Nationwide, every product recall, financial crime, or industrial accident triggers the same questions: How long have these problems been going on? Didn’t anyone see what was happening? Why didn’t someone say something?

Those are appropriate questions that put everyone in an organization under scrutiny. Didn’t anyone know what was going on — and if someone knew, why didn’t they say something? According to the 2018 Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) Report to the Nations, approximately 40% of occupational fraud is uncovered through tips reported by employees who witnessed fraudulent activity. These reports give employers the front-line insight they need to change processes and policies that allow unethical actions to occur. Perhaps most important, employees’ reports of misconduct demonstrate the strength of an organization’s culture. The ACFE states that employees of organizations with strong ethical cultures are much more likely to report suspected misconduct (Source: www.acfe.com).

WHO IS A WHISTLEBLOWER?
A whistleblower is a person who publicly denounces illegal or wasteful practices. The term comes from the expression; to “blow the whistle” and refers to a sports official who calls a foul during the game. When fraudulent activity occurs, calling foul as soon as possible can save our district thousands in monetary loss, maintains a good reputation, and builds public trust.

The outcome of whistleblowing depends on how the foul is called. Correctly handled, a whistleblower’s report allows district leadership and administration to correct issues before they turn into big problems. Therefore, the Board of Education encourages and requires all employees to report all potential fraudulent activity and unethical practices, when in good faith belief. Parents, volunteers, contractors, and concerned citizens are also encouraged to report potential fraudulent activity.

SMART WHISTLEBLOWING
To assist the Office of Inspector General (OIG) with its investigation to result in necessary changes, consider these guidelines for reporting:

- Be sure your allegations are true and can be proven. As far as possible, your report should be based on documented evidence, which might include a record of the misdeeds.
- Consider what can be done to improve or correct the situation. The OIG will work with you to determine what level of authority needs to be involved to implement the corrective changes.
- Focus on the problem being reported. Don’t muddy the waters by making broad generalizations or by bringing up past issues that are not relevant.
- The OIG’s responsibility is only limited to reports of fraudulent activity; and does not extend to other matters that are solely administrative in nature.

REPORTING LEADS TO POSITIVE CHANGE
- Reports can be anonymous. However, we prefer that complaints identify the person submitting them; to enable us to follow up with the individual in case of further questions. For individuals that do provide their name, confidentiality is respected; as far as a careful and professional investigation allows.
- All good faith reports are taken seriously and investigated fully.
- During an investigation, we involve only those who must be involved. Steps are taken to preserve confidentiality of any witnesses contacted in the investigation process.
- The OIG will conduct a thorough and objective investigation. We do not “take sides” on an issue.

THE DISTRICT’S COMMITMENT
The District shall provide protections to complainants of potential fraudulent activity who, as result of reporting violations to the OIG, may be subject to retaliation by their supervisors. Because they often raise difficult issues, whistleblowers are sometimes labeled as troublemakers or tattletales. Our district understands that silencing whistleblowers - “shooting the messenger”- solves nothing in the long run. Beyond the problems it can inflict on our district’s culture and public image, ignoring or retaliating against whistleblowers violates the law. The district encourages anyone with credible information regarding potential or suspected fraudulent activity to contact the OIG through our internal reporting channels.

A DECISION NOT TO REPORT
Why don’t all employees report misconduct when they see it? Some employees don’t want to get involved; while others think the misconduct they observe is known and accepted by the district. The most disturbing reason for not reporting misconduct is fear of retaliation. Too often, that fear is fueled by what employees see when someone reports misconduct. Some have reported that they were excluded from decisions or work activities, given the cold shoulder by other employees, mistreated or verbally abused by a supervisor, or even dismissed.

Any type of retaliation is unacceptable. Fortunately, there is also evidence that retaliation drops dramatically in organizations with strong ethical cultures and zero tolerance for retaliation that is emphasized by leadership.

“One word of truth outweighs the whole world.” - Alexander Solzhenitsyn
(Russian novelist, dramatist, historian)

AGAINST OUR POLICIES – AND AGAINST THE LAW
Retaliation toward a reporter of misconduct is damaging to everyone – to the employee who reported the misconduct, to colleagues who
What You Need To Know

witness the retaliation and refuse to report misconduct, and to our district as a whole. Nobody is better equipped to identify small issues before they escalate into serious problems; Nobody has more knowledge about processes with critical gaps, procedures that are easily sidestepped, or situations that encourage misconduct than the employees that witness those flaws. Without their reports, our district has no opportunity to become aware of, as well as address the problems, and stop the damage.

Retaliation not only violates our policies and culture; it is against the law. The Michigan Whistleblowers’ Protection Act (469 P.A. 1980) provides standards for protections of whistleblowers. Our own district’s Whistleblower Protection policy (Board Policy 1244) places significant emphasis on the responsibility and right of individuals to report misconduct. The OIG maintains a robust process for investigating and addressing any reported fraudulent activities, and our district has a zero-tolerance for any retaliation against any individual.

Q&A

Q. A report was made against my co-worker that I’m sure is not true. What should I do?
A. Immediately contact the OIG to state any information that you may know about the situation that was reported. We will factor your new information into the ongoing investigation. Be aware that; employees are subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination, for knowingly making a false report that may harm the reputation of another employee or the district’s. Similarly, employees may also be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination, if they fail to report any potential fraudulent activity and violations of Federal, State, or local laws involving or relating to the business of the District.

Q. I have observed an issue that I believe violates our district’s policies. How can I decide whether to report the issue?
A. You must report any fraudulent or unethical activity that violates our district’s policies or the law, as soon as you become aware of it. The OIG takes every report seriously and will fully investigate the issue. If you are not sure, or if you need clarification or help, we welcome your questions.

Q. I reported something and now I’m sure my supervisor is singling me out. What do I do?
A. Immediately contact the OIG. Our district has a zero-tolerance for any type of retaliatory behavior and will provide protections to complainants of potential fraudulent activity, who, as result of reporting violations to the OIG may be subject to retaliation by their supervisors.

Detroit Public Schools Community District
Office of Inspector General
Main Office phone: 313-870-5664
Call the Fraud Hotline: 313-870-3436