

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In the Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM CHARLESTON COUNTY
Court of Common Pleas

J.C. Nicholson, Jr., Circuit Court Judge

Appellate Case No. 2016-001337

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JAN 03 2017

SC Court of Appeals

Leisel Paradis Appellant,

v.

Charleston County School District, James Island Charter High School, Robert Bohnstengel, and
Stephanie Spann, in their individual capacities, ... Respondent.

RECORD ON APPEAL

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High School And Stephanie Spann

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JULIE J. ARMSTRONG
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CR

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CHELSEA RAEGAN RIKARD
PO BOX 11675
COLUMBIA SC 29211-1675

NOTICE OF ENTRY OF JUDGMENT/ORDER PURSUANT TO RULE 77 SCRPC

Order/Plntff's mot to reconsider is denied

CASE NO: 2015CP1005093

Leisel Paradis VS Charleston County School District , defendant, et al

This judgment was entered on the 19th day of May, 2016, and notice mailed first class on Monday, May 23, 2016, to all counsel of record and/or all parties entitled to receive notice.

You may view and download this document at <http://clerkofcourt.charlestoncounty.org> or obtain a copy in person at the Clerk of Court's Office during regular Charleston County business hours.

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MAY 26 2016

**J. LEWIS CROMER
& ASSOCIATES, L.L.C.**

CR

FORM 4

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON
IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS

JUDGMENT IN A CIVIL CASE

CASE NO. 2015-CP-10-5093

Leisel Paradis

Charleston County School District, et al

PLAINTIFF(S)

DEFENDANT(S)

Submitted by:

Attorney for : ☐ Plaintiff ☐ Defendant
or
☐ Self-Represented Litigant

DISPOSITION TYPE (CHECK ONE)

- ☐ **JURY VERDICT:** This action came before the court for a trial by jury. The issues have been tried and a verdict rendered.
- ☒ **DECISION BY THE COURT:** This action came to trial or hearing before the court. The issues have been tried or heard and a decision rendered.
- ☐ **ACTION DISMISSED (CHECK REASON):** ☐ Rule 12(b), SCRPC; ☐ Rule 41(a), SCRPC (Vol. Nonsuit); ☐ Rule 43(k), SCRPC (Settled); ☐ Other
- ☐ **ACTION STRICKEN (CHECK REASON):** ☐ Rule 40(j), SCRPC; ☐ Bankruptcy; ☐ Binding arbitration, subject to right to restore to confirm, vacate or modify arbitration award; ☐ Other
- ☐ **DISPOSITION OF APPEAL TO THE CIRCUIT COURT (CHECK APPLICABLE BOX):**
☐ Affirmed; ☐ Reversed; ☐ Remanded; ☐ Other

NOTE: ATTORNEYS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR NOTIFYING LOWER COURT, TRIBUNAL, OR ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCY OF THE CIRCUIT COURT RULING IN THIS APPEAL.

IT IS ORDERED AND ADJUDGED: ☐ See attached order (formal order to follow) ☒ Statement of Judgment by the Court: Plaintiff's Motion to Reconsider filed on April 29th, 2016 is respectfully denied without a rehearing.

ORDER INFORMATION

This order ☒ ends ☐ does not end the case.

Additional Information for the Clerk :

INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC INDEX

Complete this section below when the judgment affects title to real or personal property or if any amount should be enrolled. If there is no judgment information, indicate "N/A" in one of the boxes below.

Judgment in Favor of (List name(s) below)	Judgment Against (List name(s) below)	Judgment Amount To be Enrolled (List amount(s) below)
N/A		\$

If applicable, describe the property, including tax map information and address, referenced in the order:
N/A

The judgment information above has been provided by the submitting party. Disputes concerning the amounts contained in this form may be addressed by way of motion pursuant to the SC Rules of Civil Procedure. Amounts to be computed such as interest or additional taxable costs not available at the time the form and final order are submitted to the judge may be provided to the clerk. Note: Title abstractors and researchers should refer to the official court order for judgment details.

Circuit Court Judge

2117
Judge Code

Date

5/19/16

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities,

Defendants.

) IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
) NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
) CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

ORDER DISMISSING CASE

FILED
2016 APR 15 PM 12:52
JULIE J. ARMSTRONG
CLERK OF COURT

gm
THIS MATTER is before the Court on the Amended Motions to Dismiss, and
Alternatively, for a More Definite Statement, filed by Defendants Charleston County School
District and Robert Bohnstengel on March 18, 2016, and filed by Defendants James Island
Charter High School and Stephanie Spann on March 21, 2016. Plaintiff waived any objection to
the timeliness of notice of the hearing on these motions. The Motions were heard on March 30,
2016. Based on the Complaint, the legal memoranda, and arguments of Counsel, the Court
makes the following findings of fact and conclusions of law.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Plaintiff was a teacher at James Island Charter High School (JICHHS), which is a charter
school located within the Charleston County School District (CCSD). Defendant Robert
Bohnstengel was Plaintiff's Principal during a portion of the 2013-14 school year. Defendant
Stephanie Spann was the Assistant Principal at JICHHS for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years.

Plaintiff's Complaint alleges that Defendant Bohnstengel became angry with her after she
informed him that she wanted to file a police report regarding a violent and harassing assault she
suffered from a student in her classroom during the 2012-13 school year. She alleges that,

shortly thereafter, she was notified by Defendant Bohnstengel that she was being placed on SAFE-T/ADEPT evaluation for the following school year in accordance with their prior meeting. Plaintiff was shocked by this notification because she had not previously met with Defendant Bohnstengel, and she had met all of her goals of her GBE (Goals Based Evaluation) for the 2012-13 school year.

Despite her efforts to reverse the decision of Defendant Bohnstengel, she was subject to evaluation for the 2013-14 school year. Defendant Bohnstengel was one of three evaluators for Plaintiff; however, he was terminated before Plaintiff's evaluation was complete. He was then replaced by Maureen Jessup for the remainder of the evaluation period. Plaintiff failed the evaluation for the 2013-14 school year and was again placed on evaluation for the 2014-15 school year.

Plaintiff was concerned that she would not be treated fairly in the second evaluation because Defendant Spann, who had been on the prior evaluation team, would again serve as one of her three evaluators. According to Plaintiff, during the second year of evaluation, Defendant Spann changed the requirements of her evaluation, causing Plaintiff to be confused. Plaintiff met with her mentor, Charity Scruggs, almost daily. Ms. Scruggs noted that Plaintiff was under strain, but that she was doing all she could to please the evaluators. Despite her efforts, Plaintiff failed the evaluation during the second year, scoring lower at the end of the year than she had at the beginning. All of Plaintiff's peers and colleagues were aware that she was being evaluated and saw the physical and emotional toll it took on Plaintiff. Plaintiff was terminated because she failed the evaluation for two consecutive years. Plaintiff, thereafter, exhausted her administrative remedies.¹

¹ The administrative remedies available to a teacher are governed by the South Carolina Teacher Dismissal Act. Specifically, a teacher who has been terminated exhausts her administrative remedies when she requests a hearing

Plaintiff's Complaint alleges a cause of action for defamation of character against Defendants CCSD and JCHS, as well as a cause of action against Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann for civil conspiracy.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

A. Standard of Review.

A Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss should be granted when the pleadings, construed in the light most favorable to the non-moving party, fail to allege sufficient facts to state a cause of action. Rule 12(b)(6), SCRCP; Haskell Co. v. Morgan, 274 S.C. 261, 262 S.E.2d 737 (1980).

As stated in DeBerry v. McCain, 275 S.C. 569, 274 S.E.2d 293 (1981):

 A [motion to dismiss] admits the facts well-pleaded in the complaint but does not admit the inferences drawn by the plaintiff from such facts. In short, a [motion to dismiss] a complaint does not admit conclusions of law pleaded therein.

274 S.E.2d at 296; Carolina Winds Owners' Ass'n v. Joe Harden Builder, Inc., 297 S.C. 74, 374 S.E.2d 897, 899 (Ct. App. 1988) ("A motion under Rule 12(b)(6) . . . admits the well pleaded facts in the complaint, but it does not admit the inferences drawn by the plaintiff from such facts, nor does it admit conclusions of law."). An allegation of a mere legal conclusion is insufficient to state a cause of action. Jones v. Gilstrap, 288 S.C. 525, 343 S.E.2d 646 (1986); Russell v. City of Columbia, 301 S.C. 117, 390 S.E.2d 463 (Ct. App. 1989) ("The court must take well pleaded factual allegations as true. However, allegations which are conclusory rather than factual should be disregarded.")

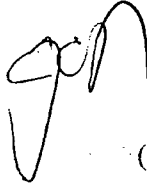
B. Plaintiff's Defamation Claim Is Dismissed as a Matter of Law.

Plaintiff alleges that she was slandered by allegedly false, oral and written statements

before the District Board of Trustees and receives a determination from the Board as to "whether the evidence showed good and just cause" for the dismissal. S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-470. Furthermore, the "teacher has the privilege of being present at the hearing with counsel and of cross-examining witnesses and may offer evidence and witnesses and present *any and all* defenses to the charges." Id. § 59-25-470 (emphasis added).

made against her by “agents and servants of Defendant District and Defendant JICHHS acting in the course and scope of their employment.” Plaintiff’s allegations fail as a matter of law and are subject to dismissal because: (1) Defendants CCSD and JICHHS are entitled to sovereign immunity; (2) Plaintiff’s claim for defamation is barred by the applicable statute of limitations; and (3) Plaintiff’s claim fails to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action for defamation.

1. Defendants CCSD and JICHHS are entitled to a dismissal of Plaintiff’s claim for defamation because it is subject to sovereign immunity.



Plaintiff’s claim for defamation is subject to the South Carolina Tort Claims Act (SCTCA), which provides the sole remedy available to a plaintiff for civil wrongs alleged to have been committed by a government agency. Hawkins v. City of Greenville, 358 S.C. 280, 292, 594 S.E.2d 557, 563 (Ct. App. 2004). CCSD and JICHHS are each a governmental entity subject to the protections of the SCTCA. S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-30(d). Although the SCTCA waived absolute immunity for torts committed by government actors, it limited liability under certain circumstances. S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-40 (Supp. 2003). Specifically, in adopting the SCTCA, the General Assembly continued the grant of immunity to the political subdivisions of the State and their employees “while acting within the scope of official duty” S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-20(b). When examining a provision which potentially limits the liability of a government agency, the Court should liberally construe the portion of the Act in favor of the government defendant. Hawkins, 358 S.C. at 292, 594 S.E.2d at 563. School officials are not liable for allegedly defamatory conduct performed in the discharge of their official duties. De Levay v. Richmond Cty. Sch. Bd., 284 F.2d 340, 340 (4th Cir. 1960). Where a government official is entitled to immunity, the defense is available, regardless of his rank or his motives, and

even when his conduct is within the “outer perimeter of his line of duty.” Green v. Cauthen, 379 F. Supp. 361, 374 (D.S.C. 1974).

Plaintiff’s claim for defamation appears to be based on the allegations that “[a]ll of the Plaintiff’s peers and colleagues knew she was undergoing the evaluation process” and that “[b]y virtue of placing and holding Plaintiff on the evaluation process for two years – which was widely known at JICHS – Plaintiff’s credibility as a teacher was greatly diminished.” Compl., ¶¶ 21, 28. Thus, the gravamen of Plaintiff’s cause of action is that CCSD and JISCHS defamed her when they placed her on formal evaluation for two consecutive school years.

gm However, CCSD and JICHS are entitled to absolute immunity for placing Plaintiff on formal evaluation because assessing teacher competence is a statutory duty of all school districts in South Carolina. See S.C. Code Ann. § 59-26-40 (“A teacher employed under a continuing contract must be evaluated on a continuous basis. At the discretion of the local district and based on an individual teacher’s needs and past performance, the evaluation may be formal or informal.”). By placing Plaintiff on formal evaluation, CCSD and JICHS were each clearly acting within the scope of its official, statutorily-mandated duties, such that there is no liability under the SCTCA. Even Plaintiff acknowledges in her Complaint that the allegedly false statements and actions were made by agents of the CCSD and JICHS “while acting within the course and scope of their employment.” Compl., ¶¶ 29, 31.

2. Plaintiff’s claim for defamation is barred by the applicable statute of limitations and is hereby dismissed.

A cause of action for defamation must be brought within two years of the time the claim arose. Jones v. City of Folly Beach, 326 S.C. 360, 368, 483 S.E.2d 770, 774 (Ct. App. 1997) (citing S.C. Code Ann. § 15-3-550 (Supp. 1995)). Plaintiff alleges Defendants CCSD and JICHS defamed her “[b]y virtue of *placing* and holding Plaintiff on the evaluation process for two years

...” Compl., ¶ 28 (emphasis added). According to her Complaint, Plaintiff was notified that she was being placed on formal evaluation shortly after her meeting with Richard Glickman in March of 2013, and she was, in fact, subject to evaluation beginning with the 2013-14 school year. Compl., ¶¶ 11, 12, 14. Thus, Plaintiff’s cause of action for defamation arose as early as March of 2013, or as late as August 2013, when the 2013-14 school year began. However, Plaintiff did not commence this litigation until September 22, 2015, after the expiration of the two-year statute of limitations for defamation claims. Therefore, her claim for defamation is time-barred.

3. Because Plaintiff does not state a claim for defamation, her cause of action for defamation is dismissed pursuant to SCRCP 12(b)(6).

Even if CCSD and JICHs were subject to liability, Plaintiff’s claim for defamation is still subject to dismissal against both Defendants because her complaint fails to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action for defamation. See Rule 12(b)(6), SCRCP.

To establish a cause of action for defamation, the Plaintiff must show: “(1) a false and defamatory statement was made; (2) the unprivileged publication was made to a third party; (3) the publisher was at fault; and (4) either actionability of the statement irrespective of special harm or the existence of special harm caused by the publication.” Erickson v. Jones St. Publishers, L.L.C., 368 S.C. 444, 465, 629 S.E.2d 653, 664 (2006).

In Pagano v. Martin, 397 F.2d 620 (4th Cir. 1968), the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals addressed a similar situation, in which the alleged defamatory statements occurred in connection with a report that was issued pursuant to an employer’s authorized duties. In that case, the alleged libel appeared in a performance evaluation report issued by the defendants, who were the plaintiff’s superior officers on the USS Robert A. Owens, a naval destroyer ship. Pagano, 397 F.2d at 620. The court acknowledged that the evaluation report “downgraded [the plaintiff]

sharply and recommended he not be re-enlisted in the future.” Id. In affirming the district court’s dismissal of the libel claim on the defendants’ motion for summary judgment, the Court of Appeals noted: “The report authorized by the Bureau of Naval Personnel Manual, was made by the defendant officers *as part of their official duties*. With the trial court, we think the suit, as a matter of law, cannot be maintained.” Id. (emphasis added).

Here, the Complaint is devoid of factual allegations that actually support Plaintiff’s contention that there was an unprivileged, defamatory communication made to a third party. The alleged defamatory material is nothing more than a negative evaluation of Plaintiff’s professional performance, and Defendants CCSD and JCHS are not only authorized, but mandated by law, to perform teacher evaluations, some of which, by their very nature, will result in substandard reviews. Furthermore, Plaintiff has failed to identify who actually published or made the alleged defamatory statements, and to whom such statements were made. Without those facts to support Plaintiff’s allegations, her claim must fail.

C. Plaintiff’s Civil Conspiracy Claim Is Hereby Dismissed as a Matter of Law.

Plaintiff’s Complaint alleges that Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann conspired against her and targeted her for an “unwarranted and invasive evaluation,” and that as a result, Plaintiff suffered special damages in the form of “being blacklisted and ostracized from the profession of education.” Compl. ¶¶ 35-36. However, Plaintiff’s claim for civil conspiracy fails as a matter of law and is subject to dismissal because: (1) Plaintiff fails to sufficiently and/or specifically state any special damages beyond those alleged in her other cause(s) of action; and (2) the actions of Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann that form the apparent basis of Plaintiff’s conspiracy claim were all done within the course and scope of their employment, such that no actionable conspiracy exists.

1. Plaintiff fails to state with specificity the special damages she sustained as a result of Defendants' alleged conspiracy.

“A civil conspiracy is a combination of two or more persons joining for the purpose of injuring and causing *special damage* to the plaintiff.” Cricket Cove Ventures, LLC v. Gilland, 390 S.C. 312, 324, 701 S.E.2d 39, 46 (Ct. App. 2010) (quoting McMillan v. Oconee Mem’l Hosp., Inc., 367 S.C. 559, 564, 626 S.E.2d 884, 886 (2006) (emphasis added)). Civil conspiracy consists of three elements: (1) a combination of two or more persons, (2) for the purpose of injuring the plaintiff, (3) which causes him special damage. Gordon v. Busbee, 397 S.C. 119, 136, 723 S.E.2d 822, 831 (Ct. App. 2012). “The gravamen of the tort of civil conspiracy is the damage resulting to the plaintiff from an overt act done pursuant to a common design.” Cricket Cove Ventures, 390 S.C. at 324, 701 S.E.2d at 46. To establish a conspiracy, “evidence, either direct or circumstantial, must be produced from which a party may reasonably infer the joint assent of the minds of two or more parties to the prosecution of the unlawful enterprise.” Cowburn v. Leventis, 366 S.C. 20, 49, 619 S.E.2d 437, 453 (Ct. App. 2005) (citation omitted).

Rule 9(g) provides that “[w]hen items of special damage are claimed, they shall be specifically stated.” Rule 9(g), SCRPC.

This rule is based upon the distinction between general and special damages. General damages are inferred by the law itself, as they are the immediate, direct, and proximate result of the act complained of. In contrast, special damages are not implied by law because they are the natural, but not the necessary or usual, consequence of the defendant’s conduct. Thus, special damages must “be specifically stated” to avoid surprise to the other party.

Benedict Coll. v. Nat’l Credit Sys., Inc., 400 S.C. 538, 548, 735 S.E.2d 518, 523 (Ct. App. 2012) (citations omitted). Where a party alleges the same damages under a conspiracy claim as they do under the other causes of action, such allegations are insufficient to establish special damages. Gordon, 397 S.C. at 136, 723 S.E.2d at 831-32 (Ct. App. 2012); Hackworth v. Greywood at

Hammett, LLC, 385 S.C. 110, 117, 682 S.E.2d 871, 875 (Ct. App. 2009) ("If a plaintiff merely repeats the damages from another claim instead of specifically listing special damages as part of their civil conspiracy claim, their conspiracy claim should be dismissed.").

The only mention of special damages in Plaintiff's Complaint, beyond the conclusory statement that she has sustained them generally, is that she has been ostracized or blacklisted from the profession of education and that she incurred legal fees to pursue the claims set forth in her Complaint. Yet, Plaintiff fails to plead any specific facts to support such an assertion, such as an inability to obtain other employment in the education profession. Furthermore, the alleged damages of being blacklisted and ostracized are simply a re-wording of the "injur[y] to her professional reputation" that are the claimed damages under her defamation cause of action. See Compl. ¶¶ 30-32.

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Additionally, Plaintiff's claim for costs and attorneys' fees in her Complaint does not constitute special damages related to her civil conspiracy claim. In this instance, Plaintiff is the "plaintiff," not a "defendant," and she "has not demonstrated how these attorney's fees are any different" than the fees "any other litigant incurs." Killian v. City of Abbeville, No. 8:14-1078-TMC, 2015 WL 1011339, *5 (D.S.C. March 6, 2015)(slip copy)(rejecting plaintiff's contention that his attorney's fees and costs constituted special damages in regard to his civil conspiracy claim). See also AJH Holdings, LLC v. Dunn, 392 S.C. 160, 168, 708 S.E.2d 218, 223 (Ct. App. 2011)("Every litigant represented by a lawyer incurs attorney's fees and costs.")

Therefore, Plaintiff's Complaint fails to "specifically state" any special damages beyond those damages alleged under other causes of action, such that her conspiracy claim fails as matter of law.

2. Plaintiff's civil conspiracy claim fails because the conduct alleged of Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann was done in the scope of their employment.

gm

A corporation or municipal entity can act only through its directors, officers, agents, and employees. See Anvar v. Greenville Hosp. Sys., No. 2007-UP-004, 2007 WL 8324255, at *5 (S.C. Ct. App. Jan. 10, 2007). Thus, where the actions of an entity's agents and employees were all performed while acting within the course and scope of their authority, a conspiracy claim is barred by the intracorporate conspiracy doctrine. See id. (citing McMillan v. Oconee Mem'l Hosp., Inc., 367 S.C. 559, 564-65, 626 S.E.2d 884, 886-87 (2006) (holding a civil conspiracy cannot exist in the context of a principal-agent relationship where the individuals are all acting only for the corporation and not for any personal purpose of their own)); see also Cameron v. Church, 253 F. Supp. 2d 611, 623 (S.D.N.Y.2003) (stating "[t]he intracorporate conspiracy doctrine provides that the officers, agents and employees of a single corporate or municipal entity, each acting within the scope of his or her employment, legally are incapable of conspiring together"). "[J]ust as it is not legally possible for an individual to conspire with himself, it is not possible for a single legal entity consisting of the corporation and its agents to conspire with itself." McAndrew v. Lockheed Martin Corp., 206 F.3d 1031, 1036 (11th Cir. 2000).

In Cricket Cove Ventures, LLC v. Gilland, 390 S.C. 312, 701 S.E.2d 39 (Ct. App. 2010), the South Carolina Court of Appeals stated:

In McMillan, our Supreme Court limited this "intracorporate conspiracy" doctrine to persons acting within the scope of their employment, 367 S.C. at 564-65, 626 S.E.2d at 887. Other jurisdictions have similarly limited the doctrine. See ePlus Tech., Inc. v. Aboud, 313 F.3d 166, 179 (4th Cir. 2002) ("[T]he intracorporate immunity doctrine does not apply where a corporate officer has an independent personal stake in achieving the corporation's illegal objectives." (quoting Greenville Pub. Co. v. Daily Reflector, Inc., 496 F.2d 391, 399 (4th Cir. 1974))); McAndrew v. Lockheed Martin Corp., 206 F.3d 1031, 1036 (11th Cir. 2000) ("Simply put, under the doctrine, a corporation cannot conspire with its employees, and its employees, *when acting in the scope of their employment*, cannot conspire among themselves." (emphasis added); Garza v. City of Omaha, 814 F.2d 553, 556 (8th Cir. 1987) ("While it is true that a corporation cannot conspire with itself, an intracorporate conspiracy may be established where

individual defendants are also named and those defendants act outside the scope of their employment for personal reasons.”).

Cricket Cove Ventures, 390 S.C. at 325-26, 701 S.E.2d at 46-47.

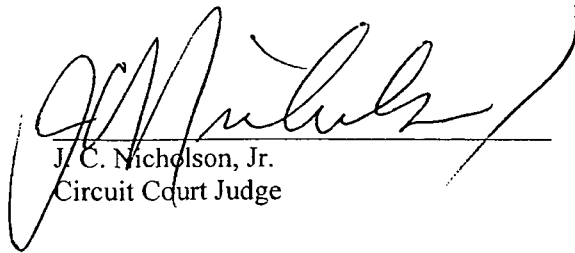
Plaintiff’s allegations against Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann all relate to conduct that occurred while they were acting within the course and scope of their employment as administrators at James Island Charter High School. Plaintiff’s bald allegations in the Civil Conspiracy section of her Complaint that Defendants “were able to specially inflict their evil agenda upon the Plaintiff and did so *outside of the scope of their own employment*”, Compl. ¶ 35 (emphasis added), are thinly-veiled and disingenuous assertions given the assertion on the preceding page that the exact same conduct and actions were “made against Plaintiff by agents and servants of Defendant District and Defendant JICHHS *acting in the course and scope of their employment*.” Compl. ¶ 29 (emphasis added). At all times relevant to the allegations of the Complaint, the individual Defendants were acting as agents and employees of Defendants CCSD and JICHHS, and Plaintiff fails to allege any facts to support a conclusion to the contrary. Thus, Plaintiff’s civil conspiracy cause of action is dismissed.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiff’s claims for defamation and civil conspiracy fail as a matter of law, and Defendants’ Amended Motions to Dismiss are granted.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that Plaintiff’s Complaint is DISMISSED.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED!


J. C. Nicholson, Jr.
Circuit Court Judge

April 14, 2016
Charleston, South Carolina

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

RECEIVED

THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

COPY AS

SEP 22 2015

C/A NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

Leisel Paradis,

J. LEWIS CROMER
& ASSOCIATES, L.L.C.

vs.

CIVIL ACTION COVERSHEET

Charleston County School District, James Island
Charter High School, Robert Bohnstengel and
Stephanie Spann, in their individual capacities,

Defendants.

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E-mail: astory@jlewiscromerlaw.com

NOTE: The coversheet and information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law. This form is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of docketing. It must be filled out completely, signed, and dated. A copy of this coversheet must be served on the defendant(s) along with the Summons and Complaint.

DOCKETING INFORMATION (Check all that apply)

- ☒ JURY TRIAL demanded in complaint. ☐ NON-JURY TRIAL demanded in complaint.
☐ This case is subject to ARBITRATION pursuant to the Court Annexed Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules.
☒ This case is subject to MEDIATION pursuant to the Court Annexed Alternative Dispute Resolution Rules.
☐ This case is exempt from ADR. (Proof of ADR/Exemption Attached)

NATURE OF ACTION (Check One Box below)

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Contracts
☐ Constructions (100)
☐ Debt Collection (110)
☐ Employment (120)
☐ General (130)
☐ Breach of Contract (140)
☐ Other (199) | Torts - Professional Malpractice
☐ Dental Malpractice (200)
☐ Legal Malpractice (210)
☐ Medical Malpractice (220)
Previous Notice of Intent Case #
20 -CP-
☐ Notice/ File Med Mal (230)
☐ Other (299) | Torts - Personal Injury
☐ Assault/Slander/Libel (300)
☐ Conversion (310)
☐ Motor Vehicle Accident (320)
☐ Premises Liability (330)
☐ Products Liability (340)
☐ Personal Injury (350)
☐ Wrongful Death (360)
☐ Other (399) | Real Property
☐ Claim & Delivery (400)
☐ Condemnation (410)
☐ Foreclosure (420)
☐ Mechanic's Lien (430)
☐ Partition (440)
☐ Possession (450)
☐ Building Code Violation (460)
☐ Other (499) |
| Inmate Petitions
☐ PCR (500)
☐ Mandamus (520)
☐ Habeas Corpus (530)
☐ Other (599) | Administrative Law/Relief
☐ Reinstate Drv. License (800)
☐ Judicial Review (810)
☐ Relief (820)
☐ Permanent Injunction (830)
☐ Forfeiture-Petition (840)
☐ Forfeiture-Consent Order (850)
☐ Other (899) | Judgments/Settlements
☐ Death Settlement (700)
☐ Foreign Judgment (710)
☐ Magistrate's Judgment (720)
☐ Minor Settlement (730)
☐ Transcript Judgment (740)
☐ Lis Pendens (750)
☐ Transfer of Structured Settlement Payment Rights Application (760)
☐ Confession of Judgment (770)
☐ Petition for Workers Compensation Settlement Approval (780)
☐ Other (799) | Appeals
☐ Arbitration (900)
☐ Magistrate-Civil (910)
☐ Magistrate-Criminal (920)
☐ Municipal (930)
☐ Probate Court (940)
☐ SCDOT (950)
☐ Worker's Comp (960)
☐ Zoning Board (970)
☐ Public Service Comm. (990)
☐ Employment Security Comm (991)
☐ Other (999) |
| Special/Complex /Other
☐ Environmental (600)
☐ Automobile Arb. (610)
☐ Medical (620)
☒ Other (699) -Defamation of Character & Civil Conspiracy | ☐ Pharmaceuticals (630)
☐ Unfair Trade Practices (640)
☐ Out-of State Depositions (650)
☐ Motion to Quash Subpoena in an Out-of-County Action (660)
☐ Sexual Predator (510) | | |

Submitting Party Signature: Ashley C. Story

Date: September 15, 2015

Note: Frivolous civil proceedings may be subject to sanctions pursuant to SCRCP, Rule 11, and the South Carolina Frivolous Civil Proceedings Sanctions Act, S.C. Code Ann. §15-36-10 et. seq.

FOR MANDATED ADR COUNTIES ONLY

Aiken, Allendale, Anderson, Bamberg, Barnwell, Beaufort, Berkeley, Calhoun, Charleston, Cherokee, Clarendon, Colleton, Darlington, Dorchester, Florence, Georgetown, Greenville, Hampton, Horry, Jasper, Kershaw, Lee, Lexington, Marion, Oconee, Orangeburg, Pickens, Richland, Spartanburg, Sumter, Union, Williamsburg, and York

SUPREME COURT RULES REQUIRE THE SUBMISSION OF ALL CIVIL CASES TO AN ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS, UNLESS OTHERWISE EXEMPT.

You are required to take the following action(s):

1. The parties shall select a neutral and file a "Proof of ADR" form on or by the 210th day of the filing of this action. If the parties have not selected a neutral within 210 days, the Clerk of Court shall then appoint a primary and secondary mediator from the current roster on a rotating basis from among those mediators agreeing to accept cases in the county in which the action has been filed.
2. The initial ADR conference must be held within 300 days after the filing of the action.
3. Pre-suit medical malpractice mediations required by S.C. Code §15-79-125 shall be held not later than 120 days after all defendants are served with the "Notice of Intent to File Suit" or as the court directs. (Medical malpractice mediation is mandatory statewide.)
4. Cases are exempt from ADR only upon the following grounds:
 - a. Special proceeding, or actions seeking extraordinary relief such as mandamus, habeas corpus, or prohibition;
 - b. Requests for temporary relief;
 - c. Appeals
 - d. Post Conviction relief matters;
 - e. Contempt of Court proceedings;
 - f. Forfeiture proceedings brought by governmental entities;
 - g. Mortgage foreclosures; and
 - h. Cases that have been previously subjected to an ADR conference, unless otherwise required by Rule 3 or by statute.
5. In cases not subject to ADR, the Chief Judge for Administrative Purposes, upon the motion of the court or of any party, may order a case to mediation.
6. Motion of a party to be exempt from payment of neutral fees due to indigency should be filed with the Court within ten (10) days after the ADR conference has been concluded.

Please Note: You must comply with the Supreme Court Rules regarding ADR.
Failure to do so may affect your case or may result in sanctions.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
C/A NO.: 2015-CP-10-

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

v.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities,

Defendants.

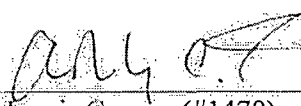
SUMMONS

FILED
2015 SEP 17 PM 2:20
JULIE A. STACY
CLERK OF COURT

TO THE DEFENDANTS ABOVE-NAMED:

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and required to answer the Complaint herein, a copy of which is herewith served upon you, and to serve a copy of your answer to this Complaint upon the subscriber, at the address shown below, within thirty (30) days after service hereof, exclusive of the day of such service, and if you fail to answer the Complaint, judgment by default will be rendered against you for the relief demanded in the Complaint.

J. LEWIS CROMER & ASSOCIATES, L.L.C.

BY: 

J. Lewis Cromer (#1470)
Ashley C. Story (#100578)
1418 Laurel Street, Suite A (29201)
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Phone 803-799-9530
Fax 803-799-9533
Attorneys for Plaintiff

September 15, 2015
Columbia, South Carolina

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

v.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, and Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities,

Defendants.

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

C/A No.: 2015-CP-10-_____

COMPLAINT
(Jury Trial Demanded)

FILED
2015 SEP 17 PM 2:20
CLERK OF COURT

Plaintiff, Leisel Paradis, complaining of the Defendants Charleston County School District ("District"), James Island Charter High School ("JICHHS"), Robert Bohnstengel ("Bohnstengel"), and Stephanie Spann ("Spann") would respectfully show unto the court:

PARTIES AND JURISDICTION

1. Plaintiff is a resident of Charleston County, South Carolina and was employed by Defendant District as an English Teacher at JICHHS.
2. Defendant District provides public educational services to student residents within its defined boundaries in Charleston County, South Carolina. JICHHS is located within the District.
3. Defendant JICHHS provides public educational services to student residents within its defined boundaries in Charleston County, South Carolina.

4. Defendant Bohnstengel is, upon information and belief, a resident of Charleston County and now works in Beaufort. He was the former Principal of JICHHS and supervised Plaintiff for a number of years.

5. Defendant Spann is, upon information and belief, a resident of Charleston County. She is the current Assistant Principal of JICHHS and participated as an evaluator for Plaintiff.

6. The events giving rise to the following causes of action occurred in Charleston County, and jurisdiction is proper.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

7. Plaintiff received positive performance evaluations throughout her employment as an English Teacher at JICHHS. She worked for the District for twenty years and attended JICHHS as a student herself. Plaintiff underwent the Goals Based Evaluation ("GBE") process every year, and successfully met each GBE.

8. During the 2012-2013 school year, Plaintiff suffered a violent and harassing verbal assault from a student in her classroom, who had documented disciplinary issues.

9. Plaintiff reported the same to Spann and Bohnstengel. After the incident, Plaintiff discussed the event with Bohnstengel in more detail and informed him that she desired to file a report with the local police department because of the aggressive and violent nature of the assault. Bohnstengel became angry with Plaintiff, strongly encouraged her not to make the report because it would "lower the JICHHS report card" related to disciplinary reports, place the school on a list of violent schools in the state,

and further told Plaintiff that her report would be useless because she could not call students as witnesses due to their ages.

10. Plaintiff was shocked and upset that she was discouraged from filing a report.

11. Following the incident with the student aforementioned, Plaintiff met with Richard Glickman ("Glickman") – a former JCHS Assistant Principal – in March of 2013, and he signed-off that she successfully accomplished her GBE for the 2012-2013 school year.

12. Shortly thereafter, Plaintiff received notice from Bohnstengel that "per their prior meeting and discussion of performance issues," Plaintiff was being placed on the SAFE-T/ADEPT evaluation ("evaluation") for the 2013-2014 school year, which would consist of Plaintiff being periodically evaluated by three individuals in addition to completing a number of rigorous tasks and assignments. Plaintiff's employment would be contingent on her successful completion of the evaluation.

13. Such news shocked Plaintiff because she never had any meetings with Bohnstengel prior to receiving his letter, and she had just met all of her goals for her GBE with Glickman.¹

14. Plaintiff tried in vain to reverse Bohnstengel's decision, but he was adamant that she would undergo the evaluation. As such, Bohnstengel, Spann, and Kevin Eakes served as Plaintiff's evaluators. Plaintiff's mentor was Tanner Tucker. None of the evaluators had any experience teaching English.

¹ Plaintiff later came to learn that Spann recommended Plaintiff for the evaluation due to the number of disciplinary referrals Plaintiff made. Spann did not recommend every teacher with a similar referral rate for the evaluation process.

15. Before Plaintiff's evaluation was completed, Bohnstengel separated employment from JICHHS and the District. Upon information and belief, Bohnstengel was terminated from his employment and subsequently filed a lawsuit against JICHHS and the District.

16. Spann continued to evaluate Plaintiff, and Bohnstengel was replaced as JICHHS Principal by Richard Gordon ("Gordon"). Maureen Jessup replaced Bohnstengel as Plaintiff's other evaluator for the evaluation. Jessup had no experience teaching English.

17. Plaintiff was evaluated less than 5% of her teaching time, and she was failed at the end of her evaluation period. Because she was failed, if she wanted to continue employment at the District and JICHHS, Plaintiff had to undergo the evaluation for a second year during the 2014-2015 school year and agree to a full-time position; formerly, Plaintiff worked part-time.

18. For the second year of the evaluation, Plaintiff's evaluation team was comprised of Gordon, Spann, and Susan Watson-Bell. Plaintiff was concerned that she would not be given a "fair shake" since Spann had previously failed her and was evaluating her performance again. She contacted a District employee relating to this matter and was informed that it was general practice for the entire team to be replaced. Charity Scruggs ("Ms. Scruggs") served as Plaintiff's mentor.

19. As the year and evaluation progressed, Spann periodically changed Plaintiff's evaluation requirements in such a way that totally confused Plaintiff until she had to seek clarity on a variety of assignments and issues. Ms. Scruggs met with Plaintiff almost daily, noticed the strain she was under, but also noted that Plaintiff successfully

employed various teaching strategies in the classroom; she was asking for assistance and doing all that she could to please the evaluation team – all to no avail.

20. Again, Plaintiff – despite all of her hard work, effort, and diligence with Ms. Scruggs – was given a failing grade on the evaluation again. Most surprisingly, Plaintiff's evaluation actually showed that she was scored more positively at the beginning of the second year of the evaluation than at the end even though Plaintiff was utilizing and adopting the suggestions given to her.

21. All of Plaintiff's peers and colleagues knew she was undergoing the evaluation process and witnessed the physical and emotional toll Plaintiff suffered as a result. Plaintiff's peers in the English department, who had experience working with her over a number of years, commented on the two-year evaluation process and speculated that Plaintiff was placed on it due to administration's belief that Plaintiff had classroom management issues, although Plaintiff was not the only teacher who reported discipline to administration.

22. After Plaintiff failed the evaluation for a second year, she was dismissed from her twenty-year career at JICHHS. She exhausted her administrative remedies.

**FOR A FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION
AGAINST DEFENDANTS DISTRICT AND JICHHS
(Defamation of Character)**

23. Plaintiff realleges paragraphs 1-22 herein.

24. Plaintiff is a private figure.

25. Plaintiff was slandered by oral and written statements as well as by actions of Defendant District and Defendant JICHHS.

26. These statements and actions made against Plaintiff were made by agents and servants of Defendant District and Defendant JICHS acting in the course and scope of their employment under the circumstances alleged above.

27. These statements and actions are false.

28. These statements and actions, including false accusations that Plaintiff could not effectively teach her students and manage her classroom, injured Plaintiff, and have defamed Plaintiff in her trade, business, and profession. By virtue of placing and holding Plaintiff on the evaluation process for two years – which was widely known at JICHS – Plaintiff's credibility as a teacher was diminished greatly.

29. By the false statements and actions made against Plaintiff by agents and servants of Defendant District and Defendant JICHS acting in the course and scope of their employment, Defendant District and Defendant JICHS defamed Plaintiff, and the defamation was published to Plaintiff's colleagues, students, and possibly others, including parents who previously knew Plaintiff to be a good and hardworking English Teacher.

30. The false statements and actions were not privileged, as there was no duty to furnish the information to the recipients, and they circulated to persons other than Plaintiff and her superiors, injuring her professional reputation.

31. The statements and actions made by the agents and servants of Defendant District and Defendant JICHS acting within the course and scope of their employment, together with the actions that Defendant District and Defendant JICHS took, including the actions that proximately caused Plaintiff's termination, are defamatory *per se*.

32. That such statements and actions were false, known to be false, and given with reckless disregard for the truth, were maliciously made, and have proximately caused Plaintiff's severe and continuing damages including the loss of her job, loss of income, loss of earning capacity, and future income and benefits associated therewith. Further, Plaintiff has sustained embarrassment, humiliation, damage to her reputation, emotional distress, and pain and suffering, which will continue into the foreseeable future. As a result of these actions, Plaintiff lost a considerable amount of sleep and her self-confidence.

FOR A SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION
AGAINST THE DEFENDANTS BOHNSTENGEL AND SPANN
(Civil Conspiracy)

33. Plaintiff realleges the paragraphs above as if set forth herein verbatim, where not inconsistent herewith.

34. The Individual Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann met, conspired, schemed and planned with others to rebuke Plaintiff and to cause her special damages in an evil and personal agenda motivated from a personal dislike of Plaintiff and her valid complaints of discipline issues, which was offensive to the Defendants, who had previously experienced issues with discipline and its negative effect upon JICHs and the District for reporting purposes.

35. Because of the position of the Individual Defendants in JICHs administration, they were able to specially inflict their evil agenda upon the Plaintiff and did so outside the course and scope of their own employment in an intentional and malicious manner, including targeting the Plaintiff for an unwarranted and invasive evaluation.

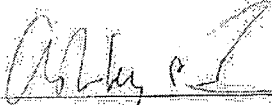
36. Such actions taken by the Defendants and others amount to an unlawful civil conspiracy and approximately cause special damages to the Plaintiff for being blacklisted and ostracized from the profession of education.

37. Plaintiff is further entitled to an award of punitive damages from the Individual Defendants for their intentional, malicious, and evil actions.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays for judgment against the Defendant District and Defendant JICHS for an appropriate amount of compensatory and actual damages, as well. Plaintiff also prays for equitable relief in the form of full back pay and any other relief granted by the court.

FURTHERMORE, Plaintiff prays for judgment against the Individual Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann for an appropriate amount of actual and punitive damages, the latter of which to deter such malicious behavior. Plaintiff also prays for attorneys' fees and costs associated with the civil conspiracy cause of action against the Individual Defendants.

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By: 

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Attorneys for Plaintiff

September 15, 2015
Columbia, SC

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON 2015-CP-10-5093

LEISEL PARADIS,)
)
 PLAINTIFF,) TRANSCRIPT OF RECORD
)
 VS.)
)
) MARCH 30, 2016
 CHARLESTON COUNTY) CHARLESTON, SC
 SCHOOL DISTRICT,)
)
 DEFENDANT.)

B E F O R E:

HONORABLE J. C. NICHOLSON, JUDGE

A P P E A R A N C E S:

Ashley Story, ESQUIRE
Chelsea Rikard, ESQUIRE
Attorneys for the Plaintiff

Bob J. Conley, ESQUIRE
Rene Dukes, ESQUIRE
Attorneys for the Defendant

* * * * *

Ruth C. Weese, RDR
Official Court Reporter
Ninth Judicial Circuit

1 (The following proceedings were held
2 March 30, 2016, Charleston County, South Carolina,
3 @ 12:00 p.m.)

4 THE CLERK: Paradis versus Charleston
5 County.

6 THE COURT: Who is representing who?

7 MS. STORY: Your Honor, my name is
8 Ashley Story. I represent the Plaintiff Leisel
9 Paradis. With me is Chelsea Rikard.

10 MR. CONLEY: Good morning or afternoon,
11 Judge. Bob Conley. I represent two of the
12 Defendants in the case, James Island Charter High
13 School and Ms. Spann.

14 MS DUKES: Your Honor, I am Rene Dukes.
15 I am here on behalf of Charleston County School
16 District and the Defendant Robert Bohnstengel.

17 THE COURT: Okay. This was a motion
18 for more definite statement and a motion to
19 dismiss.

20 MS. DUKES: Yes, Your Honor.

21 THE COURT: Which one do you want to
22 hear first?

23 MS. DUKES: Well, I think the request
24 to make a more definite statement is incorporated
25 within the motion to dismiss so I can just argue

1 that part of it.

2 THE COURT: Okay.

3 MS. DUKES: Your Honor, I'm -- I was
4 going to argue to Plaintiff's cause for defamation
5 and Mr. Conley is going take on the civil
6 conspiracy claim.

7 Leisel Paradis failed her performance
8 evaluation for two different years and as a result
9 she was terminated. She first appealed to the
10 James Island Charter High School which was her
11 right and they upheld the decision of the
12 administration. And then she had a second appeal
13 before the Charleston County School District and
14 once again based on the evidence they upheld the
15 decision to terminate her for failing her
16 performance evaluation those two years.

17 She had the right of appeal to the
18 circuit court on that finding; however, instead she
19 brought an action in tort for causes of action for
20 defamation and for civil conspiracy against the
21 school district, against James Island Charter High
22 School and also against the individuals Robert
23 Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann.

24 Ms. Paradis' defamation claim has
25 failed on several grounds. First and foremost, her

1 -- the district and also the school or governmental
2 agencies, and they're protected by immunity under
3 the South Carolina Tort Claims Act, although that
4 act does allow individuals to bring tort claims
5 against government agencies, it provides immunity
6 for government agencies who are acting within the
7 scope of their duties by performing administrative
8 tasks or by complying with state law.

9 I think it's undisputed that -- and we
10 have cited the statute, I think it's 15-78-60.
11 Under that statute the schools are required to
12 evaluate teachers on an ongoing basis to determine
13 whether their performance meets the standards of
14 the district. And so that's what they did. They
15 had some concerns, they placed her on a formal
16 evaluation and the crux of her defamation claim
17 seems to be --

18 THE COURT: What does she say was I
19 guess slanderous or what did she say was
20 slanderous?

21 MS. DUKES: Well, it's -- her complaint
22 is unclear. This seems to be the basis of her
23 defamation claim, it's paragraph 21 of her
24 complaint. All of Plaintiff's peers and colleagues
25 knew she was undergoing the evaluation process and

1 witnessed the physical and emotional toll Plaintiff
2 suffered as a result. Plaintiff's peers in the
3 English department who had experience working with
4 her over a number of years commented on the
5 two-year evaluation process and speculated that
6 Plaintiff was placed on it due to the
7 administrator's belief that Plaintiff has classroom
8 management issues. That's exactly why she was
9 placed on it.

10 So what she seems to be saying is just
11 by virtue of the fact that she was put on a formal
12 evaluation plan she was defamed. And if that's
13 true, then every time the school district complies
14 with the statutory duty to evaluate teachers it can
15 be subject to a claim for defamation. I just don't
16 think that's the law. I think you are immune from
17 that under the Tort Claims Act, specifically under
18 the waiver of immunity, the administrative action
19 or compliance with state law. I think in both
20 these cases that was what the school district was
21 doing, that was what James Island Charter School
22 was doing and so they were immune from tort
23 liability.

24 The fourth circuit also -- I cited a
25 case specifically that states that school officials

1 are not liable for allegedly defamatory conduct
2 performed in the discharge of their official duties
3 and there's no dispute as I understand from
4 Plaintiff that that's exactly what performance
5 evaluation is.

6 And so we believe that on that ground
7 alone that the cause of action for defamation
8 should be dismissed as against the school district
9 and James Island Charter School. They were the
10 only two parties that she alleged that claim
11 against.

12 THE COURT: Okay.

13 MS. DUKES: In addition to that we have
14 other arguments if you want -- the Court feels that
15 it needs additional.

16 THE COURT: You think that's your
17 strongest argument?

18 MS. DUKES: I do, Your Honor.

19 THE COURT: Let me let her address
20 that. If there are additional arguments I will
21 hear them after she addresses it.

22 MS. RIKARD: Thank you, Your Honor. I
23 appreciate it. Our position is that there are
24 several things that were defamatory in this case,
25 not only the evaluation itself, but also the act of

1 termination due to the results of the evaluation.

2 I think it's important for you to note, Your Honor,
3 that Ms. Paradis pled in the complaint she actually
4 passed evaluation before she was placed on the
5 formal evaluation.

6 And so the events leading up to that,
7 she passed her annual GBE, which is a goals based
8 evaluation, then she was slammed into the formal
9 evaluation that started the defamatory process.
10 She stayed on it for two whole years and during
11 that time her colleagues approached her and they
12 said we don't understand what's going on. We pled
13 in the complaint they believed her to have been a
14 good teacher except that now she's been on this
15 evaluation process and she has got people coming to
16 her.

17 THE COURT: Isn't the school district
18 required to say what's deficient and give her an
19 opportunity to correct it?

20 MS. RIKARD: Yes, sir, they are
21 required.

22 THE COURT: As a time frame that's
23 going to take, is there a time frame?

24 MS. RIKARD: Yes, sir. That's one
25 year.

1 THE COURT: One year.

2 MS. RIKARD: Yes, sir.

3 THE COURT: So why weren't they doing
4 what they were supposed to do?

5 MS. RIKARD: I'm sorry, I don't
6 understand your question.

7 THE COURT: I understood that you are
8 saying because of the delay that was inflammatory.

9 MS. RIKARD: Yes.

10 THE COURT: So -- but the school board
11 is required to have a delay, they have got an
12 evaluation, say you are in deficiency such and
13 such, one through five or whatever and give us some
14 time to correct it and assisted in correcting it;
15 they have up to a year to do that, right?

16 MS. RIKARD: Yes, sir. That's correct.
17 After the first year --

18 THE COURT: So how can the delay be
19 inflammatory?

20 MS. RIKARD: Because after the first
21 year --

22 THE COURT: Or how can that be
23 defamation?

24 MS. RIKARD: Because she originally
25 passed an evaluation. She should have never been

1 placed on it in the first place. She got put on it
2 the second time and there was an actual -- another
3 year after that, a second year after that. She
4 went through this process for a very long period.
5 And, in fact, if the one year holds true, they
6 believe she didn't actually pass the first year,
7 she should have never been placed on the evaluation
8 the second year because she wouldn't have been
9 employed after that time. That's we believe -- I
10 mean it's just a series of events, Your Honor, we
11 believe created defamatory action.

12 And then the termination itself under
13 Tyler v. Mack Stores and Moshtagi v. Citadel, an
14 action -- the action the district took in
15 conjunction with all of these things created the
16 defamatory act which was the termination itself.
17 We cited both of those cases in our brief, Your
18 Honor.

19 THE COURT: Well, I mean they were just
20 going through the process of evaluation and making
21 determination whether she could correct the
22 deficiency or terminate her. So how can that whole
23 process be defamation?

24 MS. RIKARD: Because originally she
25 passed her evaluation and then she got put on the

1 formal evaluation.

2 THE COURT: But so what? Every teacher
3 who passes it, they either pass it or flunk it and
4 they fail it, right? What does that have to do
5 with -- how many years has she taught?

6 MS. RIKARD: She taught for over
7 20 years.

8 THE COURT: So for 19 years she passed
9 it, the 20th year she doesn't. What's that have to
10 do with anything?

11 MS. RIKARD: Well, she wasn't put on a
12 formal evaluation until the 20th year.

13 THE COURT: So what? I mean so what?

14 MS. RIKARD: Because she had passed --
15 the goal based evaluation was --

16 THE COURT: Isn't the evaluation done
17 every year?

18 MS. RIKARD: That evaluation is done
19 every year. The ADEPT/SAFE-T evaluation that she
20 was placed on is a much more rigorous evaluation.
21 Every teacher doesn't go through that evaluation
22 process every single year. The school district has
23 to pick the teachers who are placed on ADETP/SAFE-T
24 evaluation process. And it's the school district's
25 position they placed her on that process because

1 she had turned in so many disciplinary referrals to
2 the administration. But, in fact, during one of
3 the board hearings the administrator who said that
4 happened had also admitted that they placed other
5 -- they didn't place other teachers on the same
6 evaluation for the same reason, teachers who even
7 had more disciplinary referrals than my client did.

8 And so for them to say she had a
9 classroom management issue and that's why we are
10 placing her on this evaluation, when other teachers
11 had the same issues, the same number of referrals
12 and didn't place them on the same evaluation
13 process, that is the defamatory action.

14 THE COURT: Okay. Yes, ma'am.
15 Anything you want to say in rebuttal?

16 MS. DUKES: Well, I just want to point
17 out the goals based evaluation is completely
18 different. If you just say I want to meet this
19 goal for the year and if you meet the goal then you
20 pass the evaluation, really has no relevance to the
21 evaluation process.

22 They gave her a second year just to
23 give her the benefit of the doubt. So I would hope
24 that wouldn't be held against the school and the
25 district because they did that.

1 THE COURT: Okay. Let me hear you on
2 the other grounds.

3 MS. DUKES: Did you mean the other
4 grounds for defamation? Secondly, for the school
5 district I am representing there's -- the statute
6 59-40-190 (C) provides that the school district
7 cannot be liable for any action that occurs at the
8 school in which they sponsor. So that provides the
9 second grounds for at least dismissal of the cause
10 of action against the school district.

11 Third, Your Honor, we allege that it's
12 beyond the statute of limitations. She alleges
13 that she was placed on -- she was notified that she
14 would be placed on formal evaluation in March of
15 2013. The process would have been begun in
16 August 2013. There's a two-year timeline to bring
17 an action. She didn't file this until
18 September 22nd, 2015, and as Mr. Conley pointed out
19 the defamation should be -- it's a concrete act. I
20 don't think you have just an ongoing defamatory
21 conduct. I still have don't my hands around the
22 defamation claim itself. But --

23 THE COURT: I tend to agree with you.
24 But go ahead.

25 MS. DUKES: For those reasons we argue

1 that the statute of limitations --

2 THE COURT: What happened on August
3 the 13th?

4 MS. DUKES: So she was notified she --
5 her complaint suggested that she was notified that
6 she was put on formal evaluation in March of 2013.
7 So what I don't know, is that defamatory? If it is
8 then she is way late. Or was it not until August
9 of 2013 when the actual evaluation process would
10 have begun. Is that the defamatory conduct?

11 THE COURT: Either one she's outside.

12 MS. DUKES: She's too late.

13 THE COURT: Either one. What's special
14 about August the 13th?

15 MS. DUKES: That would have been when
16 the school year resumed. But they're notified the
17 year before, by statute they are required to be
18 notified they are put on the formal evaluation. So
19 she would have been notified the prior year and
20 then the actual --

21 THE COURT: Did she teach the '13-14
22 school year?

23 MS. DUKES: She did. And she was
24 placed on her formal evaluation. But according to
25 -- the act of placing her is as I understand it,

1 just placing her on evaluation was defamatory. So
2 it's kind of hard to nail down, but it would have
3 had to have been one of those two dates.

4 Fourthly, Your Honor, we argue that the
5 defamation claim fails the 12 (b) (6) test. She
6 doesn't say who published what to whom, I mean even
7 in her argument -- she said the teachers became
8 aware. And just because people become aware that
9 you are on formal evaluation there's no
10 publication, there's -- she doesn't even plead what
11 is required to sustain a cause of action for
12 defamation.

13 So for those reasons -- also again we
14 have a fourth circuit case that we have cited that
15 say claims based on potentially defamatory
16 statements contained in a formal evaluation cannot
17 stand as a matter of law.

18 So we believe under 12 (b) (6) the Court
19 should dismiss it. And finally, Your Honor, we
20 added an argument of res judicata. As I explained
21 before, she had two hearings now. She had one
22 before the James Island Charter School Board. She
23 had another hearing before the Charleston County
24 School District Board of Trustees. At no time has
25 she raised a cause of action that I wasn't really a

1 bad teacher, I was -- it was just because I was
2 defamed and they conspired.

3 THE COURT: You don't need to go any
4 further with that argument.

5 MS. DUKES: Then I will sit down.

6 THE COURT: Yes, sir.

7 MR. CONLEY: Thank you, Judge
8 Nicholson. I want to address the civil conspiracy
9 claim against Ms. Spann and Dr. Bohnstengel. I'm
10 going to address three specific things in the
11 context of their civil conspiracy claim which is
12 where I think the focus of the Court's attention
13 needs to be as to that claim for purposes of this
14 pending motion.

15 One sort of goes to the heart of your
16 questioning here earlier about the defamatory claim
17 in and of itself and as the claimed defamatory act
18 here, was it wrong. Was there anything unlawful
19 about it, was there anything wrong about it. The
20 fact of the matter is there is not. The defamatory
21 conduct the Plaintiff is clearly pleading in this
22 complaint is conduct by the school district and by
23 the high school that's required by law in the
24 state.

25 So if you take that premise, Judge, and

1 you look at the case law in South Carolina, I will
2 cite the Court to the Cowburn vs. Leventis where
3 the court talks about part of the civil conspiracy
4 is that two people have to agree upon the
5 prosecution of an unlawful enterprise.

6 THE COURT: Who does she allege were
7 the conspirators?

8 MR. CONLEY: She alleges Dr.
9 Bohnstengel and Ms. Spann who were both at James
10 Island Charter High School when Ms. Paradis was
11 employed there. She claims they as a collected --

12 THE COURT: The principal and who?

13 MR. CONLEY: The principal and
14 essentially I will call her vice principal.

15 THE COURT: The principal and vice
16 principal are the conspirators?

17 MR. CONLEY: Exactly. So she is
18 basically claiming that the two primary
19 administrators at the school have conspired to put
20 her into this formal evaluation process, an
21 evaluation process that is clearly required by
22 statute in the state. So if you look at her
23 conspiracy claim in that context which she is
24 claiming, what Dr. Bohnstengel and Ms. Spann
25 conspired to do was that they conspired to carry

1 out what they were lawfully required to do, which
2 is put her through this formal evaluation process.
3 That alone would bar the civil conspiracy claim and
4 ought to lead to the dismissal of it..

5 Second, when -- although it's not clear
6 from the complaint, it becomes clear when you read
7 the brief Plaintiff submitted in opposition to that
8 motion. That the special damages that Ms. Paradis
9 is claiming here are special damages of the
10 attorney's fees and costs she is incurring in
11 pursuing this lawsuit. And she actually cites to
12 the case --

13 THE COURT: What does she allege is
14 special damages?

15 MR. CONLEY: The special damages are
16 clear. If you look at her brief, the special
17 damages she alleges are the cost and fees she is
18 apparently paying her lawyers to pursue this civil
19 conspiracy claim against Ms. Spann and Dr.
20 Bohnstengel. She tangentially cites to a case
21 known as AJG Holdings vs. Dunn which does not
22 support that proposition.

23 In fact, if you look further, there's a
24 subsequent South Carolina Court of Appeals opinion
25 in Benedict College vs. National Credit Systems and

1 then a subsequent federal district court opinion,
2 Killian vs. City of Abbeville that clearly said a
3 Plaintiff cannot claim as special damages the cost
4 and fees they're paying their own lawyer to pursue
5 a civil conspiracy claim.

6 What those cases stand for, and if you
7 look at them carefully, they stand for the
8 proposition that in those cases there was a
9 Defendant who was then a Plaintiff who had
10 previously spent money defending claims, meaning
11 they had previously spent costs and attorney's fees
12 defending what they believe were unlawful claims
13 brought against them for an unlawful purpose and
14 they subsequently brought a civil conspiracy claim
15 against the prior Plaintiff in another action and
16 claimed that their fees from that prior action were
17 special damages. And the Court said yes, you can
18 pursue those as special damages.

19 But if you read the Killian case and
20 you read the Benedict case, a Plaintiff in a civil
21 conspiracy claim cannot claim their ongoing
22 attorney's fees in pursuing a civil conspiracy
23 claim as special damages. That is not a basis for
24 it and that's the second reason that the civil
25 conspiracy claim should fail.

1 The third reason. The third reason is
2 that in the complaint there's the blunt, bold
3 statement made that Ms. Spann and Dr. Bohnstengel
4 acted outside the course and scope of their
5 employment. That statement is in the four corners
6 of the complaint.

7 The problem is there's nothing in this
8 outside of that bold, blunt statement that
9 indicates they did anything outside the course and
10 scope of their employment. In fact, it's to the
11 contrary. If you read the complaint, there's
12 nothing in there that would even imply they did
13 something outside the course and scope of their
14 employment.

15 By way of example, there's no
16 allegation in there that the two of them met
17 outside of the school building surreptitiously to
18 make plans about what they were going to do with
19 Ms. Paradis. There's not even an allegation they
20 met privately to conspire against her. The
21 allegations in the complaint are simply if you look
22 at them on the face, they have put her through the
23 evaluation process that's lawful and is required.
24 That's not outside the course and scope of their
25 employment.

1 And in that context Ms. Paradis can't
2 stand and pursue a claim just by saying they acted
3 in the course and scope of their employment. She
4 has got to have some indicia of factual allegation
5 in this complaint showing or implying that they did
6 something that was outside the scope and course of
7 their employment at James Island Charter High
8 School.

9 And, Judge, I would ask that you read
10 the complaint. I think you'll conclude there's no
11 factual allegation that either directly or by
12 implication would imply that either one of them
13 acted outside the course and scope of their
14 employment.

15 In fact, it's to the contrary. What
16 they did was within the course and scope of their
17 employment. The final thing I will say about that.

18 If you look at the civil conspiracy and
19 defamation claims in context and collectively, the
20 claims are basically the same. The factual claims
21 are the same. The conduct that's alleged is the
22 same as to both the defamation and civil conspiracy
23 claim. And interestingly, if you look at the
24 defamatory cause of action, within that cause of
25 action Ms. Paradis claims that Ms. Spann and Dr.

1 Bohnstengel were acting within the course and scope
2 of their employment when they defamed her which is
3 the same conduct they claim constituted a civil
4 conspiracy, but was outside the course and scope of
5 their employment.

6 Your Honor, for all of those reasons,
7 the Court should dismiss the civil conspiracy claim
8 against Dr. Bohnstengel and my client Ms. Spann.

9 THE COURT: Thank you very much. Yes,
10 ma'am.

11 MS. RIKARD: All right. So you go back
12 to the defamation and the other couple of arguments
13 that Ms. Dukes made, just to address those, Your
14 Honor. The first one that she brought up in her
15 second set of arguments was South Carolina
16 59-40-190 (c); however, if you go on and read that
17 subsection of the code there is a (d) part which
18 states that all employees of a converted school
19 shall remain the employees of the local school
20 district, a South Carolina public charter school
21 district or the public or independent institution
22 of higher learning sponsor with the same
23 compensation and benefits. We allege in our
24 complaint that Ms. Paradis, my client, she had
25 previously been an employee of Charleston County

1 School District and the school at which she taught
2 was James Island Charter High School converted to a
3 charter high school later on.

4 So the issue of the conversion would be
5 a discoverable issue whether or not she was
6 actually an employee of the school district or the
7 charter high school. That takes cares of that one.

8 There are a couple of dates that you
9 and Ms. Dukes were discussing. She was originally
10 notified that she was placed on the evaluation
11 March of 2013. The evaluation itself didn't start
12 until the fall, August of 2013. However, in the
13 spring of 2014 she was notified that she was being
14 placed on the evaluation for the next school year.
15 So that timeline started over again for the second
16 evaluation period. She wasn't actually terminated
17 or notified that she was not going to be renewed
18 her contract until March of 2015 I believe is the
19 right year.

20 So this was brought within the
21 applicable time limitations. Ms. Dukes also
22 brought up the 12 (b) (6), Your Honor. And I
23 address that in our brief. A couple of things I
24 just want you to know about that. We did say in
25 the complaint that her colleagues did speculate

1 about her ability to perform as a teacher. And we
2 have to be more clear, Your Honor. As part of the
3 issue of the more definite statement we can
4 certainly amend the complaint and do that for you,
5 but that -- there was publication. The fact that
6 she was on the evaluation and her termination was
7 widely known. They knew she didn't come back to
8 school the following year. She had been teaching
9 for 20 years. So I think that's the publication
10 and then the issue of the teachers knowing about
11 what was going on and questioning her ability to be
12 a teacher at that time was part of that publication
13 as well, Your Honor.

14 But we can be more specific if you ask
15 us to and we actually -- there is a case that cites
16 in our brief about amending the complaint to comply
17 with those requirements.

18 Moving into Mr. Conley's arguments for
19 civil conspiracy, I am talking kind of fast. Do
20 you have any questions for me right now?

21 THE COURT: Just your argument against
22 it.

23 MS. RIKARD: Thank you. As it relates
24 to the civil conspiracy claim, Mr. Conley made a
25 couple of arguments and the first one you talked

1 about was they had to agree to an unlawful
2 enterprise. The fact is that putting her on the
3 evaluation is lawful. I cannot argue, Your Honor,
4 that putting her on evaluation is not lawful. What
5 I am arguing --

6 THE COURT: What do you have as the two
7 -- I guess the two -- the principal and vice
8 principal conspired to do your client harm? What
9 evidence do you have?

10 MS. RIKARD: Yes, sir. So in the
11 complaint we pled that Ms. Paradis, my client,
12 brought up an issue of one particularly difficult
13 student who actually assaulted her in the
14 classroom. And she went to see Mr. Bohnstengel who
15 was the principal at that time and reported it and
16 she made it known to him at that time that she
17 wanted to place a report with the police because
18 she felt really threatened by this one particular
19 student. He encouraged her not to do that.

20 THE COURT: What would that have to do
21 with her evaluation?

22 MS. RIKARD: If you let me get there, I
23 am sorry, I am trying to do it as quickly as I can.
24 The reason why that played into the evaluation
25 process and all this is because they were angry

1 about the number of disciplinary referrals that
2 were coming from our client's classroom.

3 Mr. Bohnstengel, in fact, told my
4 client, and we pled this in the complaint, that he
5 did not want her making a police report because if
6 there were police reports coming from teachers that
7 would lower the overall grade of the school and
8 he's in charge of administration and he is
9 responsible for the running of the school and the
10 grades of the school.

11 THE COURT: Was any of that part of her
12 evaluation?

13 MS. RIKARD: Yes. The whole reason she
14 was placed on evaluation --

15 THE COURT: So they put her on
16 evaluation because she wanted to file a police
17 report?

18 MS. RIKARD: Because she was making the
19 disciplinary referrals, exactly.

20 THE COURT: Because what?

21 MS. RIKARD: Because she was making
22 disciplinary referrals.

23 THE COURT: Well, what do they put in
24 writing about her referrals?

25 MS. RIKARD: About that one?

1 THE COURT: Not her referral, what did
2 they did put in writing as to why they put her on
3 probation and what were the deficiencies?

4 MS. RIKARD: Well --

5 THE COURT: Were any of them that you
6 don't make police reports?

7 MS. RIKARD: Well, initially -- no,
8 that's the whole point. Initially there was not
9 anything cited about particularly why she was being
10 placed on the evaluation process to begin with and,
11 in fact, Mr. Bohnstengel in a letter said that he
12 had met with my client to talk about her
13 performance deficiencies and he never actually did
14 meet with her. He never talked to her. When she
15 got the letter she was completely caught off guard
16 because she had just passed her goals based
17 evaluation and the she receives a letter saying I
18 met with you to discuss performance deficiencies
19 and now I am putting you on formal evaluation. She
20 didn't know anything about it, had never talked to
21 him about it, never met with him about any
22 performance deficiencies.

23 THE COURT: Talk to me about your
24 special damages.

25 MS. RIKARD: So special damages, I'm

1 glad you asked. So we did plead in the complaint
2 special damages separate and apart from the
3 attorney fees and cost.

4 Specifically, in paragraph 37 we talk
5 about punitive damages. We also talk in
6 paragraph 36 about special damages for her being
7 blacklisted and ostracized. I have a case on
8 point, Your Honor. I argue another case in federal
9 court, the Grady case, I have copies for you and
10 opposing counsel, where the same issue came up on a
11 motion to dismiss about special damages.

12 And the Court in that case held those
13 were sufficient to withstand a 12 (b) (6) in federal
14 court. So if you don't mind, Your Honor, I will
15 pass those up to you.

16 THE COURT: That's okay, I don't need
17 it.

18 MS. RIKARD: It's a Grady v.
19 Spartanburg, et. al, case, and if you need me to
20 give a cite I can happily provide you a copy of it.
21 But the federal district court, it was Judge Ross
22 Anderson and Judge Jacquelyn Austin who upheld that
23 and allowed it to proceed to discovery on the same
24 basis.

25 THE COURT: Okay. Thank you very much.

1 Anything else?

2 MS. RIKARD: Lastly, Mr. Conley brought
3 up the outside the course and scope of employment
4 issue. And the motivation behind this is what's
5 outside the course and scope of the employment.
6 And that's the trouble with civil conspiracy
7 claims. When you have employers they are working
8 and using their jobs as a cover to do their unjust
9 motive.

10 And so in this case there's no way that
11 Mr. Bohnstengel or Ms. Spann could ever put her on
12 an evaluation but for the fact they're in a
13 position to do that. It's the motivation that we
14 cite to in the complaint and pled that we believe
15 is the bad basis for why she was put on it in the
16 first place. And acting out of harm towards her to
17 get her out because they didn't want the bad
18 disciplinary thing hanging over their school is a
19 bad motivation. That's what the civil conspiracy
20 is all about. Thank you, Your Honor.

21 THE COURT: Okay. Anything very
22 briefly?

23 MS. DUKES: No, Your Honor.

24 MR. CONLEY: Very briefly, Your Honor.

25 The Plaintiffs -- and this goes to the defamation

1 claim. I want to mention this to the Court. I
2 know the Court is familiar with the Tyler vs. Mack
3 cases and some of the cases afterwards. But if the
4 Court were to look at Tyler vs. Mack and the cases
5 that come afterwards that sort of talk about this
6 defamation by innuendo of defamation by act, I
7 think the Court would find, and if the Court looked
8 at all of those cases, including Tyler v. Mack,
9 involved an instance where the innuendo or the act
10 that was relied upon to constitute or argued
11 constitute defamation, there was some implication
12 of criminal conduct by the person. Some of those
13 cases involved being escorted out of a store by a
14 police officer or security. There's always this
15 implication of criminal conduct.

16 And in this case there's not even an
17 allegation in this complaint that anything that the
18 school district or the high school did implied
19 criminal conduct by Ms. Paradis and for that reason
20 I would simply mention and argue that I don't think
21 Tyler v. Mack applies here, nor any of the cases
22 that are after in that respect because the element
23 of criminal conduct by implication simply doesn't
24 exist here.

25 The issue about ostracized and

1 blacklisted as being an element of special damages,
2 Judge, that's simply a regurgitation of what the
3 claim is on the defamation claim. That's nothing
4 different than what they are claiming in the
5 defamation claim. Defamation by definition is
6 damages to your reputation and that damage to your
7 reputation could lead to things like ostracism.
8 And so that's nothing but a rebagging or recanning
9 of what they already and are already claiming in
10 regard to the defamation claim. So for that reason
11 we would simply argue those do not constitute
12 special damages as well.

13 THE COURT: Thank you so very much.
14 Give me an opportunity to read her complaint. I
15 haven't read her complaint. I have read her memo.
16 And I will give you a decision as soon as I have an
17 opportunity to read the complaint. Thank you very
18 much.

19 (These proceedings were concluded at
20 12:28 p.m., March 30, 2016, Charleston County,
21 South Carolina.)
22
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

I, Ruth C. Weese, Registered Diplomat
Reporter for the State of South Carolina at Large,
do hereby certify that the foregoing transcript is
a true, accurate, and complete record.

I further certify that I am neither related
to nor counsel for any party to the cause pending
or interested in the events thereof.

Witness my hand, I have hereunto affixed my
official seal this 7th day of July, 2016 at
Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina.

Ruth C. Weese

Ruth C. Weese

Registered Diplomat

Reporter

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF Charleston

Leisel Paradis

Plaintiff,

vs.

Charleston County School District, et al.,

Defendant.

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
Ninth JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

**MOTION AND ORDER INFORMATION
FORM AND COVERSHEET**

Plaintiff's Attorney:
Ashley C. Story, Bar No. _____
Address:
Post Office Box 11675, Columbia, SC 29211
Phone: 803 799-9530 Fax 803 799-9533
E-mail: jlewiscromeraw.com Other: _____

Defendant's Attorney:
Joshua D. Cagle, Bar No. _____
Address:
171 Church St., Ste: 310, Charleston, SC 29401
Phone: 843 577-9626 Fax 843 577-6672
E-mail: jcagle@clevelandlaborlaw.com Other: _____

- ☒ **MOTION HEARING REQUESTED** (attach written motion and complete **SECTIONS I and III**)
☐ **FORM MOTION, NO HEARING REQUESTED** (complete **SECTIONS II and III**)
☐ **PROPOSED ORDER/CONSENT ORDER** (complete **SECTIONS II and III**)

SECTION I: Hearing Information

Nature of Motion: Defs. Notice of Motion and Motion to Dismiss or Alternatively for more Definite Statement

Estimated Time Needed: 15

Court Reporter Needed: ☐ YES ☒ NO

SECTION II: Motion/Order Type

- ☒ Written motion attached.
☐ Form Motion/Order

I hereby move for relief or action by the court as set forth in the attached proposed order.

Signature of Attorney for ☐ Plaintiff ☒ Defendant

11/30/15

Date submitted

SECTION III: Motion Fee

- ☒ **PAID - AMOUNT: \$** _____
☐ **EXEMPT:** (check reason)
☐ Rule to Show Cause in Child or Spousal Support
☐ Domestic Abuse or Abuse and Neglect
☐ Indigent Status ☐ State Agency v. Indigent Party
☐ Sexually Violent Predator Act ☐ Post-Conviction Relief
☐ Motion for Stay in Bankruptcy
☐ Motion for Publication ☐ Motion for Execution (Rule 69, SCRCP)
☐ Proposed order submitted at request of the court; or,
reduced to writing from motion made in open court per judge's instructions
Name of Court Reporter: _____
☐ Other: _____

JUDGE'S SECTION

- ☐ Motion Fee to be paid upon filing of the attached order.
☐ Other: _____

JUDGE CODE _____

Date: _____

CLERK'S VERIFICATION

Collected by: _____ Date Filed: _____

- ☐ **MOTION FEE COLLECTED: \$** _____
☐ **CONTESTED - AMOUNT DUE: \$** _____

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA	)	IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
	)	
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON	)	FOR THE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
	)	
Leisel Paradis,	)	Case No.: 2015-CP-10-5093
	)	
Plaintiff,	)	
	)	
v.	)	DEFENDANTS JAMES ISLAND
	)	CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL AND
Charleston County School District, James	)	STEPHANIE SPANN'S NOTICE OF
Island Charter High School, and Robert	)	MOTION AND MOTION TO DISMISS
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their	)	OR, ALTERNATIVELY, FOR MORE
Individual capacities,	)	DEFINITE STATEMENT
	)	
Defendants.	)	

TO: ASHLEY C. STORY, ATTORNEY FOR PLAINTIFF

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the undersigned attorneys for Defendants James Island Charter High School ("JICHHS") and Defendant Stephanie Spann ("Spann") will move before the Presiding Judge of the Ninth Judicial Circuit at the Charleston County Courthouse, 100 Broad Street, Charleston, South Carolina 29401, or at such other office as the Court may direct, after ten (10) days from the date of service hereof or at such time and place as the Court may direct, for an Order dismissing the Plaintiff's Complaint, or alternatively, requiring Plaintiff make a more definite statement, on the following grounds:

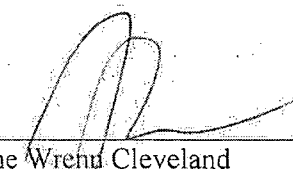
1. Plaintiff's Complaint fails to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action and therefore fails as a matter of law pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6), SCRCP, and should be dismissed in its entirety as against JICHHS and Spann.
2. Plaintiff's cause of action for defamation is barred by the applicable statute(s) of limitations.
3. Plaintiff's cause of action against JICHHS for defamation should be dismissed because it is entitled to immunity under the South Carolina Tort Claims Act.

4. Plaintiff's civil conspiracy cause of action is barred because Spann was statutorily required to subject Plaintiff to an evaluation and, therefore, could not have acted outside the course and scope of her employment in subjecting Plaintiff to such evaluation.

WHEREFORE, Spann and JICHs respectfully move this Court for an Order dismissing Plaintiff's Complaint and awarding Spann and JICHs such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Alternatively, in the event that JICHs and Spann's Motion to Dismiss is denied in whole or in part, JICHs and Spann move this Court pursuant to Rule 12(e), SCRPC, for an Order requiring Plaintiff to make a more definite and certain statement as to the conduct of each Defendant allegedly giving rise to Plaintiff's causes of action and for such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

JICHs and Spann's counsel intends to submit a memorandum in support of this Motion prior to a hearing.



Caroline Wrenn Cleveland
Bob J. Conley
Joshua D. Cagle
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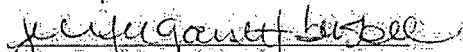
ATTORNEYS FOR DEFENDANT
JAMES ISLAND CHARTER HIGH
SCHOOL AND STEPHANIE SPANN

Charleston, South Carolina
November 30, 2015

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

This is to certify that I have this date caused to be served a copy of James Island Charter High School and Stephanie Spann's Motion to Dismiss or, Alternatively, For More Definite Statement on counsel for Plaintiff by depositing same in the United States Mail, First Class postage prepaid, and addressed to:

Ashley C. Story, Esq.
J. Lewis Cromer and Associates, LLC
Post Office Box 11675
Columbia, SC 29211


Jennifer Garrett Busbee

This 30th day of November, 2015.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS FOR THE
NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

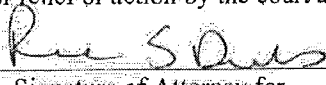
Leisel Paradis

Plaintiff

CASE NO.
2015-CP-10-5093

MOTION AND ORDER INFORMATION
FORM AND COVER SHEET

Charleston County School District, James Island
Charter High School, Robert Bohnstengel and
Stephanie Spann, in their individual capacities,
Defendants.

Plaintiff's Attorney: Ashley C. Story, Esq., Bar No. Address: J. Lewis Cromer & Associates, LLC P.O. Box 11675, Columbia, SC 29211 phone: 803-799-9530 fax: e-mail: astory@jewisecromerlaw.com other:		Defendant's Attorney: Rene S. Dukes, Bar No. 78215 Address: P. O. Box 893, Charleston, SC 29402 phone: 843-577-6726 fax: 843-724-8036 e-mail: rdukes@rrhlawfirm.com other:	
☒ MOTION HEARING REQUESTED (attach written motion and complete SECTIONS I and III) ☐ FORM MOTION, NO HEARING REQUESTED (complete SECTIONS II and III) ☐ PROPOSED ORDER/CONSENT ORDER (complete SECTIONS II and III)			
SECTION I: Hearing Information			
Nature of Motion: Notice of Motion & Motion to Dismiss &, Alternatively, for a More Definite Statement Estimated Time Needed: <u>30 min</u> Court Reporter Needed: ☒ YES / ☐ NO			
SECTION II: Motion/Order Type			
☒ Written motion attached ☐ Form Motion/Order I hereby move for relief or action by the court as set forth in the attached proposed order.			
 Signature of Attorney for ☒ Defendant			
SECTION III: Motion Fee			
☒ PAID - AMOUNT: ☐ EXEMPT: (check reason) ☐ Rule to Show Cause in Child or Spousal Support ☐ Domestic Abuse or Abuse and Neglect ☐ Indigent Status ☐ State Agency v. Indigent Party ☐ Sexually Violent Predator Act ☐ Post-Conviction Relief ☐ Motion for Stay in Bankruptcy ☐ Motion for Publication ☐ Motion for Execution (Rule 69, SCRCF) ☐ Proposed order submitted at request of the court; or, reduced to writing from motion made in open court per judge's instructions Name of Court Reporter: ☐ Other:			
JUDGE'S SECTION			
☐ Motion Fee to be paid upon filing of the attached order. ☐ Other:		JUDGE CODE: Date:	
CLERK'S VERIFICATION			
Collected by: _____ ☐ MOTION FEE COLLECTED: ☐ CONTESTED - AMOUNT DUE:		Date Filed: _____	

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities,

Defendants.

) IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
) NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
) CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

)
)
)
) **DEFENDANTS CHARLESTON COUNTY**
) **SCHOOL DISTRICT'S AND ROBERT**
) **BOHNSTENGEL'S NOTICE OF MOTION**
) **AND MOTION TO DISMISS AND,**
) **ALTERNATIVELY, FOR A MORE**
) **DEFINITE STATEMENT**

TO: PLAINTIFF ABOVE-NAMED AND HER LEGAL COUNSEL:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the undersigned attorneys for Defendant Charleston County School District (CCSD) and Defendant Robert Bohnstengel (Bohnstengel) will move before the Presiding Judge of the Ninth Judicial Circuit at the Charleston County Courthouse, 100 Broad Street, Charleston, South Carolina 29401, or at such other office as the Court may direct, after ten (10) days from the date of service hereof or at such time and place as the Court may direct, for an Order dismissing the Plaintiffs' Complaint, or alternatively, requiring Plaintiff make a more definite statement, on the following grounds:

1. Plaintiff's Complaint fails to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action and therefore fails as a matter of law pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6) and should be dismissed in its entirety as against Defendants CCSD and Bohnstengel.
2. Plaintiff's cause of action for defamation is barred by the applicable statute(s) of limitations.
3. Plaintiff's cause of action against Defendant CCSD for defamation should be dismissed because it is entitled to immunity under the South Carolina Tort Claims Act.

4. Plaintiff's cause of action against Defendant CCSD for defamation should be dismissed because CCSD is not liable for any activity related to James Island Charter School. S.C. Code Ann. §59-40-190(C).

5. Plaintiff's civil conspiracy cause of action is barred because Defendant Bohnstengel was statutorily required to subject Plaintiff to an evaluation and, therefore, could not have acted outside the course and scope of his employment in subjecting Plaintiff to such evaluation.

This Motion will be supported by the pleadings, documents on file, arguments of counsel, and a Memorandum of Law to be filed with this Court.

WHEREFORE, Defendants respectfully move this Court for an Order dismissing Plaintiff's Amended Complaint and awarding Defendants such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Alternatively, in the event that Defendants CCSD's and Bohnstengel's Motion to Dismiss is denied in whole or in part, these Defendants move this Court pursuant to Rule 12(e) for an Order requiring Plaintiff to make a more definite and certain statement as to the conduct of each Defendant allegedly giving rise to Plaintiff's causes of action and for such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

ROSEN, ROSEN & HAGOOD, LLC

By: 
Rene S. Dukes, Esquire
151 Meeting Street, Suite 400
Charleston, SC 29401
(843) 577-6726
(843) 724-8036 (f)
rdukes@trhlawfirm.com

ATTORNEYS FOR DEFENDANTS
CCSD AND BOHNSTENGEL

Charleston, South Carolina
November 30, 2015

) IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
) NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
) CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

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STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
Ninth JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

COUNTY OF Charleston)

CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

Leisel Paradis)

**MOTION AND ORDER INFORMATION
FORM AND COVERSHEET**

Plaintiff,)

vs.)

Charleston County School District, et al.,)

Defendant.)

Plaintiff's Attorney:

Ashley C. Story, Bar No. _____

Address:

P.O. Box 11675, Columbia, SC 29211

Phone: 803 799-9530 Fax 803 799-9533

E-mail: _____ Other: _____

Defendant's Attorney:

Bob J. Conley, Bar No. 12243

Address:

171 Church St., Ste: 310, Chas, SC 29401

Phone: 843 577-9626 Fax 843 577-6672

E-mail: bconley@clevelandlaborlaw.com Other: _____

☒ **MOTION HEARING REQUESTED** (attach written motion and complete **SECTIONS I and III**)

☐ **FORM MOTION, NO HEARING REQUESTED** (complete **SECTIONS II and III**)

☐ **PROPOSED ORDER/CONSENT ORDER** (complete **SECTIONS II and III**)

SECTION I: Hearing Information

Nature of Motion: Defendants Amended Motion to Dismiss or, Alternatively, For More Definite Statement

Estimated Time Needed: 15

Court Reporter Needed: ☐ YES ☒ NO

SECTION II: Motion/Order Type

☒ Written motion attached

☐ Form Motion/Order

I hereby move for relief or action by the court as set forth in the attached proposed order.

Signature of Attorney for ☐ Plaintiff ☒ Defendant

3/18/16

Date submitted

SECTION III: Motion Fee

☒ **PAID - AMOUNT: \$** _____

☐ **EXEMPT:**

(check reason)

☐ Rule to Show Cause in Child or Spousal Support

☐ Domestic Abuse or Abuse and Neglect

☐ Indigent Status ☐ State Agency v. Indigent Party

☐ Sexually Violent Predator Act ☐ Post-Conviction Relief

☐ Motion for Stay in Bankruptcy

☐ Motion for Publication ☐ Motion for Execution (Rule 69, SCRCP)

☐ Proposed order submitted at request of the court; or,

reduced to writing from motion made in open court per judge's instructions

Name of Court Reporter: _____

☐ Other: _____

JUDGE'S SECTION

☐ Motion Fee to be paid upon filing of the attached order.

☐ Other: _____

JUDGE CODE _____

Date: _____

CLERK'S VERIFICATION

Collected by: _____ Date Filed: _____

☐ **MOTION FEE COLLECTED: \$** _____

☐ **CONTESTED - AMOUNT DUE: \$** _____

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA	)	IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
	)	
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON	)	FOR THE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
	)	
Leisel Paradis,	)	Case No.: 2015-CP-10-5093
	)	
Plaintiff,	)	
	)	
v.	)	DEFENDANTS JAMES ISLAND
	)	CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL AND
Charleston County School District, James	)	STEPHANIE SPANN'S
Island Charter High School, and Robert	)	AMENDED MOTION TO DISMISS
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their	)	OR, ALTERNATIVELY, FOR MORE
Individual capacities,	)	DEFINITE STATEMENT
	)	
Defendants.	)	

TO: ASHLEY C. STORY, ATTORNEY FOR PLAINTIFF

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the undersigned attorneys for Defendants James Island Charter High School ("JICHHS") and Defendant Stephanie Spann ("Spann") will move before the Presiding Judge of the Ninth Judicial Circuit at the Charleston County Courthouse, 100 Broad Street, Charleston, South Carolina 29401, or at such other office as the Court may direct, after ten (10) days from the date of service hereof or at such time and place as the Court may direct, for an Order dismissing the Plaintiff's Complaint, or alternatively, requiring Plaintiff make a more definite statement, on the following grounds:

1. Plaintiff's Complaint fails to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action and therefore fails as a matter of law pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6), SCRPC, and should be dismissed in its entirety as against JICHHS and Spann.
2. Plaintiff's cause of action for defamation is barred by the applicable statute(s) of limitations.
3. Plaintiff's cause of action against JICHHS for defamation should be dismissed because it is entitled to immunity under the South Carolina Tort Claims Act.

4. Plaintiff's civil conspiracy cause of action is barred because Spann was statutorily required to subject Plaintiff to an evaluation and, therefore, could not have acted outside the course and scope of her employment in subjecting Plaintiff to such evaluation.

5. Plaintiff's claims and causes of action are barred by the doctrines of res judicata and/or collateral estoppel.

WHEREFORE, Spann and JICHs respectfully move this Court for an Order dismissing Plaintiff's Complaint and awarding Spann and JICHs such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Alternatively, in the event that JICHs and Spann's Motion to Dismiss is denied in whole or in part, JICHs and Spann move this Court pursuant to Rule 12(e), SCRCP, for an Order requiring Plaintiff to make a more definite and certain statement as to the conduct of each Defendant allegedly giving rise to Plaintiff's causes of action and for such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

JICHs and Spann's counsel intends to submit a memorandum in support of this Motion prior to a hearing.



Caroline Wrenn Cleveland

Bob J. Conley

Emmanuel J. Ferguson

CLEVELAND & CONLEY, L.L.C.

One Seventy One Church Street, Suite 310

Charleston, South Carolina 29401

Telephone: (843) 577-9626

Facsimile: (843) 577-6672

ccleveland@clevelandlaborlaw.com

bconley@clevelandlaborlaw.com

eferguson@clevelandlaborlaw.com

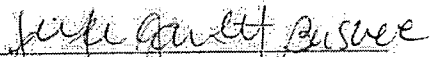
ATTORNEYS FOR DEFENDANT
JAMES ISLAND CHARTER HIGH
SCHOOL AND STEPHANIE SPANN

Charleston, South Carolina
March 18, 2016

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

This is to certify that I have this date caused to be served a copy of James Island Charter High School and Stephanie Spann's Amended Motion to Dismiss or, Alternatively, For More Definite Statement on counsel for Plaintiff by depositing same in the United States Mail, First Class postage prepaid, and addressed to:

Ashley C. Story, Esquire
J. Lewis Cromer and Associates, LLC
Post Office Box 11675
Columbia, South Carolina 29211


Jennifer Garfield Busbee

This 18th day of March, 2016.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

Leisel Paradis

Plaintiff

v.

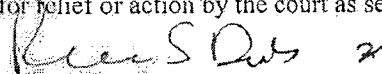
Charleston County School District, James Island
Charter High School, Robert Bohnstengel and
Stephanie Spann, in their individual capacities,
Defendants.

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS FOR THE
NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

CASE NO.

2015-CP-10-5093

MOTION AND ORDER INFORMATION
FORM AND COVER SHEET

Plaintiff's Attorney: Ashley C. Story, Esq., Bar No. Address: J. Lewis Cromer & Associates, LLC P.O. Box 11675, Columbia, SC 29211 phone: 803-799-9530 fax: e-mail: .astory@jlewiscromerlaw.com other:		Defendant's Attorney: Rene S. Dukes, Bar No. 78215 Address: P. O. Box 893, Charleston, SC 29402 phone: 843-577-6726 fax: 843-724-8036 e-mail: rdukes@rrhlawfirm.com other:	
☒ MOTION HEARING REQUESTED (attach written motion and complete SECTIONS I and III) ☐ FORM MOTION, NO HEARING REQUESTED (complete SECTIONS II and III) ☐ PROPOSED ORDER/CONSENT ORDER (complete SECTIONS II and III)			
SECTION I: Hearing Information			
Nature of Motion: Notice of Motion & Amended Motion to Dismiss &, Alternatively, for a More Definite Statement **Please schedule to be heard at the hearing already scheduled on March 30, 2016 at 11:30 a.m.			
Estimated Time Needed: _____		Court Reporter Needed: ☒ YES / ☐ NO	
SECTION II: Motion/Order Type			
☒ Written motion attached ☐ Form Motion/Order			
I hereby move for relief or action by the court as set forth in the attached proposed order.			
 Signature of Attorney for		<u>3/18/16</u> ☒ Defendant	
SECTION III: Motion Fee			
☒ PAID - AMOUNT: 25.00 ☐ EXEMPT: (check reason) ☐ Rule to Show Cause in Child or Spousal Support ☐ Domestic Abuse or Abuse and Neglect ☐ Indigent Status ☐ State Agency v. Indigent Party ☐ Sexually Violent Predator Act ☐ Post-Conviction Relief ☐ Motion for Stay in Bankruptcy ☐ Motion for Publication ☐ Motion for Execution (Rule 69, SCRPC) ☐ Proposed order submitted at request of the court; or, reduced to writing from motion made in open court per judge's instructions Name of Court Reporter: _____ ☐ Other: _____			
JUDGE'S SECTION			
☐ Motion Fee to be paid upon filing of the attached order. ☐ Other: _____		JUDGE: _____	
		CODE: _____ Date: _____	
CLERK'S VERIFICATION			
Collected by: _____		Date Filed: _____	
☐ MOTION FEE COLLECTED: _____			

SCCA/233 (1/2003)

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities,

Defendants.

) IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
) NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
) CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

)
)
)
)
) **DEFENDANTS CHARLESTON COUNTY**
) **SCHOOL DISTRICT'S AND ROBERT**
) **BOHNSTENGEL'S NOTICE OF MOTION**
) **AND AMENDED MOTION TO DISMISS**
) **AND, ALTERNATIVELY, FOR A MORE**
) **DEFINITE STATEMENT**

TO: PLAINTIFF ABOVE-NAMED AND HER LEGAL COUNSEL:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the undersigned attorneys for Defendant Charleston County School District (CCSD) and Defendant Robert Bohnstengel (Bohnstengel) will move before the Presiding Judge of the Ninth Judicial Circuit at the Charleston County Courthouse, 100 Broad Street, Charleston, South Carolina 29401, or at such other office as the Court may direct, after ten (10) days from the date of service hereof or at such time and place as the Court may direct, for an Order dismissing the Plaintiffs' Complaint, or alternatively, requiring Plaintiff make a more definite statement, on the following grounds:

1. Plaintiff's Complaint fails to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action and therefore fails as a matter of law pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6) and should be dismissed in its entirety as against Defendants CCSD and Bohnstengel.

2. Plaintiffs causes of action are barred by the doctrines of res judicata and/or collateral estoppel.

3. Plaintiff's cause of action for defamation is barred by the applicable statute(s) of limitations.

4. Plaintiff's cause of action against Defendant CCSD for defamation should be dismissed because it is entitled to immunity under the South Carolina Tort Claims Act.

5. Plaintiff's cause of action against Defendant CCSD for defamation should be dismissed because CCSD is not liable for any activity related to James Island Charter School. S.C. Code Ann. §59-40-190(C).

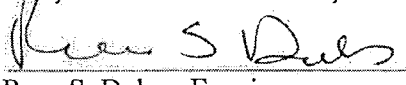
6. Plaintiff's civil conspiracy cause of action is barred because Defendant Bohnstengel was statutorily required to subject Plaintiff to an evaluation and, therefore, could not have acted outside the course and scope of his employment in subjecting Plaintiff to such evaluation.

This Motion will be supported by the pleadings, documents on file, arguments of counsel, and a Memorandum of Law to be filed with this Court.

WHEREFORE, Defendants respectfully move this Court for an Order dismissing Plaintiff's Amended Complaint and awarding Defendants such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Alternatively, in the event that Defendants CCSD's and Bohnstengel's Motion to Dismiss is denied in whole or in part, these Defendants move this Court pursuant to Rule 12(e) for an Order requiring Plaintiff to make a more definite and certain statement as to the conduct of each Defendant allegedly giving rise to Plaintiff's causes of action and for such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

ROSEN, ROSEN & HAGOOD, LLC

By: 

Rene S. Dukes, Esquire
151 Meeting Street, Suite 400
Charleston, SC 29401
(843) 577-6726

ATTORNEYS FOR DEFENDANTS
CCSD AND BOHNSTENGEL

Charleston, South Carolina
March 18, 2016

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities,

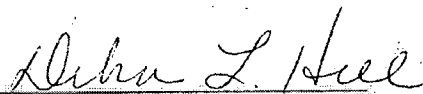
Defendants.

) IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
) NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
) CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned hereby certifies that on the 18 day of March, 2016 a true and correct copy of Defendant's Charleston County School District's and Robert Bohnstengel's Notice of Motion and Amended Motion to Dismiss and, Alternatively, for a More Definite Statement was emailed and placed in an envelope with first class postage prepaid and affixed thereto and mailed to the following:

Ashley C. Story, Esquire
J. Lewis Cromer & Associates, LLC
P.O. Box 11675
Columbia, SC 29211
astory@jlewiscromerlaw.com


Debra L. Hill

FILED
2016 MAR 18 PM 3:14
CLERK OF COURT

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
C/A NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

v.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities,

Defendants.

**PLAINTIFF'S MEMORANDUM IN OPPOSITION TO DEFENDANTS'
MOTIONS TO DISMISS AND MOTIONS FOR MORE DEFINITE
STATEMENT**

The Plaintiff, by and through her undersigned counsel, requests that this Honorable Court deny the Defendants' Motions¹ to Dismiss and Motions for More Definite Statement filed pursuant to Rules 12(b)(6) and 12(e), respectively, South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure ("SCRCP") as they relate to the Plaintiff's cause of action for defamation against Defendants Charleston County School District ("District") and James Island Charter High School ("JICHHS") and civil conspiracy against Individual Defendants Robert Bohnstengel ("Bohnstengel") and Stephanie Spann ("Spann"). The Defendants' motions should be denied for the following reasons:

¹ All Defendants filed an Amended Motion to add an argument for *res judicata* and collateral estoppel on March 18, 2016. Their Amended Motions were not filed within the ten (10) days required by statute for notice; however, the undersigned counsel has agreed to argue the same at the scheduled motion hearing for March 30, 2016. At the time of submitting this Memorandum in Opposition to both the presiding Judge (five (5) business days before the hearing) and for filing with the Clerk of Court, the undersigned has not received any supplemental memoranda from counsel for the Defendants and respectfully requests that she be given leave to amend her Memorandum in Opposition to address any specific arguments, statutes, and/or case law cited by counsel for all Defendants.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Leisel Paradis ("Plaintiff") filed her Complaint on September 17, 2015, asserting a cause of action for defamation against the District and JICHHS and for civil conspiracy against the Individual Defendants. (Complaint at ¶¶ 23-37). Defendants filed their Motions on November 30, 2015. Subsequently, on March 18, 2016, Defendants filed amended motions to include arguments for *res judicata* and collateral estoppel.

STATEMENT OF THE PLEADINGS

Plaintiff was formerly employed with Defendant District as an English Teacher at JICHHS, which is a school located within the District. (Compl. at ¶¶ 1-2). Plaintiff worked under the supervision of both Individual Defendants prior to her termination² and successfully met her Goals Based Evaluation ("GBE") each year. *Id.* at ¶¶ 4-5, 7.

During the 2012-2013 school year, Plaintiff was the victim of a terrible verbal assault from one of her students who had well-documented disciplinary issues; Plaintiff reported the same to the Individual Defendants and made it clear that she believed it was necessary to file a police report. (Compl. at ¶¶ 8-9). Bohnstengel became angry with Plaintiff concerning her wish to file a police report because he believed and informed Plaintiff that such a report would reflect poorly upon JICHHS as it related to disciplinary reports. *Id.* After Plaintiff reported this incident, she met with another JICHHS Assistant Principal to review and sign-off on her successfully completed GBE for the 2012-2013 school year. *Id.* at ¶ 10.

Despite having received a passing GBE, Plaintiff was notified by Bohnstengel that she was being placed on the SAFE-T/ADEPT evaluation ("evaluation") for the upcoming (2013-2014) school year due to performance issues, and Plaintiff's employment was contingent upon

² Plaintiff was terminated in 2015; she exhausted her administrative remedies. (Compl. at ¶ 22).

passing the same; Bohnstengel went on to allege that he had previously met with Plaintiff regarding these performance issues³, which was false. *Id.* at ¶¶ 12-13. Bohnstengel⁴, Spann, and another District employee served as Plaintiff's evaluators; none of them had any experience teaching English. *Id.* at ¶¶ 14. During the 2012-2013 evaluation period, Plaintiff was observed less than five (5%) percent of her teaching time and was failed by her evaluation team, which included Spann. *Id.* at ¶ 17. As a result, Plaintiff was placed on the evaluation⁵ for another school year – 2013-2014. *Id.* Yet again, Spann served on Plaintiff's evaluation team, although Spann previously recommended Plaintiff for the evaluation and served on the same team that failed her previously. *Id.* at ¶ 18.

During the course of the evaluation period of the 2013-2014 school year, Spann periodically changed Plaintiff's evaluation requirements on a number of occasions, which caused Plaintiff a great deal of confusion and extra time seeking clarity. *Id.* at ¶ 19. During that time, Plaintiff regularly met with her assigned mentor, who noted Plaintiff's progress and work towards meeting the goals set forth by the evaluation team. *Id.* However, despite Plaintiff's attempts, she was failed⁶ yet again; as a result, she lost her job. *Id.* at ¶¶ 20, 22.

³ Plaintiff never did meet with Bohnstengel to discuss any performance issues concerning her teaching work; subsequently, Plaintiff later learned that it was Spann who actually recommended Plaintiff for the evaluation due to the number of disciplinary referrals made by Plaintiff to administration. (Compl. at ¶ 13 and fn 1). Moreover, Plaintiff also learned that there were other teachers with similar disciplinary referral rates as Plaintiff, but Spann *did not* recommend those teachers for evaluations like she did for Plaintiff. *Id.* (emphasis added).

⁴ Upon information and belief, Bohnstengel was terminated from his employment mid-year; Spann continued to evaluate Plaintiff during the 2013-2014 evaluation. (Compl. at ¶¶ 15-16).

⁵ As a condition of Plaintiff's employment for the next school year, in addition to being placed on evaluation for a second year, Plaintiff was forced to work full-time. (Compl. at ¶ 17). If Plaintiff was indeed suffering from poor performance issues, it seems suspicious that she was offered a full-time position, as she had previously been working part-time.

⁶ Ironically, Plaintiff's scores at the beginning of the 2013-2014 evaluation were higher than the end of the year scores she received from Spann and the other evaluators, despite the progress Plaintiff made as documented by her mentor. (Comp. ¶ 20).

Throughout the two (2) year period that Plaintiff was subjected to the rigorous evaluation, Plaintiff's peers and colleagues at JICHs knew that she was under great strain as a result of the evaluation and even went so far as to speculate and discuss among each other that Plaintiff's involvement with the evaluation was a result of administration's belief that Plaintiff could not effectively control her classroom. *Id.* at ¶ 21. Because Plaintiff underwent the evaluation for two (2) consecutive school years, her reputation as a hardworking English Teacher at JICHs was impugned. *Id.* at 29. Furthermore, the Individual Defendants initiated the evaluation against Plaintiff, not as a result of disciplinary referrals, but out of malice to silence her from reporting a student to the police, which would negatively impact JICHs ratings and further diminish the credibility of their administration. *Id.* at ¶¶ 34-36.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

I. Motion to Dismiss

Under Rule 12(b)(6) of the SCRPC, a defendant may move to dismiss based on a failure to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action. *Spence v. Spence*, 368 S.C. 106, 116 (2006); *Baird v. Charleston County*, 333 S.C. 519, 527 (1999). A court may dismiss a claim when the defendant demonstrates the plaintiff has failed to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action in the pleadings filed with the court. *Williams v. Condon*, 347 S.C. 227, 553 S.E.2d 496 (Ct.App. 2001). "Generally, in considering a 12(b)(6) motion, the trial court must base its ruling solely upon allegations set forth on the face of the complaint." *Baird*, 333 S.C. at 527 (citing *Stiles v. Onorato*, 318 S.C. 297, 457 S.E.2d 601 (1995)). "[A] ruling on 12(b)(6) motion must be bottomed and premised solely upon allegations set forth by plaintiff." *Williams*, 347 S.C. at 233. If, in viewing the facts and inferences reasonably drawn therefrom in the light most favorable to the plaintiff,

would entitle the plaintiff to relief on any theory of the case, then the Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss should be denied. *Baird*, 333 S.C. at 511; *Gentry v. Yonce*, 337 S.C. 1, 5 (1999); and *Stiles*, 318 S.C. at 300. Looking at facts in the light most favorable to plaintiff, and with all doubts resolved in his behalf, the court must consider whether the pleadings articulate any valid claim for relief. *Id.*

The complaint should not be dismissed merely because the court doubts the plaintiff will prevail in the action. *Toussaint v. Ham*, 29S.C. 415, 357 S.E.2d 8 (1987). The court may grant a motion to dismiss only if the facts alleged in the complaint do not support relief under any theory of law. *Tatum v. Medical Univ. of South Carolina*, 346 S.C. 194, 552 S.E.2d 18 (2001).

II. Motion for More Definite Statement⁷

Under Rule 12(e) of the SCRCPP, a defendant may move for a more definite statement. *See Hopkins v. Shuman*, 235 S.C. 191, 193, 110 S.E.2d 713, 715 (1959) (“[D]ifferent causes of action must be stated separately in a complaint so that the defendant may plead to them separately, if necessary or desirable.”); *Fowler v. Floyd*, 204 S.C. 118, 28 S.E.2d 641 (1944) (when causes of action are jumbled in a complaint, defendant's remedy is to move to require them to be stated separately). While the instant case was pending on appeal, the new South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure were adopted. *See* Act No. 100, 1985 S.C. Acts 277; H. Lightsey & J. Flanagan, *South Carolina Civil Procedure* (2d ed. 1985). S.C.R.Civ.P. 8(e)(2) provides: “A party may set forth two or more statements of a cause of action or defense alternatively or hypothetically, either in one count or defense or in separate counts or defenses.”

⁷ To the end that Defendants seek a more definite statement, they have failed to identify what they seek to be made more definitive; that is, they do not argue what is so vague that prevents them from properly answering the Complaint.

S.C.R.Civ.P. 12(e) provides: "If a pleading to which a responsive pleading is permitted is so vague or ambiguous that a party cannot reasonably be required to frame a responsive pleading, he may move for a more definite statement before interposing his responsive pleading." *Henderson v. Gould, Inc.*, 288 S.C. 261, 263, 341 S.E.2d 806, 808 (Ct. App. 1986).

ARGUMENT

I. PLAINTIFF HAS SUFFICIENTLY ALLEGED FACTS TO SUPPORT A CLAIM FOR DEFAMATION AGAINST DEFENDANTS DISTRICT AND JICHHS.

Defendant District argues that Plaintiff's claim for defamation (1) fails as a matter of law, (2) is barred by the statute of limitations⁸; (3) is further barred by the South Carolina Tort Claims Act ("SCTCA")⁹; and (4) should be dismissed because District is not liable for any activity relating to JICHHS.¹⁰ (District Motion to Dismiss, pps. 1-2). Similarly, Defendant JICHHS argues that Plaintiff's claim for defamation should be dismissed for the same reasons as listed (1) – (3)

⁸ As set forth *supra*, Plaintiff brought her claim for defamation against both the District and JICHHS on September 17, 2015, which is within two (2) years of her first and second evaluations, which began on or around August of 2012 and lasted through May of 2014. The statute of limitations applicable to actions for libel or slander is two (2) years running from the time of the defamatory statement. S.C. Code § 15-3-550(1); *see also Jones v. City of Folly Beach*, 326 S.C. 360, 483 S.E.2d 770 (Ct. App. 1997). Plaintiff argues that the acts taken to have her placed and kept on the evaluation for two (2) consecutive school years following her valid disciplinary reports created an inference that she could not manage her classroom, resulting in her being unable to perform her job, which is defamation *per se*. *See Fountain v. First Reliance Bank*, 398 S.C. 434, 730 S.E.2d 305 (S.C. 2012) (an insinuation may be defamatory); *Lynch v. Toys "R" Us-Delaware*, 375 S.C. 604, 654 S.E.2d 541 (Ct. App. 2007) (conduct may also convey defamatory meaning); *Moshtagi v. The Citadel*, 314 S.C. 316, 443 S.E.2d 915 (Ct. App. 1994) (impropriety or inadequacy in performing a trade or profession may be actionable *per se*).

⁹ The District and JICHHS are not immune from suit for defamation under the SCTCA. The SCTCA waives immunity of state political subdivisions from liability in tort; the SCTCA is the sole remedy for any tort committed by an employee of a governmental entity while acting within the course and scope of his or her official duty. S.C. Code § 15-78-200.

¹⁰ Defendant District argues that it is not responsible for any actions taken by JICHHS; however, Plaintiff alleges that she is an employee of Defendant District, as JICHHS is a school located within the District. (Comp. ¶ 1). Discovery is warranted on the issue of the District's oversight of JICHHS and its relationship with JICHHS to determine whether or not it is, in fact, liable for JICHHS's actions.

supra. (JICHs Motion to Dismiss, pps. 1-2).

A properly pled defamation claim must assert the following: (1) a false and defamatory statement concerning another; (2) an unprivileged publication to a third party; (3) fault on the part of the publisher; and (4) actionability of the statement. *Argoe v. Three Rivers Behavioral Health, L.L.C.*, 392 S.C. 462, 474, 710 S.E.2d 67, 74 (2011). In this case, Plaintiff alleges sufficient facts to support each of the elements required by the law, and the Defendants' Motions to Dismiss should be denied.

a. Plaintiff alleges a false and defamatory statement.

A communication is defamatory if it tends "to impeach the honesty, integrity, virtue, or reputation, or publish the natural or alleged defects, of one who is alive, and thereby expose him to public hatred, contempt, ridicule, or obloquy, or to cause him to be shunned or avoided, or to injure him in his office, business, or occupation." *Smith v. Bradstreet*, 63 S.C. 525, 41 S.E. 763 (1902) (emphasis added). In the alternative, even if the statement is not considered a statement in words, the South Carolina Supreme Court has held that an actionable defamatory insinuation may be made by action or conduct, not just by words. *Tyler v. Macks Stores of South Carolina*, 275 S.C. 456, 458, 272 S.E.2d 633, 634 (1980).

Plaintiff alleges at one (1) specific ongoing defamatory act made by District and JICHs officials – including Bohnstengel and Spann, in the course and scope of their employment with Defendant District and JICHs. Plaintiff also alleges that the action of her termination, in conjunction with the surrounding events, constitutes an actionable defamation claim. Specifically, Plaintiff alleged that Bohnstengel placed her on the evaluation for performance deficiencies but later learned that Spann instigated this act as a result of Plaintiff's disciplinary

referrals, although Plaintiff was not alone in making the referrals as compared to her colleagues. (Compl. ¶ 12 and fn 1). Moreover, Plaintiff went on to allege that, as a result of being placed under administrative scrutiny for two (2) consecutive years, her colleagues and peers began speculating and inferring that Plaintiff could not manage her students and was unable to perform her job. (Compl. ¶¶ 21, 28-29, 30).

Similarly, Plaintiff alleges that the actions the District and JCHS took – terminating Plaintiff in the wake of Plaintiff’s placement on evaluation, which is and of itself an indicator of poor work performance – is defamatory because, when taken together, a third party may assume and infer that Plaintiff’s termination was the result of ineffective teaching on Plaintiff’s part and that she was incapable of performing her job.

b. Plaintiff sufficiently alleges an unprivileged communication to a third party.

The second element of defamation is an unprivileged publication to a third party. *Id.* “No matter what a person may write, if it is not published, there is of course no liability, since no one is injured.” *Holtzscheiter v. Thomson Newspapers*, 332 S.C. 502, 520, 506 S.E.2d 497, 507 (1998) (Toal, C.J., concurring) (citing *Carver v. Morrow*, 213 S.C. 199, 202, 48 S.E.2d 814, 816 (1948)). The publication is the communication, intentionally or by a negligent act, to a third party who is someone other than the person defamed. *Id.* (citing 50 Am. Jur. 2d Libel & Slander § 235 (1995)).

Plaintiff alleges that unprivileged, defamatory actions were taken openly, so much so that Plaintiff’s colleagues and peers were on notice that she was placed on an evaluation for two (2) years before she was not permitted to return to work. (Compl. at ¶ 20). Plaintiff has the burden of alleging that the statement must have been communicated to someone other than the Plaintiff.

Tyler v. Macks Stores of South Carolina, 275 S.C. 456, 458, 272 S.E.2d 633, 634 (1980). Here, Plaintiff has met this requirement, and Defendant's Motion to Dismiss should be denied.

c. Plaintiff alleges fault of the defamatory statement on the part of Defendants District and JCHS through its agent and employees and further alleges an actionable claim.

"The defamatory meaning of a message or statement may be obvious on the face of the statement, in which case the statement is defamatory *per se*. An example of defamation *per se* is 'A is a thief.'" *Holtzscheiter v. Thomson Newspapers*, 332 S.C. 502, 508-509, 506 S.E.2d 497, 501 (1998). If the defamatory meaning is not clear then the statement is defamatory *per quod*. *Holtzscheiter*, 332 S.C. at 509, 506 S.E.2d at 501. In cases involving defamation *per quod*, the plaintiff must introduce facts extrinsic to the statement itself in order to prove a defamatory meaning. *Id.* An example of defamation *per quod* is "A had a baby" where the extrinsic fact is that A is unmarried. *Id.*

An actionable defamatory insinuation may be made by action or conduct, not just by words. *Tyler v. Macks Stores of South Carolina*, 275 S.C. 456, 458, 272 S.E.2d 633, 634 (1980). Moreover, defamation can be actionable even when it is indirect. *See Eubanks v. Smith*, 292 S.C. 57, 354 S.E.2d 898 (1987); *see also Tyler*, 275 S.C. at 458, 272 S.E.2d 633, 634 (1980). "To render the defamatory statement actionable, it is not necessary that the false charge be made in a direct, open and positive manner. A mere insinuation is as actionable as a positive assertion if it is false and malicious and the meaning is plain." *Tyler*, 275 S.C. at 458, 272 S.E.2d at 634 (citing *Timmons v. News and Press, Inc.*, 232 S.C. 639, 644, 103 S.E.2d 277, 280 (1958)). The utterance and the publication of statements rendering Plaintiff to be unable to teach due to classroom mismanagement are false and contain defamatory insinuations by their very existence. (Compl. fn 1 and ¶ 20). Further, the act of termination itself with the surrounding events may

lead to the insinuation of a defamatory act. *See Tyler*, 75 S.C. at 458, 272 S.E.2d 633, 634 (1980).

Lastly, where a statement is found to be actionable *per se* because it accuses a plaintiff of being unfit for his profession, general damages are presumed. *McBride v. Sch. Distr. of Greenville County*, 389 S.C. 546, 698 S.E.2d 845 (Ct. App. 2010). Plaintiff alleges that the statements made about her work performance are defamatory *per se*. (Comp. ¶ 31).

In conclusion, Plaintiff's defamation claim asserted against Defendants District and JCHS does not fail as a matter of law because Plaintiff has sufficiently established each element of the claim; Defendants' Motions to Dismiss should be denied.

II. PLAINTIFF HAS PROPERLY PLEAD A CLAIM FOR CIVIL CONSPIRACY AGAINST BOHNSTENGEL AND SPANN UPON WHICH RELIEF MAY BE GRANTED.

By way of their Motions to Dismiss, the Individual Defendants first assert that Plaintiff cannot maintain an action against the Individual Defendants for civil conspiracy because the Individual Defendants were statutorily required to place Plaintiff under evaluation.¹¹ (Individual Defendants' Motions to Dismiss, p. 2.)

A properly pled civil conspiracy claim must assert the following: (1) a combination of two or more persons; (2) with the purpose of injuring the plaintiff; and (3) causing special damages to the Plaintiff. *Vaught v. Waites*, 300 S.C. 201, 208, 387 S.E.2d 91, 95 (Ct.App.

¹¹ As an initial matter, the Individual Defendants fail to cite to any applicable statutory authority. In any event, Plaintiff argues that the fact that Spann convinced Bohnstengel to place Plaintiff on the evaluation as a result of Plaintiff's disciplinary referrals further supports Plaintiff's position that both Bohnstengel and Spann acted in concert outside the course and scope of their duties to harm Plaintiff because Spann *knew* that other teachers had as many if not more disciplinary referrals as Plaintiff but singled out Plaintiff for the evaluation for that reason *after* Plaintiff successfully passed her 2011-2012 GBE. (emphasis added).

1989).

a. Plaintiff alleges facts to support the first two elements of the claim.

To establish the first two elements, the plaintiff needs to allege “additional acts in furtherance of conspiracy.” *Todd v. S.C. Farm Bureau Mut. Ins. Co.*, 276 S.C. 284, 293, 278 S.E.2d 607, 611 (1981). Plaintiff alleges that Bohnstengel and Spann colluded together to protect themselves from being blamed for disciplinary issues that were going unchecked under their administration and to insulate themselves from blame of Plaintiff making a report with law enforcement for the same. (Compl. ¶¶ 9-10, 34-35). Plaintiff further alleges the following additional acts: Bohnstengel initially informed Plaintiff that she was being placed on evaluation *after* she successfully met her GBE for what he characterized as “performance issues” he previously addressed with Plaintiff; Spann actually instigated the evaluation process after noticing Plaintiff had several disciplinary referrals and singled out Plaintiff for the same; both served on Plaintiff’s evaluation team although they had no experience in English teaching; Spann failed Plaintiff in both years; and Spann constantly changed Plaintiff’s evaluation requirements. (Compl. ¶¶ 12, 15, 19, 20, fn 1) (emphasis added). Plaintiff goes on to allege that the Individual Defendants were motivated by self-protection and personal dislike of Plaintiff. (Compl. ¶ 34). Plaintiff successfully alleges the first two elements of civil conspiracy.

b. Plaintiff successfully alleges special damages.

The third element, special damage, must be satisfied to prevent a double recovery. *Kuznik v. Bess Ferry Assocs.*, 342 S.C. 579, 610, 538 S.E.2d 15, 31 (Ct.App. 2000). Therefore, a properly pled civil conspiracy claim requires the plaintiff to plead special damages. “If a plaintiff merely repeats the damages from another claim instead of specifically listed special damages as part of their civil conspiracy claim, their conspiracy claim should be dismissed.”

Hackworth, 358 S.C. at 117, 682 S.E.2d 871 at 875 (citing *Vaught*, 300 S.C. at 209, 387 S.E.2d 95).

Here, the Plaintiff alleges that the Individual Defendants, while acting outside the course and scope of their employment, combined together for the purpose of scapegoating Plaintiff for disciplinary referrals and “blacklist[ing] and ostraciz[ing]” Plaintiff from education. (Compl. at ¶¶ 34, 36).

Additionally, Plaintiff alleges that she is entitled to special damages against the Individual Defendants for attorneys’ fees and costs for this specific cause of action. (Comp. at second prayer for relief). Compare *AJG Holdings LLC v. Dunn*, 392 S.C. 160, 708 S.E.2d 218 (Ct. App. 2011) (plaintiffs did not identify specific attorney’s fees or costs they contended qualified as special damages). Plaintiff pled special damages that are separate and distinct from those damages pled in her other claim because the damages pled in the defamation claim are exclusively set forth against the Defendants District and JCHS and not the Individual Defendants. (Complaint. at ¶ 32).

For the foregoing reasons, this Court should allow Plaintiff’s civil conspiracy claim against the Individual Defendants to proceed to discovery and should DENY their Motions to Dismiss.

III. PLAINTIFF’S CLAIMS ARE NOT BARRED BY *RES JUDICATA* OR COLLATERAL ESTOPPEL.

In their Amended Motions, Defendants assert that Plaintiff’s claims are barred by *res judicata* and the doctrine of collateral estoppel. Defendants, in their filed motions, fail to cite to any case law or statutory authority to support this position; as such, their motion, as to this ground, should be denied.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiff respectfully asks this Honorable Court to DENY the Defendants' motions and allow this case to proceed to discovery. In the alternative, the Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Honorable Court GRANT her leave to amend the Complaint to promote the ends of justice.¹²

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March 24, 2016

Columbia, South Carolina

¹² See *Parker v. Spartanburg Sanitary Sewer Dist.*, 362 S.C. 276, 286, 607 S.E.2d 711, 716 (S.C. Ct. App. 2005) (citing *Crestwood Golf Club, Inc. v. Potter*, 328 S.C. 201, 493 S.E.2d 826 (1997) ("Leave to amend pleadings pursuant to Rule 15, SCRCP, shall be liberally and freely given when justice so requires and does not prejudice any other party."))

) IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
) NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
) CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

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FACTS ALLEGED IN COMPLAINT

Plaintiff's Complaint alleges that Defendant Bohnstengel became angry with her after she informed him that she wanted to file a police report regarding a violent and harassing assault she suffered from a student in her classroom during the 2012-13 school year. Compl., ¶¶ 8, 9. She alleges that, shortly thereafter, she was notified by Defendant Bohnstengel that she was being placed on SAFE-T/ADEPT evaluation for the following school year in accordance with their prior meeting. Compl., ¶ 12. Plaintiff was shocked by this notification because she had not previously met with Defendant Bohnstengel, and she had met all of her goals of her GBE (Goals Based Evaluation) for the 2012-13 school year. Compl., ¶¶ 11, 13.

Despite her efforts to reverse the decision of Defendant Bohnstengel, she was subject to evaluation for the 2013-14 school year. Compl., ¶ 14. Defendant Bohnstengel was one of three evaluators for Plaintiff; however, he was terminated before Plaintiff's evaluation was complete.

Compl., ¶¶ 14, 15. He was then replaced by Maureen Jessup for the remainder of the evaluation period. Compl., ¶ 16. Plaintiff failed the evaluation for the 2013-14 and was again placed on evaluation for the 2014-15 school year. Compl., ¶ 17.

Plaintiff was concerned that she would not be treated fairly in the second evaluation because Defendant Spann, who had been on the prior evaluation team, would again serve as one of her three evaluators. Compl., ¶ 19. According to Plaintiff, during the second year of evaluation, Defendant Spann changed the requirements of her evaluation, causing Plaintiff to be confused. Compl., ¶ 19. Plaintiff met with her mentor, Charity Scruggs, almost daily. Compl., ¶¶ 18, 19. Ms. Scruggs noted that Plaintiff was under strain, but that she was doing all she could to please the evaluators. Compl., ¶ 19. Despite her efforts, Plaintiff failed the evaluation during the second year, scoring lower at the end of the year than she had at the beginning. Compl., ¶ 20. All of Plaintiff's peers and colleagues were aware that she was being evaluated and saw the physical and emotional toll it took on Plaintiff. Compl., ¶ 21. Plaintiff was terminated because she failed the evaluation for two consecutive years. Compl., ¶ 22. Plaintiff, thereafter, exhausted her administrative remedies. Compl., ¶ 22.¹

Plaintiff's Complaint alleges a cause of action for defamation of character against Defendants CCSD and James Island Charter High School (JICHHS), as well as a cause of action against Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann for civil conspiracy.

¹ The administrative remedies available to a teacher are governed by the South Carolina Teacher Dismissal Act. Specifically, a teacher who has been terminated exhausts her administrative remedies when she requests a hearing before the District Board of Trustees and receives a determination from the Board as to "whether the evidence showed good and just cause" for the dismissal. S.C. Code Ann. §59-25-470. Furthermore, the "teacher has the privilege of being present at the hearing with counsel and of cross-examining witnesses and may offer evidence and witnesses and present *any and all* defenses to the charges." Id. § 59-25-470 (emphasis added).

ARGUMENT

A. Standard of Review.

A Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss should be granted when the pleadings, construed in the light most favorable to the non-moving party, fail to allege sufficient facts to state a cause of action. Rule 12(b)(6), SCRPC; Haskell Co. v. Morgan, 274 S.C. 261, 262 S.E.2d 737 (1980). As stated in DeBerry v. McCain, 275 S.C. 569, 274 S.E.2d 293 (1981):

A [motion to dismiss] admits the facts well-pleaded in the complaint but does not admit the inferences drawn by the plaintiff from such facts. In short, a [motion to dismiss] a complaint does not admit conclusions of law pleaded therein.

274 S.E.2d at 296; Carolina Winds Owners' Ass'n v. Joe Harden Builder, Inc., 297 S.C. 74, 374 S.E.2d 897, 899 (Ct. App. 1988) ("A motion under Rule 12(b)(6) . . . admits the well pleaded facts in the complaint, but it does not admit the inferences drawn by the plaintiff from such facts, nor does it admit conclusions of law."). An allegation of a mere legal conclusion is insufficient to state a cause of action. Jones v. Gilstrap, 288 S.C. 525, 343 S.E.2d 646 (1986); Russell v. City of Columbia, 301 S.C. 117, 390 S.E.2d 463 (Ct. App. 1989) ("The court must take well pleaded factual allegations as true. However, allegations which are conclusory rather than factual should be disregarded.")

B. Plaintiff's Defamation Claim Should be Dismissed as a Matter of Law.

Plaintiff alleges that she was slandered by allegedly false, oral and written statements made against her by "agents and servants of Defendant District and Defendant JICHHS acting in the course and scope of their employment." Compl. ¶¶ 25-26. Plaintiff's allegations fail as a matter of law and should be dismissed as to Defendant CCSD because: (1) Defendant CCSD is entitled to sovereign immunity; (2) Defendant CCSD is not liable for any activity related to Defendant JICHHS under S.C. Code Ann. § 59-40-190(C); (3) Plaintiff's claim for defamation is

barred by the applicable statute of limitations; (4) even if the Court finds Defendant CCSD is not entitled to immunity, Plaintiff's claim fails to facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action for defamation; and (5) Plaintiff's claim for defamation is barred by the doctrine of res judicata because it could have—and should have—been raised at the hearing before the CCSD Board.

1. Defendant CCSD is entitled to a dismissal of Plaintiff's claim for defamation because it is subject to sovereign immunity.

Plaintiff's claim for defamation is subject to the South Carolina Tort Claims Act (SCTCA), which provides the sole remedy available to a plaintiff for civil wrongs alleged to have been committed by a government agency. Hawkins v. City of Greenville, 358 S.C. 280, 292, 594 S.E.2d 557, 563 (Ct. App. 2004). CCSD is a governmental entity subject to the protections of the SCTCA. S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-30(d). Although the SCTCA waived absolute immunity for torts committed by government actors, it limited liability under certain circumstances. S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-40 (Supp. 2003). Specifically, in adopting the SCTCA, the General Assembly continued the grant of immunity to the political subdivisions of the State and their employees "while acting within the scope of official duty" S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-20(b). When examining a provision which potentially limits the liability of a government agency, the Court should liberally construe the portion of the Act in favor of the government defendant. Hawkins, 358 S.C. at 292, 594 S.E.2d at 563. School officials are not liable for allegedly defamatory conduct performed in the discharge of their official duties. De Levay v. Richmond Cty. Sch. Bd., 284 F.2d 340, 340 (4th Cir. 1960). Where a government official is entitled to immunity, the defense is available, regardless of his rank or his motives, and even when his conduct is within the "outer perimeter of his line of duty." Green v. Cauthen, 379 F. Supp. 361, 374 (D.S.C. 1974).

Plaintiff's claim for defamation appears to be based on the allegations that "[a]ll of the Plaintiff's peers and colleagues knew she was undergoing the evaluation process" and that "[b]y virtue of placing and holding Plaintiff on the evaluation process for two years – which was widely known at JICHS – Plaintiff's credibility as a teacher was greatly diminished." Compl., ¶¶ 21, 28. Thus, the gravamen of Plaintiff's cause of action is that CCSD defamed her when they placed her on formal evaluation for two consecutive school years.

However, CCSD is entitled to absolute immunity for placing Plaintiff on formal evaluation because assessing teacher competence is a statutory duty of all school districts in South Carolina. See S.C. Code Ann. § 59-26-40 ("A teacher employed under a continuing contract must be evaluated on a continuous basis. At the discretion of the local district and based on an individual teacher's needs and past performance, the evaluation may be formal or informal."). By placing Plaintiff on formal evaluation, CCSD was clearly acting within the scope of its official, statutorily-mandated duties, such that there is no liability under the SCTCA. Even Plaintiff acknowledges in her Complaint that the allegedly false statements and actions were made by agents of the CCSD "while acting within the course and scope of their employment." Compl., ¶¶ 29, 31. For this reason alone, the Court should dismiss Plaintiff's cause of action for defamation against Defendant CCSD.

2. Plaintiff's cause of action against Defendant CCSD for defamation should be dismissed because CCSD is not liable for any activity related to James Island Charter School.

South Carolina Code Ann. § 59-40-190(C) provides, in pertinent part: "A local school district [is] immune from civil or criminal liability with respect to all activities related to a charter school they sponsor." Because Plaintiff's claim for defamation arose solely from

activities related to Defendant JCHS, Defendant CCSD is not liable to Plaintiff, and is entitled to dismissal of this cause of action.

3. Plaintiff's claim for defamation is barred by the applicable statute of limitations.

A cause of action for defamation must be brought within two years of the time the claim arose. Jones v. City of Folly Beach, 326 S.C. 360, 368, 483 S.E.2d 770, 774 (Ct. App. 1997) (citing S.C. Code Ann. § 15-3-550 (Supp. 1995)). Plaintiff alleges Defendant CCSD defamed her “[b]y virtue of *placing* and holding Plaintiff on the evaluation process for two years” Compl., ¶ 28 (emphasis added). According to her Complaint, Plaintiff was notified that she was being placed on formal evaluation shortly after her meeting with Richard Glickman in March of 2013, and she was, in fact, subject to evaluation beginning with the 2013-14 school year. Compl., ¶¶ 11, 12, 14. Thus, Plaintiff’s cause of action for defamation arose as early as March of 2013, or as late as August 2013, when the 2013-14 school year began. However, Plaintiff did not commence this litigation until September 22, 2015, after the expiration of the two-year statute of limitations for defamation claims. Therefore, her claim for defamation is time-barred.

4. Plaintiff does not state a claim for defamation and dismissal is proper under SCRPC 12(b)(6).

Even if the Court were to determine that CCSD is subject to liability, Plaintiff’s claim for defamation should be dismissed against both Defendant CCSD because her complaint fails to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action for defamation. See Rule 12(b)(6), SCRPC.

To establish a cause of action for defamation, the Plaintiff must show: “(1) a false and defamatory statement was made; (2) the unprivileged publication was made to a third party; (3) the publisher was at fault; and (4) either actionability of the statement irrespective of special

harm or the existence of special harm caused by the publication.” Erickson v. Jones St. Publishers, L.L.C., 368 S.C. 444, 465, 629 S.E.2d 653, 664 (2006).

In Pagano v. Martin, 397 F.2d 620 (4th Cir. 1968), the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals addressed a similar situation, in which the alleged defamatory statements occurred in connection with a report that was issued pursuant to an employer’s authorized duties. In that case, the alleged libel appeared in a performance evaluation report issued by the defendants, who were the plaintiff’s superior officers on the USS Robert A. Owens, a naval destroyer ship. Pagano, 397 F.2d at 620. The court acknowledged that the evaluation report “downgraded [the plaintiff] sharply and recommended he not be re-enlisted in the future.” Id. In affirming the district court’s dismissal of the libel claim on the defendants’ motion for summary judgment, the Court of Appeals noted: “The report authorized by the Bureau of Naval Personnel Manual, was made by the defendant officers *as part of their official duties*. With the trial court, we think the suit, as a matter of law, cannot be maintained.” Id. (emphasis added).

Here, the Complaint is devoid of factual allegations that actually support Plaintiff’s contention that there was an unprivileged, defamatory communication made to a third party. The alleged defamatory material is nothing more than a negative evaluation of Plaintiff’s professional performance, and Defendant CCSD is not only authorized, but mandated by law to perform teacher evaluations, some of which, by their very nature, will result in substandard reviews.

Alternatively, Defendants would request a more definite statement with respect to Plaintiff’s allegation that there was a defamatory publication. Specifically, Plaintiff has failed to identify who actually published or made the alleged defamatory statements, and to whom such statements were made. Without those facts to support Plaintiff’s allegations, her claim must fail, or at the very least be plead with greater specificity.

5. Plaintiff's defamation claim is barred by the doctrine of res judicata.

Res judicata bars subsequent actions by the same parties when the claims arise out of the same transaction or occurrence that was the subject of a prior action between those parties. Catawba Indian Nation v. State, 407 S.C. 526, 537-38, 756 S.E.2d 900, 906 (2014). Under the doctrine of res judicata, a "litigant is barred from raising any issues which were adjudicated in the former suit and *any issues which might have been raised in the former suit.*" Id. (citing Plum Creek Dev. Co. v. City of Conway, 334 S.C. 30, 34, 512 S.E.2d 106, 109 (1999)) (emphasis added).

The doctrine of res judicata applies to the decisions of state agencies, barring the relitigation of issues which were or could have been raised before an administrative hearing body. S. Carolina Dep't of Soc. Servs. v. Winyah Nursing Homes, Inc., 282 S.C. 556, 563, 320 S.E.2d 464, 468 (Ct. App. 1984); Wright v. Marlboro Cty. Sch. Dist., 317 S.C. 160, 164, 452 S.E.2d 12, 15 (Ct. App. 1994) ("Ordinarily, the decision of an administrative tribunal precludes the relitigation of the issues addressed by that tribunal in a collateral action."); see also Bennett v. South Carolina Dep't of Corrections, 305 S.C. 310, 408 S.E.2d 230 (1991). In Wright, the South Carolina Court of Appeals stated:

In Perry v. State Law Enforcement Div., 310 S.C. 558, 426 S.E.2d 334 (Ct. App. 1992), this Court relied on Bennett to give preclusive effect to the State Employee Grievance Committee's decision to uphold an employee's termination in the employee's collateral breach of contract action. The court reasoned the two actions arose out of the same facts and sought adjudication that the termination was unwarranted. *The employee could have defended against his termination before the Grievance Committee by asserting the same rights and defenses available to him in the breach of contract action.* Therefore, the court did not permit the employee to raise the same issues in a civil suit which could have been raised before the Grievance Committee.

Wright, 317 S.C. at 164, 452 S.E.2d at 15 (citing Bennett, 305 S.C. at 313, 408 S.E.2d at 232) (emphasis added).

The facts and circumstances giving rise to Plaintiff's hearing before the CCSD Board (as required by the South Carolina Teacher Dismissal Act) are the exact same facts contained in her Complaint. Plaintiff could have raised the issues she now pleads in her Complaint at that time, as defenses or otherwise, but did not do so. Therefore, Plaintiff is now barred by the doctrine of res judicata from relitigating those issues which she should have raised before the appropriate administrative hearing body.

C. Plaintiff's Civil Conspiracy Claim Should be Dismissed as a Matter of Law.

Plaintiff's Complaint alleges that Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann conspired against her and targeted Plaintiff for an "unwarranted and invasive evaluation," and that as a result, Plaintiff suffered special damages in the form of "being blacklisted and ostracized from the profession of education." Compl. ¶¶ 35-36. However, Plaintiff's claim for civil conspiracy fails as a matter of law and should be dismissed because: (1) Plaintiff fails to sufficiently and/or specifically state any special damages beyond those alleged in her other cause(s) of action; and (2) the actions of Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann that form the apparent basis of Plaintiff's conspiracy claim were all done within the course and scope of their employment, such that no actionable conspiracy exists.

1. Plaintiff fails to state with specificity the special damages she sustained as a result of Defendants' alleged conspiracy.

"A civil conspiracy is a combination of two or more persons joining for the purpose of injuring and causing *special damage* to the plaintiff." Cricket Cove Ventures, LLC v. Gilland, 390 S.C. 312, 324, 701 S.E.2d 39, 46 (Ct. App. 2010) (quoting McMillan v. Oconee Mem'l Hosp., Inc., 367 S.C. 559, 564, 626 S.E.2d 884, 886 (2006) (emphasis added)). Civil conspiracy

consists of three elements: (1) a combination of two or more persons, (2) for the purpose of injuring the plaintiff, (3) which causes him special damage. Gordon v. Busbee, 397 S.C. 119, 136, 723 S.E.2d 822, 831 (Ct. App. 2012). “The gravamen of the tort of civil conspiracy is the damage resulting to the plaintiff from an overt act done pursuant to a common design.” Cricket Cove Ventures, 390 S.C. at 324, 701 S.E.2d at 46. To establish a conspiracy, “evidence, either direct or circumstantial, must be produced from which a party may reasonably infer the joint assent of the minds of two or more parties to the prosecution of the unlawful enterprise.” Cowburn v. Leventis, 366 S.C. 20, 49, 619 S.E.2d 437, 453 (Ct. App. 2005) (citation omitted).

Rule 9(g) provides that “[w]hen items of special damage are claimed, they shall be specifically stated.” Rule 9(g), SCRCP.

This rule is based upon the distinction between general and special damages. General damages are inferred by the law itself, as they are the immediate, direct, and proximate result of the act complained of. In contrast, special damages are not implied by law because they are the natural, but not the necessary or usual, consequence of the defendant’s conduct. Thus, special damages must “be specifically stated” to avoid surprise to the other party.

Benedict Coll. v. Nat’l Credit Sys., Inc., 400 S.C. 538, 548, 735 S.E.2d 518, 523 (Ct. App. 2012) (citations omitted). Where a party alleges the same damages under a conspiracy claim as they do under the other causes of action, such allegations are insufficient to establish special damages. Gordon, 397 S.C. at 136, 723 S.E.2d at 831-32 (Ct. App. 2012); Hackworth v. Greywood at Hammett, LLC, 385 S.C. 110, 117, 682 S.E.2d 871, 875 (Ct. App. 2009) (“If a plaintiff merely repeats the damages from another claim instead of specifically listing special damages as part of their civil conspiracy claim, their conspiracy claim should be dismissed.”).

The only mention of special damages in Plaintiff’s Complaint, beyond the conclusory statement that she has sustained them generally, is that she has been ostracized or blacklisted from the profession of education. Yet, Plaintiff fails to plead any specific facts to support such

an assertion, such as an inability to obtain other employment in the education profession. Furthermore, the alleged damages of being blacklisted and ostracized are simply a re-wording of the “injur[y] to her professional reputation” that are the claimed damages under her defamation cause of action. See Compl. ¶¶ 30-32. Therefore, Plaintiff’s Complaint fails to “specifically state” any special damages beyond those damages alleged under other causes of action, such that her conspiracy claim fails as matter of law.

2. Plaintiff’s civil conspiracy claim must fail because the conduct alleged of Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann was done in the scope of their employment.

A corporation or municipal entity can act only through its directors, officers, agents, and employees. See Anvar v. Greenville Hosp. Sys., No. 2007-UP-004, 2007 WL 8324255, at *5 (S.C. Ct. App. Jan. 10, 2007). Thus, where the actions of an entity’s agents and employees were all performed while acting within the course and scope of their authority, a conspiracy claim is barred by the intracorporate conspiracy doctrine. See id. (citing McMillan v. Oconee Mem’l Hosp., Inc., 367 S.C. 559, 564-65, 626 S.E.2d 884, 886-87 (2006) (holding a civil conspiracy cannot exist in the context of a principal-agent relationship where the individuals are all acting only for the corporation and not for any personal purpose of their own)); see also Cameron v. Church, 253 F. Supp. 2d 611, 623 (S.D.N.Y.2003) (stating “[t]he intracorporate conspiracy doctrine provides that the officers, agents and employees of a single corporate or municipal entity, each acting within the scope of his or her employment, legally are incapable of conspiring together”). “[J]ust as it is not legally possible for an individual to conspire with himself, it is not possible for a single legal entity consisting of the corporation and its agents to conspire with itself.” McAndrew v. Lockheed Martin Corp., 206 F.3d 1031, 1036 (11th Cir. 2000).

In Cricket Cove Ventures, LLC v. Gilland, 390 S.C. 312, 701 S.E.2d 39 (Ct. App. 2010), the South Carolina Court of Appeals stated:

In *McMillan*, our Supreme Court limited this “intracorporate conspiracy” doctrine to persons acting within the scope of their employment, 367 S.C. at 564–65, 626 S.E.2d at 887. Other jurisdictions have similarly limited the doctrine. See *ePlus Tech., Inc. v. Aboud*, 313 F.3d 166, 179 (4th Cir. 2002) (“[T]he intracorporate immunity doctrine does not apply where a corporate ‘officer has an independent personal stake in achieving the corporation’s illegal objectives.’” (quoting *Greenville Pub. Co. v. Daily Reflector, Inc.*, 496 F.2d 391, 399 (4th Cir. 1974))); *McAndrew v. Lockheed Martin Corp.*, 206 F.3d 1031, 1036 (11th Cir. 2000) (“Simply put, under the doctrine, a corporation cannot conspire with its employees, and its employees, *when acting in the scope of their employment*, cannot conspire among themselves.”) (emphasis added); *Garza v. City of Omaha*, 814 F.2d 553, 556 (8th Cir. 1987) (“While it is true that a corporation cannot conspire with itself, an intracorporate conspiracy may be established where individual defendants are also named and those defendants act outside the scope of their employment for personal reasons.”).

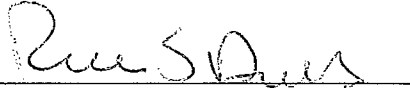
Cricket Cove Ventures, 390 S.C. at 325-26, 701 S.E.2d at 46-47.

Plaintiff’s allegations against Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann all relate to conduct that occurred while they were acting within the course and scope of their employment as administrators at James Island Charter High School. Plaintiff’s bald allegations in the Civil Conspiracy section of her Complaint that Defendants “were able to specially inflict their evil agenda upon the Plaintiff and did so *outside of the scope of their own employment*”, Compl. ¶ 35 (emphasis added), are thinly-veiled and disingenuous assertions given the assertion on the preceding page that the exact same conduct and actions were “made against Plaintiff by agents and servants of Defendant District and Defendant JICHHS *acting in the course and scope of their employment*.” Compl. ¶ 29 (emphasis added). At all times relevant to the allegations of the Complaint, the individual Defendants were acting as agents and employees of Defendants CCSD and JICHHS, and Plaintiff fails to allege any facts to support a conclusion to the contrary. Thus, Plaintiff’s civil conspiracy cause of action should be dismissed.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Defendants CCSD and Bohnstengel respectfully request that this Court grant their Motion to Dismiss because Plaintiff's claims fail as a matter of law.

ROSEN, ROSEN & HAGOOD, LLC

By: 

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ATTORNEYS FOR DEFENDANT

Charleston, South Carolina
March 24, 2016

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
FOR THE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
CASE NO: 2015-CP-10-00593

Leisel Paradis

Plaintiff,

vs.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in
their individual capacities,
Defendant.

The undersigned states that on March 25, 2016, she served a copy of Memorandum of Law in Support of Motion to Dismiss via electronic mail and by placing a copy in the mail o the following address(s):

Ashley C. Story, Esquire
J. Lewis Cromer & Associates, L.L.C.
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Bob J. Conley, Esquire
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FILED
2016 MAR 25 AM 10:01
J. L. ARMSTRONG
CLERK OF COURT

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April 13, 2016

VIA HAND DELIVERY

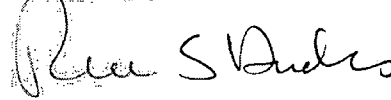
The Honorable J.C. Nicholson, Jr.
Charleston County Judicial Center
100 Broad Street, Suite 341
Charleston, SC 29401

Re: Leisel Paradis v. Charleston County School District, James Island Charter High School, Robert Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their Individual Capacities
Case No. 2015-CP-10-5093

Dear Judge Nicholson:

Enclosed is a proposed Order Dismissing Case affirming the District's Order in the above-referenced matter. If it meets your approval, I would appreciate your signing it and forwarding it to the Clerk for filing.

Sincerely yours,



Rene S. Dukes

RSD/dlh
Enclosure

cc: Bob J. Conley, Esquire (via email and U.S. Mail)
Chelsea Rikard, Esquire (via email and U.S. Mail)

RECEIVED

APR 18 2016

J. LEWIS CROMER
& ASSOCIATES, L.L.C.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities,

Defendants:

) IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
) NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
) CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

ORDER DISMISSING CASE

THIS MATTER is before the Court on the Amended Motions to Dismiss, and Alternatively, for a More Definite Statement, filed by Defendants Charleston County School District and Robert Bohnstengel on March 18, 2016, and filed by Defendants James Island Charter High School and Stephanie Spann on March 21, 2016. Plaintiff waived any objection to the timeliness of notice of the hearing on these motions. The Motions were heard on March 30, 2016. Based on the Complaint, the legal memoranda, and arguments of Counsel, the Court makes the following findings of fact and conclusions of law.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Plaintiff was a teacher at James Island Charter High School (JICHHS), which is a charter school located within the Charleston County School District (CCSD). Defendant Robert Bohnstengel was Plaintiff's Principal during a portion of the 2013-14 school year. Defendant Stephanie Spann was the Assistant Principal at JICHHS for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years.

Plaintiff's Complaint alleges that Defendant Bohnstengel became angry with her after she informed him that she wanted to file a police report regarding a violent and harassing assault she suffered from a student in her classroom during the 2012-13 school year. She alleges that,

shortly thereafter, she was notified by Defendant Bohnstengel that she was being placed on SAFE-T/ADEPT evaluation for the following school year in accordance with their prior meeting. Plaintiff was shocked by this notification because she had not previously met with Defendant Bohnstengel, and she had met all of her goals of her GBE (Goals Based Evaluation) for the 2012-13 school year.

Despite her efforts to reverse the decision of Defendant Bohnstengel, she was subject to evaluation for the 2013-14 school year. Defendant Bohnstengel was one of three evaluators for Plaintiff; however, he was terminated before Plaintiff's evaluation was complete. He was then replaced by Maureen Jessup for the remainder of the evaluation period. Plaintiff failed the evaluation for the 2013-14 school year and was again placed on evaluation for the 2014-15 school year.

Plaintiff was concerned that she would not be treated fairly in the second evaluation because Defendant Spann, who had been on the prior evaluation team, would again serve as one of her three evaluators. According to Plaintiff, during the second year of evaluation, Defendant Spann changed the requirements of her evaluation, causing Plaintiff to be confused. Plaintiff met with her mentor, Charity Scruggs, almost daily. Ms. Scruggs noted that Plaintiff was under strain, but that she was doing all she could to please the evaluators. Despite her efforts, Plaintiff failed the evaluation during the second year, scoring lower at the end of the year than she had at the beginning. All of Plaintiff's peers and colleagues were aware that she was being evaluated and saw the physical and emotional toll it took on Plaintiff. Plaintiff was terminated because she failed the evaluation for two consecutive years. Plaintiff, thereafter, exhausted her administrative remedies.¹

¹ The administrative remedies available to a teacher are governed by the South Carolina Teacher Dismissal Act. Specifically, a teacher who has been terminated exhausts her administrative remedies when she requests a hearing

Plaintiff's Complaint alleges a cause of action for defamation of character against Defendants CCSD and JCHS, as well as a cause of action against Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann for civil conspiracy.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

A. Standard of Review.

A Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss should be granted when the pleadings, construed in the light most favorable to the non-moving party, fail to allege sufficient facts to state a cause of action. Rule 12(b)(6), SCRCP; Haskell Co. v. Morgan, 274 S.C. 261, 262 S.E.2d 737 (1980).

As stated in DeBerry v. McCain, 275 S.C. 569, 274 S.E.2d 293 (1981):

A [motion to dismiss] admits the facts well-pleaded in the complaint but does not admit the inferences drawn by the plaintiff from such facts. In short, a [motion to dismiss] a complaint does not admit conclusions of law pleaded therein.

274 S.E.2d at 296; Carolina Winds Owners' Ass'n v. Joe Harden Builder, Inc., 297 S.C. 74, 374 S.E.2d 897, 899 (Ct. App. 1988) ("A motion under Rule 12(b)(6) . . . admits the well pleaded facts in the complaint, but it does not admit the inferences drawn by the plaintiff from such facts, nor does it admit conclusions of law."). An allegation of a mere legal conclusion is insufficient to state a cause of action. Jones v. Gilstrap, 288 S.C. 525, 343 S.E.2d 646 (1986); Russell v. City of Columbia, 301 S.C. 117, 390 S.E.2d 463 (Ct. App. 1989) ("The court must take well pleaded factual allegations as true. However, allegations which are conclusory rather than factual should be disregarded.")

B. Plaintiff's Defamation Claim Is Dismissed as a Matter of Law.

Plaintiff alleges that she was slandered by allegedly false, oral and written statements

before the District Board of Trustees and receives a determination from the Board as to "whether the evidence showed good and just cause" for the dismissal. S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-470. Furthermore, the "teacher has the privilege of being present at the hearing with counsel and of cross-examining witnesses and may offer evidence and witnesses and present *any and all* defenses to the charges." Id. § 59-25-470 (emphasis added).

made against her by “agents and servants of Defendant District and Defendant JICHHS acting in the course and scope of their employment.” Plaintiff’s allegations fail as a matter of law and are subject to dismissal because: (1) Defendants CCSD and JICHHS are entitled to sovereign immunity; (2) Plaintiff’s claim for defamation is barred by the applicable statute of limitations; and (3) Plaintiff’s claim fails to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action for defamation.

1. Defendants CCSD and JICHHS are entitled to a dismissal of Plaintiff’s claim for defamation because it is subject to sovereign immunity.

Plaintiff’s claim for defamation is subject to the South Carolina Tort Claims Act (SCTCA), which provides the sole remedy available to a plaintiff for civil wrongs alleged to have been committed by a government agency. Hawkins v. City of Greenville, 358 S.C. 280, 292, 594 S.E.2d 557, 563 (Ct. App. 2004). CCSD and JICHHS are each a governmental entity subject to the protections of the SCTCA. S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-30(d). Although the SCTCA waived absolute immunity for torts committed by government actors, it limited liability under certain circumstances. S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-40 (Supp. 2003). Specifically, in adopting the SCTCA, the General Assembly continued the grant of immunity to the political subdivisions of the State and their employees “while acting within the scope of official duty” S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-20(b). When examining a provision which potentially limits the liability of a government agency, the Court should liberally construe the portion of the Act in favor of the government defendant. Hawkins, 358 S.C. at 292, 594 S.E.2d at 563. School officials are not liable for allegedly defamatory conduct performed in the discharge of their official duties. De Levay v. Richmond Cty. Sch. Bd., 284 F.2d 340, 340 (4th Cir. 1960). Where a government official is entitled to immunity, the defense is available, regardless of his rank or his motives, and

even when his conduct is within the “outer perimeter of his line of duty.” Green v. Cauthen, 379 F. Supp. 361, 374 (D.S.C. 1974).

Plaintiff’s claim for defamation appears to be based on the allegations that “[a]ll of the Plaintiff’s peers and colleagues knew she was undergoing the evaluation process” and that “[b]y virtue of placing and holding Plaintiff on the evaluation process for two years – which was widely known at JICHS – Plaintiff’s credibility as a teacher was greatly diminished.” Compl., ¶¶ 21, 28. Thus, the gravamen of Plaintiff’s cause of action is that CCSD and JICHS defamed her when they placed her on formal evaluation for two consecutive school years.

However, CCSD and JICHS are entitled to absolute immunity for placing Plaintiff on formal evaluation because assessing teacher competence is a statutory duty of all school districts in South Carolina. See S.C. Code Ann. § 59-26-40 (“A teacher employed under a continuing contract must be evaluated on a continuous basis. At the discretion of the local district and based on an individual teacher’s needs and past performance, the evaluation may be formal or informal.”). By placing Plaintiff on formal evaluation, CCSD and JICHS were each clearly acting within the scope of its official, statutorily-mandated duties, such that there is no liability under the SCTCA. Even Plaintiff acknowledges in her Complaint that the allegedly false statements and actions were made by agents of the CCSD and JICHS “while acting within the course and scope of their employment.” Compl., ¶¶ 29, 31.

2. Plaintiff’s claim for defamation is barred by the applicable statute of limitations and is hereby dismissed.

A cause of action for defamation must be brought within two years of the time the claim arose. Jones v. City of Folly Beach, 326 S.C. 360, 368, 483 S.E.2d 770, 774 (Ct. App. 1997) (citing S.C. Code Ann. § 15-3-550 (Supp. 1995)). Plaintiff alleges Defendants CCSD and JICHS defamed her “[b]y virtue of *placing* and holding Plaintiff on the evaluation process for two years

...” Compl., ¶ 28 (emphasis added). According to her Complaint, Plaintiff was notified that she was being placed on formal evaluation shortly after her meeting with Richard Glickman in March of 2013, and she was, in fact, subject to evaluation beginning with the 2013-14 school year. Compl., ¶¶ 11, 12, 14. Thus, Plaintiff’s cause of action for defamation arose as early as March of 2013, or as late as August 2013, when the 2013-14 school year began. However, Plaintiff did not commence this litigation until September 22, 2015, after the expiration of the two-year statute of limitations for defamation claims. Therefore, her claim for defamation is time-barred.

3. Because Plaintiff does not state a claim for defamation, her cause of action for defamation is dismissed pursuant to SCRCP 12(b)(6).

Even if CCSD and JICHS were subject to liability, Plaintiff’s claim for defamation is still subject to dismissal against both Defendants because her complaint fails to state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action for defamation. See Rule 12(b)(6), SCRCP.

To establish a cause of action for defamation, the Plaintiff must show: “(1) a false and defamatory statement was made; (2) the unprivileged publication was made to a third party; (3) the publisher was at fault; and (4) either actionability of the statement irrespective of special harm or the existence of special harm caused by the publication.” Erickson v. Jones St. Publishers, L.L.C., 368 S.C. 444, 465, 629 S.E.2d 653, 664 (2006).

In Pagano v. Martin, 397 F.2d 620 (4th Cir. 1968), the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals addressed a similar situation, in which the alleged defamatory statements occurred in connection with a report that was issued pursuant to an employer’s authorized duties. In that case, the alleged libel appeared in a performance evaluation report issued by the defendants, who were the plaintiff’s superior officers on the USS Robert A. Owens, a naval destroyer ship. Pagano, 397 F.2d at 620. The court acknowledged that the evaluation report “downgraded [the plaintiff]

sharply and recommended he not be re-enlisted in the future.” Id. In affirming the district court’s dismissal of the libel claim on the defendants’ motion for summary judgment, the Court of Appeals noted: “The report authorized by the Bureau of Naval Personnel Manual, was made by the defendant officers *as part of their official duties*. With the trial court, we think the suit, as a matter of law, cannot be maintained.” Id. (emphasis added).

Here, the Complaint is devoid of factual allegations that actually support Plaintiff’s contention that there was an unprivileged, defamatory communication made to a third party. The alleged defamatory material is nothing more than a negative evaluation of Plaintiff’s professional performance, and Defendants CCSD and JCHS are not only authorized, but mandated by law, to perform teacher evaluations, some of which, by their very nature, will result in substandard reviews. Furthermore, Plaintiff has failed to identify who actually published or made the alleged defamatory statements, and to whom such statements were made. Without those facts to support Plaintiff’s allegations, her claim must fail.

C. Plaintiff’s Civil Conspiracy Claim Is Hereby Dismissed as a Matter of Law.

Plaintiff’s Complaint alleges that Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann conspired against her and targeted her for an “unwarranted and invasive evaluation,” and that as a result, Plaintiff suffered special damages in the form of “being blacklisted and ostracized from the profession of education.” Compl. ¶¶ 35-36. However, Plaintiff’s claim for civil conspiracy fails as a matter of law and is subject to dismissal because: (1) Plaintiff fails to sufficiently and/or specifically state any special damages beyond those alleged in her other cause(s) of action; and (2) the actions of Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann that form the apparent basis of Plaintiff’s conspiracy claim were all done within the course and scope of their employment, such that no actionable conspiracy exists.

1. Plaintiff fails to state with specificity the special damages she sustained as a result of Defendants' alleged conspiracy.

“A civil conspiracy is a combination of two or more persons joining for the purpose of injuring and causing *special damage* to the plaintiff.” Cricket Cove Ventures, LLC v. Gilland, 390 S.C. 312, 324, 701 S.E.2d 39, 46 (Ct. App. 2010) (quoting McMillan v. Oconee Mem’l Hosp., Inc., 367 S.C. 559, 564, 626 S.E.2d 884, 886 (2006) (emphasis added)). Civil conspiracy consists of three elements: (1) a combination of two or more persons, (2) for the purpose of injuring the plaintiff, (3) which causes him special damage. Gordon v. Busbee, 397 S.C. 119, 136, 723 S.E.2d 822, 831 (Ct. App. 2012). “The gravamen of the tort of civil conspiracy is the damage resulting to the plaintiff from an overt act done pursuant to a common design.” Cricket Cove Ventures, 390 S.C. at 324, 701 S.E.2d at 46. To establish a conspiracy, “evidence, either direct or circumstantial, must be produced from which a party may reasonably infer the joint assent of the minds of two or more parties to the prosecution of the unlawful enterprise.” Cowburn v. Leventis, 366 S.C. 20, 49, 619 S.E.2d 437, 453 (Ct. App. 2005) (citation omitted).

Rule 9(g) provides that “[w]hen items of special damage are claimed, they shall be specifically stated.” Rule 9(g), SCRCP.

This rule is based upon the distinction between general and special damages. General damages are inferred by the law itself, as they are the immediate, direct, and proximate result of the act complained of. In contrast, special damages are not implied by law because they are the natural, but not the necessary or usual, consequence of the defendant’s conduct. Thus, special damages must “be specifically stated” to avoid surprise to the other party.

Benedict Coll. v. Nat’l Credit Sys., Inc., 400 S.C. 538, 548, 735 S.E.2d 518, 523 (Ct. App. 2012) (citations omitted). Where a party alleges the same damages under a conspiracy claim as they do under the other causes of action, such allegations are insufficient to establish special damages. Gordon, 397 S.C. at 136, 723 S.E.2d at 831-32 (Ct. App. 2012); Hackworth v. Greywood at

Hammett, LLC, 385 S.C. 110, 117, 682 S.E.2d 871, 875 (Ct. App. 2009) ("If a plaintiff merely repeats the damages from another claim instead of specifically listing special damages as part of their civil conspiracy claim, their conspiracy claim should be dismissed.").

The only mention of special damages in Plaintiff's Complaint, beyond the conclusory statement that she has sustained them generally, is that she has been ostracized or blacklisted from the profession of education and that she incurred legal fees to pursue the claims set forth in her Complaint. Yet, Plaintiff fails to plead any specific facts to support such an assertion, such as an inability to obtain other employment in the education profession. Furthermore, the alleged damages of being blacklisted and ostracized are simply a re-wording of the "injur[y] to her professional reputation" that are the claimed damages under her defamation cause of action. See Compl. ¶¶ 30-32.

Additionally, Plaintiff's claim for costs and attorneys' fees in her Complaint does not constitute special damages related to her civil conspiracy claim. In this instance, Plaintiff is the "plaintiff," not a "defendant," and she "has not demonstrated how these attorney's fees are any different" than the fees "any other litigant incurs." Killian v. City of Abbeville, No. 8:14-1078-TMC, 2015 WL 1011339, *5 (D.S.C. March 6, 2015)(slip copy)(rejecting plaintiff's contention that his attorney's fees and costs constituted special damages in regard to his civil conspiracy claim). See also AJH Holdings, LLC v. Dunn, 392 S.C. 160, 168, 708 S.E.2d 218, 223 (Ct. App. 2011)("Every litigant represented by a lawyer incurs attorney's fees and costs:");

Therefore, Plaintiff's Complaint fails to "specifically state" any special damages beyond those damages alleged under other causes of action, such that her conspiracy claim fails as matter of law.

- 2. Plaintiff's civil conspiracy claim fails because the conduct alleged of Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann was done in the scope of their employment.**

A corporation or municipal entity can act only through its directors, officers, agents, and employees. See Anvar v. Greenville Hosp. Sys., No. 2007-UP-004, 2007 WL 8324255, at *5 (S.C. Ct. App. Jan. 10, 2007). Thus, where the actions of an entity's agents and employees were all performed while acting within the course and scope of their authority, a conspiracy claim is barred by the intracorporate conspiracy doctrine. See id. (citing McMillan v. Oconee Mem'l Hosp., Inc., 367 S.C. 559, 564-65, 626 S.E.2d 884, 886-87 (2006) (holding a civil conspiracy cannot exist in the context of a principal-agent relationship where the individuals are all acting only for the corporation and not for any personal purpose of their own)); see also Cameron v. Church, 253 F. Supp. 2d 611, 623 (S.D.N.Y.2003) (stating "[t]he intracorporate conspiracy doctrine provides that the officers, agents and employees of a single corporate or municipal entity, each acting within the scope of his or her employment, legally are incapable of conspiring together"). "[J]ust as it is not legally possible for an individual to conspire with himself, it is not possible for a single legal entity consisting of the corporation and its agents to conspire with itself." McAndrew v. Lockheed Martin Corp., 206 F.3d 1031, 1036 (11th Cir. 2000).

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individual defendants are also named and those defendants act outside the scope of their employment for personal reasons.”).

Cricket Cove Ventures, 390 S.C. at 325-26, 701 S.E.2d at 46-47.

Plaintiff's allegations against Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann all relate to conduct that occurred while they were acting within the course and scope of their employment as administrators at James Island Charter High School. Plaintiff's bald allegations in the Civil Conspiracy section of her Complaint that Defendants “were able to specially inflict their evil agenda upon the Plaintiff and did so *outside of the scope of their own employment*”, Compl. ¶ 35 (emphasis added), are thinly-veiled and disingenuous assertions given the assertion on the preceding page that the exact same conduct and actions were “made against Plaintiff by agents and servants of Defendant District and Defendant JICHHS *acting in the course and scope of their employment*.” Compl. ¶ 29 (emphasis added). At all times relevant to the allegations of the Complaint, the individual Defendants were acting as agents and employees of Defendants CCSD and JICHHS, and Plaintiff fails to allege any facts to support a conclusion to the contrary. Thus, Plaintiff's civil conspiracy cause of action is dismissed.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiffs claims for defamation and civil conspiracy fail as a matter of law, and Defendants' Amended Motions to Dismiss are granted.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that Plaintiff's Complaint is DISMISSED.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED!

J. C. Nicholson, Jr.
Circuit Court Judge

April ____, 2016
Charleston, South Carolina

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

v.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel, and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities

Defendants.

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
CASE NO. 2015-CP-10-5093

**PLAINTIFF'S NOTICE AND MOTION
TO RECONSIDER**

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that Plaintiff, by and through her undersigned counsel, hereby moves pursuant to Rule 59(e), SCRCP, for an order altering or amending the Order granting the Defendants' Motion to Dismiss in the above-captioned matter. This motion for reconsideration is based on the following grounds:

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed the current action in the Charleston County Court of Common Pleas on September 17, 2015. Plaintiff brought a cause of action for Defamation against Defendant Charleston County School District ("District") and James Island Charter High School ("JICHHS"), and a cause of action for Civil Conspiracy against Robert Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann. Defendants separately filed Motions pursuant to Rules 12(b)(6) of the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure, seeking dismissal as to all of Plaintiff's claims. A hearing was held before the Honorable J.C. Nicholson, Jr., Circuit Court Judge, on March 30, 2016. Judge Nicholson entered an Order granting Defendants' Motion to Dismiss, which was filed with the Clerk of Court on or about April 15, 2016.

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MAY 24 2016

J. LEWIS CROMER
& ASSOCIATES, L.L.C.

ARGUMENT FOR RECONSIDERATION

The Plaintiff is now seeking reconsideration of this Order by way of this motion and any additional arguments that may be supplemented to the Court. The Plaintiff intends to rely on the pleadings, the memorandum in opposition previously filed with the Court, arguments raised in the hearing, and any additional arguments as set forth herein or provided in additional memorandum in support to be filed with the Court.

I. Leave to Amend the Complaint

While the Plaintiff believes she has sufficiently pled the Amended Complaint, she requested leave of the Court to amend the complaint to clarify and remedy any concerns the Court may have.

Pursuant to South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure Rule 15(a) this Court should grant the Plaintiff leave to amend his complaint. *See, Dockside Ass'n, Inc. v. Detyens, Simmons & Carlisle*, 297 S.C. 91, 94, 374 S.E.2d 907, 909 (Ct. App. 1988) ("where complaint is dismissed under Rule 12(b)(6), plaintiff should be granted leave to file an amended complaint";) citing, *Foman v. Davis*, 371 U.S. 178, 83 S.Ct. 227, 9 L.Ed.2d 222 (1962). Plaintiff requests an amendment on the grounds that granting a Motion to Dismiss is a drastic remedy, the additional allegations discussed in Plaintiff's Memorandum in Opposition to the motion for judgment on the pleadings in this case would support an amendment consistent therewith, justice would require such, and the parties would not be prejudiced by an amendment. "Where a judgment on the pleadings is appropriate, the court has the discretion to grant the opposing party leave to amend. Amendments should be readily allowed so as to preclude entry of such judgment. In order to protect a plaintiff's right to amend, when a party challenges the sufficiency of a petition to state a cause of action, a motion

for judgment on the pleadings should be sustained only when an amendment cannot cure the defect. Leave to amend should be granted if a party can show that he or she is able to state a claim for relief.” 61A Am. Jur. 2d Pleading § 551.

If the Plaintiff, assuming *arguendo*, has deficiencies in any of her claims then she should be given leave to amend her complaint, especially to clarify her special damages, the actions the Individual Defendants took outside the course and scope of their employment, and the defamatory statements or actions. The Order itself says the complaint lacked specificity, thus it would not be futile to amend the pleadings and provide such further specificity. Plaintiff requested leave to amend in her memorandum in opposition and the denial of such resulted in dismissal where an amendment to the pleadings was not futile. Therefore, Plaintiff respectfully requests this Court to reconsider the decision to grant Defendants’ Motions to Dismiss and permit Plaintiff to amend her complaint.

II. Civil Conspiracy

As Set forth in Plaintiff’s Memorandum in Opposition to Defendants’ Motions to Dismiss, Plaintiff sufficiently pled that the Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann combined together with the intent to cause her harm, including special damages.

First, Plaintiff’s complaint, memorandum, and arguments at the hearing set forth sufficient allegations that she suffered special damages as a result of actions of the Individual Defendants. The damages alleged within her claim for civil conspiracy differ from her other damages in nature and type. Plaintiff specifically pled that she was ostracized and blacklisted from amongst her peers because she was placed on formal evaluation twice for alleged classroom management deficiencies, although several of Plaintiff’s peers had similar issues, and Plaintiff most recent GBE evaluation did not identify such issues. *See, Austin v. Torrington Co.*, 810 F.2d 416 (4th Cir. 1987). Rather than support Plaintiff’s decision to file a police report against a student who violently

attacked her, the Individual Defendant's not only disagreed with her, but when so far as to single her out and place her on a formal evaluation—all while knowing they could fail her at the end of the incredibly rigorous and intensive evaluation thus providing them the grounds to remove Plaintiff from her position. The intent and purpose of the ADEPT/SAFE-T program is not to be a ways and means for administrators to remove educators without just cause. Additionally, Plaintiff specifically pled her attorney's fees and costs as a special damage. The cost of prosecuting an action is a properly considered special damage. *Benedict College v. Nat'l Credit Sys., Inc.*, 400 S.C. 538, 735 S.E.2d 518, 523 (2012).

Second, Plaintiff's complaint sufficiently alleges facts supporting her assertion that the Individual Defendants acted outside the course and scope of their employment. Plaintiff alleged in her complaint and argued in her memorandum that the Individual Defendants, acting under the color of their state titles, utilized the ADEPT/SAFE-T program as a means to perpetrate their agenda of removing Plaintiff from her position. Plaintiff's complaint specifically alleges that Bohnstengel and Spann conspired against her for personal, rather than professional motivations; thus unveiling themselves of any intracorporate immunity. *See, Anthony v. Ward*, 336 Fed. Appx. 311 (4th Cir. 2009); *Pridgen v Ward*, Op. No. 4770 (S.C. Ct App. Filed December 22, 2010) (citing *Cricket Cove Ventures, LLC v. Gilland*, Op. No. 4730 (S.C. Ct. App. Filed Aug. 25, 2010); *Lee v. Chesterfield General Hosp., Inc.*, 289 S.C. 6, 14, 344 S.E.2d 379, 383 (Ct. App. 1986)).

Based on the foregoing, Plaintiff avers that she sufficiently pled that Defendants Bohnstengel and Spann acted in combination for the intent to cause her harm, including special damages. *See, Island Car Wash, Inc. v. Norris*, 292 S.C. 595, 358 S.E.2d 150, (Ct. App. 1987) Therefore, Plaintiff respectfully requests that the grant of Defendants' Motion to Dismiss as to her claim for civil conspiracy be reversed.

III. Defamation

Plaintiff's Memorandum in Opposition and her arguments at the hearing identify specific allegations sufficient to support her claim for defamation. Most important to her claim for defamation is that the placement of Plaintiff on the ADEPT/SAFE-T evaluation process without justification, for two years in a row, falsely suggested that she was unfit in her profession and unable to successfully perform her duties as an educator, which is defamation *per se*. See, *Fountain v. First Reliance Bank*, 398 S.C. 434, 730 S.E.2d 305 (S.C. 2012) (an insinuation may be defamatory); *Lynch v. Toys "R" Us-Delaware*, 375 S.C. 604, 654 S.E.2d 541 (Ct. App. 2007) (conduct may also convey defamatory meaning); *Moshtagi v. The Citadel*, 314 S.C. 316, 443 S.E.2d 915 (Ct. App. 1994) (impropriety or inadequacy in performing a trade or profession may be actionable *per se*).

Though the qualifying defamatory actions began as early as March 2013, the action continued for a span of two years, in that Plaintiff was continuously held on formal evaluation and she was forced to repeat for the same for the 2014-2015 school year. Thus, Plaintiff's legal right to sue on this continuing action did not begin and end on the March or August dates discussed in the Court's order. Rather, Plaintiff's right to sue on this action continued well into the two year limitation period and Plaintiff avers that her action was timely.

Next, the Defendants are not entitled to sovereign immunity because the defamatory acts taken by the agents of the Defendants were done so in the course and scope of their employment. Plaintiff specifically alleged that the defamatory acts taken by the District's and JCHS agents were done in the prescribed manner. Thus, where the defamatory acts that culminated in Plaintiff's termination are not barred by the SCTCA, as it serves as the sole remedy for any tort committed by an employee of a governmental entity while acting within the course and scope of his or her official duty.

Lastly, Plaintiff sufficiently pled that the District and JICHS partook in defamatory action and made defamatory statements by not only publishing a negative evaluation, but also by consistently giving her failing scores on the ADEPT/SAFE-T evaluations; thus falsely demonstrating to unprivileged parties that she was unfit and incapable of fulfilling the duties of her profession. Plaintiff additionally alleged that the act of placing her on consecutive evaluations, which culminated in a termination, qualifies as a defamatory act cognizable under South Carolina law. *See, Tyler v Mack Stores of South Carolina*, 275 S.C. 456, 458, 272 S.E.2d 633, 634 (1980).

Based on the foregoing, Plaintiff avers that she sufficiently pled her claim that the Defendants defamed her. Therefore, Plaintiff respectfully requests this Court to reverse the grant of Defendants' Motions to Dismiss as to her claim for defamation.

CONCLUSION

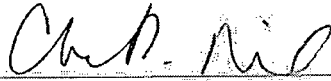
This motion requests the Court to reconsider the specific arguments made in Plaintiff's Memorandum in Opposition to Defendant's Motion to Dismiss and other documents provided to the Court at the hearing. This motion is further made pursuant to the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure, the pleadings, and all applicable statutory law and common law. This motion is made in good faith, supported by the sworn testimony and documents discovered in this case, supporting memoranda of law to be filed by plaintiffs' counsel prior to the hearing, and any memoranda or affidavits which they may file with the Court in support of this Motion or any arguments they may advance at any hearing. Plaintiff respectfully requests the Court reconsider its Order and permit this action to proceed to discovery.

{Signature Block on Next Page.}

Respectfully Submitted,

J. LEWIS CROMER & ASSOCIATES, LLC

BY:



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Chelsea R. Rikard (#102355)

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Fax 803-799-9533

Attorneys for Plaintiff

April 28, 2016

Columbia, South Carolina

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF CHARLESON

Leisel Paradis

Plaintiff,

vs.

Charleston County School District, James Island
Charter High School, Robert Bohnstengel, and
Stephanie Spann, in their individual capacities

Defendants.

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10- 5093

**MOTION AND ORDER INFORMATION
FORM AND COVERSHEET**

Plaintiff's Attorney:

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Defendants' Attorney:

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Bob Conley, 12243
Cleveland & Conley LLC
171 Church St, Suite 310
Charleston, SC 29401
Email: bconley@clevelandlaborlaw.com

- ☒ **MOTION HEARING REQUESTED** (attach written motion and complete **SECTIONS I and III**)
☐ **FORM MOTION, NO HEARING REQUESTED** (complete **SECTIONS II and III**)
☐ **PROPOSED ORDER/CONSENT ORDER** (complete **SECTIONS II and III**)

SECTION I: Hearing Information

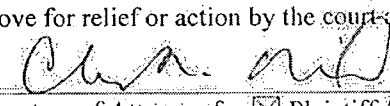
Nature of Motion:

Estimated Time Needed: _____ Court Reporter Needed: ☒ **YES** / ☐ **NO**

SECTION II: Motion/Order Type

- ☒ Written motion attached
☐ Form Motion/Order

I hereby move for relief or action by the court as set forth in the attached proposed order:


Signature of Attorney for ☒ Plaintiff / ☐ Defendant

April 28, 2016
Date submitted

SECTION III: Motion Fee

☒ **PAID - AMOUNT: \$25.00**

JUDGE'S SECTION

- ☐ Motion Fee to be paid upon filing of the attached order.
☐ Other: _____

JUDGE CODE: _____

Date: _____

CLERK'S VERIFICATION

Collected by: _____ Date Filed: _____

- ☐ **MOTION FEE COLLECTED: \$** _____
☐ **CONTESTED - AMOUNT DUE: \$** _____

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
C/A NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

v.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities,

Defendants.

**PLAINTIFF'S MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF MOTION FOR
RECONSIDERATION**

The Plaintiff, by and through her undersigned counsel, requests that this Honorable Court grant her Motion for Reconsideration filed pursuant to Rule 59(e) South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure ("SCRCP"). The Defendants filed a response to Plaintiff's motion on May 12, 2016. Plaintiff incorporates herein her arguments contained within her Motion filed on April 29, 2016, and replies to Defendants' Response by way of the following:

ARGUMENT

I. PLAINTIFF'S MOTION WAS TIMELY

Defendants first argue that Plaintiff's Motion was timely. A Motion for Reconsideration filed pursuant to Rule 59(e) of the SCRCP must be "served not later than 10 days after receipt of written notice of the entry of the order." Further, Rule 5(b) prescribes that a party represented by an attorney shall be served by way of service to their attorney; with the same being made by "mailing a copy to him at his last known address." Rule 6(e) then permits five days be added to a prescribed period whenever a party has the right or is required to do some act or take some

proceedings within a prescribed period after service of notice and the notice is served upon him by mail.

In support of their assertion that Plaintiff's Motion is untimely, Defendant's aver that the posting date of the Order Dismissing the Case on the Court's My Case Notification is the date on which Plaintiff received 'written notice of the entry of order.' However, the rule specifically requires *written notice* rather than electronic notice. It would be inequitable and against the principles of judicial economy to permit this theory to prevail thus requiring all parties to routinely inspect the Court's electronic system for the posting of the Court's Order. Furthermore, Defendants did not point to any case law or statute in support of their assertion that an electronic posting sufficiently qualifies as 'written notice' pursuant to Rule 59(e).

Rule 59(e) requires a moving party to act by filing a motion within a prescribed period – ten days. Furthermore, Plaintiff received copy of the Court's Order by mail on April 22, 2016. *See* (Exhibit A, Notice of Entry of Order). Thus Plaintiff was permitted an additional five days to file and serve her Motion pursuant to Rule 6(e). Plaintiff subsequently filed her Motion on April 29, 2016; seven (7) days after receiving the Court's Notice. Defendants admit in their Response that they were served on May 3, 2016, which is only 11 days after Plaintiff received written Notice by mail and within the prescribed period afforded by the SCRCF.

In conclusion, Plaintiff's Motion for Reconsideration was timely, and she respectfully requests this Court to grant the same.

II. PLAINTIFFS ARGUMENTS IN HER MOTION MIRROR THOSE MADE IN HER MEMORANDUM AND AT THE INITIAL HEARING

Each argument Plaintiff raised in her Motion for Reconsideration mirrored arguments she raised in her Memorandum in Opposition to Defendants' Motion to Dismiss and in the initial

hearing. Defendants' second and third arguments state that Plaintiff's Motion should be denied because her Motion raised new arguments that she failed to raise previously. However, Plaintiff's Memorandum in Opposition to Defendants' Motion to Dismiss specifically requested this Court grant her leave to amend her Complaint to promote the ends of justice. Additionally, Plaintiff specifically requested during the initial hearing that if this Court found any deficiencies within her Complaint that she be permitted to amend the same. Therefore, the present motion is not the first instance in which she has put forth this request.

Further, Plaintiff's Motion sought to clarify or expound upon any issues she believed the Court may have misunderstood, failed to fully consider, or perhaps failed to rule on. By way of her Motion, Plaintiff identified and specifically discussed the legal misunderstanding regarding the statute of limitations for her defamation claim. Moreover, Plaintiff sought to clarify any factual misunderstandings regarding her civil conspiracy claim by providing the Court with a more succinct explanation of the unlawful motivation of the Individual Defendants.

Therefore, Plaintiff's Motion for Reconsideration properly raised arguments that were previously raised and specifically identified factual and legal misunderstandings that she requests this Court to reconsider.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiff respectfully asks this Honorable Court to GRANT her Motion for Reconsideration.

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J. LEWIS CROMER AND ASSOCIATES

BY: Ch R. Rikard

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astory@jlewiscromerlaw.com

Attorneys for Plaintiff

May 17, 2016

Columbia, South Carolina

Exhibit A

Notice of Entry of Order

JULIE J. ARMSTRONG

CLERK OF COURT, C.P. & G.S.
100 BROAD STREET, SUITE 106
CHARLESTON, SC 29401-2258

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



clerkofcourt.charlestoncounty.org

CR



110



CHELSEA RAEGAN RIKARD
PO BOX 11675
COLUMBIA SC 29211-1675

NOTICE OF ENTRY OF JUDGMENT/ORDER PURSUANT TO RULE 77 SCRPC

Order dismissing case

CASE NO: 2015CP1005093

Leisel Paradis VS Charleston County School District , defendant, et al

This judgment was entered on the 15th day of April, 2016, and notice mailed first class on Monday, April 18, 2016, to all counsel of record and/or all parties entitled to receive notice.

You may view and download this document at <http://clerkofcourt.charlestoncounty.org> or obtain a copy in person at the Clerk of Court's Office during regular Charleston County business hours.

RECEIVED

APR 22 2016

J. LEWIS CROMER
& ASSOCIATES, L.L.C.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

Leisel Paradis,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in their
individual capacities,

Defendants.

) IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
) NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
) CASE NO.: 2015-CP-10-5093
)
)
)

) **DEFENDANTS' RESPONSE TO**
) **PLAINTIFF'S MOTION TO**
) **RECONSIDER**
)

FILED
2016 MAY 12 AM 10:17
JAMES J. JAMES
CLERK OF COURT
BY _____

Plaintiff has moved this Court for to Reconsider its Order regarding Defendants' Motions to Dismiss. Based on the law and facts, this Motion should be denied on the following grounds.

I. THE PLAINTIFFS' MOTION IS UNTIMELY.

A motion to reconsider is authorized pursuant to Rule 59(e) of the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure. Rule 59(e) provides that "[a] motion to alter or amend the judgment shall be served not later than ten days after receipt of written notice of the entry of Order." The Order Dismissing Case was filed April 15, 2016, and posted on My Case Notification on April 18, 2016. Plaintiff's Motion to Reconsider was not filed until April 29, 2016, or eleven (11) days after written notice of the entry of the Order by the Court. Furthermore, it was not *served* on Defendants until May 3, 2016, or fifteen (15) days after written receipt of the notice of the Order. (See Exhibit A) There is a clear distinction between filing and service of papers. Proper service is made on parties and their counsel under Rules 4(a), (b), and (c) of the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure.; whereas, filing is addressed in the Rules 4(d) and (e). The timeliness of a motion to reconsider is adjudged by service and not by filing. However, under either standard, the Plaintiff's Motion is untimely and must be denied.

II. THE ARGUMENTS CONTAINED IN PLAINTIFF'S MOTION CANNOT BE CONSIDERED BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT RAISED AT THE INITIAL HEARING.

It is improper procedure for a party to advance a new legal argument in the context of a Motion to Reconsider pursuant to Rule 59(e). This proscription is well-established in the case law:

A party cannot use Rule 59(e) to present to the court an issue the party could have raised prior to judgment but did not. *See Natural Resources Defense Council v. U.S. E.P.A.*, 705 F.Supp. 698, 701 (D.D.C.1989), *vacated on other grounds*, 707 F.Supp. 3 (D.D.C.1989) ("Rule 59(e) motions are not vehicles for bringing before the court theories or arguments that were not advanced earlier."); *Smith v. Stoner*, 594 F.Supp. 1091, 1118 (N.D.Ind.1984) ("Issues which could have been presented to the court for consideration previously, but which were not, are not the proper subject of Rule 59(e) relief; the issues are waived."); *Johnson v. City of Richmond*, 102 F.R.D. 623, 623 (E.D.Va.1984) ("I do not conceive of Fed.R.Civ.P. 59(e) as serving the office of providing a disappointed suitor with a post-judgment opportunity to argue that which could have been argued pre-judgment.").

Hickman v. Hickman, 301 S.C. 455, 456-57, 392 S.E.2d 481, 482 (Ct. App. 1990), see also Powell v. Potterfield, 2012 WL 10929124, *3 (S.C.Com.Pl.) ("It is that concern of judicial efficiency and fairness that underpins the rule stated in *Gartside*, that a party cannot use a Rule 59(e) motion to bring up issues not raised before judgment.")

Plaintiff's request for Leave to Amend the Complaint could, and should, have been advanced at the initial hearing. Accordingly, the motion as to this request for relief is improper and should be denied.

III. THE ARGUMENTS CONTAINED IN PLAINTIFFS' MOTION CANNOT BE CONSIDERED BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT RAISED AT THE INITIAL HEARING

A motion pursuant to Rule 59(e) motion is a proper vehicle to request that the Court reconsider the issues and arguments in addition to asking the Court to alter and amend its judgment. Elam v. S. C. Dep't of Transp., 361 S.C. 9, 21, 602 S.E.2d 772, 778 (2004). A motion

pursuant to Rule 59(e) of the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure is appropriate where a party "believes the court has misunderstood, failed to fully consider, or perhaps failed to rule on an argument or issue...." Id., 361 S.C. at 24, 602 S.E. 2d at 780. In her Motion to Reconsider, Plaintiff does not highlight any legal or factual misunderstanding, nor does she allege the Court failed to rule on an argument or issue. Instead, she merely refers back to her Memorandum in Opposition to Defendants' Motions to Dismiss and the arguments made at the hearing. Likewise, Defendants crave reference to the arguments advanced in their briefs and, verbally, before the Court. Because the Court correctly understood and fully considered the facts and the law of this case as set forth in the parties' briefs and arguments, Plaintiff's Motion to Reconsider is inappropriate and should be denied.

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AND BOHNSTENGEL

[ADDITIONAL SIGNATURE ON FOLLOWING PAGE]

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Caroline Wrenn Cleveland permission of.

Bob J. Conley

Emmanuel J. Ferguson

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Charleston, South Carolina
May 11, 2016

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
FOR THE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
CASE NO: 2015-CP-10-00593

Leisel Paradis

Plaintiff,

vs.

Charleston County School District, James
Island Charter High School, Robert
Bohnstengel and Stephanie Spann, in
their individual capacities,
Defendant.

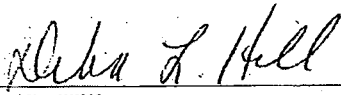
CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

2016 MAY 12 AM 10:18
JULIE ARMSTRONG
CLERK OF COURT

The undersigned states that on May 12, 2016, she served a copy of Defendant's Response to Plaintiff's Motion to Reconsider via electronic mail and by placing a copy in the mail o the following address(s):

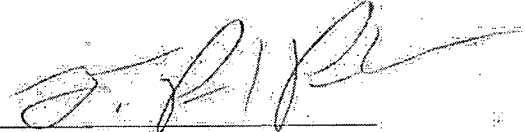
Chelsea Rikard, Esquire
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Bob J. Conley, Esquire
Cleveland & Conley, LLC
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Charleston, SC 29401


Debra L. Hill

Certificate of Appellant

The undersigned here certifies, in accord with Rule 210(g), SCACR that the Record on Appeal contains all material proposed to be included by any of the parties and not any other material.

By: 

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J. Paul Porter (S.C. Bar No. 100723)

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RECEIVED

JAN 03 2017

SC Court of Appeals