

Northern High School Parent Meetings

Follow-up Questions and Answers

Guilford County Schools (GCS) Superintendent Maurice “Mo” Green answered questions in two meetings with various members of the Northern Guilford High School Community on May 14, 2009. Some questions required additional research in order to provide accurate information. Outlined below are the questions that required follow-up and the answers to those questions. These answers were compiled by various GCS staff members and Jill Wilson, attorney to the Guilford County Board of Education.

Media Center: Superintendent’s Meeting with Parents and Student Athletes on May 14, 2009

1. What laws determine what is a public record, what is not?

In North Carolina, most records compiled by government entities, such as school districts, are considered public records. There are some notable exceptions, however. As it pertains to the investigation of issues at Northern Guilford High School, the following records are confidential unless the records fit into certain exceptions not applicable at this time:

Confidential information relating to students is protected by both FERPA (20 U.S.C. §1232), the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, a Federal law, and State law, specifically (North Carolina General Statute) N.C.G.S. §115C-402 and N.C.G.S. §115C-403.

Employee personnel records are also confidential in North Carolina, specifically N.C.G.S. §115C-319, N.C.G.S. §115C-320 and N.C.G.S. §115C-321. Per N.C.G.S. §115-320, the following information is a public record: the “employee’s name, age, date of original employment or appointment, current contract terms, current position, current title, current salary, date and amount of most recent promotion, demotion, transfer, suspension, separation, or other change in position classification, and the office or station to which the employee is currently assigned.”

Certain files of volunteers are also confidential. See N.C.G.S. §115C-209.1.

2. What has the investigation cost GCS and taxpayers?

Our school board attorney, who led the investigation, is currently compiling her records regarding this matter. However, most of the day-to-day work was conducted by GCS employees as part of their regular job duties. The departments involved include, but are not limited to, human resources, athletics, and student placement, among others.

3. Who conducted the investigation and what are their credentials?

The investigation was led by school board attorney Jill Wilson, an attorney with Brooks, Pierce, McLendon, Humphrey & Leonard, LLP.

A graduate of Wake Forest University's School of Law, Ms. Wilson represents numerous public school boards of education, private educational institutions, and colleges and universities on a wide range of education issues and in litigation in state and federal courts. She is the approved Counsel for the North Carolina School Board Trust and is a member of the Litigation and Insurance Section, American Bar Association.

The former president of the North Carolina Council of School Attorneys, Ms. Wilson is listed in The Best Lawyers in America (Woodward/IWhite in Education Law, 2008). She also was named by her peers as a North Carolina "Super Lawyer" in Schools and Education Law (2007-09), Law & Politics magazine.

Numerous GCS staff members were involved in the investigation as well as part of their regular job duties. These staff members include but are not limited to: Sharon Ozment, chief financial officer; Angie Henry, assistant finance officer; Dr. Peggy Thompson, chief human resources officer; Dr. Shirley Morrison, executive director of human resources; Carla Alphin, program administrator, human resources; Leigh Hebbard, GCS athletic director; and, Doyle Craven, executive director of student placement and assignment. State employees' resumes are not considered public records in North Carolina.

4. How do parents access the 6,000 emails?

A box of the public records mentioned above has been sent to Northern. Parents may view the records by calling the main office at Northern and scheduling an appointment.

5. How do we contact the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA)?

The NCHSAA Web site address is: www.nchsaa.org. This Web site includes contact information, eligibility rules and other helpful links.

6. Is the letter that the superintendent sent to the NCHSAA a public record? Can it be viewed by the NGHS parents?

Records filed by GCS with the NCHSAA are not available to the public. The documents filed related to individual student eligibility and are not public records as they contain confidential information relating to students protected by both FERPA (20 U.S.C. §1232) and State law, specifically N.C.G.S. §115C-402 et seq. and N.C.G.S. §115C-319 et seq.

Auditorium: Superintendent's Meeting with Parents, Students and Community Members

1. Is there a way to appeal the decisions regarding students' athletic eligibility and the state championship to the NCHSAA?

The NCHSAA is an organization made up of its member institutions, including Guilford County Schools. Only member schools or districts may appeal decisions made by the NCHSAA by making such a request in writing.

Outside of the regular meetings of the Board of Directors, the NCHSAA Executive Committee of the Board will review the appeal. Any expenses related to the appeal must be paid by the member school or district making the request. GCS does not plan to appeal the decision or the penalties levied by the NCHSAA.

There is no legal right of appeal to the NCHSAA for individual students. There is no legal right of appeal to the Superintendent or Board of Education for individual students who are declared ineligible.

2. What will be done to protect our students at future games? Many of them are being bullied on Facebook and from other schools.

Bullying of staff or students will not be tolerated in GCS. Any students or staff members who feel harassed or bullied should contact a member of administration immediately. Any such claims will be investigated and handled as appropriate. For more information, see the attached form or click on http://www.gcsnc.com/policies/admin_policy/jcdad-p.htm.

As mentioned previously, the district-wide character education plan will also address issues regarding bullying, as well as the importance of taking personal responsibility for one's actions and showing respect to others, among other character traits.

3. Have you found any academic misdoings related to athletics?

So far, our investigation has focused primarily on athletic eligibility, particularly on residency issues. The academic program is a part of the ongoing investigation, however. The new principal, William "Will" Laine, will review the academic program and will work collaboratively with teachers and staff to make any modifications needed for improvement.

4. What is the statute that prohibits confidential information from being released?

See answer to question number one from the superintendent's meeting with parents and student athletes.

5. Were parents of the five ineligible students notified that their children were going to be spoken to individually?

The plan was to talk with the students with the parents present or with their knowledge and permission. To that end, GCS athletic director Leigh Hebbard attempted to contact each family personally, using the phone numbers on record at the school. In some cases, Mr. Hebbard was not able to reach parents directly and had to leave a message.

6. Why does Jill Wilson's daughter attend Grimsley when she lives in the Page district?

Student records are private and confidential; however, Ms. Wilson has authorized staff to release the following information: Ms. Wilson's daughter is properly enrolled in her school.

7. Will the principal meet with the student body prior to the end of the year?

Yes. Mr. Laine will start meeting with small groups of students, staff members and parents in June as part of his “entry plan” into Northern.

8. What is the district going to do about bullying at Northern?

GCS’ student services division has worked with the interim principal and Mr. Laine to develop a plan for addressing this concern. More information about this will be shared with parents as part of a separate communication. Students, parents or staff members are encouraged to report any and all incidents or suspected incidents of bullying. Bullying of any kind will not be tolerated at Northern, or within GCS. See the attached form or go to for more information:

http://www.gcsnc.com/policies/admin_policy/jcdad-p.htm

9. How will Mr. Laine handle high school exit standards without senior high school experience?

Mr. Laine is a highly capable instructional leader. We are confident he will ensure that students and staff meet all local, state and federal requirements and standards for secondary schools. His new regional superintendent, Dr. John Modest, is a highly experienced former principal who will assist in this process as well.

10. Is there bullying occurring at the elementary level about this incident?

Again, bullying will not be tolerated. Anyone with concerns or information about bullying should contact their school principal immediately so we may address any situations that occur forthrightly and proactively.

The district-wide character education plan will also address issues regarding bullying, as well as the importance of taking personal responsibility for one’s actions and showing respect to others, among other character traits.

11. Will Mr. Green address the entire student body, regardless of whether they are athletes?

Mr. Green will not meet with the entire student body at this time; however, he will continue to consider this suggestion. The new principal will meet with students, faculty, staff members and parents in a series of small group sessions, beginning in June.

12. How can we promote NGHS and be positively promoted in the media?

Information about good news, awards and achievements by students and staff at Northern may be sent to District Relations at goodnews@gcsnc.com. District Relations shares this information with others via the GCS Web site, GCSTV2, various publications and through the local news media.

13. Does Northern have the funds to return to the NCHSAA? Will monies raised by the booster club be used to pay for the fines?

The fines are being paid by the athletic department at Northern.

14. Where did the money for the gate receipts go?

Gate receipts go the athletic department account for the school hosting and/or participating in the event.