



LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Department of Communications and Community Engagement

June 13, 2024

Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC
20554

Dear FCC Administrator,

Please allow this communication to serve as an official complaint of broadcast news distortion by WJLA-TV, an affiliate of the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and owned by Sinclair Broadcast Group. I have familiarized myself with the FCC's position and responsibility regarding this type of complaint, and I believe that after you review the attached information, you will agree that the burden of proof has been met.

First, WJLA-TV is a broadcast medium. It is affiliated with ABC and owned by Sinclair Broadcast Group. Second, I have attached numerous accounts of stories and social media posts that are clearly and deliberately slanted and misleading to the community. As suggested on your website, the Communications and Community Engagement staff of Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) has attempted to work with the reporters and news director regarding these incidents; however, they have chosen to ignore our requests and actually responded with retaliation in the form of bullying and harassing behavior.

You will find documentation supporting all of these claims attached. We do not take this action lightly, as we work tirelessly to have positive and collaborative relationships with our media partners. But at this time, we can no longer stand by while WJLA and its staff consistently provide misinformation and disinformation to our community.

It is LCPS' position that after a thorough review of our information, the Commission will see that the personnel at WJLA-TV have systematically provided segments that were either intentionally deceptive and/or contained a reckless disregard for the truth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Incident #1 - Staffing, Bathrooms and Special Education	2
Incident #2 - Student Overdose Reporting	5
Incident #3 - Student Overdose Notification Legislation	15
Incident #4 - School Canine Scans	21
Incident #5 - Professional Development Schedule	22
Incident #6 - Superintendent Travel & Development	26
<i>Crisis in the Classroom</i>	33
Summary	35

Incident #1 - Staffing, Bathrooms and Special Education

On 3/29/2023 I, on behalf of the LCPS Communications staff, responded to an inquiry from Mr. Nick Minock with:

“Sorry for the delay getting back to you. It’s been a little busier today than I was hoping for. Here is the information regarding Safety & Privacy in Restrooms.”

<http://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/loudoun/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=CPRRRRG6ED8B9>”

The provided link goes to the LCPS BoardDocs, where School Board documents are provided online and publicly available.

On 4/14/2023, WJLA reporter Nick Minock asked LCPS Communications staff:

“Do you have information on the funding for the 10 SLP positions that are set to be cut? How much would it cost to keep these ten positions?”

On the same date, I responded with the following information:

“Thank you for reaching out with your inquiry. Mr. Serotkin and Mr. Mahedavi are not available for on-cameras today, but they asked that I pass along some information. To make sure we are on the same page, let me review the situation for accuracy. Due to COVID, and with the additional funds provided due to the pandemic, LCPS was able to provide numerous services and positions, including speech pathologists, above the staffing standard. Specifically, LCPS had 10 more speech pathologists than the staffing standard required.

For FY24, LCPS identified 36 full-time positions that would no longer be funded through that COVID money. Only 8.3 of those positions will remain unfunded, primarily because they are currently vacant – no one is working that position at this time. The remaining positions will be funded through other means. Of the 8.3 vacant positions not being funded next year, 2.9 of them are speech pathologists. These 2.9 speech pathology positions have been vacant for over 1 year.

So, in summary:

- *LCPS is not “cutting” or “eliminating” 10 speech pathologist positions. Rather, we are not funding 2.9 speech pathologist positions for FY 24 that currently sit vacant and no one is working.*
- *By funding the other 7.1 speech pathologist positions, LCPS is remaining above the staffing standard. In short, we’re providing 7 full-time employees in speech pathology above our recommended staffing standard.*
- *Speech pathologists, like other positions around the division, remain above the staffing standard because enrollment is still down compared to pre-COVID numbers, but staff has not been reduced commensurately.*

You may quote Mr. Serotkin as saying, “The Board recognizes the difficulty in hiring speech pathologists, evidenced by the nearly 3 full-time positions being vacant for the last year. Because of this, we wanted to not only continue to provide this important resource with

above-staffing standard service to our students, but retain these dedicated and hard-working employees as well.”

Regarding safety and privacy in school restrooms, you can quote Mr. Serotkin as saying, “The Board remains committed to providing the best options that promote and protect student safety while respecting privacy. We are confident that Dr. Smith and his team will present the Board with a plan that utilizes innovative design, technology and other resources to achieve our goal, and we look forward to that presentation.”

Please let me know if you need anything else.

On April 15, 2023, Mr. Minock posted the following story on WJLA’s website:

[Loudoun County School Board spends \\$11M on new bathroom design, cuts special ed funds](#)

Mr. Minock’s resulting story stated in part “Special education is one of the priorities community members, teachers, and parents said they would like the next Loudoun County superintendent to focus on, according to a recent survey of more than 4,100 people. New bathroom designs were not among the priorities parents, teachers and community members said they would like the next superintendent to focus on.”

The underlined statement in the story is directly contradictory to the information Mr. Minock was provided in the earlier email exchange. In slide 10 of the update document, it clearly shows that school principals were surveyed in September 2022 and common themes of their responses included decreased staff access to staff-only restrooms and concerns about safety of single-user restrooms for Students.

Mr. Minock filed a different story about LCPS school restrooms three days prior on April 12, 2024, where he referenced and used pictures from the LCPS update document, thereby demonstrating he had gone through the document and must have seen the above-referenced information on slide 10.

Mr. Minock also states in the story that “Serotkin’s goal is to accommodate students who identify as transgender and/or nonbinary. But some Loudoun County parents have argued that LCPS is wasting funds by spending \$11 million on new bathroom designs.” Mr. Serotkin has never stated that was the goal of the new bathroom design. In fact, the pilot program was designed to increase accessibility to allow students, now and in the future, a choice to utilize the multi-fixture, gender-specific restrooms or single-occupancy restrooms in all LCPS facilities. The Pilot Program improvements address the identified needs of principals, staff, students and parents, focus on student and staff safety, and address safety-related activities. More information can be found on the [division website](#), which is publicly available.

In addition, Mr. Minock states in his story, “Instead, the school board is cutting three speech pathologists, one special education supervisor, three occupational therapists, and fourteen teachers, according to a spokesperson. The LCPS spokesperson added that the school district is adding assistants, which would be a net decrease of eight positions.”

This is disinformation and contradictory to the information provided, as I explained that the positions were not being cut but rather unfunded and that they were currently unfilled and had been for over a year. In addition to being inaccurate, the story is clearly slanted to make it

appear as if LCPS was sacrificing special education and other positions in order to construct bathrooms solely for transgender students and/or nonbinary students.

This is a prime example of WJLA's efforts to twist information from LCPS to fit an ideological or political narrative that serves an agenda other than providing information to the public.

Incident #2 - Student Overdose Reporting

On October 31, 2024, Park View High School principal Dr. Jason Jefferson sent the following message to his entire school community regarding the dangers of Fentanyl:

Dear Park View Families,

I want to address the community about the important topic of Fentanyl. The use of this powerful, synthetic opioid is affecting young people across the nation. Sadly, our students are no exception. And I need your help to address this crisis.

My heart is breaking for the students in LCPS, and other young people in the community, who have suffered from taking this drug. It is often added to other drugs that look like legitimate prescription opioids (e.g., Xanax, Adderall, Percocet or oxycodone), or mixed into powders or nasal sprays (US Drug Enforcement Administration).

We are seeing students ingesting drugs prior to school and suffering the effects while in school. We are hearing reports of young people outside of school experiencing medical emergencies. And our staff and first responders are working together in critical situations to meet the crisis.

Please talk with your children, teens and young people about the dangers of Fentanyl. Please talk with them about the dangers of taking any substance not authorized by their own parent, guardian or doctor. A recent DEA public health alert notes that "laboratory testing indicates 7 out of every 10 pills seized by DEA contain a lethal dose of fentanyl." Learn more at <https://www.dea.gov/onepill>.

LCPS is taking several steps to support our students, staff and community.

1. Naloxone. We want to let you know that LCPS has Naloxone available at every secondary school in the division (high schools and middle schools). Naloxone is a medication designed to rapidly reverse opioid overdose. LCPS employees are trained to administer this medication and all School Resource Officers for Loudoun County Sheriff's Office and Leesburg Police Department carry it as well.

2. Community Educational Events. Please check our calendar.

1. Park View will be hosting informational events for parents and students as early as next week.

2. My team and I will be hosting assemblies in school to address this important topic with all students at every grade level. Please support your student's attendance.

3. Extra counselors and support staff will be at the school in the coming days to ensure students have the support they need.

Please visit the LCPS Drug Awareness webpage to find information and resources to help you understand more and speak with your student about the dangers associated with Fentanyl.

And, please call local law enforcement if you or your student have seen these pills. Speaking up may save someone's life.

Later that day, the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office distributed the following media release announcing a number of overdoses in the community:

<https://sheriff.loudoun.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=8729>

Loudoun County Public Schools had already been spearheading efforts around the community to educate students and their families regarding the dangers of opioids and other drugs, as well as providing resources for mental health and addiction services. In fact, WJLA ran a story about fentanyl awareness efforts by LCPS on 2/14/2023:

[Loudoun Co. schools to host community fentanyl awareness sessions](#)

It is important to note that at the time of the Sheriff Department's media release, there was no local, state, or federal statute that required school divisions to notify parents of drug-related overdoses of students, regardless of where the incident occurred. Despite the lack of requirement, LCPS sent community messages each time a school had a student, staff member, or visitor experience a medical emergency. To respect student and personal privacy, the nature of the medical emergencies was not relayed in the messages.

An example of a community message sent at that time includes:

*From: Jason Jefferson
To: Park View High School Recipients
Subject: Park View Community Message
Date: Tuesday, October 17, 2023 5:07:33 PM*

To the Park View High School Community -

I am writing to advise you that something out of the ordinary happened in school today. A student experienced a medical emergency that required school staff members to administer care and call first responders. Your student may have witnessed their classmate's distress. Emergency Medical Services responded to the school, the student's family was notified and the student was transported to an area hospital for further care.

The safety and well-being of every student is our highest priority, and that includes their emotional well-being. I want you to know that Park View High School counselors and other members of the unified mental health team are available to support your students if they want to discuss their feelings about this incident.

Please contact me at Jason.jefferson@lcps.org or any of our counselors if we can assist in supporting your student's emotional needs.

Thank you.

*Dr. Jason Jefferson
Principal*

Loudoun County Public Schools was dedicated to providing information and resources to students and their families regarding the dangers of drugs and addiction. On the same day as the LCSO media release, WJLA reporter Nick Minock ran the following story:

[9 opioid-related overdoses connected to 1 Loudoun County High School, Officials Say](#)

In this article the reporter, Mr. Nick Minock, suggests that LCPS did not notify families regarding the overdoses promptly enough. As mentioned above, LCPS did notify families of medical emergencies on campuses, just not the nature of the emergency. Also, Dr. Jefferson had already sent the above comprehensive message about fentanyl use in the school and in the community to all of his school's families.

Additionally, LCPS was extremely active in the community educating and providing resources around fentanyl. Also, as the article does point out, of the overdoses linked to Park View High School students, four occurred on campus.

The next day, November 1, 2023, WJLA reporter Kellye Lynn ran another story:

[LCPS school board members push for answers after 9 drug overdoses at 1 high school since September](#)

The opening line of the article stated, "There have been at least nine drug-related overdoses at a Loudoun County high school since September and eight within the past three weeks, according to officials." This is incorrect. As Mr. Minock pointed out in the earlier story, eight students with a connection to Park View High School had experienced an overdose, but only four were on the school's campus. Ms. Lynn also suggests that the Superintendent and school division failed to notify families in a timely manner.

The next day, November 2, 2023, WJLA reporter Nick Minock ran the following story:

[Loudoun Co. school board member calls for resignation of superintendent after delayed reporting of student overdoses](#)

In the article, Mr Minock inflated the number of students who experienced an overdose by now including former Park View High School students. With three stories in a row, it is apparent that WJLA was trying to report as high a number as possible of students from Park View High School who overdosed. He also continues to drive a narrative that the superintendent and school division were not notifying the community of the overdoses.

The article also mentions Governor Yungkin's [Executive Order 28](#), which requires school divisions to notify communities of school-related overdoses within 24 hours. It is at this point that a legal requirement now exists for such a measure.

WJLA reporter Nick Minock then ran a story on November 9, 2023.

[Loudoun Co. superintendent holds first listening session after criticism over handling of](#)

Again, Mr. Minock drove a narrative that the superintendent did not notify families of the school division in a timely fashion about the overdoses. Dr. Spence spent several minutes speaking to Mr. Minock in an interview and on camera, explaining the reality of the situation. Mr. Mincok also placed his microphone and camera on Dr. Spence as he answered

community questions both during and after the meeting for at least 20 minutes. However, Mr. Minock did not air either the responses he provided directly to the reporter or the responses recorded during conversations with parents. Instead, he disrupted the public meeting and physically came between the superintendent and a parent who did not wish to be on camera, refusing to turn off his camera at the superintendent's request, at which point the superintendent left to protect the privacy of the parent. At this point, Mr. Minock followed the superintendent away from the meeting asking questions similar to those the superintendent had already answered. This was clearly done to create the narrative that Dr. Spence was running away from a member of the media asking questions about overdoses.

WJLA has continued to publish stories admonishing the superintendent for not notifying the community about student overdoses. These include:

['This is a crisis': PTSA President at Park View HS calls for more student support in wake of fentanyl overdoses](#)

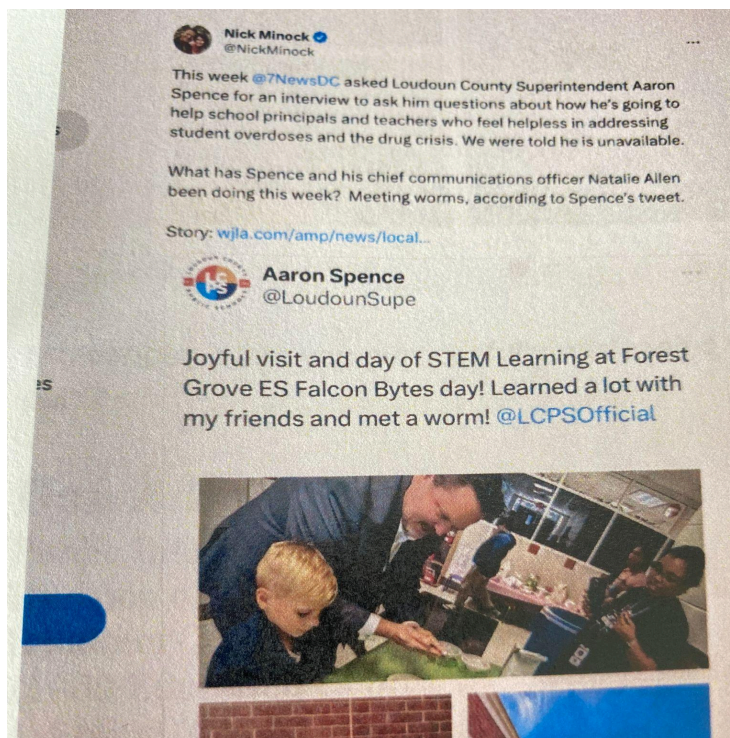
[Suspected drug overdose reported at Loudoun County high school in Leesburg, Va.](#)

[Loudoun school board members left in the dark about student overdoses despite new hires for transparency](#)

['We are in need of assistance:' Principal begs Loudoun Co. school leaders for help with drug crisis](#)

In this last story, Mr. Minock states, "When 7News attempted to ask Superintendent Aaron Spence why it took him so long to notify the public of student overdoses in November, Spence walked away several times." Again, Dr. Spence did actually speak to Mr. Minock on camera, however, it appears that WJLA decided not to air that portion. We recognize that this is completely within their purview; however, it makes the slant of the above statement untrue.

One of the most malicious attempts at disinformation came from Mr. Minock's X (formerly Twitter) account. On **December 21, 2023**, Mr. Minock posted the following to his account:

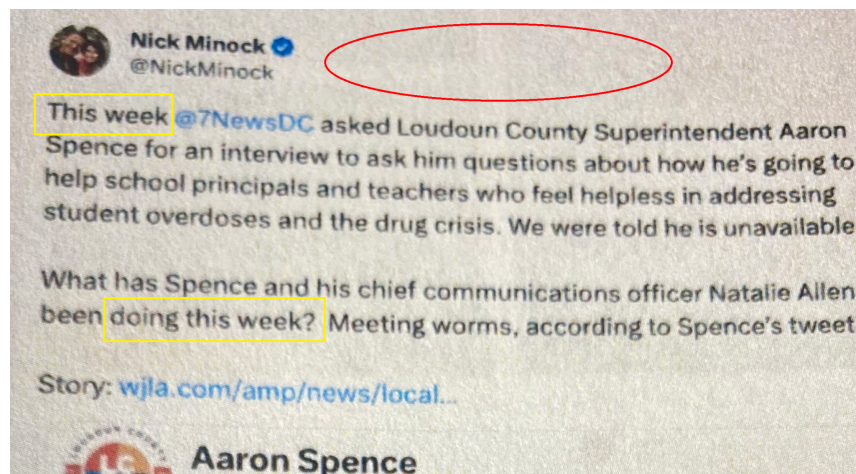


The LCPS post that Mr. Minock was referring to was originally posted as:



You can see at the top of the post that the date it was posted was **October 26, 2023**.

As you can see in the markup picture below, the post is clearly designed to create a narrative that Dr. Spence was not concerned about school overdoses and was visiting schools at the time of the events. In reality, the post Mr. Minock shared was actually from October 26, 2023, almost two months earlier.



Where the red circle is on the picture above shows where the date would be IF the original tweet was retweeted with a quote. The yellow rectangles show the text that suggests the event pictured was from the week of December 21, 2023, when Mr. Minock posted this message. In our estimation, instead of retweeting the LCPS tweet and adding his own narrative, Mr. Minock copied the link to the LCPS post and created a new original tweet, which removes the date from the LCPS tweet.

Examining tweets by Mr. Minock both before and after this post shows that he did not utilize this technique any other time that could be identified. The only reason I can see to share the LCPS tweet this way is that it removes the date.

On December 21, 2023, after seeing the tweet I emailed Mr. Minock and the WJLA News Director Cheryl Carson with the following:

Mr. Minock,

I was advised of a social media post that you published where you reference an LCPS social media post. Your post states that, "What has Spence and his chief communications officer Natalie Allen been doing this week? Meeting worms, according to Spence's tweet."

In reality, the post you copied and referenced was from October 26, 2023. As shown here: I'm curious, were you purposefully misleading the community, or was this another oversight on your part? I would genuinely like to know. Thank you

Mr. Minock responded the same day with the following:

Dan:

We've been requesting interviews with Dr. Spence for a while to discuss his handling of the drug crisis and we re-upped our request yet again this week. When will he make himself available?

Best,

*Nick
WJLA*

I think it is important to note a number of things with this response. First, it does not acknowledge the disinformation in the social media post. At no point in this communication does Mr. Minock state that a mistake was made or that his intention was not to be misleading.

Secondly, his aggressive request for an interview appears to be the only point of the message. It's almost as if the post was not only designed to be misleading to the community, but also egregious enough to force LCPS Communications personnel to respond so that he could once again attempt to force an interview.

I feel that this response is quite indicative of what Mr. Minock's intent was with the social media post. It clearly illustrates a purposeful misrepresentation of our own social media post in order to cast Dr. Spence and Ms. Allen in bad light, suggesting that playing with students is more important than the opioid epidemic.

Based on Mr. Minock's reply, I responded with:

I understand your requests; however, I don't think that justifies a purposefully misleading post on social media. If these are the tactics we can expect, I cannot in good conscience recommend Dr. Spence participate in an interview with a journalist who does not adhere to the most basic ethical principals. We will take your request under advisement as well as this latest incident.

That same day Mr. Minock replied with the following:

Dan:

Thank you sincerely for telling me the date of the social media post was October 26, 2023. I posted a correction.

Kind regards,

*Nick
WJLA*

The correction that Mr. Minock posted on social media was:



Despite being called out on the falsified date, Mr. Minock remains committed to his originally misleading narrative that still paints the picture of Dr. Spence visiting schools during the time of student overdoses. This fact is the most telling that the original post was, in fact, designed to be misleading and an attempt at disinformation.

Being unable to falsely portray the original lie, Mr. Minock simply altered his disinformation to retain the original and untrue narrative. The fact that he worked to keep this distorted viewpoint only further demonstrates his goal to not just report alleged crises in classrooms, but create them when they do not exist.

On January 9, 2024, WJLA reporter Ida Domingo reported the following story:

[First overdose of 2024 in Loudoun County involved a Park View High School student: Sheriff](#)

The original headline of the story indicated that the overdose occurred at the school. This was not true. This incident occurred off campus and was not related to the school. In the story,

the reporter states, "The Jan. 5 incident at Park View High School was non-fatal thanks to the intervention of a sheriff's deputy, LCSO officials said."

I wrote to the reporter and the WJLA News Director, Cheryl Carson, advising them of the following:

*"Good afternoon,
I'm writing to bring to your attention a glaring inaccuracy in your article:*

<https://wjla.com/news/local/loudoun-county-first-juvenile-overdose-2024-fentanyl-opiod-overdo-separk-view-high-school-narcan-cpr-juveniles-sterling-deadly-serious-data-rising-numbers-dru-gscime-virginia-schools-prevention-resources-ods-students>

Both the headline and story appear to indicate that the incident occurred AT Park View High School.

This is not true and inaccurate."

I did not receive a response from either WJLA representative; however, the headline was changed but not the text in the story. I sent another message on January 9, 2024:

"Thank you for your attention in this matter, however you still have a line in the story that reads: The Jan. 5 incident at Park View High School was non-fatal thanks to the intervention of a sheriff's deputy, LCSO officials said. Again, this is not accurate and we would appreciate a correction.

Thanks again"

I never received a communication back, and the story text was never changed. It remains the same as of the date of this filing.

On April 19, 2024, Mr. Minock and WJLA posted the following story:

[Virginia House Democrats reject 24-hour school overdose notification mandate](#)

In the article, Mr. Minock once again misrepresents the number of student overdoses and insinuates that LCPS delayed notification to parents.

On April 23, 2024, LCPS Chief Communications Officer Natalie Allen sent the following email to WJLA News Director Cheryl Carson:

Dear Ms. Carson, I am writing to you, once again, to point out a grossly inaccurate report from Nick Minock regarding Loudoun County Public Schools. In his tweet and story from April 19, Mr. Minock indicates "late last year, LCPS delayed notification to parents for weeks of 11 Park View High School students who overdosed." Specifically, there are two matters of misinformation in this statement.

First, I do not know where the number 11 came from, but that number is wrong. LCPS has not had 11 school-connected overdoses at Park View High School. To continuously report an

appreciably inflated number of school-connected overdoses at one school is factually incorrect and misleading.

Second, as we have pointed out previously, LCPS did not delay any reporting of school-related overdoses. Communications were sent to school families advising them of a medical emergency at their student's school; however, the nature of the medical emergency was not identified so as to protect the privacy of the student involved.

LCPS has complied with the Governor's November 1, 2023 Executive Order, requiring schools to notify the community of school-related overdoses, since it went into effect. So, to characterize the prior communications as "delayed reporting" is factually inaccurate.

Such an important issue demands accurate reporting to the community. WJLA, and Mr. Minock specifically, have continuously provided factually inaccurate information and slanted narratives to the people of Loudoun County and the greater Washington metropolitan area.

I look forward to the story's correction.

Regards,

Natalie Allen | Chief Communications & Community Engagement Officer

On May 3, 2024, Ms. Carson responded with the following:

Dear Natalie,

Following up on your email, we stand by the facts of our reporting on the student overdoses. If you or Dr. Spence would like to offer a different perspective, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss in person.

I would be happy to facilitate a discussion, as I offered multiple times last year and at the beginning of this year.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Cheryl Carson

As with Mr. Minock's response to me regarding the falsified social media post, Ms. Carson's priority appears to be meeting with the Superintendent as opposed to correcting the inaccuracies in WJLA's reporting. Ms. Allen, still attempting to address those inaccuracies, responded with the following:

Hi Cheryl— Respectfully, what facts? Four school-connected overdoses were reported by LCSO at Park View late last year. The number 11 is not factual. This is not a matter of perspective.

Ms. Carson has not responded to this message as of the filing of this complaint.

Incident #3 - Student Overdose Notification Legislation

On February 27, 2024, Mr. Minock of WJLA sent LCPS the following inquiry:

Hello:

Which lobbyists does LCPS pay for lobbying services in Richmond? Can you send me the lobbying contracts and how much LCPS is paying lobbyists?

I heard LCPS's lobbyist is lobbying against Del. Holly Seibold's bill and Sen. Jennifer Carroll Foy's bill that would require school districts to notify parents and school communities within 24 hours of school-connected overdoses. What is LCPS's comment?

I'm cc'ing the school board members in case any of them would like to offer their personal opinions on this topic.

On the same date, I responded with the following:

LCPS works with Jackson West Consulting. In regards to your request for contracts, I will treat that as a FOIA and provide those records through that mechanism.

To be clear, LCPS has NOT asked Jackson West Consulting to lobby against the bill. Rather, LCPS recognizes that the opioid crisis affects the entire community and not only schools. Therefore, we are advocating that the bill be strengthened by requiring notification by law enforcement of any suspected overdose anywhere in the community, not only in schools. This is a highly concerning issue around the entire community and it will take a whole community approach to address.

Mr. Minock responded on the same date:

Thank you.

When you say "we are advocating that the bill be strengthened..." who is "we?" The superintendent? The school board?

Also, to my knowledge, there have not been transparency issues at the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office or the Fairfax County Police Department when it comes to notifying the community about overdoses. Both law enforcement agencies, in my experience, have told us when there have been overdoses and have spoken openly about them. However, that hasn't always been the case with LCPS and that's why the notifications bills were introduced by the patrons because there were transparency issues with LCPS. For instance, Sheriff Chapman and Chief Davis have done interviews with us about overdoses, but not Superintendent Aaron Spence. When did LCPS decide to support the notification bills?

*Nick Minock
WJLA*

I responded with the following:

"We being the School Division. The Chair speaks for the Board."

Mr. Minock then asked:

Ok. To clarify, it's then fair to say that the Superintendent and the lobbying firm hired by LCPS is advocating for the bills to require notification by law enforcement of any suspected overdose anywhere in the community, not only in schools?

When did the superintendent change his position on this topic? When we spoke with him at a listening session in Purcellville late last year, Aaron Spence was not in favor of notification.

The second part of his inquiry is incorrect and actually an outright lie. Dr. Spence has not told anyone, including Mr. Minock, that he was not in favor of the bill. Dr. Spence's position has always been that the issue deserved wider notification than just the incidents at schools.

I provided Mr. Minock with the following:

In addition, it is worth pointing out that LCPS AND LCSO have partnered to actively share concerns about overdoses in the community, including partnering on seven Community Education events in 2023. We are also not alone advocating for wider notification. Delegate Geary Higgins shares this view.

For clarity, LCPS is not advocating for a requirement that law enforcement be responsible to notify, but that someone should notify the community for non-school connected suspected overdoses.

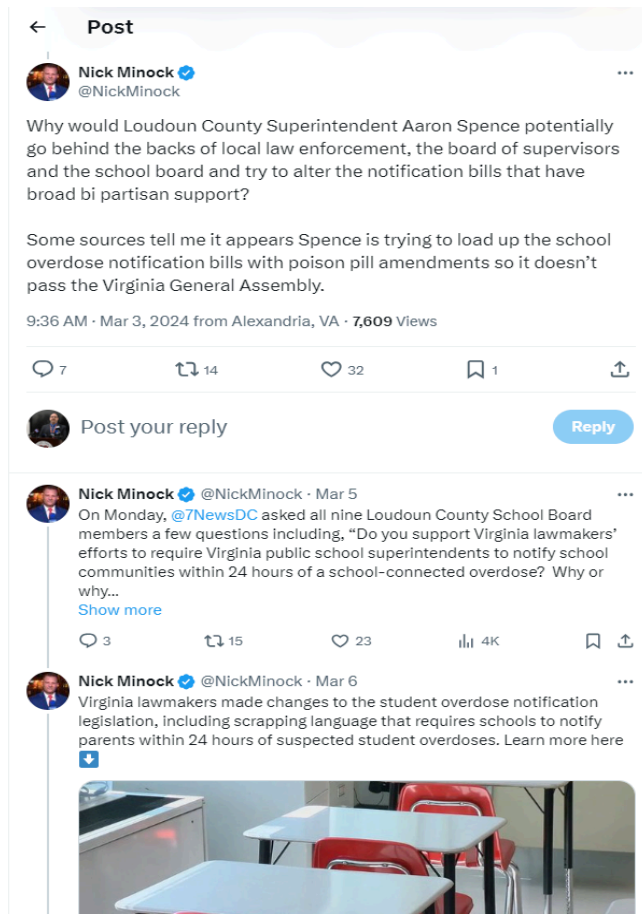
LCPS is not aware of any mandatory reporting to the community when non-school related overdoses occur by law enforcement or any other entity, either here in Loudoun or in any community across the Commonwealth. It seems we could all agree that if it's important we share with parents what's happening in our schools, we also find a way to share with citizens what's happening in our communities.

I also answered his specific questions with the text highlighted below:

*Ok. To clarify, it's then fair to say that the Superintendent and the lobbying firm hired by LCPS is advocating for the bills to require notification by law enforcement of any suspected overdose anywhere in the community, not only in schools? **That is correct.***

*When did the superintendent change his position on this topic? When we spoke with him at a listening session in Purcellville late last year, Aaron Spence was not in favor of notification. **That is not what Dr. Spence said to you at the listening session. He said he had concerns about student privacy with reporting and that should be addressed. Since the Executive Order, LCPS has complied with its requirements in line with the guidance from VDOE.***

As you can see, I was very pointed and clear that Dr. Spence and LCPS were not against the notification bill, but were also advocating for it to be broader in reporting to share more information with the community. No one at LCPS or the school division's lobbyist was instructed to advocate against the bill. Despite my attempts to convey this information, Mr. Minock posted the following to Twitter on March 3, 2024:



The post is completely misleading. It suggests to the viewer that Dr. Spence was attempting to defeat the bill when I clearly explained that his efforts were to strengthen the reporting function.

On March 4, 2024, Mr. Minock sent the following questions to Loudoun County School Board members:

Hello:

According to state lawmakers and their staff, Superintendent Aaron Spence has personally lobbied lawmakers in Richmond, along with LCPS's lobbyist, against the original versions of the student overdose notification bills that were introduced by lawmakers after LCPS delayed notification to parents about several student overdoses at Park View High School last year.

Did Superintendent Spence tell you that he was lobbying against the original versions of the student overdose notification bills?

Are you aware that Superintendent Spence did not notify the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office about his lobbying efforts to change the overdose notification bills?

Do you support Virginia lawmakers' efforts to require Virginia public school superintendents to notify school communities within 24 hours of a school-connected

overdose? Why or why not?

If Superintendent Spence did not notify the Loudoun County School Board of his lobbying efforts on the student overdose notification bills, are you considering disciplinary action?

Mr. Minock's question about "lobbying against the original versions" is misleading in the least. As I had often explained, Dr. Spence supported a stronger version. The nature and subtext of the questions are clearly designed to promote his narrative that Dr. Spence was doing something untoward, even to the point of suggesting disciplinary action was needed.

From a previous phone conversation, WJLA's News Director did advise LCPS' Chief of Communications and Community Engagement, Natalie Allen, to provide examples of Mr. Minock's incorrect or unethical reporting. On March 6, 2024, I provided the following to Ms. Carson:

Ms. Carson,

As I understand it from Ms. Allen, you asked for specific examples of Mr. Minock's propensity to misrepresent facts and information to the community regarding Loudoun County Public Schools. The latest example is not only egregious, it is potentially dangerous. Attached is an email string between Mr. Minock and myself where he is asking about LCPS' lobbying efforts regarding SB498. Mr. Minock indicates that his understanding is LCPS advised our lobbyist to work against the bill. As you will see in the email string, that is completely false. In reality, and as I explained to Mr. Minock, LCPS is in favor of expanding the bill to include community notification of any overdose in the community. This position is backed by numerous research studies, the CDC, and many communities across the country that have undertaken the effort.

Despite my consistent clarification, Mr. Minock posted on social media the attached message that suggests Dr. Spence is trying to "poison" the bill with amendments. Again, this could not be further from the truth. What most concerns me is that this goes far beyond not fairly representing the facts or giving both sides of the issue. We have worked tirelessly over the past 6 months to provide resources to students and families, engage county experts and leadership on a whole community approach, and hold numerous listening sessions and conversations for anyone needing to discuss this highly concerning issue. Mr. Minock's irresponsible post not only erroneously characterizes LCPS' position, but could potentially put lives in danger. I fear that students struggling with substance abuse who see this post may hesitate to reach out to school-based resources.

Time and again we have shared our concerns and frustrations over the bias and purposefully inaccurate information put out by Crisis in the Classroom. Mr. Minock has continuously demonstrated that if he cannot find a crisis, he is more than willing to invent one. In light of this recent malicious and dangerous post, LCPS Communications is reevaluating how to address the issue that you appear to be unwilling to resolve.

To date LCPS has not received a response regarding this concern. Instead, on March 6, 2024, Mr. Minock posted the following story:

[Virginia lawmakers make changes to school-connected overdose notification bill](#)

In the story Mr. Minock once again puts forth the disinformative narrative that Dr. Spence failed to notify parents of student overdoses when he wrote:

“After Loudoun County Public Schools and Superintendent Aaron Spence didn’t tell parents for weeks about several student overdoses at Park View High School in Sterling last October, Youngkin took immediate action.”

Mr. Minock goes on to describe the legislative path of the proposed bill and points out groups that spoke against it, also stating:

“Loudoun County Public School’s lobbyist and Loudoun County Superintendent Aaron Spence have been working to change the bills since January.

‘I’m Charlie Jackson with Loudoun County Public Schools,’ LCPS lobbyist Charlie Jackson told lawmakers on January 31 in a committee hearing. ‘We think if schools have to notify the community about suspected overdoses, law enforcement should too.’

Superintendent Spence has told at least one lawmaker he wouldn’t support the introduced overdose notification bill unless law enforcement also had to notify the community whenever there is an overdose anywhere in the community, according to sources.

And sources tell 7News that Spence did not tell the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office and all members of the Loudoun County School Board that he was personally lobbying lawmakers and working against the introduced versions of the student overdose notification legislation.”

Again, this is a misrepresentation of the truth. In addition, Dr. Spence never told anyone that he wouldn’t support the bill in its original version. Once again, I brought the inaccuracies to the attention of Mr. Minock and the WJLA News Director, Cheryl Carson, when I wrote to them on March 7, 2024:

Good afternoon,

Once again I find myself having to point out inaccuracies in your stories about LCPS. In your story about the overdose notification bill you make several statements that factually not true and you have clearly printed only part of what you were provided in order to slant reality.

Your statement about Dr. Spence telling at least one lawmaker he wouldn’t support the bill is completely inaccurate. Dr. Spence has not told anyone he would not support the bill unless changes were made. He has advocated for expanding the bill to provide more information to the community on a serious topic. And at no time has Dr. Spence lobbied against the bill. Your statements, attributed to unnamed “sources” are completely erroneous.

In this paragraph you refer to notification by law enforcement, even though in the SAME email string I wrote:

“For clarity, LCPS is not advocating for a requirement that law enforcement be responsible to notify, but that someone should notify the community for non-school connected suspected overdoses.”

As of this filing I have not received any communication back from Ms. Carson.

On April 19, 2024, Mr. Minock and WJLA posted the following story:

[Virginia House Democrats reject 24-hour school overdose notification mandate](#)

In the article, Mr. Minock writes, “As 7News previously reported, the Virginia Education Association, the Virginia Association of School Superintendents, the Virginia School Boards Association, and Loudoun County Public Schools testified against the overdose notification legislation this session.” Again, this is inaccurate as LCPS did not lobby against the bill but rather suggested improvements to strengthen reporting around the county.

Further attempts to communicate with the News Director have gone unanswered.

Incident #4 - High School Canine Scans

On March 25, 2024, WJLA reporter Nick Minock filed the following story:

[LCPS restricts where Loudoun County Sheriff's canines ...](#)

In the article, Mr. Minock states, "7News is learning the sheriff's office is limited to where it can search...The sheriff's office told 7News Loudoun County Public Schools have permitted canines to search school common areas, corridors, and bathrooms, but LCPS has not permitted the canine to search backpacks, students, areas outside the school, and vehicles on the school grounds."

This is disinformation. LCPS and the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) met multiple times to formulate the operational plan for canine scans of LCPS high schools. It was a mutual decision by both parties that police canines would not be used to scan students. In addition, LCSO staff advised LCPS staff that with a limited number of canines available, it would not be feasible to scan vehicles and outside areas.

After the story was posted, LCPS Chief Communications and Community Engagement Officer, Natalie Allen, emailed LCSO Director of Media Relations and Communications, Tom Julia, about the article. Ms. Allen asked Mr. Julia about addressing the inaccuracy in the article (see attached message in its entirety).

On April 2, 2024, Mr. Julia advised Ms. Allen that he had spoken to Mr. Minock and WJLA would not be changing its story. "I explained that while it is correct that the scans do not include students and classrooms, this scope was purposeful and by mutual agreement of the three participating agencies."

Despite this corrective statement to the reporter, WJLA has stayed with its disinformation narrative to slant the story so it sounds as if LCPS is obstructing the LCSO in its search for opioids at LCPS high schools. This is not only journalistically unethical but also a dangerous distortion of the facts as LCPS and LCSO continue to work diligently with the community and its partners to address the opioid epidemic in Loudoun County.

Incident #5 - Professional Development Schedule

This spring the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) advised school divisions that new professional development standards for educators would result in a minimum of 36 hours of additional professional development requirements to be completed by the end of the 2024-2025 school year. This development required LCPS to devise an updated school calendar in order to accommodate the additional training hours.

On May 14, 2024, Dr. Spence and his staff presented the Loudoun County School Board members with a schedule change option for 16 instructional days throughout the year where teachers would arrive at their normal time and conduct their training while students arrived two hours late. The presentation can be seen here on the [LCPS website](#). During the presentation, Chief Communications Officer Natalie Allen advised the School Board, "I wanted to mention too that we will have a let's talk form open for families to give us extra feedback as part of the webpage that goes up tomorrow and as part of the communication that goes out tomorrow. So to that point, we're not gonna have a survey with multiple options and that kind of thing, but we do want to hear from families about anything we might not be thinking about or any struggles that they need to have addressed so that we can then address them."

In addition to the public announcement at the school board meeting, Dr. Spence sent the following communication to all LCPS families:

Dear LCPS Families and Staff,

At the May 14, 2024 School Board meeting, the Board heard information on the potential impact of the announced Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) changes and new initiatives for the 2024-2025 school year. These additional initiatives will require more professional development (PD) or training time for teachers. Given the importance and volume of the VDOE changes and new initiatives, LCPS is looking at ways to provide sufficient time for educators to learn, process and plan so that they can best serve the students of LCPS. LCPS must examine how best to support our staff in PD since these VDOE changes will significantly impact teacher planning and professional learning. Currently, teachers and educational staff have three days of training, or PD, that they take part in each year. The increased training requirements will ultimately benefit both teachers and students by enhancing teaching practices, ensuring alignment to state standards and creating a more conducive learning environment; however, finding the time for this additional, necessary PD is challenging.

On Tuesday night, May 14, 2024, the School Board heard the staff's recommendation to institute adjusted arrival times creating 16 two-hour adjusted arrival days across the school year to be utilized as PD time for instructional staff. On these days, students would be scheduled to arrive two hours later than their regular schedules.

We understand the inconvenience this proposed schedule shift may cause for families, and we don't take that lightly. That said, implementing strategies that will maximize student success remains our priority. Every effort will be made to assess impacts and offer solutions where possible. LCPS is engaging with our nearby childcare providers, both public and private, to assess both the need and feasibility of additional early childcare options.

The item is scheduled for School Board action at the School Board meeting on May 28, 2024. Once the school board votes on an updated calendar, all versions of the calendars for students and schools, and staff calendars will be updated and posted. In addition, parents will receive a text and email when the new calendars are available. Reminders about adjusted arrival times and cadence will be included in newsletters. The proposed changes do not alter the first and last days of school.

To learn more about the VDOE initiatives and changes driving this schedule recommendation, read the Frequently Asked Questions posted on the website.

We recognize that this potential update to next year's schedule is unusual and may in some ways be a hardship. We are doing this with the goal of implementing the new initiatives from the VDOE as quickly as possible to benefit our students while minimizing disruption.

LCPS staff will gather **feedback through this form** to share with the School Board and administration for consideration. Thank you for providing valuable feedback.

In partnership and appreciation,

Aaron C. Spence, Ed.D.
Superintendent

The highlighted portion of the letter included a link to an online feedback form that parents could use to provide their thoughts. LCPS received over 2000 messages from its families on this matter. Despite the numerous statements advising we were seeking feedback, on May 16, 2024, Mr. Minock posted the following message on X:



Mr. Minock states in the post, “On Tuesday, administrators rolled out the plan with a school board vote planned on May 28th and no plans to seek public input.” That same evening I sent the following message to the News Director, Cheryl Carson:

Good evening,

Please find attached information regarding another false social media post from Mr. Minock. Earlier today he posted on X that LCPS was proposing a change to school schedules to provide professional development without any feedback from the community.

In reality you will find attached the letter from Dr. Spence that went to all LCPS families yesterday seeking input. I look forward to your correction.

As of the date of this filing, I have not received any communication from either Mr. Minock or Ms. Carson. In addition, despite my correction, WJLA posted the following story the next day:

[Loudoun Co. parents raise concerns about 10 a.m. school start time due to teacher training](#)

In the article Mr. Minock writes, “On Tuesday, administrators told the school board what the next steps were with implementing the delayed start times. However, gathering public input on the delayed start times isn’t part of the administrator’s plan.”

Not only had I already sent a correction about this statement the day before, but in the article, Mr. Minock also writes, “In an email to parents, Loudoun County Public Schools Superintendent Aaron Spence said the school board will vote on the delayed start on May 28.” He also provides a copy of the entire email Dr. Spence sent to families. Both of these point to the fact that Mr. Minock must have seen Dr. Spence’s statement in the email saying the school division was looking for feedback.

On May 24, 2024, Dr. Spence sent the following message to LCPS families:

Dear LCPS Families,

Thank you for your continued engagement and valuable feedback regarding our proposed calendar adjustments for the 2024-2025 school year. We have carefully reviewed the more than 2,000 responses we received through our feedback form, and as we shared previously, it is clear that the adjusted arrival times are not the ideal solution for most families.

In response to your feedback, we are now exploring an alternative approach. This approach was suggested by many of you. We are considering revising the calendar to include four new professional development (PD) days for our teachers instead of implementing adjusted arrival times. These “stand-alone” days fall in between weekends and holidays and are considered easier for families to adjust to according to the community feedback we received. The proposed PD days would be:

- *October 4, 2024*
- *November 4, 2024*
- *January 28, 2025*
- *June 16, 2025*

This new plan aims to provide the necessary PD time for our teachers to meet the new Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) requirements while minimizing disruption to students and families. This is a one-time solution because of extenuating, unanticipated circumstances and would not occur year over year.

We plan to present this revised option to the School Board at the meeting on May 28, 2024. Your input has been crucial in shaping this proposal, and we believe this approach will better balance the need for teacher development with the practical needs of our community.

We will keep you updated on the outcome of the School Board meeting and any further changes to the calendar. Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership as we work to provide the best educational experience for our students.

Sincerely,

*Aaron C. Spence, Ed.D.
Superintendent*

As you can see by the message, Dr. Spence thanks the community for the engagement that we requested in the previous messages. Over 2000 community members provided valuable feedback to the school division in response to our efforts that WJLA said did not exist.

Incident #6 - Superintendent Travel & Development

Since April 1, 2024, Mr. Minock has filed eight Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests regarding Dr. Spence's travel and professional development. On May 28, 2024, Mr. Minock and WJLA posted the following story:

[Loudoun Co. Superintendent under scrutiny for extensive travel amid school overdose crisis](#)

To begin with, the headline is completely misleading. Other than Mr. Minock's FOIA requests and subsequent story, there has not been any "scrutiny" regarding Dr. Spence's travel or attendance at professional development conferences. In addition, it is completely disingenuous to characterize Dr. Spence's travel for professional development "amid school overdose crisis."

The article starts with saying that Dr. Spence has "missed a month of school." This is not accurate. Dr. Spence has been out of the office for 19.5 days for professional development as defined and allowed under his contract. And even during those days Dr. Spence was in contact with the division's staff.

In the fourth paragraph, the article states, "7News found pictures on social media of Spence in Miami, including a picture of Spence at the Black Bird Ordinary dance and nightclub on a Monday." In my correction email to the News Director, Cheryl Carson, I asked what other pictures there were. The implication is that WJLA has more than just the one they linked to in the article. Dr. Spence attended one after hours event; it is also important to note that this event took place after the work day.

The article also states, "Spence was paid to be on a panel in San Diego for a discussion on "reclaiming the narrative." The conference paid him \$15,000 for two teaching sessions, according to emails obtained by 7News in a public records request." This is also incorrect. Dr. Spence was not paid to attend the conference or participate in the panel discussion. Dr. Spence was paid \$7500 to teach during a three-day session of the National Superintendent's Certification Program for the School Superintendents Association (AASA). This took place before the conference and was a separate event and not related. Dr. Spence is a nationally recognized leader and has been teaching for AASA since 2018.

This article, in more than one place, mischaracterizes these conferences as parties and getaways instead of the opportunities for professional development and networking that they were. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) lists professionalism as one of the evaluation factors for a superintendent. Please see the standard outlined below:

Performance Standard 7: Professionalism

The superintendent fosters the success of teachers, staff, and students by demonstrating behavior consistent with legal, ethical, and professional standards, engaging in continuous professional development, and contributing to the profession.

Sample Performance Indicators

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

The superintendent:

- 7.1 Models professional, moral, and ethical standards as well as personal integrity in all interactions.
- 7.2 Works in a collegial and collaborative manner with stakeholders to promote and support the mission, vision, and goals of the school division.
- 7.3 Respects and maintains confidentiality and assumes responsibility for personal actions and responds appropriately to the actions of others.
- 7.4 Takes responsibility for and participates in a meaningful and continuous process of professional development that results in the enhancement of student learning.
- 7.5 Provides service to the profession, the division, and the community by participating on state and/or national committees, being active in professional and community-based service organizations, and serving as a mentor.
- 7.6 Takes a leadership role and encourages staff to do so as well, by presenting workshops at local, state, regional, or national conferences, authoring publications, or delivering coursework for institutions of higher education.
- 7.7 Maintains a high level of personal knowledge regarding new developments and techniques and shares the information with appropriate staff.
- 7.8 Actively seeks and engages in opportunities to network, share knowledge, and stay abreast of the latest research to promote individual and organizational knowledge, skills, and success.

The article also continues to provide the inaccurate reporting that Dr. Spence did not notify LCPS families of school-related overdoses in a timely manner. Despite all of the information we have provided to WJLA to the contrary, their outlet continues to recite this narrative of disinformation. Additionally, WJLA isn't even consistent in this reporting.

Christian Flores, A WJLA reporter, wrote an article on May 30, 2024:

[Loudoun County leaders hold event to educate community about fentanyl, opioid use](#)

The article refers to nine student overdoses from Park View High School students. It appears that the only thing consistent in WJLA's reporting on this issue is getting the facts wrong.

On the same day Mr. Minock had another story:

[2 Loudoun Co. School Board members want to review superintendent's contract after travel](#)

He continues the same false narrative and also cites a specific Virginia statute by saying, "Did the Loudoun County School Board approve Superintendent Spence's other business or

employment? According to Virginia statute “ 22.1-66. Vacancy in office. The office of any division superintendent, whether full-time or part-time, shall be deemed vacant upon his engaging in any other business or employment during his term of office as such superintendent unless such superintendent was granted prior approval by the school board or school boards appointing him, or upon his resignation or his removal from office.”

The question was posed to a School Board member and was reproduced in the article. The question in and of itself is inappropriate, as it is clearly designed to show that the Superintendent is doing something not allowed by law. Even though Mr. Minock had already cited in the article that Dr. Spence’s travel was approved by the School Board Chair. In addition, Dr. Spence’s contract specifically addresses this statute:

“Approval of the School Board Chair or designee shall be considered School Board approval for the purposes of this section in compliance with section 22.1-66 of the Code of Virginia.” Again the question is completely inappropriate, and because Dr. Spence was out of the office for a total of 19.5 days, the question is moot.

On May 31, 2024, I wrote the following to WJLA News Director Cheryl Carson:

Ms. Carson,

Mr. Minock’s recent article, [Loudoun Co. Superintendent under scrutiny for extensive travel amid school overdose crisis](#), contains numerous inaccuracies and disinformation that must be addressed. The article states that Dr. Spence has “missed a month of the school year.” First, Dr. Spence has not “missed” any days as he has always been in contact with the staff during the time of professional development. In addition, he has only used a total of 19.5 days for professional development over the last roughly 220 days. Some days of conferences or travel were partial days and he was also on campus.

In the fourth paragraph, the article states, “7News found pictures on social media of Spence in Miami, including a picture of Spence at the Black Bird Ordinary dance and nightclub on a Monday.” What other pictures are there? The implication is you have more than just the one you linked to. What additional pictures are there? I’m quite confident there are none, so why would it be suggested there were multiple when you only have one? It is also important to note that this event took place after the work day.

The article also states, “Spence was paid to be on a panel in San Diego for a discussion on “reclaiming the narrative.” The conference paid him \$15,000 for two teaching sessions, according to emails obtained by 7News in a public records request.” This is also incorrect. Dr. Spence was not paid to attend the conference or participate in the panel discussion. Dr. Spence was paid \$7500 to teach during a three-day session of the National Superintendent’s Certification Program for the School Superintendents Association (AASA). This took place before the conference and was a separate event and not related. Dr. Spence is a nationally recognized leader and has been teaching for AASA since 2018.

This article, in more than one place, mischaracterizes these conferences as parties and getaways instead of the opportunities for professional development and networking that they were. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) lists professionalism as one of the evaluation factors for a superintendent. Please see the standard outlined below:

<p><i>Performance Standard 7: Professionalism</i></p> <p><i>The superintendent fosters the success of teachers, staff, and students by demonstrating behavior consistent with legal, ethical, and professional standards, engaging in continuous professional development, and contributing to the profession.</i></p>
<p>Sample Performance Indicators</p> <p><i>Examples may include, but are not limited to:</i></p> <p>The superintendent:</p> <p><i>7.1 Models professional, moral, and ethical standards as well as personal integrity in all interactions.</i></p> <p><i>7.2 Works in a collegial and collaborative manner with stakeholders to promote and support the mission, vision, and goals of the school division.</i></p> <p><i>7.3 Respects and maintains confidentiality and assumes responsibility for personal actions and responds appropriately to the actions of others.</i></p> <p><i>7.4 Takes responsibility for and participates in a meaningful and continuous process of professional development that results in the enhancement of student learning.</i></p> <p><i>7.5 Provides service to the profession, the division, and the community by participating on state and/or national committees, being active in professional and community-based service organizations, and serving as a mentor.</i></p> <p><i>7.6 Takes a leadership role and encourages staff to do so as well, by presenting workshops at local, state, regional, or national conferences, authoring publications, or delivering coursework for institutions of higher education.</i></p> <p><i>7.7 Maintains a high level of personal knowledge regarding new developments and techniques and shares the information with appropriate staff.</i></p>
<p><i>7.8 Actively seeks and engages in opportunities to network, share knowledge, and stay abreast of the latest research to promote individual and organizational knowledge, skills, and success.</i></p>

The article also continues to provide the inaccurate reporting that Dr. Spence did not notify LCPS families of school-related overdoses in a timely manner. Despite all of the information we have provided to the contrary, your outlet continues to recite this narrative of

disinformation. Additionally, your outlet isn't even consistent in this reporting. [Christian Flores' article](#) from last night refers to nine student overdoses from Park View High School students. It appears that the only thing consistent in WJLA's reporting on this issue is getting the facts wrong.

Finally, I have to inquire about the title of the article. Is Dr. Spence really "under scrutiny" if the only people making an issue out of him doing what he was hired to do and allowed by his contract is your outlet?

On the same day Mr. Minock posted the following to X, formerly Twitter:



Nick Minock @NickMinock

New: This week @7NewsDC reported that Loudoun County Superintendent Aaron Spence traveled to conferences during the Park View High School overdose crisis. LCPS and Spence delayed notification of the overdoses to the school community.

Here is the timeline:

- 9/12/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD
- 10/6/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD
- 10/12/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD
- 10/17/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD
- 10/17/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD
- 10/19/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD
- 10/23/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD
- 10/24/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD
- 10/25/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD
- 10/27/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD

10/27/23–School Board Member Brenda Sheridan wishes Superintendent Aaron Spence "Safe Travels!"

10/29–31/23–Spence attends a conference in Richmond

10/31/23–Sheriff Mike Chapman emailed Superintendent Spence expressing his concerns to Dr. Spence about the fentanyl crisis. "Not providing this information is a disservice," Chapman wrote to Spence. "This [email] was issued by [Park View High School Principal] Dr. Jefferson this morning at 8:30, not Friday or Monday, but this morning. Very vague, evasive and boilerplate. There is nothing that specifically addresses the crisis you and I discussed last week and a short time ago regarding Parkview HS. I believe parents, students and residents of Sterling need to know what is actually occurring."

10/31/23–Sheriff Chapman issues a public statement about how many Park View High School students overdosed.

11/1/23–Spence returns from a conference.

11/1/23–Park View High School Student Fentanyl OD

11/1/23–Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin signs an executive order requiring schools to notify parents within 24 hours of school-connected overdoses due to LCPS not notifying parents of the string of overdoses.

11/2–3/23–Spence travels to Consortium Conference in West Palm Beach.

11/4/23–LCSO/LCPS Fentanyl Forum at Park View High School. Community members told me Spence did not attend. Was Spence in West Palm Beach?

Story: wjla.com/news/local/lou...

4:32 PM · May 31, 2024 · 3,881 Views

Just as the story, the social media post is inaccurate. The information in the timeline of Park View overdoses is not correct. It is clear that the intent of the article and social media post are to paint a narrative that Dr. Spence is not addressing the opioid crisis and spends an

exorbitant amount of time at conferences. This is just plain false. Dr. Spence is a nationally recognized leader in education leadership and LCPS has greatly benefited from his contacts, experience and reputation.

On June 3, 2024, WJLA News Director Cheryl Carson responded to my email with the following:

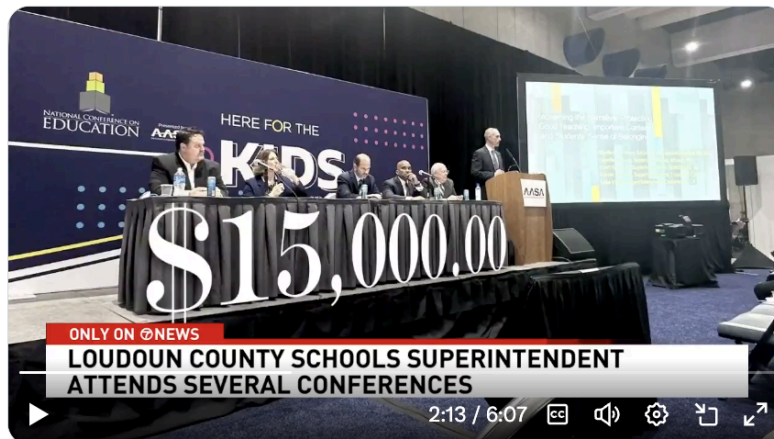
We are happy to review your notes below and would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you or preferably Dr. Spence. We have emailed your office and Dr. Spence requesting an interview to get your perspective and never hear back. Please let Dr. Spence know that our request for an interview stands.

Just as with the other rare occasions when someone from WJLA responds to our requests for corrections, this message prioritizes the desire for an interview with the Superintendent, and does not address the issue of misinformation or disinformation. This further supports the notion that it is WJLA's strategy to print misleading stories that fit their narrative, while at the same time forcing LCPS into contacting them about corrections and forcing the school division to arrange an interview with Dr. Spence. Despite our corrections, the following social media post, which includes the inaccurate graphic of \$15,000, is still active as of this filing:

New: Why was Loudoun County Superintendent Aaron Spence traveling to conferences when Park View High School students were overdosing?

Why was Spence traveling to Miami, Puerto Rico, West Palm Beach, and San Diego? Here's my full report as seen on [@7NewsDC](#)

Story: wjla.com/news/local/lou...



6:56 PM · May 28, 2024 · 14.9K Views

Additionally, Mr Minock posted the following picture on this X feed on May 28, 2024. The pictures on each end clearly show Dr. Spence in a suit attending and participating in a conference. However, Mr. Minock includes the picture situated in the middle as well. However, Dr. Spence is not in that picture and did not attend that event. And again, despite

the corrections we have sent to WJLA, the reporter and the News Director, no updates have been made and the post is still active as of this filing.

Loudoun Parent Coalition reposted



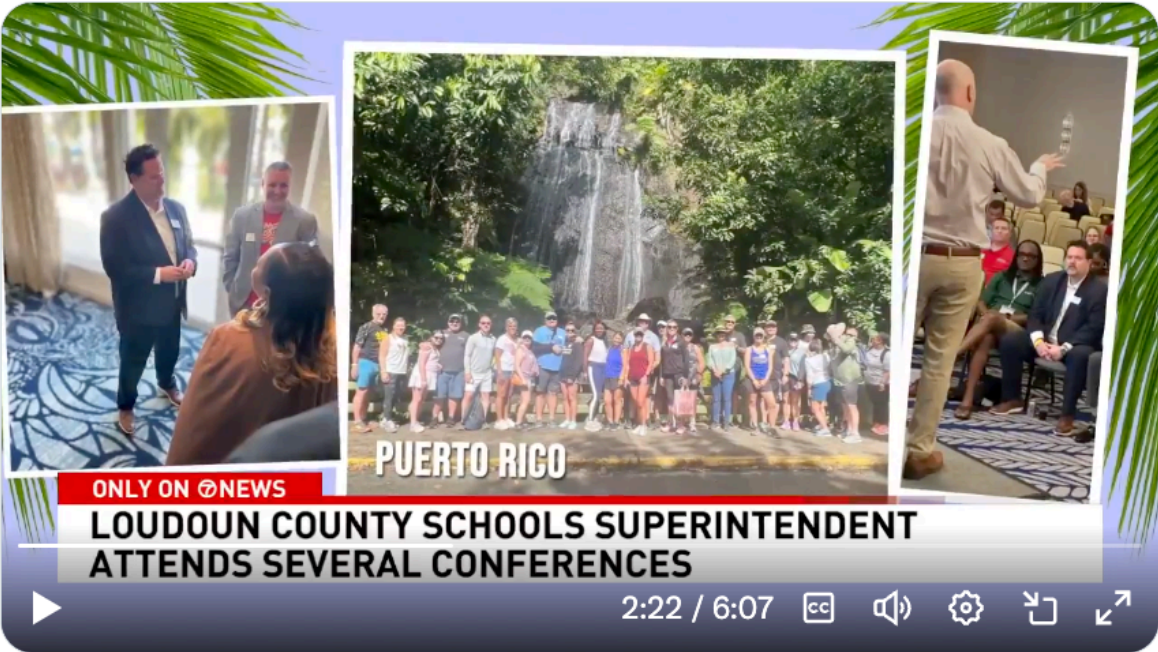
Nick Minock ✓
@NickMinock



New: Why was Loudoun County Superintendent Aaron Spence traveling to conferences when Park View High School students were overdosing?

Why was Spence traveling to Miami, Puerto Rico, West Palm Beach, and San Diego? Here's my full report as seen on [@7NewsDC](#)

Story: wjla.com/news/local/lou...



6:56 PM · May 28, 2024 · 14.9K Views

22 89 170 17 ↑

Crisis in the Classroom

According to the [Crisis in the Classroom website](#), the segment is “the brand name for Sinclair Broadcast Group’s national K-12 education franchise. Airing on 73 local news stations across the country, Crisis in the Classroom is focused on covering issues most important to American parents. Our social media platforms and website act as aggregators for the content produced by our local stations and national bureau. Crisis in the Classroom is not a non-profit organization.”

The content of reporting from *Crisis in the Classroom* and its [staff](#) has been the focus of everything from [news articles](#) to [research studies](#) in academia. Most pertinent to our complaint is the description that *Crisis in the Classroom* is “not a non-profit organization,” as stated above. If financial gain is the goal of the segment and not fair and objective reporting, how can the community be expected to know that aired stories are not slanted to fit a certain narrative.

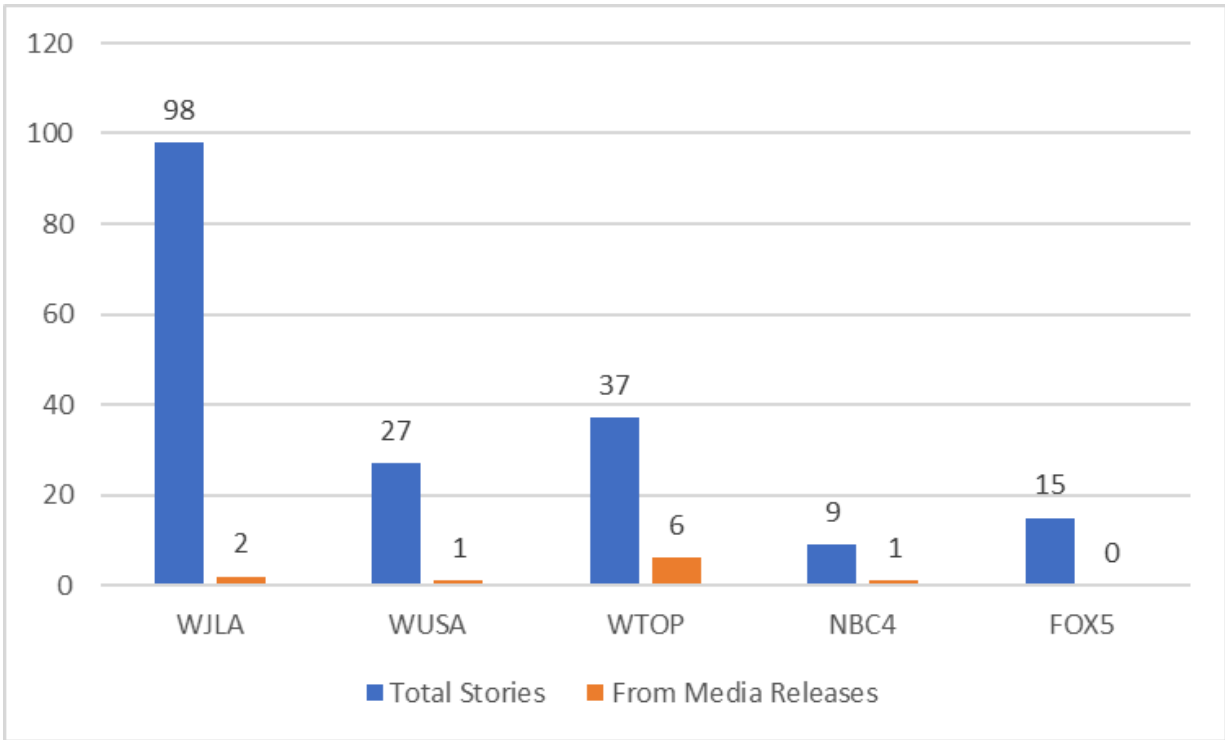
In the 7th edition of *Media Ethics*, the authors write, “Democratic theory gives the press a crucial role...Informed public opinion is typically believed to be a weapon of enormous power—indeed, the cornerstone of legislative government.” Therein lies an unspoken contract between the media and the community that the media will deliver accurate, timely and relevant information to its customers.

A recent communications audit of Loudoun County Public Schools revealed that 39% of those surveyed rely on local news and media to provide information about the school division on a daily basis. The Communications and Community Engagement staff at LCPS rely on the media to report fairly and professionally to our community and share all news with our students, staff and families.

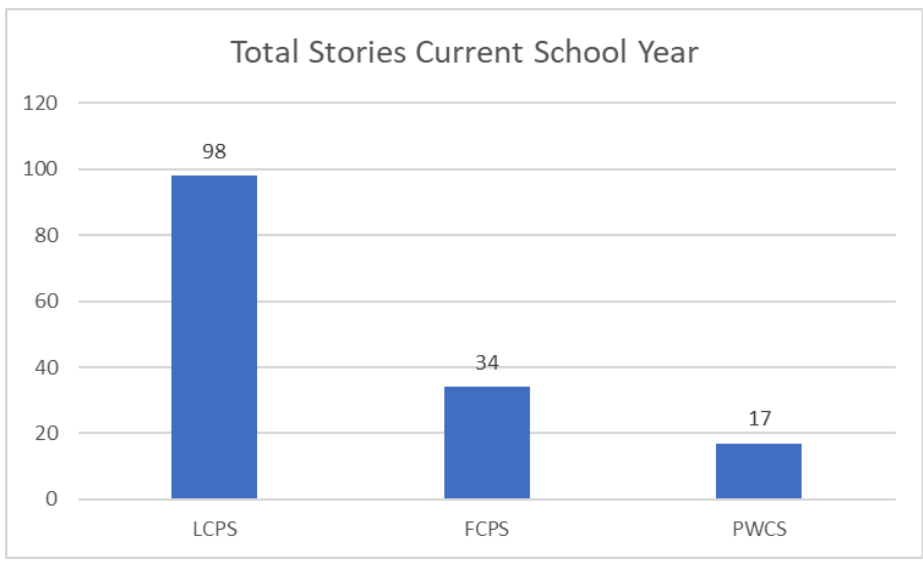
The name *Crisis in the Classroom* clearly communicates that the stories are going to be negative in nature. Given that WJLA is a significant source of news in Northern Virginia, it was our expectation that the outlet would at least share other stories outside of *Crisis in the Classroom*, possibly even some of the good news stories we regularly share with our local media partners.

The previously mentioned communications audit also showed, “Without exception, participants in every focus group expressed a longing for ‘good news’ stories. Their desire for an increase in positive stories went beyond district communication tools to include school-level tools and the public news media.”

A review of 75 positive news story media releases distributed by LCPS to the five local television media outlets showed that WJLA wrote stories on two of them. It appears that over the past year, WJLA has accounted for about 260 mentions of LCPS in broadcasting and social media. This clearly demonstrates WJLA’s intention to slant sentiment about LCPS to the negative. This is further demonstrated in the following chart, which shows the five outlets and the total number of stories that they aired about LCPS and the number of stories that they aired that corresponded to a positive story media release LCPS distributed.



The chart further illustrates WJLA's disproportionate focus on LCPS, showing that they have aired more stories than the other four TV outlets combined. As further proof, WJLA has written 98 stories about LCPS compared to comparable sized Fairfax County Public Schools and Prince William County Public Schools. These stories are from the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year to 6/1/2024.



Summary

The six examples listed here are only some of the stories and social media posts that are slanted and misleading toward LCPS. WJLA and its reporters have clearly demonstrated a systemic misrepresentation of our school division and have attempted to create certain narratives. It is clear from these examples that the station and its staff are trying to paint LCPS as a division that does not care about students and families. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Just as disappointing is the lack of response and action from the station's leadership. Repeated concerns and requests for corrections have gone unanswered from not only the reporters, but the News Director as well. LCPS is forced to ask itself, "what recourse remains?" WJLA has demonstrated through its actions and failure to communicate that their behavior will continue unabated without some kind of external action. LCPS understands the scrutiny that the education system is under and we respect the role a free and just press plays in our society. But it's our position that WJLA has acted outside the bounds of ethical and professional journalism.

A recent study by the [Pew Research Center](#) found that the share of U.S. adults who say they are paying close attention to local news has dropped since their last major survey of attitudes toward local news in 2018, mirroring declining attention to national news. The same study also stated that most Americans say local journalists should remain neutral on issues in their community.

According to the FCC website, "Broadcasters may not intentionally distort the news. The FCC states that 'rigging or slanting the news is a most heinous act against the public interest.'" LCPS wholeheartedly agrees with this position and is concerned that the behavior demonstrated by WJLA and its staff in this document more than demonstrates that danger to our community.

Loudoun County Public Schools has been the topic of local and national headlines for quite some time now, well before the pandemic. The division leadership and communications staff readily accept this reality and work everyday to communicate effectively with all stakeholders, regardless of the news. So please understand that this complaint is not filed with the intent of painting a picture of LCPS being unfairly scrutinized. But rather that WJLA's reporting on LCPS has been dishonest and distorted in a way that injures the public interest.

We feel that we have sufficiently demonstrated WJLA's repeated efforts to distort and misrepresent the truth to the people of Loudoun County. We appreciate the staff of the FCC reviewing our material and hope that after a thorough examination, you will agree with our assessment and take appropriate action to dissuade future unethical behavior from WJLA and its staff.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel L. Adams
Public Information Officer
Loudoun County Public Schools