

STATE OF OHIO
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

REPORT OF
INVESTIGATION



AGENCY: OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
FILE ID NO.: 2012 CA-00050
DATE OF REPORT: DECEMBER 20, 2012

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

“Safeguarding integrity in state government”

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STATE OF OHIO

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

FILE ID NUMBER: 2012 CA-00050

SUBJECT NAME: Kathleen Garner

POSITION: Customer Service Assistant 1

AGENCY: Ohio Department of Education

BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION: Referral from Agency

ALLEGATIONS: Falsification of Records

INITIATED: April 4, 2012

DATE OF REPORT: December 20, 2012

INITIAL ALLEGATION AND COMPLAINT SUMMARY

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General received a complaint from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) regarding an employee, Kathleen Garner, who was suspected of issuing GED¹ diplomas without the necessary backup documentation. ODE alleged Garner provided a questionable GED to her husband within days of being transferred to the division overseeing the program. A further review of records created by Garner indicated an additional six individuals who may have received questionable GEDs. An investigation was opened immediately upon receipt of the complaint. The Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) was asked to assist with the investigation.

BACKGROUND

Ohio Department of Education

The Ohio Department of Education oversees all public school districts and public community schools as well as monitoring 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 8 members appointed by the governor. The Board hires the Superintendent of Public Instruction who is responsible for the day-to-day operations of ODE.²

General Educational Development (GED)

The GED provides individuals who did not finish high school an opportunity to earn a high school equivalent diploma. In order to take the GED test, an individual must be at least 19 years of age and apply to take the test with the state GED office housed within ODE. To apply, an individual must first create a SAFE³ account and submit a non-refundable \$40 fee. The

¹ The General Education Development (GED) provides individuals who did not finish high school an opportunity to earn a high school equivalent diploma.

² Source: Legislative Service Commission biennial budget documents.

³ SAFE stands for Secure Application for Enterprise and according to ODE's website, it is a "single sign-on security application" allowing ODE customers the ability to access multiple programs and functions administered by the department from a single source.

individual must log-in to their SAFE account or contact a local test center to determine if their application has been approved.

Once the application is approved, the individual can take the test at a regional test center. The test is a national test composed of five parts, including language arts-writing, language arts-reading, science, social studies, and mathematics and is based on a 12th grade curriculum. To earn an Ohio GED, an individual must earn a minimum total score of 2,250 out of 4,000 points and at least 410 points out of 800 in each of the five sections. Individuals can retake sections they did not pass up to three times in a calendar year for an additional \$10 fee per section. Once an individual passes all sections, a transcript and diploma are issued by the state GED office.

Individuals from out of state or country can take the GED test in Ohio as long as they have a valid driver's license. If an individual passes the test, a transcript but not a diploma will be issued. The transcript acts the same as receiving an actual high school diploma. Individuals can ask to have transcripts reissued by submitting a request for reprint along with a nominal fee to the state GED office.⁴ Transcripts from individuals who have created a SAFE account but took the test out of state can send a copy of their transcript to ODE. The information is then entered into the web-based system that an individual can access via their SAFE account and the hardcopy transcript is stored onsite for six months before it is destroyed. It should be noted when ODE staff enter scores into the system for an individual, it is automatically inserted into a section titled "Out of State/Military Scores" even if the individual did not take the test out of state.

In October 2004, ODE moved their GED records to a web-based system an individual can access via their SAFE account. From 1984 to September 2004, ODE used a system called VAX. All records in the VAX system were transferred to the web-based system when it became operational. ODE did not delete the information from VAX and stored it as a back-up. ODE also had in their possession index cards from the Cleveland school district. Up until 2010, the district maintained records on 3"x 5" index cards for students who took the GED test. The ODE

⁴ Source: ODE's GED Frequently Asked Questions website.

considers the cards the official record of individuals who took the test in the Cleveland area as the district did not use the VAX system to track these individuals. Therefore, this information would not have been transferred to the web-based system and would be considered the only record ODE has of students taking the GED test in the Cleveland school district. The cards were retrieved by ODE in June 2010 with the intent of entering the information for those who passed the GED test into the web-based system. According to the ODE GED office, the Cleveland school district was “getting out of the GED business” and provided the cards to ODE at the department’s request. The cards were going to be kept by ODE for an undetermined amount of time after all of the information was entered into the GED system.

In addition, ODE had received similar index cards from the Columbus school district. This information was already in the web-based system at the start of this investigation. ODE only kept the cards when the information was not complete and employees were unable to enter the information into the GED system. All other cards were destroyed.

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY

In early April 2012, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General met with officials from the Ohio Department of Education regarding the allegations against Garner. According to Sharon Bowman, state GED administrator, the state GED office planned on entering the information from the Cleveland school district index cards into the web-based system as time permitted. After several months elapsed and none of the index card information transferred into the system, starting in March 2012, it was decided an employee would work on a stack of cards one week at a time until all the information was entered. Bowman stated Kathleen Garner volunteered to be the first to work on entering the information. The cards were stored in alphabetical order by last name and only those with a passing score were to be entered into the GED system. As such, Garner would start entering information for those individuals whose last name began with the letter “A” and continue working as time permitted to the end of the week. The next employee on the list would begin where Garner left off, again working in alphabetical order.

On July 18, 2010, Garner had transferred to the GED section of ODE as a Customer Service Assistant 1. Previously, Garner had worked in an ODE call center. Her job duties in the GED office included processing transcript requests; taking phone calls from individuals regarding their SAFE accounts as it applied to the GED section; creating SAFE accounts for individuals who called in and were having difficulties; inserting scores received via mail or fax into the GED system from those who took the test out of state; and other duties as assigned by her supervisor.

Bowman stated Garner had told another unnamed ODE employee she had found her husband's GED information in the Cleveland cards she was entering. This comment was reported back to Bowman who stated that she was concerned because Garner had just started entering the information and should not have been on the "G's" and because she was entering a relative's information.⁵ A review of the SAFE account by Bowman for Garner's husband showed Garner inserted scores to obtain a passing score on July 22, 2010 – four days after she transferred into the state GED office.⁶ This contradicted Garner's statement that she had entered the information in March 2012. As the scores indicated the test was taken in 1988, Bowman conducted a review of the VAX system and found no records for Garner's husband. In addition, Bowman reviewed the Cleveland cards and found no documentation on Garner's desk or in the card files.

To determine if any other questionable GEDs may have been created, Bowman asked ODE's IT department to create a query to list how many test scores were entered into SAFE accounts by each ODE employee in the GED section. From this list, Bowman determined Garner entered passing scores for more than 300 individuals. Bowman then compared these records against the VAX system for those individuals receiving passing GED test scores between 1984 and 2004. Records not in the VAX system were verified by Bowman by reviewing the Cleveland index cards and other sources to determine if they were legitimate. Bowman stated this review resulted in identifying a total of four additional individuals with questionable GEDs.

⁵ It should be noted ODE did not have a written policy at the time prohibiting employees from entering or accessing relative's information in the GED system.

⁶ The web-based system lists actions taken by ODE employees on an individual's SAFE account in the comments section by date and action taken.

On March 29, 2012, after Garner was notified she was being placed on administrative leave by ODE, Garner was allowed to return to her desk to collect her personal belongings. According to officials at ODE, Garner was accompanied by a union representative who was not assigned to the GED section. Bowman did not supervise or watch Garner collect her belongings and stated she remained in her office during this time. The Office of the Ohio Inspector General interviewed the individual who accompanied Garner, and she stated Garner was at her desk for five or 10 minutes while she straightened up her desk and changed her shoes. When asked if Garner took any paperwork or accessed her computer during this time, the individual was unable to state if Garner had taken any paperwork but was sure she did not access her computer. Garner was not given a time frame in which to collect her belongings.

Prior to ODE contacting the Office of the Ohio Inspector General, Bowman stated she had examined Garner's desk area. At this time, Bowman said she found what she believed to be "doctored" out-of-state transcripts showing passing scores for two additional individuals in the overhead bin section of Garner's desk area. According to Bowman, other related documents that appeared to be in Garner's handwriting were located in Garner's desk drawers. When asked why she believed the handwriting to be Garner's, Bowman stated she had seen Garner's signature and handwriting on other documents reviewed in the past. These original documents were provided as part of the initial meeting between ODE and the Office of the Ohio Inspector General and were secured by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General at that time.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General requested an interview with Garner scheduled for June 14, 2012. On June 14, 2012, at the beginning of the meeting, Garner stated she did not wish to cooperate without first consulting with an attorney. Garner was informed that once she obtained legal counsel, she should have her legal counsel contact the Office of the Ohio Inspector General for a possible rescheduling of the interview. The initial meeting was then concluded. Garner contacted the Office of the Ohio Inspector General on July 5, 2012, to state she was unable to obtain counsel and would be declining the request for an interview.

On August 30, 2012, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General was informed the Ohio State Highway Patrol had contacted Garner and interviewed her on August 28, 2012, and August 29, 2012. Details of the interviews were provided to the Office of the Ohio Inspector General on September 4, 2012.

The following is a summary of the information collected by ODE and the Office of the Ohio Inspector General, along with the reasoning behind the belief that several GEDs Garner documented were questionable. Bowman stated anytime an ODE employee enters scores into the system for an individual, it is inserted into the “out-of-state” category with a source code. If the source listed ODE, it means an ODE employee entered the scores after receiving a hardcopy transcript from the individual. If the source listed “GETS,” the information came from the national GED Testing Service. For purposes of this investigation, limited background checks were conducted on each individual to determine if they ever resided out-of-state; making it possible for them to have taken the GED test out-of-state.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General also attempted to locate and make contact with all individuals who received the questionable GEDs. The individuals’ responses to questions are noted below.

Individual #1 – Hastings Garner

According to his SAFE account, Garner’s husband received his GED test scores on May 20, 1988. [\(Exhibit 1\)](#) According to Bowman, his name did not appear in the VAX system and a review of the cards from Cleveland, where he indicated he attended high school, did not produce a match. Bowman stated a search was conducted on both the card files and Garner’s desk and the card was not located.

Garner stated in her interview with OSHP that her husband’s GED had burned in a house fire and he inquired how he could obtain a replacement transcript. Garner stated she looked him up in the computer system and did not find his records. While searching through the Cleveland card files looking for another individual’s records, Garner said she found her husband’s card. It was

at that time she stated she entered the scores from the card into the system. When OSHP asked why her husband's records were not already in the computer system, Garner stated she had been told by a co-worker that another employee had deleted records from the time her husband would have received his GED. The Office of the Ohio Inspector General asked Bowman if ODE had deleted any records from the VAX system dating to 1988 or 1989 and she stated they had not.

On August 29, 2012, in her second interview with OSHP, Garner repeated her story on how she came to enter passing GED scores into the SAFE account for her husband. The Office of the Ohio Inspector General attempted to contact Mr. Garner by visiting an address listed for him in Cleveland. The individual living at the address answered the door and stated Mr. Garner was living in Columbus. Attempts to contact him via phone were unsuccessful.

Individual #2 – Lemont Reynolds

Lemont Reynolds, Garner's brother, is listed as having received his test scores on October 6, 1989. Garner is listed as inserting these scores into his SAFE account on February 2, 2011.

(Exhibit 2) A review of the VAX system by Bowman did not produce any matches. A background check on the individual conducted by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General indicated he was living in Franklin County, Ohio, at the time he would have taken the test. Reynolds SAFE account information states he attended school in the Columbus area, part of Franklin County. The Office of the Ohio Inspector General attempted to contact Reynolds regarding his GED but he did not return requests to be interviewed.

On August 28, 2012, Garner stated in her first interview with OSHP that she thought she found her brother's records when she was looking for some unrelated records. She stated when she found the information, she checked the GED computer system and there was nothing there. Garner stated she then entered the scores for him. She stated she contacted Reynolds who then faxed a copy of his ID and Social Security card so she could enter this information into his SAFE account. She later admitted Reynolds did not fax any information into ODE and instead she stated she had met him outside of work and copied the information then.

In her second interview with OSHP, she reiterated she found her brother's information and entered the scores into the SAFE account based on the records found. Bowman stated she was unable to locate the records on Garner's desk or in the card files.

Individual #3 – David Reynolds

During the search of Garner's desk by Bowman, documents were located that appeared to be "doctored." The documents were titled "Official Report of Test Results from the State of Indiana." On one document, the name of the individual had been covered with white-out tape. Another document had the fax line information doctored with white-out and a small piece of paper with a different date in the upper left corner. This small piece of paper did not appear to be in the same font as the rest of the fax line information. A third document appeared to be a copy of the second document that could be used to test if the alterations looked authentic. A fourth and final document appeared to be a copy with the fax line information completely covered and contained the name, birthdate, and last four digits of the Social Security number of David Reynolds. Also, it should be noted, according to the final altered document, the date the individual authorized the test scores is before the date the test was taken. [\(Exhibit 3\)](#)

A search of the web-based system by Bowman listed Reynolds as having received scores matching those of the altered documents. Garner is listed as having inserted the scores on March 7, 2011. [\(Exhibit 4\)](#) A background check of the individual conducted by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General indicated he was living in Franklin County, Ohio, at the time he would have been taking the test. Officials in Indiana were contacted and they stated there was no record Reynolds had taken the test in their state. The Office of the Ohio Inspector General attempted to contact Reynolds regarding his GED but he did not return requests to be interviewed.

In her first interview with OSHP, Garner stated she had received an out-of-state transcript for Reynolds, who she stated was her nephew, in the mail and entered the scores into his SAFE account. She believed the transcript was from Indiana and listed a failing score. Garner stated she called Reynolds and he stated the math section was going to be rescored. A couple of months later, Garner stated Reynolds came to Columbus to get his scores and she asked him if he

took the test out of state. She stated Reynolds replied he had not been out of town. Garner stated at this point she felt she had “entered a bad score” for her nephew.

Garner further stated the ODE office received test scores via fax from another individual from Indiana and thought the ones she received from her nephew did not look the same. She then admitted to altering the transcript to make them appear as if they were for Reynolds. Garner admitted she knew she entered “bad scores” into the system for her nephew but did not do anything about because she felt bad for him.

In her second interview with OSHP, Garner stated she did receive something in the mail for her nephew and entered the scores into the system for him. She stated the information was not addressed to her; it was sent to ODE and just happened to appear in her inbox. She admitted again to doctoring transcripts to match the scores she had entered into the system. Garner stated she felt bad because she did not verify the information that was sent to ODE and went ahead and entered the “bad scores” into the system.

Individual #4 – Leoandra Reaves

A transcript from “FCI Elkton” was located by Bowman in the overhead bin of Garner’s desk. Attached to the document was a strip of information with Leoandra Reaves’ name, birthdate, and Social Security number that did not match the information on the transcript. [\(Exhibit 5\)](#) A search of the web-based system by Bowman for Reaves noted Garner had inserted out-of-state scores that matched the scores and test date on the original transcript on April 15, 2011.

[\(Exhibit 6\)](#) A background check conducted by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General indicated Reaves was living in Franklin County, Ohio, at the time she would have taken the test.

Reaves was incarcerated at the Ohio Women’s Reformatory (OWR) in December 2011. The Office of the Ohio Inspector General contacted officials at OWR and requested a list of her visitors, approved call list, and a list of calls made by Reaves since January 2012. A search of the information provided found no apparent connection with Garner as she was not listed as a visitor nor were calls made to any phone numbers associated with her.

On July 26, 2012, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General interviewed Lеоandra Reaves. During this interview, Reaves stated she met Garner while they were incarcerated together in Franklin County and they had exchanged phone numbers when Garner was released.⁷ She stated she knew Garner worked at ODE but did not know what she did there. When asked if she requested Garner to get her a GED, Reaves said she had not. Reaves was asked if Garner volunteered to get her a GED and she said they had a phone conversation about Reaves wanting to go to a technical school but could not attend because she had not graduated high school. Reaves stated Garner said she could take care of that for her but Garner did not elaborate further. Reaves stated Garner later asked her for some information, including her birthdate, but mid-way through the conversation Garner said she had to go and Reaves stated she did not hear back from her. Reaves stated she did not recall giving Garner her Social Security number.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General contacted ODE's legal department and Bowman to determine if Garner could have had access to Reaves' Social Security number or could have contacted someone within ODE who would. ODE stated they do not maintain Social Security numbers for students in any of their databases. As a result, at this time, it cannot be determined how Garner would have obtained Reaves' information.

Reaves was asked to confirm if the Social Security number, birthdate, and last address listed in the SAFE account was hers. She said they were. When asked if she knew that ODE's records showed she had a GED, Reaves stated she did not know. Reaves further stated she was currently taking study courses at ORW and was working towards taking the GED test. This was confirmed by officials at ORW who had her listed as a student.

In her interview with OSHP, Garner admitted to creating a false GED for Reaves. She stated they met while both were incarcerated in Franklin County and Reaves had been nice to her during that time. She felt she was returning the favor and Reaves did not ask her to create the false records. She further stated she did not tell Reaves she had created the record. Garner also

⁷ According to the Franklin County Clerk of Courts website, Garner had been charged with domestic violence.

admitted to attempting to alter the transcript to make it appear as if it was for Reaves. She stated she had left the records in her overhead bin where Bowman had located them earlier

Individual #5 – Charles Mullens

Charles Mullens is listed on the SAFE account as having received his test scores on May 19, 1992, and Garner inserted the scores into his SAFE account on April 19, 2011. [\(Exhibit 7\)](#) A review of the VAX system by Bowman did not produce any matches. A background check conducted by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General indicates Mullens was living in Franklin County, Ohio, at the time he would have been taking the test. Mullens is listed in his SAFE account as having attended high school in the Columbus area within Franklin County.

In addition, an Ohio GED Transcript Request Form was located on Garner's desk by Bowman. According to Bowman, the handwriting appeared to be that of Garner's based on seeing Garner's handwriting on other documents in the past. The test location on the form indicated Mullens took the test in Columbus, Ohio. [\(Exhibit 8\)](#)

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General spoke to Mullens, who denied the signature on the GED Transcript Request Form was his and provided his signature for comparison. He stated he took the GED test because he needed it to obtain a job. When asked where he took the test, Mullens stated he took it at ODE's offices on Front Street in Columbus. He described the individual who assisted him as "short, long hair, Spanish." The description is similar to Garner's appearance.

According to ODE, their office on Front Street is not an approved GED test site and Mullens would have been unable to take the test there. Also, if he had taken the test at an approved GED testing center, the scores would have automatically been transmitted to ODE through their computer system and there would have been no need for Garner to insert the test scores. The SAFE account for Mullens indicated he took the test in 1992 when he was 19 and not two to three years ago as he stated in his interview with the Office of the Ohio Inspector General.

In her first interview with OSHP, Garner admitted to signing Mullens name on the transcript request form. In regards to the GED, Garner stated she thought she received his information in the mail and entered the information at that time. Garner stated Mullens is her son's uncle.

During her second interview with OSHP, Garner admitted to entering in false scores for Mullens because he was having trouble finding a job and she felt sorry for him. Garner stated she made the numbers up and planned on ordering a transcript for him. She stated she did this on her own and Mullens did not know anything about her actions.

Individual #6 – Patrick Kidd

In addition to the other documents reviewed, a wedding invitation for Patrick Kidd was located by Bowman in Garner's desk. According to his SAFE account, Kidd is listed as having received his scores on October 5, 1989, and Garner is listed as having inserted these scores into his account on August 4, 2011. In this instance, she is also listed as having created Kidd's SAFE account on the same day in order to insert the scores. [\(Exhibit 9\)](#) A search by Bowman of the VAX system and the Cleveland card files, where Kidd indicated he attended high school, did not produce a match. A background check conducted by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General indicated he was living in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, at the time he would have been taking the test.

In addition to the wedding invitation, Bowman located an Ohio GED Transcript Request Form for Kidd in Garner's desk area. According to Bowman, the signature on the bottom of the form appeared to be in Garner's handwriting based on seeing her handwriting on other documents in the past. [\(Exhibit 10\)](#)

When contacted by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General, Kidd denied knowing Garner and stated he never took the test out of state. Kidd did not state if he had a GED or not. He stated he could not offer an explanation as to why she would have a wedding invitation in her desk from him and insisted he did not know her.

In interviews with OSHP, Garner stated she was a long-time friend of Kidd's wife and that was how she knew him. She admitted to signing his name on the GED Transcript Request Form. Garner stated Kidd's wife had planned to come to Columbus from Cleveland, so Garner completed and signed the form and paid the \$10 fee⁸ so Kidd could get a copy of his transcript. She stated Kidd's wife never visited and Garner didn't throw the form away. However, a review of the transcript form by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General shows applicants have two methods for receiving a transcript – either by mail within 30 days upon receipt of the form, or by priority/fax service. There is no indication on the form that the applicant can receive a transcript in person at ODE's offices in Columbus.

Regarding the GED, Garner told OSHP that Kidd's wife contacted her because Kidd was applying for a job. Garner could not recall if it was mentioned the job required a GED or other type of educational background. Garner stated she checked the computer system and learned he was not entered so she went to the Cleveland records and found Kidd's card. She stated she entered the information from the card into the system. According to Bowman, she was unable to locate the card on Garner's desk or in the Cleveland card files.

Individual #7 – Richard Coad

Bowman's review of GED passing test scores inserted by Garner in March 2012 against the Cleveland index cards indicated a questionable GED for one individual. The index card located by Bowman listed Richard Coad as having failed the test in October 1976. [\(Exhibit 11\)](#) However, a review of the information by ODE showed a passing score inserted into his SAFE account by Garner on March 7, 2012. [\(Exhibit 12\)](#) This was the same date she created an account for Coad. A background check conducted by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General using the identifying information on the Cleveland index card revealed Coad had passed away in 2004.

⁸ According to ODE's transcript request form, only money orders are accepted as form of payment. However, daily receipts provided by ODE showed other forms of payment were accepted including cash.

In her interview with OSHP, Garner indicated she did not know the individual and did not know why she would have inserted passing scores for Coad. She denied creating a false GED for the individual.

Additional Potential Questionable Record – Individual X

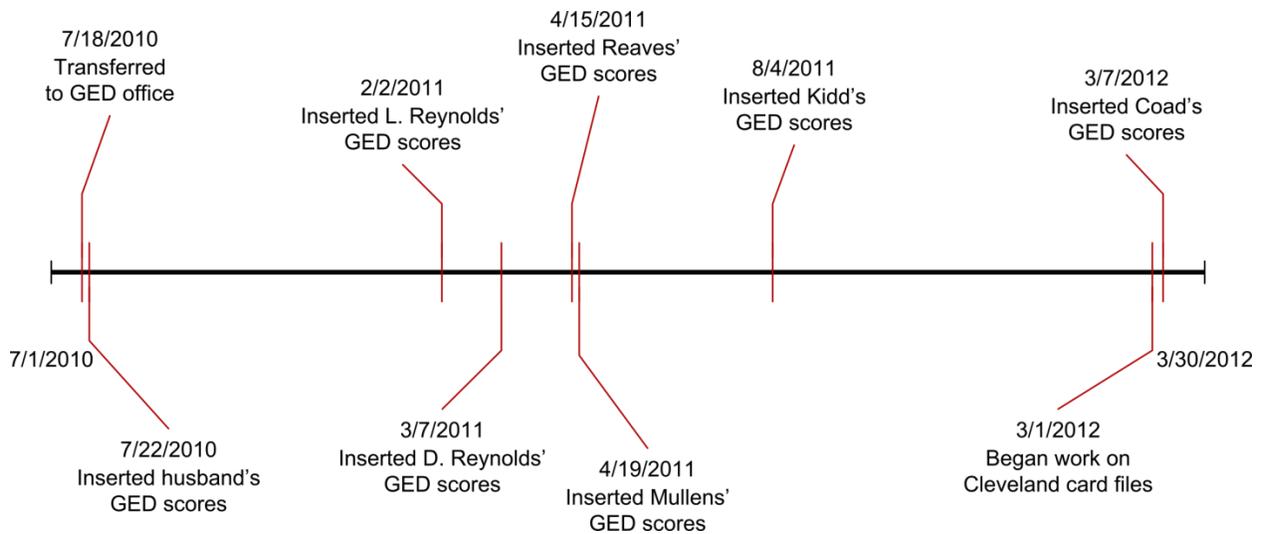
Included in the documents obtained from Garner's work area were two pieces of paper with security stickers attached. Visitors to ODE's offices are required to have their picture taken and state who they intend to visit. This information is then printed on a security sticker the individual is required to wear during their visit. The information on these stickers indicated Individual X visited Garner 12 times between June 2011 and March 2012. This individual was identified as a friend of Garner's. An Ohio GED Transcript Request and Release of Information form was located on Garner's desk by Bowman for this individual and according to her it appeared to be in Garner's handwriting. [\(Exhibit 13\)](#) It was determined by ODE the GED obtained by Individual X was legitimate. Garner was not asked about this document in her interview with OSHP.

CONCLUSION

During the course of the meeting with officials at the Ohio Department of Education, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General asked ODE to describe the step-by-step process for obtaining a GED, in particular, how a GED is recorded in the department's software system. At this meeting, an ODE official was able, within five minutes, to create a SAFE account in an Office of the Ohio Inspector General employee's name, entered scores, and "obtained" a GED. The system was not designed to incorporate a separation of responsibilities, specifically, allowing one person to enter information and a different person to verify and approve the information entered is correct and proper. Also, the written state GED office's policies and procedures did not prohibit employees from entering information into the system for family and friends. Without these checks and balances, Garner was able to easily create questionable GED records and did so within days of transferring into the section.

The SAFE accounts for the individuals who received the GEDs in question do not indicate which state the test may have been taken. Because transcripts are retained by ODE for only six months, it could not be determined if the individuals referred to with Garner had actually mailed their transcripts to ODE. It should be noted, based on the dates the tests were taken according to their SAFE accounts, four of the six individuals waited more than 20 years before submitting scores to ODE to obtain a GED transcript. In each case, Garner was the individual who entered the information into the system for her relatives or friends.

Garner stated she entered this information after locating the records in either the Cleveland card files she was working on entering into the GED system or from other records located in the GED office. However, as the following timeline shows, Garner created the passing GED test records before ODE began processing the Cleveland card records:



Garner herself admitted to creating false GED records for two individuals – Charles Mullens and Leeoandra Reaves – and to falsifying the signatures on Ohio GED Transcript Request forms for Charles Mullens and Patrick Kidd. In a written statement Garner provided to OSHP she stated:

I want to apologize for entering false GED records for: Leeoandra Reaves and Charles Mullens. I felt sorry for them and they never asked me to assist them. I entered a record for my nephew David Reynolds (mailed to ODE) and later found out that he hadn't re-

tested. I felt bad – he’s my nephew and I didn’t know how to say I entered a bad score for him. I am very sorry for my actions.

However, Mullens in his interview with the Office of the Ohio Inspector General admitted to having a GED but stated he took the test in Columbus and passed. Garner also admitting to altering transcripts received from other individuals to make it appear as if they were legitimate for Reaves and David Reynolds.

Garner resigned her position with ODE effective August 31, 2012. On December 13, 2012, Garner was indicted by a Franklin County grand jury on two felony counts of tampering with records and one felony count of forgery.

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

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

- 1) Consider making changes to the GED system to allow for a secondary verification and approval of information entered by another employee.
- 2) Consider making changes to the web-based system to allow for a scanned copy of out-of-state transcripts to be included as an attachment. If this is not feasible, consider keeping scanned copies of transcripts stored in another system before they are destroyed.
- 3) Consider adding a field in the SAFE account to indicate which state the transcript was received from when ODE employees are entering information received in the mail or via fax. This should include the testing location if known.

- 4) Make changes to their policies and procedures prohibiting employees from entering information for relatives.
- 5) Notify the appropriate individuals regarding the questionable GEDs and ensure the individuals are unable to receive a transcript in the future related to the scores inserted by Garner. If the individual takes and passes the test in the future, they should be allowed access to that transcript.

REFERRALS

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General presented a packet of information to the Franklin County Prosecutor's Office on October 2, 2012, for consideration.

[\(Click here for Exhibits 1-13 combined.\)](#)



STATE OF OHIO
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

NAME OF REPORT: Ohio Department of Education
FILE ID #: 2012 CA-00050

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jill Jones", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jill Jones
KEEPER OF RECORDS

CERTIFIED
December 20, 2012

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