

Investigation Summary Report - Luke Tranel

Creation date: 12/19/2023

Background

Luke Tranel is a Special Education teacher at Theisen Middle School. He has been employed with the Fond du Lac School District for 9.5 years (hire date 8/24/2016).

2014, 2015 - Instructional Assistant at Woodworth (2 years)

2016, 2017 - Special Ed Teacher at Woodworth (2 years)

2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 - Special Ed teacher at Theisen (5.5)

It was brought to our attention that there were issues with Luke's performance of his duties. These included not following proper procedures for holding legal IEP meetings, not meeting deadlines for the paperwork and implementation of IEPs, and the possible falsification of information on IEP documents. Luke Tranel was placed on paid administrative leave for the duration of this investigation, beginning on 12/13/2023.

This issue first came to light when Karen Russel (Pupil Services Secretary) was processing IEPs and noticed there was information missing or left blank and the dates were off in the IEP for student [REDACTED]. The case manager completing the IEP was Luke Tranel. Karen notified Jason Gahan (Director of Pupil Services). He reviewed the file and reached out to Allison Birschbach (Assistant Principal - LEA rep) and let her know he would be contacting her and Luke due to concerns about IEP completion. These concerns led to preliminary investigation by Jason Gahan; he called the mother of [REDACTED] on 12/8/23 and asked if they attended a reevaluation meeting. The mother said she thought she attended a meeting, but wasn't positive she attended that specific meeting.

Investigation Summary

Oral interviews were conducted by Marisa Lombardo with the following people:

- Luke Tranel - Special Education teacher at Theisen Middle School (subject of the investigation)
 - Jason Gahan and an FEA Representative for Luke Tranel also attended this meeting
- Allison Birschbach - Assistant Principal at Theisen Middle School and LEA
- Holly Heisler - Math teacher at Theisen Middle School
- Amanda Feucht - Science teacher at Theisen Middle School
- Anna Weber - school psychologist at various schools including Theisen Middle School
- Aniya Langjahr - long-term substitute ELA teacher at Theisen Middle School

Additional IEP investigation was conducted by Jason Gahan and staff from the Pupil Services office. The following is the information regarding 3 specific IEPs from the 2023-2024 school year:

IEP of student [REDACTED]

- Documents for IEP - student due for 3 year reevaluation
 - Receipt of Referral/Start of Reevaluation (R-1) Missing
 - Review of Existing Data (ED-1) 11/2/23 (In person meeting)
 - Reevaluation: Notice that No additional Assessments Needed (RE-4) 11/14/23
 - IEP Invite (I-1) 11/14/23 (form dated)
 - **Meeting scheduled for 11/01/23**
 - Team Meeting Cover Page (I-3)
 - Date of Meeting 11/06/23
 - Team Participants (Allison B.-LEA, Aniya Langjahr-Gen Ed.)
 - Both reported not attending a reevaluation meeting for [REDACTED]

- No signatures of cover page
- Evaluation Report (ER-1) 11/02/23
- Criteria Disability Category EBD Blank
- Annual IEP and Placement (Due in 2/2024) Missing
- Evaluation Checklist (Blue Sheet) lists "Date of the meeting" 11/16/23

According to the dated documents above, an invitation was sent for a meeting was scheduled for 11/1/2023 to discuss reevaluation; this invitation was dated 11/14/2023. The documents then show that a meeting took place on 11/2/2023 and the ER-1 is also dated 11/2/2023, but the cover page is dated 11/6/2023, the Evaluation Checklist lists the date of the meeting at 11/16/2023, and the RE-4 is dated 11/14/2023.

In the interviews with the people listed above, Allison Birschbach and Aniya Langjahr both reported attending a meeting with [REDACTED] parents on 11/1/2023. She was approached by Aniyjah on 10/31/2023 about having a meeting to discuss classroom concerns with student [REDACTED]. Aniya said that she would like to include Luke as the student's case manager, and wrote a narrative of her concerns. The teacher wanted Allison there to support the meeting as a principal. The meeting was held on 11/1/2023. The purpose of the meeting was a concerns meeting based on behavioral concerns from the classroom teacher (none of [REDACTED] goals are based on behavior). No formal invite was sent or received, because it wasn't an IEP meeting. There was no cover sheet, neither Allison nor Aniya signed any documents, nor did they discuss any reevaluation criteria or IEP-related information at that meeting. Allison stated that there was no formal structure or documents that would have indicated this was an IEP; she has not attended any other meetings related to the reevaluation or IEP of this student.

The analysis of the witness interviews and the paperwork completed and submitted by Luke Tranel demonstrates that no legal IEP meeting took place on the dates indicated nor any other dates, and that the dates on the paperwork are a falsification of meetings and discussions that should have, but did not, occur.

IEP of student [REDACTED]

The IEP for student [REDACTED] expired on 10/24/23. The cover sheet submitted by Luke Tranel indicates the IEP meeting was held on 10/25/23. An email sent by Luke Tranel on 10/31/23 indicates that student [REDACTED] mother can attend a meeting on 11/2/23 during parent/teacher conferences. The IEP meeting was held, and was attended by Brad Nerat (principal of Theisen Middle School - LEA), the parents of [REDACTED] Amanda Feucht (Science) and Holly Heisler (Math). There are no signatures on the cover sheet for attendees. The interview with Amanda Feucht indicated that she did attend a portion of that meeting and there was discussion of moving from an IEP to a 504 plan. Holly Heisler also attended for 5-10 minutes; her interview indicated that she didn't realize this was an IEP meeting and she thought it was a parent teacher conference. Neither signed any documents; an I-2 excusing them from the meeting was not created or signed. The (I-5) Review of Annual Goals form indicates a date of 11/08/23, and the (P-2) Notice of Placement indicates the IEP was held on 10/18/23 with an implementation date of 10/23/23.

Analysis of the documents and interviews again indicates that the dates on the paperwork were falsified to indicate that this IEP was compliant and occurred within the dates indicated.

IEP of student [REDACTED]

The IEP of student [REDACTED] expired on 12/7/2023. The IEP and reevaluation documents were created in Skyward, but were not filled out; they are blank. Luke Tranel sent an email on 9/25/23 to set up a tentative meeting date

of 10/9/23 or 10/10/23 for an ED-1 meeting. The meeting took place on 10/25/23. An interview with school psychologist Anna Weber indicates that the group didn't discuss goals, progress, scores or behaviors. The case manager was relying on her to run a meeting for a student she had never met; Luke didn't supply the information that was needed to determine if additional testing would be needed.

She noted that the paperwork for this IEP meeting should have been open and prepared ahead of time but wasn't. After the meeting she created a document for Luke to define the roles and responsibilities of the case manager and school psychologist for the reevaluation process, as she didn't think he knew what to do.

Review of Evaluations

Luke Tranel's evaluations for the 5.5 years he has been a Special Education teacher were reviewed by Marisa Lombardo. The following information was drawn from the review of those documents:

- Luke was not evaluated in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years due to COVID and remote learning/teaching.
- In 2017-18 and 2021-22 it was noted in his evaluations that he struggles with keeping up on his IEP paperwork.
- In 2018-19 he was placed on a Plan for Improvement to improve adherence to Special Education Paperwork documents.
 - It was noted that 0 of the 7 IEPs that he had due that year were in compliance.
 - It was noted that this is not the first year this trend has been an issue.

2023-24 training

Jen Johnson (Special Education Program Support Teacher) (PST) gave Special Education teachers a [template for scheduling IEPs](#), and Jason gave them a deadline of October to schedule their IEPs for the year. (This scheduling template was also done for them in the 2022-23 school year by Jen Johnson) ([22-23 scheduling template](#))

The IEP scheduling calendar was discussed in August during Professional Development days that he attended. Mandatory team members to be included in IEP meetings was a topic they discussed: LEA, gen ed, spec ed, parent. It was noted that mandatory team members cannot be excused from the meeting, and that there should be discussion in advance to avoid attendance issues for teachers.

Interview w/Luke Tranel

In this interview we discussed the pattern of non-compliance with IEP deadlines and procedures. Luke indicated that he did understand the expectations for these deadlines and procedures, and that supports had been provided for him to stay on track with his IEPs. He admitted to struggling with deadlines in general.

We discussed the IEP for student [REDACTED]. He admitted that no IEP meeting was held; he met with the parents about the behavior in class and "used the meeting with Aniyjah and Allison to count for that because I needed to get that done." He admitted that no legal IEP meeting was held and he put dates in that appeared to account for that meeting. He admitted that in addition to there not being an actual meeting, no one actually attended an IEP meeting; he indicated meeting participants in his paperwork.

We discussed the IEP for student [REDACTED] Luke admitted that it was late. He admitted that he held the meeting with the LEA present and general education teachers coming in as they could because they were in their own parent/teacher conferences. There was no I-2 signed to account for their absence, nor was there a signed I-3 (this is the expectation in the Fond du Lac School District).

We discussed the IEP for student [REDACTED] Luke admitted that while there was a meeting held, there was no signed I-3 to document the participants, and there were no prepared documents in Skyward in anticipation of the reevaluation meeting. Luke said that he was confused about the order in which things must happen; he has been a Special Education teacher for 5.5 years. However, we know from Anna Weber's interview that she prepared a document for him with that information; despite having that information he did not then correct that mistake by completing the paperwork.

Final Conclusions

Luke Tranel has a documented history of not complying with expectations in relation to the completion of his IEP duties, including not completing IEPs and reevaluations before they expire and not following expected District protocols in relation to paperwork and meeting processes. He has received support, training, tools, and help from district staff to try to correct these deficiencies, but they continue unabated.

Additionally, in the 2023-24 school year alone, we see clear evidence that Luke Tranel intentionally falsified IEP documents to hide the fact that IEP meetings either occurred past the expiration deadlines, or simply did not occur at all. We believe that this constitutes gross misconduct in his duties and is grounds for termination of his employment with the Fond du Lac School District.