

Kellie Kochensparger
Before the State Board of Education of Ohio
July 15, 2014

Members of the Board:

This is my second effort to alert state officials about testing irregularities at Horizon Science Academy Dayton High School in Dayton. In March 2013 – my third and final year at the school – I filed an anonymous phone complaint with the Ohio Department of Education after witnessing a series of troubling events during the administration of the OGTs.

Although students were permitted to use calculators for the science portion of the test, school administrators refused to allow them to do so. That placed our students at a disadvantage over students in other schools. Because of a lack of administrative planning and space constraints, the ESL students kept getting moved from room to room after the initial 2 ½ hour testing period based on what room might be available at that time. That is not a good testing practice and again puts students at a disadvantage.

During a test administration prep meeting for the OAAs, the school's testing coordinator told the teachers to make sure the students showed us, page by page, that they finished answering all of the questions before allowing them to turn in their tests. I knew that was not permitted so I asked our director, Mr. Ugur Zengin, about it while we were all still in the same meeting. He stated that teachers were permitted to make sure the students answered the questions. I told him I would check with ODE regarding testing protocol, and he made it very clear to everyone in the room that no one was supposed to contact ODE under any circumstances.

I followed the state's testing guidelines and protocol.

Although I am licensed to teach grades 1 through 8, during my time at Horizon, I was assigned and taught students in grades 5 through 12. I did my best, despite working for a school that was hopelessly disorganized and tolerated, and even rewarded, incompetent teachers. I had several students complain to me about a science teacher, Mr. Ali Ozer. They said he sometimes fell asleep in class and did little more than show in-class videos. School administrators knew this but promoted him to director of the downtown elementary school.

While I did not personally witness the in-class groping "game" described by other teachers, I heard about it from some students. Students described the game that took place in Mr. Toprak's classroom. There were multiple times that he left the classroom unattended – something that is not supposed to

occur. I don't know whether this "game" took place while he was in the room or after he had left. Either way, the school principal knew about the issues and did nothing to try and stop them.

Administrators also failed to tell parents that their kids were suspended for having oral sex outside of the building where they were supposed to be inside attending a school-sponsored after-school cultural festival. Some of the activity by the 6th & 8th graders was captured on a surveillance video, and many other students stood around watching the sexual activity. An administrator shared that the school told parents the suspensions were handed out because the kids were outside of their assigned areas, with no mention of the sexual activity. As a teacher and parent, when I questioned further, I was told that I ask too many questions and that the situation was "being handled."

I don't think parents had any idea what was going on at the school. There was a great emphasis on keeping parents happy and there was a culture of intimidation intended to discourage teachers from doing anything that could adversely affect the school's relationship with parents. Any teacher who asked too many questions ran the risk of getting fired.

I was not surprised that an incident as serious as the oral sex was kept from the parents. Concept school leaders care much more about the school's image than the students they are supposed to serve.

For one year, I served as the school's public communications director in addition to teaching. I went to the Concept PR training program meetings. The training emphasizes promotion of the schools' academic achievements – even if those achievements are inflated or fabricated. Concept places a big emphasis on courting politicians. PR people had to do a monthly report and list the politicians they contacted, tell whether they took any kids to visit his or her office, and say if they invited any politicians to visit the school. Their strategic PR plan was comprehensive and designed to continually put the schools in a positive light in terms of how the politicians and communities viewed them. The reality was much different from the newsletter photos shown. I know of one student who failed 7th grade and then had to repeat the year with the agreement with Mr. Ugur Zengince that she would be promoted to 9th grade if she passed 7th grade during her second attempt. She indeed completely skipped 8th grade and all associated curriculum.

I have a new job and will be teaching English Writing to students in grades 6 through 8. I am looking forward to my new challenges. I have no doubt that Concept and Horizon will try to paint me and any others that speak out about their inappropriate behavior as "former disgruntled employees" or try to say that it was a "miscommunication." Please keep in mind that I have nothing to gain by sharing with you these truths except that I implore you for the sake of the students to please scrutinize carefully how the education of the children and our tax dollars are being abused by this school system.

I am happy to provide additional information if needed. You can contact me at the following email:

Kakochensparger@gmail.com