley suspended Ms. Alvi with pay and subsequently removed her from the testing environment.

On October 17, 2012, Dr. O'Malley notified the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), Office of Assessments (OA) of his findings. The OA tasked the Middlesex County Office of Education (county office) with conducting a County Office Preliminary Investigation of a Security Breach in the State Wide Testing Program (preliminary investigation). In November 2012, Samuel Stewart, Interim Executive County Superintendent (retired), conducted a preliminary investigation and the county office verified the statements gathered by the district and submitted a report to the OA.

Following a review of the preliminary investigation, the OA requested the Office of Fiscal Accountability and Compliance (OFAC) conduct a follow-up investigation of the alleged breach. In December 2014, the OFAC investigators began the follow-up investigation. The investigators reviewed pertinent documentation included the county's preliminary investigation, the district's correspondence, the district's 2012 Grade 4 School Security Checklists, the district's 2012 turnkey training documents, including Ms. Alvi's signed NJDOE Statewide Assessment Test Security Agreement, and the historical and the mapped testing data provided by Measurement Incorporated, the NJDOE state assessment contractor for the NJ ASK 4. In addition, the investigators interviewed 10 students, one parent, and two staff members.

From witnesses' account and a review of pertinent documentation, the investigators determined Ms. Alvi breached the test security during the 2012 NJ ASK 4 by influencing examinees responses by providing feedback to indicate the correctness of a response during the mathematics (MATH) portion of the test. The information obtained during the OFAC review is detailed below.

Naheed Alvi –Teacher and NJ ASK Examiner

Based upon witness accounts the investigators concluded Ms. Alvi breached the security and the confidentiality of the 2012 NJ ASK 4 MATH by failing in her responsibilities as the examiner, to ensure a proper and secure administration of the NJ ASK, by coaching students during testing and by interfering with students' responses.

Coaching students during testing

Ms. Alvi failed to follow the guidelines regarding the security of the test by verbally coaching students individually during the test administration.

Interfering with students' responses

According to witness statements, Ms. Alvi pointed out incorrect answers to the students during testing.

Interviews

There were 13 students who were administered the 2012 NJ ASK 4 by Ms. Alvi. The investigators interviewed 10 students. Two were out of the state and one was absent on medical leave and could not be interviewed. The investigators also interviewed the parent who made the initial allegation, Ms. Blum, and Ms. Alvi. The following was disclosed:

Student interviews

Five of the 10 students interviewed stated that Ms. Alvi assisted students with the NJ ASK by coaching them during testing or by interfering with their responses. Four students did not provide information regarding test security breaches and/or procedural irregularities.

- Student One asked Ms. Alvi a question during the NJ ASK 4 and was told it wasn't allowed, but Ms. Alvi then stated to the student "Think back at the chapter and think about what we did last week." When the student told Ms. Alvi, "I do not know how to divide this." Ms. Alvi told the student to think about how you would do this. Then the student described the steps used to solve the question, Ms. Alvi stated "You got it." The student also stated, "Ms. Alvi said to make sure you check before you flip the page and make sure you put the decimal in the right place." According to this student Ms. Alvi specifically told another student to move the decimal over.
- Student Three stated during the administration of the NJ ASK 4 testing, Ms. Alvi helped other students by looking at the question and then giving them tips about the question. The student further stated when a student didn't know the meaning of a word. Ms. Alvi told them to think of a sentence with that word in it, to help define it. The student also said at

the completion of the exam, Ms. Alvi would go over the test questions and give the answers.

- Student Four stated during the administration of the NJ ASK 4, the student heard Ms. Alvi say to other students, “Go back and check that answer.” The student also stated Ms. Alvi pointed to two or three questions on the student’s test and stated “check that answer.”
- Student Six stated Ms. Alvi helped with questions during the administration of the NJ ASK 4, the student could not provide any specific details.
- Student Seven stated during the administration of the NJ ASK 4 testing, the student heard Ms. Alvi tell other students “Reread the sentence, try to fix it.” The student further stated Ms. Alvi told the student to check that one over, gesturing to an equation on the student’s scrap paper.

Witness

On March 31, 2015, the investigators interviewed the parent who made the initial allegation. The parent stated after the conclusion of NJ ASK testing, the parent’s child came home and told the parent Ms. Alvi told the child to change an answer. The parent asked the child why, and the child responded “I guess I got it wrong.” The parent had concerns regarding the above and notified Ms. Cavuto.

Michele Blum – Reading Specialist/STC

The investigators interviewed Ms. Blum on April 16, 2015. Ms. Blum stated that in 2012, she trained the teachers during a faculty meeting which lasted about an hour. Ms. Blum further stated, she went over every piece of the manual with the staff at training and informed the staff of things that should and should not be done during testing. Teachers were told they could say and do only what was in the manual and to follow all protocols. Ms. Blum went to each teacher individually and asked if they had any questions or concerns. Ms Blum stated none of the staff members had any questions during or after the training.

Naheed Alvi – Second Grade Teacher

The investigators interviewed Ms. Alvi on April 16, 2015. She is currently a second grade teacher at Lincoln. She has been employed in the education field for 20 years, 16 years with Lincoln. In 2012, she was a fourth grade teacher and was also an examiner during NJ ASK.

The investigators asked Ms. Alvi if she assisted her students in any way during the administration of the NJ ASK. She answered, “I am not allowed to help any of the students and I didn’t help them, all I did was to make sure that they are filling in the bubbles. And I had a couple of children who were filling them improperly and I told them.” She also stated, “Two kids asked for help. One of the children asked two or three times for a meaning of a word, I told her I can’t help you, do the best that you can.”

When the investigators asked Ms. Alvi if she told the students to check their answers, she answered, “I never said to check your answers; all I said was make sure to fill in the bubbles correctly. Because one of the students was sleeping, I may have said to the student, make sure you check your work, make sure you have done everything. I had nothing to gain from helping them cheat; there are no repercussions if they didn’t do well.”

When asked if she tapped on any of the students’ desks for any reason, Ms. Alvi said, “One child was falling asleep; I tapped on her desk to keep her awake. I also tapped on some desks to tell them to fill in the bubbles properly, and then I walked away. I never helped them, I have nothing to gain from that and that year I had a very intelligent group of kids, so why would I?”

The investigators asked Ms. Alvi if she assisted with any of the students’ responses to the NJ ASK. She stated, “When a kid asked, I would turn around and say, I’ve taught you this, go ahead, do the best you can. We learned this, but I cannot answer that question for you. I never helped anyone.”

The investigators informed Ms. Alvi that several students had stated she provided them with assistance during the NJ ASK testing. She stated, “I did not help and could not explain why the students would allege that I did.”

The New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge Spring 2012 Examiner Manual (the Manual) governs specific procedures to maintain the confidentiality and security of the testing process for all grades three through eight. The pertinent portion of the Manual as it relates to the investigation is:

Security Procedures Page 13: *Examiners, proctors, and other school personnel may not discuss or disclose any test items either before, during, or after the test administration. Examiners are not to influence, alter, or interfere with examinees’ responses in any way. Examiners are not to provide feedback, including any hint about the correctness of a response.*

Responsibilities of program personnel Page 28: *The DTC, STC, proctors, and examiners are responsible for the proper administration of the NJ ASK 3-8. The successful administration of this test depends upon cooperation and adherence to the procedures outlined in this Test Coordinator Manual and the Test Examiner Manuals.*

NJDOE Statewide Assessments Test Security Agreement Page 73: 8. *I will not interfere with the independent work of any student taking the assessment, and I will not compromise the security of the test by any means including, but not limited to:*

- c) Coaching students during testing or altering or interfering with the students’ responses in any way.*
- g) Participating in, directing, aiding, counseling, assisting in, or encouraging any of the acts prohibited in this section.*

CONCLUSION

Based upon the preponderance of the evidence collected during this investigation, the investigators concluded Ms. Alvi breached the security and the confidentiality of the 2012 NJ ASK 4 MATH by failing in her responsibilities as the examiner, to ensure a proper and secure administration of the NJ ASK.

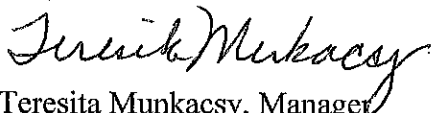
RECOMMENDATION

The district developed and submitted a corrective action plan (CAP) to the OA, which was accepted. The district shall submit an additional CAP to the OFAC indicating the measures it will implement to correct the security breach listed above and include the measures the district will implement to ensure staff compliance with the testing security procedures.

REFERRAL

This investigative report will be referred to the State Board of Examiners for further review and whatever action it deems appropriate.

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Approved by:



Robert J. Cicchino, Director
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