

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

February 2, 2013

Ringleader in Teacher Cheating Scam Pleads Guilty (WREG-Channel 3, Memphis)

Video available at <http://wreg.com/2013/02/01/ringleader-in-teacher-cheating-scam-pleads-guilty/>

(Memphis) A former assistant principal and guidance counselor pleaded guilty to facilitating a test-taking scam spanning three states for almost two decades.

59-year-old Clarence Mumford Sr. pleaded guilty to two counts out of his 63-count indictment, admitting to wire fraud, mail fraud, social security fraud, and aggravated identity theft. He will face between two and five years in federal prison, as well as a maximum fine of \$250,000.

He admitted to a federal judge that he helped create fake IDs for test-takers to take teacher examinations for other teachers or prospective teachers.

So far, eight others have pleaded guilty. Eighteen more people have signed diversion agreements, admitting that they paid Mumford to have tests taken for them. Those people are not allowed to teach for the next five years.

The people involved come from three states, including employees at Memphis City Schools, Shelby County Schools, schools in Eastern Arkansas, and several school districts in Mississippi.

Mumford's attorney, Coleman W. Garrett, said, "He's not doing well. He's shaking. He's nervous, he's scared."

Mumford sat through the court proceeding with his arms crossed and did not want to speak to the media.

Garrett said the complicated scheme of creating fake IDs with superimposed photos and laminate paper was a result of something spiraling out of control over time.

"It started out with him trying to assist someone, just doing him a favor. And it grew. Once he was successful doing it a couple of times, the word got out," he said.

15 years later, several people managed to take 70 to 90 tests using fake IDs.

Garrett said that his client has not said that he is sorry in so many words, but knows that he did wrong and needs to be punished. Still, Garrett said that his client believes he has suffered quite a lot already.

"It's kind of like a Joe Paterno effect. You know, you spend your whole life trying to build a reputation and trying to help people and what have you, and at the end of the line, it all gets snatched up from under you and you go down in flames," he said.

Mumford was at one time a guidance counselor and an assistant principal in the Memphis City Schools. He most recently worked for the Hughes, AR school district.

Garrett does not believe Mumford recruited anyone along the way. Rather, people approached him.

However, in one press release, the U.S. Attorney's Office referred to a case of a Mr. Shaw, who also took tests for others: "Mumford Sr. repeatedly asked Mr. Shaw to take examinations for teachers needing passing scores, and Mr. Shaw eventually agreed."

The U.S. Attorney's office named 26 people who paid to have tests taken for them. They paid hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars.

Ironically, sometimes the paid test-takers did not show up or did not pass the test. Some of the people who paid did not eventually get their teaching license.

In some cases, Educational Testing Services that creates the PRAXIS exam, discarded test results when they observed an unexplained big jump in someone's score, or observed handwriting that didn't match.

ETS finally caught one of the test-takers taking tests for two different people in one day. ETS then reported it to the Tennessee Department of Education, who then turned it over to TBI.

U.S. Attorney Edward L. Stanton III said in a statement, "Clarence Mumford cheated both honest teachers who did things the right way and also the parents and children who deserve to have qualified teachers in the classroom."

LR district filing: Keep '89 deal (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The Little Rock School District on Friday asked a federal judge to refuse to release the state from a 1989 settlement of the 30-year-old Pulaski County school desegregation lawsuit.

An attorney for the 25,000-student Little Rock district, the state's largest, asked U.S. District Judge D. Price Marshall Jr. to instead direct the state to assist Pulaski County districts with remediation programs and transportation costs.

The school district's filing Friday came in response to the state's motion last year to be relieved from obligations in the settlement, which has cost the state about \$1.1 billion.

The state continues to pay about \$70 million a year in special desegregation aid to the Little Rock, North Little Rock and Pulaski County Special districts, primarily for magnet schools, the majority to-minority interdistrict student transfer program and for teacher health insurance and retirement costs.

Also on Friday, in the same desegregation case, the Pulaski County Special district sent to Marshall a 27-page status report on that district's efforts to comply with the unmet provisions of its Desegregation Plan 2000. Marshall had asked for the status report in December with an eye toward scheduling court hearings later this year.

The Arkansas attorney general's office last year argued to Marshall that release from 1989 settlement obligations was warranted in part because the Little Rock and North Little Rock districts have been declared unitary or desegregated by the federal courts and that the Pulaski County Special district is partially unitary.

Chris Heller, who represents the Little Rock district, argued Friday to the contrary.

“The State was adjudicated a constitutional violator,” he said, “in part, because of its role in creating and maintaining residential segregation in Pulaski County. Thus, residential segregation is a vestige of the state’s past discrimination that must be eliminated to the extent practicable before the State may be released.”

Aaron Sadler, a spokesman for the attorney general’s office, said the state’s attorneys had received the Little Rock district response late Friday afternoon and were reviewing it.

In a Jan. 17 order, Marshall had denied the Little Rock district’s motion to dismiss the state’s request for release without a hearing. He said changed circumstances in the districts, including the fact that the North Little Rock and Little Rock districts are unitary and released from court supervision, warrant an evidentiary hearing on the motion for release.

The judge directed the Little Rock district to respond to the state’s motion to withdraw by Friday, and that all the parties in the case submit to him by Feb. 22 proposed dates for completing discovery, filing legal briefs and holding an evidentiary hearing.

Heller also argued Friday that the unitary status of the districts was an expected outcome of the 1989 settlement and does not justify terminating the magnet school and majority-to-minority transfer programs that promote student desegregation in the three districts. He said the unitary status “does not constitute a changed circumstance” that would warrant the state’s release from the settlement.

In the 30-page response, Heller on behalf of the Little Rock district asserted that the state “has consistently interpreted the agreement to the detriment of LRSD and the defendant districts, forcing the districts to pursue remedies through litigation.”

Heller also argued that the state failed to maintain a constitutional public education system because it has failed to make financial adjustments in school funding that are rational or necessary. He said school districts are inappropriately funded based on available money and not on what is necessary for student achievement.

He also said the state has failed to identify or develop programs to remediate the racial achievement disparity among students. Instead of attempting to develop those programs, the state hired an expert to say that there was not a known program to lessen the disparity, he said.

“The state’s failure to make a good-faith effort cannot be excused simply because it might not have been successful,” Heller wrote.

He argued that the state has failed to monitor the districts as required by the settlement.

He also said the state has adopted a transportation funding system that funds the Pulaski County districts to a lesser degree than other districts in the state, a move he said that offends the anti-retaliation provision of the settlement.

“Assuming finite funds, every dollar spent on transportation is a dollar that cannot be spent on direct educational programs needed to remediate the racial achievement disparity,” he said.

STATUS REPORT

The Pulaski County Special district's status report on Friday was in response to the judge's request in December. The district had asked in November for court hearings on areas in which its leaders believed the 17,935-student school system is now in compliance and can be released from court monitoring.

"The District believes it has attained substantial plan compliance in the areas of Staffing, Special Education, One-Race Class Reports, and Secondary Gifted and Talented, Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement [courses] so as to be adjudicated unitary and eligible for release from court supervision," Sam Jones, an attorney for the district, wrote in the introduction of Friday's status report.

Jones proposed that hearings be conducted in a sequence starting with special education, then one-race classes, then staffing and, lastly, the gifted education/ Advanced Placement issue.

Even if the district is found after the hearings to be in compliance with its obligations in the four areas, it would remain under court supervision in areas such as student discipline, student achievement, school facilities, scholarships and monitoring.

In May 2011, U.S. District Judge Brian Miller, who has since stepped down as the presiding judge in the desegregation case, was particularly critical of the Pulaski County Special district, saying that compliance with the district's desegregation Plan 2000 "seems to be an afterthought."

The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis in December 2011 upheld Miller's finding that the district had not complied with many parts of its desegregation plan.

Friday's status report to Marshall highlighted district efforts on each desegregation plan provision in areas that the district has yet to be released from court monitoring.

Calendar (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — This is a calendar of public events of the 89th General Assembly for Monday, the 21st day of the 2013 legislative session.

HOUSE

10 a.m. Advanced Communications and Information Technology Committee, Room 151 1:30 p.m. House convenes

SENATE

1:30 p.m. Senate convenes 10 minutes after adjournment Transportation, Technology and Legislative Affairs Committee, Room 309

ALSO 9 a.m. Polaris Project, Room 171 10 a.m. Joint Public Retirement and Social Security Programs, Room 130
11 a.m. Legislative Black Caucus, Room 149 2 p.m. Freshman Caucus, Room 171 3 p.m. Cattleman's Caucus, Room 272

Legislative summary (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — This is a summary list of bills (by bill number, lead sponsor and title) introduced through Friday in the 89th General Assembly, except for appropriation bills, which, along with other bills and resolutions, may be found at the legislative website: www.arkleg.state.ar.us

HOUSE

HB1235, W. Wagner - An act to repeal obsolete requirements for reporting and retaining records of stolen and recovered vehicles to the Department of Arkansas State Police.

HB1236, W. Wagner - To repeal certain positions that no longer exist from the state police additional salary payment provisions.

HB1237, Wardlaw - Concerning training requirements for canine law enforcement units.

HB1238, Kerr - To amend the law concerning state supported public employees' retirement systems, local public employees' retirement systems, and retirement benefits paid to public officials.

HB1239, Gossage - To create a new benefit program under the Arkansas Local Police and Fire Retirement System.

HB1240, Love - To allow an earned income tax credit against Arkansas income tax liability.

HB1241, Steel - Concerning the consequences of not paying a court-ordered fine.

HB1242, Steel - Concerning the offense of furnishing, possessing, or using prohibited articles in a correctional facility.

HB1243, Collins - To allow trained and licensed staff and faculty to carry a concealed handgun on a university, college or community college campus under certain circumstances.

HB1244, Lampkin - To amend the definition of "child" for the purpose of a state employee's leave for participation in children's educational leave to include a developmentally disabled child.

Watson Chapel School District personnel get training for emergency situations (Pine Bluff Commercial)

With several shootings reported at schools around the country recently, the Watson Chapel School District is trying to be proactive and develop a plan to deal with that possibility, as well as with bomb threats and other incidents on campus.

On Friday, school administrators, members of the school board, school security officers, principals and others gathered for an all-day training session under the instruction of Jeff Sharpmack, the emergency manager at Little Rock Air Force Base in Jacksonville and the son of a school district employee.

Sharpmack said he and Paul Jones — director of security for the school district and a Jefferson County Justice of the Peace — walked through school buildings Monday, and he discussed some of his observations, including locks on classroom doors.

“They all lock on the outside and if you have an active shooter, you want to lock the doors but you can’t from the inside,” he said.

He also explained that while there are blinds on windows in some classrooms, others don’t have blinds.

“You want to give a shooter outside the sense that there is nobody in the room and having the capacity to lower blinds can create that,” Sharpmack said.

He also suggested posting a checklist for teachers in each classroom, explaining what they are expected to do in the event of an emergency.

“For example, if there is a tornado, you’re expected to do this, do this, and do this, and your job is done,” he said, adding that principals and school administrators would have their own checklists.

“You want to make it as simple as it can be,” he said. “Don’t make people think too much, just react.”

Sharpmack said it is important to have just one entrance to a building, so that office personnel and principals can control who has access.

He also suggested that after the school holds a fire drill or tornado drill, the teachers and others should get together and talk about the how the drill went, looking for ways to make things smoother.

Sharpmack said that at the Air Force base, security personnel conduct random surveys, looking at who might be on a parking lot, for example, or what vehicles might be driving through an area, and he said the same principle would work for the school district.

On the subject of fire drills and tornado drills, John Hayden, a principal at the high school, mentioned that in a mass shooting several years ago at Jonesboro Westside, part of the plan was to get the students out of the classrooms by calling in a bomb threat.

“There are a lot of possibilities out there,” Sharpmack said. “There are a lot of gray areas but one of the things you want to do is check the surroundings.”

Also on the subject of bomb threats, Sharpmack passed out copies of a document used at the Air Force base that included a number of things the person receiving the call should note, including the voice of the caller, background sounds, the exact wording of the threat, and even asking for the caller’s name and location.

Still on the subject, Sharpmack asked who was responsible for knowing that all the students were accounted for in the event that they are sent out of the classrooms because of a bomb or other threat.

Rose Martin, a principal at Coleman Intermediate School, said each teacher is responsible for taking roll, and that information is relayed to administrators.

When to call police about a threat also was discussed, with Sharpmack recommending that the call should be made from outside the school building, rather than inside since electronic impulses could trigger an explosive device if there was one.

“Our number one priority is to vacate the building,” Superintendent Danny Hazelwood said.

Jones mentioned that when the schools do conduct fire drills or have bomb threats, “we don’t get far enough away.”

Asked by Hazelwood “what is a safe distance?” Sharpmack recommended contacting the fire department.

“A lot of times, the fire department will come out for free and help you figure out a safe distance,” he said. “If you’re unsure, get back until you can’t see the school.”

Ideas such as adding caller ID, providing radios for teachers and improving communications between the offices and classrooms were also discussed during the early part of the training session, as was posting the phone numbers for Jones, other security personnel and school administrators in each classroom.

Arkansas Times Blog

* PRAYING FOR CONWAY SCHOOLS: Having had some cutesy responses to past FOI requests for the Conway School District, all now funneled first (improperly I believe) through a Texas religious organization, I expanded a request for all possible forms of communication on the subject of campus visits by church groups, apparently a longstanding practice in Conway that a church-state separation group has questioned. The request produced 200 pages of emails, texts, notes and more on the subject.

Let me say this in Conway's defense: If some of the communications are correct in practice as well as in stated policy, the visits are defensible. The rules — which apply to a number of church groups — say that visitors may only visit students on an approved list, only in the lunchroom, only when an administrative supervisor is present and, most important, "not witnessing."

K.K. Bradshaw, director of administrative services, indicated in outlining the church visitors at various middle and high schools that K-Life, an evangelical organization, in visiting the Carl Stuart Middle School, had apparently caused concerns. She reported that a school administrator there had had "a very frank discussion with K-Life about respecting boundaries because they could be asked not to return." K-Life has insisted to me it does not proselytize. The Freedom from Religion Foundation had targeted Carl Stuart as the location of impermissible religious activities, although it mentioned an unrelated church with a similar name that doesn't visit Carl Stuart, which it may have confused with K-Life.

I've said from the start that, if the school district allows lunch visitors from a broad spectrum of groups, they can't exclude churches. And if they prevent proselytizing and religious recruitment, I don't think the schools have ventured into constitutional problem areas. There's obviously a recruitment effect from any visitation of students by any type of visitor. And anyone is free to argue about the educational value of outside visitors generally, church or otherwise. But the question in controversy is religious establishment. Given the evangelical bent of several of the visiting groups, it's not unfair to fear they might take liberties.