

STATE OF OHIO
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

REPORT OF
INVESTIGATION



AGENCY: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
FILE ID NO.: 2017-CA00033
DATE OF REPORT: NOVEMBER 28, 2018

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General ... The State Watchdog

“Safeguarding integrity in state government”

The Ohio Office of the Inspector General is authorized by state law to investigate alleged wrongful acts or omissions committed by state officers or state employees involved in the management and operation of state agencies. We at the Inspector General’s Office recognize that the majority of state employees and public officials are hardworking, honest, and trustworthy individuals. However, we also believe that the responsibilities of this Office are critical in ensuring that state government and those doing or seeking to do business with the State of Ohio act with the highest of standards. It is the commitment of the Inspector General’s Office to fulfill its mission of safeguarding integrity in state government. We strive to restore trust in government by conducting impartial investigations in matters referred for investigation and offering objective conclusions based upon those investigations.

Statutory authority for conducting such investigations is defined in *Ohio Revised Code §121.41* through *121.50*. A *Report of Investigation* is issued based on the findings of the Office, and copies are delivered to the Governor of Ohio and the director of the agency subject to the investigation. At the discretion of the Inspector General, copies of the report may also be forwarded to law enforcement agencies or other state agencies responsible for investigating, auditing, reviewing, or evaluating the management and operation of state agencies. The *Report of Investigation* by the Ohio Inspector General is a public record under *Ohio Revised Code §149.43* and related sections of *Chapter 149*. It is available to the public for a fee that does not exceed the cost of reproducing and delivering the report.

The Office of the Inspector General does not serve as an advocate for either the complainant or the agency involved in a particular case. The role of the Office is to ensure that the process of investigating state agencies is conducted completely, fairly, and impartially. The Inspector General’s Office may or may not find wrongdoing associated with a particular investigation. However, the Office always reserves the right to make administrative recommendations for improving the operation of state government or referring a matter to the appropriate agency for review.

The Inspector General’s Office remains dedicated to the principle that no public servant, regardless of rank or position, is above the law, and the strength of our government is built on the solid character of the individuals who hold the public trust.



Randall J. Meyer
Ohio Inspector General



STATE OF OHIO
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

FILE ID NUMBER: 2017-CA00033

SUBJECT NAME: Jennifer Ross

POSITION: Consultant 3

AGENCY: Ohio Department of Education

BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION: Complaint

ALLEGATIONS: Criminal Conduct;
Failure to Comply with State Law and/or
Regulations

INITIATED: September 13, 2017

DATE OF REPORT: November 15, 2018

INITIAL ALLEGATION AND COMPLAINT SUMMARY

On September 13, 2017, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) notified the Office of the Ohio Inspector General about a complaint alleging that ODE Consultant 3 Jennifer Ross, during the same time she was employed by ODE, also contracted with the Columbus City School District (CCSD) to provide the same or similar services she performed at ODE. The Ohio Department of Education provided to investigators training sheets and invoices for July 13, August 2, and August 8, 2017, which indicated Ross was on compensable time with ODE.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General opened an investigation to review the actions of ODE Consultant 3 Jennifer Ross regarding ODE policies and procedures; specifically, concerning secondary employment and ethics violations.

BACKGROUND

Ohio Department of Education

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) oversees all public school districts and public community schools; and monitors educational service centers, early learning programs, and state-chartered nonpublic schools. ODE also administers funding to the schools, collects student data, develops academic standards and curricula, administers state achievement tests, and licenses education personnel. The department is governed by a 19-member State Board of Education with 11 elected members and eight members appointed by the governor. The board hires the Superintendent of Public Instruction who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the department. The Ohio Department of Education is funded through general revenue funds, federal funding, and transfers from lottery profits.

Applicable Laws, Rules and Policies

Workday and reporting hours worked

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) *Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual-40.0 Payroll* states,

Employees enter time and attendance information into Oracle ... and initial the summary sheets every two weeks to verify the accuracy of time worked. The employee is

responsible for verifying the accuracy of his/her time and completing any additional paperwork ... when absent.

The Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual - 210.0 Work Day – Work Schedule, Reporting Hours Worked – ODE Employee Timesheets states that,

All employees are required to accurately complete and submit the ODE Employee Timesheet. The timesheet must indicate the start and end time as well as the hours worked each day and week of the state pay period. The form is signed by the employee, certifying that the submission is an accurate representation of hours worked.

Ethical conduct of public employees

The Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual - 203.0 Ethics Policy states:

“Employees must conduct themselves in a manner that avoids favoritism, bias and the appearance of impropriety.” A general summary of the restraints upon the conduct of all ODE employees includes, but is not limited to stating that:

No ODE employee shall:

- A. Solicit or accept anything of value from anyone doing business with the ODE;
- B. Solicit or accept employment from anyone doing business with the ODE, unless the official or employee completely withdraws from ODE activity regarding the party offering employment, and the ODE approves the withdrawal; ...
- D. Be paid or accept any form of compensation for personal services rendered on a matter before, or sell goods or services to, the ODE;
- E. Be paid or accept any form of compensation for personal services rendered on a matter before, or sell (except by competitive bid) goods or services to, any state agency other than the ODE, unless the member or employee first discloses the services or sales and withdraws from matters before the ODE that directly affect officials and employees of the other state agency, as directed in ORC 102.04; ...
- H. Solicit or accept honoraria [see ORC 102.01(H) and 102.03(H)];

Outside employment and conflict-of-interest

Related to outside employment, the *Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual - 203.0 Ethics Policy* states,

Before embarking on outside employment, ODE employees are required to obtain permission from the Office of Legal Counsel, the Office of Human Resources, their direct supervisors and other ODE leadership. The Employment Outside of ODE form must be submitted for approval before accepting any offer of outside work. In addition to the restrictions listed ..., prohibitions that apply to public employees engaged in a private business include:

- Using any public resources in a private business;
- Using one's title or uniform while conducting private business activities;
- Using relationships with other public employees to benefit the private business;
- Using the authority of one's ODE employment to benefit one's private business;
- Receiving payment for services on projects one recommended in one's capacity as an employee of ODE;
- Using one's authority as an ODE employee to affect one's private business competitors; or
- Otherwise using one's position at ODE to benefit one's private business interests.

It is critical that all employees abide by the conflict-of-interest provisions in Ohio law and ODE policy. The completed form is submitted to the Office of Legal Counsel, who will notify employees of the outcome.

The *Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual – 301.0 Standards of Employee Conduct* addresses outside employment by stating,

Employees shall not have a direct or indirect financial interest or other interest that conflicts or appears to conflict with one's government duties and responsibilities. For more information regarding conflicts of interest or outside employment, see ODE Policy 203.0 – Ethics, and Chapters 102 (the Ohio Ethics Law) and 2921 of the Ohio Revised Code.

Employment Outside of ODE form

The *Employment Outside of ODE form* instructions state,

This form must be completed prior to the start of outside employment. This form must also be completed whenever a significant change in outside employment occurs (e.g., hours of work, wages, duties, etc.) or no less than annually, whichever occurs first.

Equipment and supplies

The *Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual – 213.0 Standards of Conduct* addresses equipment and supplies for those employees designated as teleworkers and states, “The use of ODE equipment, software, and data is limited to the use of authorized persons and for purposes related to State business only.” Section *301.0 Standards of Employee Conduct* of the manual further addresses use of ODE-issued computers, and states,

All government property, including but not limited to automobiles, supplies, equipment, telephones, computer hardware, computer software, electronic mail, ODE information systems, Internet usage and facilities are to be used for official purposes only, unless otherwise stated

Confidentiality

The *Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual – 213.0 Teleworking* states, “The teleworker and the supervisor shall take appropriate safeguards to secure confidential data and information.”

Employee conduct

The *Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual – 301.0 Standards of Conduct* addresses employee conduct by stating,

... It is the responsibility of all employees of the Department to conduct themselves in such a manner that their activities, both on and off duty, are consistent with the mission of the Department and do not adversely affect their ability to perform their duties.

Illegal activities

Illegal activities are covered under the *Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual – 301.0 Standards of Conduct* and states,

Illegal activities on the part of any employee, in addition to being unlawful, reflect on the integrity of the Department and betray the trust and confidence placed in it by the public.

It is expected that employees will obey not only the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law, whether engaged in personal or official activities.

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY

During an internal review, Columbus City School District discovered that Ohio Department of Education employee Jennifer Ross was contracting with the Columbus City School District to perform private consulting work. CCSD determined there could be an ethical and legal issue contracting with Ross and therefore reported the matter to ODE.

Jennifer Ross

During the course of this investigation, Jennifer Ross was employed by the Ohio Department of Education as an education employee consultant 3. Part of her responsibilities was to serve as a transformation specialist on behalf of the ODE Office for Improvement and Innovation. Ross' duties included, but were not limited to, assisting with Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) school improvement initiatives. Ross provided technical assistance to school administrators through development of the school improvement program policy, and provided consultation services to school administrators and community members. This included providing program development and day-to-day direction and coaching to support district personnel with achievement of turnaround goals through establishment and development of the role of Building Team Leadership (BTL) and Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) system structures. Ross was categorized by the department as a teleworker¹ and was issued a Dell Laptop and Apple iPhone. Ross' scheduled work hours were from 8:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m., Monday through Friday.

¹ Teleworker – A person who works at home, a remote workplace or is home-headquartered to assist with travel and produces an agreed-upon work product. ODE *Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual-213.0 Teleworking*, V. DEFINITIONS.

CCSD Documents Reviewed by Investigators

On September 20, 2017, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General obtained documents from the Columbus City School District related to Jennifer Ross' contract with CCSD. The documents consisted of:

- Nine invoices from R.O.S.S. Consulting (the name of Jennifer Ross' private consulting business) ([Exhibit 1](#))
- Seven In-Service Attendance Form Sign-In and Sign-Out Sheets ([Exhibit 2](#))
- One document labeled "Ross Consulting – Consulting and Professional Development Documentation July 1 – August 31, 2016" ([Exhibit 3](#))
- Four purchase orders from R.O.S.S. Consulting ([Exhibit 4](#))
- Seven check payments issued by Columbus City School District dated as far back as December 2013. ([Exhibit 5](#))

Emails

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General reviewed Ross' ODE emails. Two emails dated May 20, 2013, and January 2, 2014, had blank secondary employment forms attached. Investigators contacted ODE and were informed that the department did not have secondary employment records on file for Ross because she never submitted a completed request for secondary employment.

Investigators found a series of emails dated September 4, 2017, September 14, 2017, and September 19, 2017, in Ross' ODE email account. The emails outlined a consulting agreement between Ross and a non-profit organization called the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) whereby Ross would earn \$6,000 for work performed from September 1, 2017, to July 30, 2018. NFTE specified that Ross would be "... designing and writing a learning series course, Teacher as Educational Entrepreneur for NFTE. In-person trainings will be designed and delivered during the NFTE Summit ..." as well as providing "... any other services around the learning series as they arise throughout the development of the course." Investigators contacted representatives from NFTE regarding the agreement and verified that the company was currently in discussion with Ross, and was planning to enter into a contract with Ross for these services.

A series of emails between Ross and Knight Consulting Group (KCG) dated May 17, 2016, titled “Consulting Availability June and July 2016” were both sent and received in Ross’ ODE email account. The emails outlined KCG’s requests asking if Ross would be available to conduct trainings 1-2 times a month. Ross responded to KCG, stating she could be available 1-2 days a week.

Calendar and Related Documents/Emails

Investigators found three calendar entries on Jennifer Ross’ ODE computer related to R.O.S.S. Consulting:

- An August 2, 2017, entry from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. was titled: “Summer BLT Session 1 at Weinland Park Elementary School.” The organizer of the meeting was Porscha D. Robinson-Ervin.
- An August 8, 2017, entry from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. was titled: “Weinland Park BLT Meeting,” with the organizer listed as Jennifer Ross.
- A July 13, 2017, entry from 10:00 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. was titled: “Weinland Park BLT Meeting at Weinland Park ES,” and listed the organizer as Jennifer Ross.

Additionally, investigators found a Microsoft Word document titled, “Weinland Park BLT Meeting Agenda July 13, 2017.” The document outlined the topics that would be discussed and activities for the meeting. Investigators compared Ross’ calendar events to the Microsoft Word document and the documentation provided by CCSD, and discovered the following:

- An invoice from R.O.S.S. Consulting, dated July 17, 2017, and in the amount of \$1,800 for “consulting, summer PD and training” at Weinland Park Elementary School;
- In-Service Attendance Form Sign-In and Sign-Out sheet dated July 13, 2017, for Summer BLT Session 1 at Weinland Park from 10:00 a.m. until 12:30 p.m.
- Columbus City School District Purchase Order #17012468-00 for vendor Jennifer E. Ross for consulting services for summer professional development (PD) at Weinland Park.
- Columbus City School District Check #20081320 payable to Jennifer E. Ross for consulting services in the amount of \$4,800.

On July 18, 2016, an email was received by Jennifer Ross through her ODE email account titled “Sample Quote,” which originated from a CCSD employee. The email contained a Microsoft Word attachment that consisted of a sample quote to conduct a seven-week educational series for “... 25 students participating in a EVF (Expanding Visions Foundation) Leadership Institute at Windsor STEM Academy one day per week (April 18th – May 31st) for a total of 7 classes.” The quote appeared to be an outline Ross could use when presenting quotes to CCSD for R.O.S.S. Consulting. Investigators contacted the Expanding Visions Foundation and representatives stated they had no knowledge of, or affiliation with Jennifer Ross or R.O.S.S. Consulting.

Quotes

Investigators found two quotes for consulting services by R.O.S.S. Consulting on Ross’ ODE-issued computer. One quote was issued to Windsor STEM Academy for \$1,750 and dated June 12, 2016. A second quote was issued to Windsor STEM Academy for \$3,000 and dated July 15, 2016.

Invoices/Time Records/Sign-in Sheets

Investigators also discovered 11 invoices on Jennifer Ross’ ODE-issued computer from R.O.S.S. Consulting to the Columbus City School District.

In addition, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General obtained detailed timekeeping records for Ross from the Ohio Department of Education in order to compare the records to the documents found on Ross’ ODE-issued computer, email account, and CCSD documents provided to investigators. Investigators reviewed CCSD in-service “sign-in” and “sign-out” attendance sheets located on Ross’ ODE-issued computer as well as attendance forms provided by CCSD and compared them to Ross’ detailed ODE timesheets. The attendance sheets are used by CCSD to assist the district in preparation for audits as support documentation when paying professional development invoices. However, investigators learned the attendance sheets were not required by CCSD in 2013 and 2014.

Date	School	Ross' CCSD Training Start/End	Ross' ODE Start/End	Lunch
7/19/16	Windsor	1:00pm - 5:15pm	8:30am - 5:15pm	12:00-12:15
8/13/16	Windsor	10:00am - 1:30pm	8:00am - 6:00pm	None
7/13/17	Weinland	10:00am - 12:30pm	8:30am - 4:30pm	None
8/2/17	Weinland	9:00am - 3:00pm	8:00am - 4:00pm	None
8/8/17	Weinland	9:00am - 3:00pm	8:00am - 4:00pm	None

Investigators reviewed the dates and times of the attendance sheets and determined that Ross was conducting R.O.S.S. Consulting work for CCSD during days and times she claimed to be working for ODE.

Travel Reimbursements for Non-ODE Work Related Meetings During ODE Work Hours

Investigators discovered Ross had submitted a request for reimbursement to ODE for \$22.88 (44 miles @ \$0.52 per mile) for travel expenses for driving to a training at Windsor Elementary on July 19, 2016, while Ross was conducting consulting work for R.O.S.S. Consulting. In this instance, investigators determined Ross improperly submitted a reimbursement request to ODE for travel totaling \$22.88.

Investigators also discovered an email on Ross' email account titled, "Networking" and received on April 2, 2016. The email was a request from Jennie Vargo² to Ross to network with another person:

One of my (Vargo's) BRIGHT Fellows, Tracy Carter, a fellow at Ohio Avenue^[3] is wanting to network with people working with and in Columbus City. She knows you are serving the Priority Schools in CCSD and would like to talk with you sometime.

Later that day, Ross replied to Vargo from her ODE email account agreeing to meet with Tracy Carter. On April 18, 2016, a series of emails between Ross (from her ODE email account) and Carter discussed meeting at Panera Bread in Bexley, Ohio that day at 1:00 p.m. Investigators reviewed Ross' detailed ODE timesheet for April 18, 2016, which reported Ross working from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. with a lunch from 12:00 p.m. to 12:30 p.m. Ross submitted a

² Vargo and Ross were co-workers at ODE. Vargo then went to work for Columbus City Schools.

³ Ohio Avenue is an elementary school within Columbus City School District.

reimbursement request to ODE for \$27.56, covering her mileage for “Travel to East High School than to Windsor Stem to Panera Bread in Bexley and return to Dublin Ohio.” Ross’ ODE supervisors noted to investigators that Ross’ meeting at Panera Bread would not be considered ODE work-related and therefore would have been deemed by ODE as a personal meeting. In this instance, investigators determined Ross improperly submitted a reimbursement request for travel totaling \$27.56.

African American Policy Forum and Third Wave Funding

Investigators found numerous references to African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and Third Wave Funding in Ross’ ODE email account. In the emails, Ross was requested to review and edit a draft of a town hall sponsorship letter for AAPF whereby Ross was requesting a monetary sponsorship of \$1000, \$1500, or \$2000 for an AAPF town hall meeting to take place on April 22, 2017. Investigators also discovered additional emails received by Ross that outlined a conference call between herself and Third Wave/Mobilize Power Fund organizers. One of the emails specified that the conference call had occurred on Monday, September 11, 2017, at 2:00 p.m. and that Ross participated in the call. A review of Ross’ ODE timesheet showed that Ross claimed working hours for ODE between 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. on that day, with no lunch taken.

Ashland University

Investigators found on Ross’ ODE computer a 2016 W-2 form in the name of Jennifer E. Ross issued by Ashland University for employment as an adjunct professor.

Interview with Lease, Ward, and Faulkner

On October 17, 2017, investigators met with ODE Chief Legal Counsel Diane Lease, ODE Director of the Office of Improvement and Innovation Jo Hannah Ward, and Assistant Director of the Office of Improvement and Innovation Andrea Faulkner. Ward and Faulkner are Jennifer Ross’ supervisors. Investigators asked if Ross had submitted a request form for secondary employment or if she had been given permission to maintain secondary employment. Lease, Ward, and Faulkner stated that there was no record to show Ross ever submitted a secondary employment form or obtained permission for secondary employment.

Investigators showed Lease, Ward, and Faulkner copies of the R.O.S.S. Consulting invoices located on Ross' ODE computer along with the documents provided by CCSD. Lease, Ward, and Faulkner were also shown the W-2 form from Ashland University and emails from her ODE account involving Knight Consulting Group and NFTE. Lease, Ward, and Faulkner stated these documents appeared to confirm Ross was maintaining secondary employment, and each added they were unaware of Ross' secondary employment.

Lease, Ward, and Faulkner were shown the CCSD In-Service Attendance Form Sign-In and Sign-Out Sheets. Ward noted that some of the sheets showed the trainings were being paid for with School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds. Ward explained that in Ross' position at ODE, she would be knowledgeable about which schools at CCSD had SIG funds available to spend. For further clarification, investigators requested Ward review five documents provided by CCSD which were located on Ross' ODE-issued computer. Ward was asked to explain to investigators whether the work described in the five documents reflected the same or similar services required by Ross in her employment at ODE. The five documents under review, including Ward's comments, were:

- R.O.S.S. Consulting invoice dated July 17, 2017
(Ward) "All items on this invoice also reflect work performed by a program consultant in our office."
- R.O.S.S. Consulting invoice dated January 6, 2017
(Ward) "Two of the three items on the invoice are the same description as the work she would perform as a Ed. Program consultant or transformation specialist for our office"
- ODE document titled "Building Leadership Teams"
(Ward) "The content on this page is the same consultation and support she should be offering schools under the work performed in our office."
- Ross Consulting - Consulting and Professional Development Documentation July 1- August 31, 2016
(Ward) "Items dates 8/6, 11, 13, 20 /16 are all items associated with leadership theory which is supported by staff in our office. The other items dates July 9,2 and Aug. 5th are not work my staff would be performing but it is work she learned and performed while

serving in another office here at ODE so I would say she should not be consulting on her own for that work either.”

- Weinland Park Summer Professional Development Plan

(Ward) “All of the items noted in the work – planning are items performed as an ODE Ed program consultant for our office.”

Investigators also asked Ward and Faulkner to compare copies of the CCSD In-Service Attendance Form Sign-In and Sign-Out Sheets with detailed records from Ross’ ODE timesheets. After conducting a comparison between the two sets of documents and discovering instances where Ross was conducting her secondary employment during dates and times she had reported working for ODE, Ward and Faulkner both stated that Ross did not appear to be reporting her ODE work hours accurately.

Ward and Faulkner were also shown copies of the April 2, 2016, and April 18, 2016, emails involving the meeting with Tracy Carter at Panera Bread in Bexley, Ohio. Ward and Faulkner both stated they were unaware of the meeting and agreed that the meeting appeared to have been conducted during hours Ross claimed to be working for ODE, was not ODE related, and concluded Ross fraudulently submitted a request for mileage reimbursement.

Ward and Faulkner were asked about Ross’ ODE involvement in the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and Third Wave Funding. Ward stated that Ross had requested to attend professional development training at AAPF events. Ward and Faulkner were asked if Ross was allowed to solicit from her ODE computer monetary funding for AAPF by using her ODE computer. Ward and Faulkner both stated this would not be allowed as it does not pertain to Ross’ ODE employment. Ward and Faulkner were asked if Ross was permitted to conduct non-ODE related conference calls during ODE work hours, and both stated the phone calls would not be allowed.

Interview with Jennifer Ross

On October 26, 2017, investigators contacted Jennifer Ross by telephone to coordinate an interview with her. During this conversation, Ross agreed to appear for an interview at the

Office of the Ohio Inspector General on November 2, 2017, at 10:00 a.m. On October 30, 2017, investigators received a call from Ross' attorney requesting time to speak with Ross before being interviewed. On November 28, 2017, Ross' attorney stated it would be against Ross' best interest to be interviewed, and that the request was being denied.

CONCLUSION

On September 13, 2017, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) notified the Office of the Ohio Inspector General about a complaint regarding an ODE employee who was suspected of illegal and improper activity at the department. The complaint alleged ODE Consultant 3 Jennifer Ross, during the same time she was employed by ODE, was also contracted by the Columbus City School District (CCSD) to provide the same or similar services she performed at ODE. Specifically, Ross allegedly accepted monetary compensation from both ODE and CCSD for performing the same or similar services.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General reviewed ODE policy documents, R.O.S.S. Consulting invoices, and CCSD payments. Additionally, investigators reviewed Ross' ODE emails and files from her state-issued computer. Investigators determined Ross failed to file a secondary employment form, and thereby did not obtain permission for secondary employment while working for her privately owned and operated personal business, R.O.S.S. Consulting. Investigators also discovered Ross had worked for Ashland University during the same time she was working for ODE. Investigators reviewed records detailing the trainings Ross had conducted and accepted payment for as a CCSD private contractor and concluded that Ross provided the same or similar services as those she performed at ODE. Furthermore, investigators discovered that Ross had conducted trainings at CCSD during work times she was being monetarily compensated by ODE. On two occasions, Ross fraudulently submitted requests for mileage reimbursement from ODE.

State-Issued Property and Email Account

Investigators determined ODE Consultant 3 Jennifer Ross used her ODE-issued computer to send, receive, and store documents related to her private business interest, R.O.S.S. Consulting. Ross further used her ODE email account to send and receive documents for her private business

interest, R.O.S.S. Consulting. She also used her ODE email account to discuss matters as a private consultant with Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) and to schedule times she was available to conduct private consulting work with Knight Consulting Group. Ross also used her ODE email account to conduct a meeting that was not work-related and submitted a request for monetary reimbursement from ODE for the meeting.

Using ODE Resources to Promote Private Business Interest

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General further determined Jennifer Ross used her position with ODE to promote her private business interest, R.O.S.S. Consulting, by:

- Using ODE documents for private training;
- Using professional connections, such as principals and teachers at CCSD, to schedule trainings at CCSD schools where Ross was assigned through ODE to work;
- Using knowledge gained in her position at ODE regarding which CCSD schools were awarded School Improvement Grants (SIG).

Time Reporting

Investigators concluded Ross violated ODE time and attendance policies by wrongly reporting hours worked in her position as an ODE Consultant 3. Investigators determined Ross had been compensated by ODE for 22.25 hours for work she performed for her private business, R.O.S.S. Consulting, during days and times she reported on her ODE timesheet to be working for ODE. ODE paid Ross \$886.86 in wages and \$310.40 in benefits for the 22.25 hours. Furthermore, investigators discovered that Ross fraudulently submitted to ODE a reimbursement request for \$22.88 for travel expenses for a training that she had conducted that was not ODE-related. Investigators also determined Ross conducted a meeting that was not ODE-related and failed to deduct the time for the meeting from her submitted ODE timesheet. Investigators found Ross had fraudulently submitted a reimbursement request for \$27.56 for travel expenses for this meeting. In addition, investigators discovered Ross conducted telephone calls that were not work-related, while failing to deduct the time for the calls from the timesheets she submitted to ODE.

Outside Employment

Investigators determined Ross failed to notify ODE of her secondary employment regarding both her private business interest, R.O.S.S. Consulting, and as an adjunct professor at Ashland University. Ross further failed to notify ODE that she was attempting to contract with Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, and was discussing her availability to conduct private consulting work with Knight Consulting Group.

Investigators also determined Ross conducted contracted trainings with Columbus City School District at Highland Elementary School, Windsor Elementary School, and Weinland Park Elementary School during hours she reported working for the Ohio Department of Education as a Consultant 3, thereby improperly profiting by \$16,300.00.⁴ Investigators for the Office of the Ohio Inspector General also determined Ross was compensated monetarily as an adjunct professor while maintaining secondary employment at Ashland University.

Accordingly, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General finds reasonable cause to believe wrongful acts or omissions occurred in these instances.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General makes the following recommendation and asks the Ohio Department of Education to respond within 60 days with a plan detailing how this recommendation will be implemented.

1. Review the conduct of Ohio Department of Education employee Jennifer Ross to determine if administrative action is warranted.

REFERRAL(S)

This report of investigation will be provided to the Franklin County Prosecuting Attorney, the Columbus City Attorney, and the Ohio Ethics Commission for consideration.

⁴ The \$16,300.00 is the total amount Ross was paid by CCSD for conducting the trainings, and was the total of seven checks issued to Ross.



STATE OF OHIO
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

NAME OF REPORT: Ohio Department of Education

FILE ID #: 2017-CA00033

KEEPER OF RECORDS CERTIFICATION

This is a true and correct copy of the report which is required to be prepared by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General pursuant to Section 121.42 of the Ohio Revised Code.

Jill Jones
KEEPER OF RECORDS

CERTIFIED
November 28, 2018

MAILING ADDRESS

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
JAMES A. RHODES STATE OFFICE TOWER
30 EAST BROAD STREET – SUITE 2940
COLUMBUS, OH 43215-3414

TELEPHONE

(614) 644-9110

IN STATE TOLL- FREE

(800) 686-1525

FAX

(614) 644-9504

EMAIL

OIG_WATCHDOG@OIG.OHIO.GOV

INTERNET

WATCHDOG.OHIO.GOV