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## **CPS Inspector General Releases Annual Report: First Full Year of Reporting from the OIG's Sexual Allegations Unit; Barbara Byrd-Bennett's Repeated Efforts to Steer CPS Business to Her Friends; and CPS's Changes to Testing Procedures in Response to the OIG's Review**

Chicago — The Office of Inspector General for the Chicago Board of Education investigated a wide range of fraud, mismanagement and misconduct last school year, including numerous sexual misconduct matters.

This year's Annual Report documents the first full year of the work of the OIG's Sexual Allegations Unit, which is tasked with investigating allegations of sexual misconduct or other concerning behavior by a school-affiliated adult against a CPS or charter school student. Those SAU cases include eight that have resulted in criminal charges, as well as eight more matters involving particularly severe sexual misconduct. The OIG made additional findings of sexual harassment, sex-based discrimination or other sexual misconduct in 24 other cases.

The OIG investigations found violations that fell short of sexual misconduct in 68 additional SAU cases. Those cases included some instances of very troubling behavior — including matters involving lewd comments or unusually close personal relationships with students — that, based on the evidence, did not rise to the level of sexual misconduct. In some other cases the conduct was clearly non-sexual and perhaps well-intentioned, but nevertheless violated CPS policy or guidelines designed to thwart grooming or otherwise limit opportunities for improper interaction between adults and students.

The OIG also completed full investigations and issued reports to the Board in 159 other SAU cases in which the OIG found that the allegations were not substantiated.

The Annual Report also discusses yet another OIG investigation into former CPS Chief Executive Officer Barbara Byrd-Bennett, who pleaded guilty to wire fraud in 2015 for her role in a kickback scheme with CPS vendors. This latest OIG investigation involving Byrd-Bennett examined her ongoing efforts during the entirety of her tenure with CPS to steer CPS business to two close friends and colleagues in the field of education.

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She first successfully steered a \$6.3 million professional-services contract to the company where her friends worked. Although that contract was required to be awarded pursuant to a competitive process, Byrd-Bennett and other trusted CPS officials engineered the process so that the contract was awarded to the company they favored based on their personal relationships.

Further, the following year, after her two friends left that CPS vendor to form their own company, Byrd-Bennett twice attempted to redirect CPS professional-services business to them improperly as subcontractors, first under a renewal of the contract with their former company, and later under a subsequent contract for professional services that CPS awarded a third company.

The OIG found that Byrd-Bennett and three other CPS officials — who have all since left the district — violated district procurement and ethical rules through their dealings with the two friends and the associated companies. The OIG also made similar findings against the two friends, the three companies involved and three company executives.

The Board has advised that it is taking action in response to the OIG's recommendations in this matter, including initiating proceedings to debar certain vendors from doing business with CPS and engaging an independent monitor to assess the third company's ethics and compliance culture and monitor it for three years.

This year's Annual Report also includes an update on the Board's response to the OIG's performance review of CPS's high-stakes test for third- through eighth-graders. The OIG's review revealed a concerning level of unusually long test durations, high test pause counts and other irregularities among exams administered in the spring of 2018.

The Board has adopted all of the OIG's recommendations, including hiring a test security expert to help implement new procedures recommended by the OIG. The new procedures for these computer-based adaptive Reading and Mathematics tests include, among other things: setting a time limit; recording the proctor of each test; requiring proctors to document the reason for every pause during the test; and requiring that primary proctors be "disinterested" teachers for exams tied to teacher evaluations (in the past, Reading and Math teachers whose evaluations were tied to their students' test results were allowed to be the sole proctors of their students' tests).

The OIG believes the latest changes represent a substantial step forward in test security.

According to CPS, the test vendor attested that the policies proposed by CPS "make progress toward addressing the primary issue identified in the Inspector General's report and, if faithfully implemented, will greatly improve the consistency of test administration procedures within CPS."

In addition, CPS's new test security expert has said that moving to a timed test constitutes "a very important step in strengthening test security and protecting test validity."

Other matters discussed in the OIG's Annual Report include cases involving employees who falsified their time or abused benefits, employees who violated CPS's residency policy and vendors who engaged in misconduct.

A copy of the Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report can be found online at the OIG's website: [cpsoig.org](https://www.cpsoig.org).

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