

The Wolverine Way. It's worth the climb.

Bellevue High School  
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Date: September 1, 2015  
To: Butch Goncharoff  
From: Scott Powers, Principal Bellevue High School  
Re: Grievance Response

Mr. Goncharoff:

Over the last twelve years as head coach, the Bellevue football program is the premier program in the state and arguably the country, with national recognition. In our conversations and my observations of you as a coach, I have witnessed someone who is not only committed to the game but committed to developing the character and life skills of your players. An incident occurred on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 in the weight room where a student alleged he was threatened by Tracy Ford, a former player who ran a strength and conditioning program. The Bellevue School District completed an investigation of this incident and determined that there were violations of District policies and procedures committed by this individual. As part of that investigation, your role in initially attempting to resolve the student and his family's complaint was noted.

On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 you were issued a written reprimand by Lauren McDaniel, Bellevue High School Athletic Director. You disagreed with the letter of reprimand and filed a Step 1 grievance per the Collective Bargaining Agreement, Article 6. Ms. McDaniel upheld her original decision and left the letter intact for violating Bellevue School District (BSD) policy, therefore denying the Step 1 grievance. You filed a Step 2 grievance, appealing her decision. Due to my absence during the timeframe stated in Article 6 for the Step 2 grievance, you filed a Step 3 grievance with Dr. Jeff Thomas, Executive Director of Human Resources. On August 17<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Thomas issued his Step 3 decision which removed the letter of reprimand from your file and I was asked to draft a new letter establishing corrective action(s) and expectations for you as head coach. Dr. Thomas identified the following two key issues:

1. What is the appropriate outcome associated with the self-reported violations involving Bellevue High School Football Program delineated as a result of the complaint filed?
2. What is the District response for corrective actions for you as the leader of the football program?

With the first issue, Ms. McDaniel will respond outlining the process of the sanctions imposed by the KingCo League for the Washington Interscholastic Athletics Association (WIAA) violations. These are violations associated with the football program and are adjudicated by KingCo and WIAA. As the head coach, you are the leader of the program and therefore these sanctions pertain to you and the program from the WIAA perspective. These sanctions are independent of any disciplinary action that may be taken by the Bellevue School District. Therefore, your grievance rights are directed for employment action taken by BSD, not program action taken by KingCo and WIAA. The appeal process or remedy based upon your disagreement of these

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program sanctions should be handled by Ms. McDaniel or Mr. Lowell in an appeal to the WIAA through the procedures outlined in the KingCo, WIAA District 2, and WIAA handbooks. Regarding the second key issue, my understanding of what took place between the time of the incident and the formal complaint to Jeff Lowell, District Athletic Director is as follows:

- You were not a first-hand witness to the exchange between Tracey Ford and the student on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014.
- The information you had gathered came from conversations with Tracy Ford and Matt Coombs about the exchange. Your recollection noted in the Initial Investigation from Tracy Ford, "that the student wanted to fight Tracy." You noted Matt described the meeting as "people assessing blame"...and did not ask Matt any further questions about [the event].
- You had a limited conversation with the father of the student at the banquet the night following the incident. The incident was not mentioned in the conversation with the father.
- I acknowledge you informed me in a timely manner about the meeting called by Tracy Ford and that you had made the decision to sever all ties between the BHS football program and his services. I was unaware that the meeting involved an exchange between Tracy Ford and a student that was a potential Harassment, Intimidation, or Bullying incident as outlined in the District procedure 3207P. It is important to note, however, in our conversation you did not convey some of the important details of the conflict between Mr. Ford and the student and the seriousness of the incident. I believe there was a missed opportunity to look into the incident as thoroughly as it could have been at the time you first learned of the incident. You should have talked with more than just the two adults in the room to get more information and you should have more assertively reached out to the parents as the issue unfolded. I should have pushed you for more details as well.
- You met with Tracy Ford within a few days of the incident on December 8, 2014 and informed Tracy Ford you would be severing all ties with him and business Ford Sports Performance.

Procedure 3270P states, "Any school staff who observes, overhears, or otherwise witnesses harassment, intimidation, or bullying or to whom such actions have been reported must take prompt and appropriate action to stop the harassment and to prevent its recurrence." Your actions severing further programmatic ties with Tracy Ford and his company met the requirements as outlined in this procedure. Your actions were done in a timely manner and would prohibit him having contact with the student.

Furthermore, Procedure 3270P defines Step 2 as: *Receiving an Incident Reporting Form*, "All staff are responsible for receiving oral and written reports. Whenever possible staff who initially receive an oral or written report of harassment, intimidation, or bullying will attempt to resolve the incident immediately. If the incident is resolved to the satisfaction of the parties involved, or if the incident does not meet the definition of harassment, intimidation or bullying, no further action may be necessary under this procedure." This procedure provides the direction, that

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communication should have taken place with both the potential victim and perpetrator to gathering information to have a more complete account of what transpired. Though you took actions against the perpetrator, you did not communicate this with the student or his family to see if the resolution met their satisfaction. Additionally, the procedure lays out steps when the report is unresolved, "All reports...will be recorded on a district Incident Reporting Form and submitted to the principal or designee." Without the closure with the family this incident would be deemed unresolved, and you had a responsibility to complete the Incident Reporting Form.

Procedure 5253P (Professional Boundaries) provide additional guidance that "employees are required to promptly notify the principal or supervisor of an employee or volunteer suspected of engaging in inappropriate conduct that violates this policy." Again, while you communicated that the meeting took place and Tracy Ford's role in calling the meeting, however, it was not communicated that there was an exchange that potentially met the district's definition of harassment, intimidation, bullying and/or boundary invasion.

It is my intent that his letter serve as documentation of the event and your role as the head coach of the Bellevue High School Football program. As such you have a responsibility to ensure players' both a physical and emotional safe environment. You took some prudent steps to address the concerns of the family, but the lack of awareness of the policies and procedures left your efforts short of what was required. It is my determination that both the district and you have an obligation to develop your knowledge and awareness in the area of harassment, intimidation, bullying and boundary invasion. It is my understanding the Bellevue School District coaches under the direction of the Bellevue School District Activities and Athletics Director has increased its training in this area to better serve coaches and their athletes. You are required to attend these annual trainings, and take a personal responsibility to further your understanding of them and the obligations you have as the head coach. In the future, incidents which could have an impact on student safety must be documented or you may use the appropriate reporting forms or methods to adequately document the steps you have taken.

Respectfully,

Scott Powers – Principal  
Bellevue High School  
425-456-7002