

From: [Waggoner, Mary](#)
To: [EPS.MailList](#)
Subject: Message from Superintendent Cohn -- setting the record straight
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...*NewsLinks*

A Web-based newsletter for the staff of Everett Public Schools
Sept. 14, 2010 (*NewsLinks* articles are now [archived on DocuShare](#))

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Yesterday afternoon on its website and again this morning in print, the *Herald* misstated the district's actions, intentions and statements about a personnel matter involving anonymous allegations against one of our principals we received last summer. I am truly sorry this is occurring.

Be assured that allegations against our principal were thoroughly investigated and found to be completely unfounded.

So that you have correct information and to assure you about how the district investigates allegations of misconduct, I have obtained Principal Terry Cheshire's permission to share with you this additional information.

Last June, the district's human resources department received anonymous allegations of adult-to-adult misconduct by Jackson High School Principal Terry Cheshire. With Mr. Cheshire's knowledge, the department contacted the Washington School Risk Management Pool, our insurance company, to request assistance in investigating the allegations from an independent, outside investigator. Shortly thereafter, Terry and his wife received at their home an anonymous letter with the same allegations. The Risk Pool assigned an independent legal firm to lead the investigation. Contacting the Risk Pool to request assistance with a personnel matter, a student discipline matter, or similar matters that hold the potential for high risk or liability is normal operating procedure.

The findings, which showed no evidence to support the anonymous allegations, were reported to me last summer. I agreed that our duty to diligently investigate had been met, that the allegations were absolutely unfounded, and closed the matter in July.

At that time, Mr. Cheshire could have filed a complaint with police and asked for a law enforcement investigation into who was behind the false, anonymous accusations. He chose instead the high road and decided not to pursue such action. As he told his staff this morning in his meeting with them, "I am very protective of my family and personal life, and I had hoped that the letters had provided this person the opportunity to vent their anger, and they would fade away, eliminating the need for me to address this issue publicly."

Last week, our communications office was contacted by *Herald* reporter Andy Rathbun, and asked, "Are any principals, assistant principals or other administrators under investigation?" Mary Waggoner answered truthfully, "No." No member of our administrative staff is under investigation by this district. That answer is true today as it was when given; no member of the district administrative team is under investigation.

After learning of reporter Rathbun's call and his disclosure that the paper had received a letter apparently repeating unfounded accusations against Mr. Cheshire, I grew concerned that other media outlets might receive similar false reports. Therefore, I sent an email to our school board members on Friday afternoon apprising them of the possibility of a news story. That email contained a PDF file of a memo from Lynn Evans to me. Somehow, that memo was posted to the *Herald* website yesterday, Monday.

Because the anonymous letters were received by our human resources office, which is within the city of Everett, I decided to follow up with conversations with the Everett Police about the harassment of Mr. Cheshire. Because Mr. Cheshire's residence is in the county, Mr. Cheshire filed a complaint yesterday with the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office. Please be clear: our request that law enforcement be involved in this matter is due solely to repeated, unfounded, anonymous harassment of Mr. Cheshire and his family. We will work with both law enforcement agencies, should they determine there are grounds for criminal investigation.

The *Herald* has portrayed the district as lying and misleading and characterized a confidential personnel investigation as a cover-up. The fact is, the investigation was conducted professionally, thoroughly, and fairly; Mr. Cheshire was aware of it at the time. In my view, our human resources staff and the Risk Pool staff afforded Mr. Cheshire the due process to which he is entitled, while thoroughly investigating the claims. The allegations were unfounded, and the case was closed in July. Yet it appears someone continues to anonymously perpetuate rumors. Common decency says we should respond to such malicious action; Everett Public Schools cannot tolerate a hostile environment for its staff or its students.

In this profession we are held to a very high standard. Individually and as an organization, we all work carefully to keep our schools safe places to work and learn. Even so, any one of us can be the subject of complaints. In my 25 years in leadership roles, I've seen some complaints proven true and some proven to be false. We walk a very fine line when investigating such complaints: to learn the truth, to protect student and staff safety and rights, and to be fair to all involved.

In my view, the investigation of anonymous allegations against Mr. Cheshire was a necessary investigation conducted with utmost professionalism and with the utmost sense of fairness. I am committed to conducting all investigations in a fair, forthright, and *confidential* manner, and to both supporting staff and holding staff accountable for the high standards of our profession and of this community.

Confidential does not mean cover up; it means confidential. Each of us is entitled to the basic presumption of innocence as a fundamental value in our society. That is what happened here, and that is what you can count on me to ensure while I'm superintendent.

Tonight, our school board will hold a special meeting to discuss this matter. If they feel it is necessary, Washington state law allows them to meet in an executive session, a confidential setting to receive and evaluate complaints or charges against a public employee, review the performance of a public employee, and discuss litigation or potential litigation with legal counsel representing the district.

Today's *Herald* characterizes an executive session as a "secret meeting" and hints at a cover up. *Like you and I are, Mr. Cheshire is entitled to executive session confidentiality and to protection against statements that defame him.* The law and board policy bind all board members and me to maintain, in strict confidence, the content of executive sessions, should it be the board's choice to hold an executive session.

After being in this community for a little over a year, I'm very proud to be a part of this district. I'm very proud to do this work with and for you and our students, and I'm very proud of the culture of success here.

I choose to tell a story fairly, treat others with an even hand and support our work to build a better future for our kids and our colleagues. I assume the best of intentions in those with whom we work, and I wish you the very, very best in the new school year.

4086. (Email address for each is FirstInitialLastName@everettsd.org)