

December 28, 2005

Mr. Rotunno,

Your letter to file dated October 6, 2005 (and received by me on October 14, 2005); describes your version of the meeting that we had in the presence of Ms. Stillman, our JFK UFT Chapter Leader. During that meeting, you made a number of accusations.

I was 'summoned to the principal's office to be questioned on four letters to file for which I had filed four grievances with the UFT.

1. The first, was from Ms. Raquel Ortiz, former AP of the Science department. In the letter, she accuses me of being missing from marking the science regent's exams for portions of two days. I made a written reply, refuting her accusations, which included a number of documents and a petition from eyewitness teachers which stated that I was indeed present in the marking room at the times she made issue.
2. The second, was a letter from you, Mr. Rotunno, Principal of John F. Kennedy High School, which reprimands me and suggests that I be docked 4 days pay for claimed absences in June. I wrote a timely letter in reply, refuting your claims and providing supporting explanation and documentation.
3. The third, was a letter from Ms. Wafta Shama, who claims that I was late for a staff development meeting. In my letter of response, I stated that I was retrieving a cabinet with the permission of Mr. Shama, the new AP for Art, Music, Science, Business & Technology. Mr. Shama had been present at a previous meeting to confirm my claim and so, the letter was withdrawn.
4. The fourth, was a letter from Mr. Shama, who claims that he looked through my classroom window for five minutes and criticized what he saw. I wrote a letter in response, describing his actions as harrassive and objected to the fact that his was not a real 'observation'. I also refuted his claims and questioned his credentials to evaluate me given that he has no science background.

After the grievance letters were discussed, you then went on to describe reports that were made to you by Mr. Kent, my 'cooperating' teacher. After reading his descriptions, you asked me to comment. Ms. Stillman and I left the room to have a brief conversation. Upon our return, I declined to respond.

You said that "Mr. Kent states that a student sits at the back of the room because he does not want to be video taped. You still videotape. Why?"

You said that "Mr. Kent saw you with a student inside the science prep room (618) with a video camera. Mr. Kent stated that "he overheard you talking about Mr. Kent". You then said that "Kent approached and said 'you should not be videotaping'. He then turned his attention to the student and said 'don't you have a social studies class?' You said that Mr. Kent claimed that "Ms. Williams said that the student was doing something for her".

You then said that “Mr. Kent stated that you were videotaping a class that you are in. Mr. Kent said that he did not want to be videotaped”. He said that “Ms. Williams said that she was taping for a chemistry teacher certification”. You, Mr. Rotunno, then stated that: ‘This is yet another instance in which you defied his request’.

I feel that an analysis of your statements will beautifully expose your underlying motivations regarding your objections to the idea of videotaping and with the issue of my team teaching with Mr. Kent.

Must I remind you that Mr. Kent is a ‘cooperating teacher’. I do not take direction from him. He was to work with me as an equal. However, through his own acts, he undermined my authority in the classroom and failed to gain the respect of the students. That you, Mr. Rotunno, feel that Mr. Kent has the right to order me to do anything related to the classroom can only be explained by me stating the obvious. It appears to me, that you and Mr. Kent share similar biases and delusions regarding your power and authority. I believe that your Catholic upbringing aligns you with Mr. Kent’s Orthodox Jewish upbringing to share the opinion that men somehow have a presumed authority over women. I believe that for this reason, you have supported Mr. Kent’s various tactics to disrupt my teaching of the classes that we were assigned by you to ‘share’. You have been complicit in failing to recognize me as a teacher in the team taught classes by failing to list my name on the attendance and grade report sheets; you have also protected Mr. Kent’s teaching status and position in the school; although you knew that he received an unsatisfactory teaching performance review from the YABC program in Spring 2005. As it is clear that Mr. Kent was not placed in my classroom for his teaching contributions, I can only assume that he was placed there by you to serve as an annoyance to me and also, to act as a spy against me for your administration. It is no wonder that Mr. Kent resists the idea of being videotaped. Both he and you have an interest in masking the truth regarding your failure to perform your duties. I believe this is why you both fear and attack anyone one who may hold any record of your malfeasance.

Regarding the issue of the video release forms; I searched the Board of Education Website and could not find a standard form. The release form that I distributed to students and parents has the same text as the release used by the Boy Scouts of Canada. As the Boy Scouts is a National Organization which involves school age children; I believe that a release that is good enough for them, should also be good enough for John F. Kennedy High School. If the release is not adequate for the needs of the school, I feel that you should have notified me of that in advance. I have, after all, been photographing and videotaping students during school related activities for some time now. Last year, I made up a more extensive release form which was used for trips; it contained a photograph and video release. Is there an ‘official John F. Kennedy High School video release form? If there is, you had ample time to provide me with a copy of it. I believe that the ones that I created are being used by most of the teachers in the school who require one.

I did videotape a class session of the period 2 Living Environment class for future use as a lesson for my application for a Chemistry Teacher license. The subject; 'which elements are essential to life?' was appropriate for submission to the state. The view of the camera was of the entire classroom, with full view of the blackboard. I faced the camera and students remained anonymous as the camera only took a far view of the back of their heads.

I find your claim that Mr. Kent's stated that 'students are afraid' of me to be strange. I have not noticed that any students fear me. I believe that this claim is but another libelous invention on his part.

All of my students have returned their photo release forms. As this videotape footage was to be used for teaching certification; I was not required to obtain releases; I did so however, as a precaution; (as I expected the JFK administration would take issue with it in some desperate search to 'build their case').

The students to whom you refer to as 'Student C.' and "Student K", are, I believe, Fantasia K. and Konate B. Both have a good rapport with me. I called Konate and his mother to clarify why I requested that he sign a video release form. Once it was clarified that he did not have to be videotaped if he did not want to be, he agreed to sign the form. I offered any student and Mr. Kent himself the option of sitting in the back of the room so as of be out of camera range while the lesson was taped. At the end of the class, Fantasia came up to me. She was distressed at the behavior of Mr. Kent on a previous day and wanted to talk with me about it. As there was no other private space, I talked briefly with her in the science prep room immediately after the end of second period. I saw Mr. Kent peep through the window as she was talking. I then saw Mr. Colon pass by the room. When she was done speaking, we both left the room. After an encounter with Mr. Kent in the hallway, I escorted her to her third period class. She was no more than 5 minutes late. Your reported accusations based on rumours from Mr. Kent are inaccurate. I did not 'attempt to interview her on three occasions'. Nor did I state to her that 'the school is trying to fire me and I need your help'. At no time did Fantasia run away from me, nor did I ask her any personal questions. She does not fear me and she did not miss her third period class.

This letter, and the others, have established a pattern to harassment by you against me. As your October 6, 2005 letter is yet another 'letter to file' **it too will be grieved for it's unfairness and inaccuracy.** I also note that my responses to your previous 'letters to file' are missing from my employee file. May I remind you that my letters in response are required by law to be attached to the accusatory letters filed by JFK HS administrators.

My notes from our October 3, 2005 outline the following:

At no time during the one way conversation, did you ever describe my conduct as 'unbecoming of a teacher'. Nor did I ever say "I have nothing to say" but rather; I said nothing.

1. Regarding your conclusions that my actions 'once again demonstrated a serious disregard for your role as a classroom teacher' and that I am in 'violation of various bylaws, regulations and

standards of professional conduct'; I invite you to cite specifically which rules you claim that I 'violated'.

2. Your reprimand is without basis; as I was videotaping a lesson for certification as a chemistry teacher. I obtained releases from all students involved and respected everyone's rights to privacy. I do not believe that I was insubordinate. Videotaping is not against the law; and I did so with the permission of all involved.

3. Your directive to me on November 6, 2003 was to return a videotape which recorded a specific instance. (A student recorded a meeting that I and students held with Mr. Shapiro, regarding their request to obtain discarded iMac computers for science student use. I gave Mr. Shapiro my DV tape after your request). Your letter was not a generalized prohibition not to videotape; therefore, I did not fail to follow your 'directive'.

Please inform me specifically of how it is that you believe that my actions in this matter violate the code of ethics.

I invite you to proceed with your "charges". I take note once again of your threats that 'these incidents may lead to further disciplinary action including an unsatisfactory rating as a Teacher of Biology and termination'.

I hope that as the proceedings ensue, persons of character and authority within the Board of Education will reasonably weigh and consider both my actions and yours.

Sincerely,

Ms. Natalie Williams