



Grand Prairie Schools Media Advisory

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Former Grand Prairie Schools Finance Chief Charged in Theft

Alert district employees helped foil the crime

(August 23, 2016) – The former chief financial officer of the Grand Prairie Independent School District was arrested yesterday for the theft of \$600,000 from GPISD after two alert district employees questioned her handling of cash, Superintendent Dr. Susan Hull said.

The alleged theft of funds by the former chief financial officer of the Grand Prairie Independent School District was “a reprehensible act of selfishness and greed,” and deserves to be prosecuted “to the fullest extent of the law,” Superintendent Hull said today.

Two accountants in the district’s finance department questioned the way cash funds had been handled and alerted their supervisor the day after former CFO Carolyn Foster’s employment ended, Dr. Hull said.

“We are very proud of the two finance department employees whose commitment to public service and diligence in doing their jobs helped uncover Foster’s apparent misdeeds just one day after she left the district,” Dr. Hull said. “GPISD accountants Edie Ellis and Becky Harris told a supervisor in the finance department on Sept. 1, 2015 about their questions regarding these funds, and thanks to their work, we reported this matter to the Grand Prairie Police Department for investigation right away.”

Hull said Foster allegedly “abused her authority as CFO” to gain access to cash held in a vault in the GPISD administration building for awards to teachers and other needs. Over a period of nearly a year, Foster allegedly stole \$600,000 in cash. She allegedly ordered the money withdrawn from district bank accounts and delivered by armored truck to the district offices. Foster then allegedly told finance department employees the money was for special cash awards for teachers for school supplies and for settlements in lawsuits. There were no such lawsuits that needed cash settlements.

“The school board and I stand in strong support of the law enforcement and criminal justice community in this process, and if these allegations are true, we urge that Carolyn Foster be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law,” Dr. Hull said. “That someone serving in a position of authority of an organization whose job is to educate and nurture the children of our

community would violate that sacred trust is unconscionable. We will work with authorities to retrieve every penny that was allegedly stolen, and we will work to make sure that such a despicable act will never happen again.”

Foster’s plan started to unravel on Sept. 1, the day after she left the district. Finance department staff accountants Ellis and Harris had previously questioned Foster about the handling of the cash, and she had assured them she took responsibility for management of the funds. Both the accountants reported on Sept. 1 to Finance Director Ray Wilks their questions about the funds and Foster’s responses to their inquiries. Wilks immediately notified the district’s top leadership and after a quick initial investigation to verify information, police were contacted the next morning.

“All of us at GPISD deeply regret this apparent violation of the public trust by this former official. We thank our community for their strong and ongoing support of our schools and our children, and we will work hard every day to continue to earn that support,” Superintendent Hull said.

Foster apparently was able to make a change in district financial procedures after she became CFO without notifying anyone, which gave her the ability to quietly access the money. Hull said the district already has put into place new processes and procedures, with multiple backups and redundancies, “to make sure that never again can a single person, even a high-ranking executive, on his or her own authority gain access to money that belongs to our schools.”

The new procedures now require at least two district officials to be involved in any order for cash, with responsibilities rotating between officials monthly. The new maximum amount that can be withdrawn from the bank at any time is set at \$10,000. Under the new procedures, cash can be withdrawn from the bank only for concession stand supplies for events. Cash may not be withdrawn for any other purpose without specific written approval from the superintendent, the deputy superintendent and the general counsel.

The district also has added two digital combination, floor bolted safes to hold any cash on hand for business purposes at district headquarters. The combinations to the safe will be changed monthly. The district has added cameras to specifically record any activities in the vault and safe areas.

For more information, please contact [Sam Buchmeyer](#), GPISD Public Information Officer at (972) 264-6141.

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