



March 5, 2017

Hon. Bill de Blasio
New York City Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Carmen Farina
NYC Schools Chancellor
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Elaine Lindsey
Superintendent
30-48 Linden Place, Room 405
Flushing, NY 11354

Dear Mayor De Blasio, Chancellor Farina, and Superintendent Lindsey,

We are aware that at the School's District 26 Leadership meeting on Friday, a representative from the Superintendent's office provided a report about the current situation at Townsend Harris High School regarding the controversies surrounding Interim Acting Principal Rosemarie Jahoda. The representative was Frances DeSanctis, Ms. Jahoda's mentor. In a letter to Chancellor Farina that we have obtained, two assembly members wrote the following about the DLT meeting: "While Ms. DeSanctis acknowledged community concern [over Ms. Jahoda], she did so while referencing the current environment in which 'fake news' is being widely circulated." The letter also states that Ms. DeSanctis "affirmed [her] opinion of Ms. Jahoda as a qualified candidate."

We will let the public decide whether or not Ms. Jahoda is qualified.

However, since our reporting has been the most prominent during this controversy, it is reasonable to conclude that Ms. DeSanctis, speaking on behalf of the Superintendent and the Department of Education, means to refer to *The Classic* as "fake news." We do take issue with this.

In this political climate, where the media is persecuted by the new president's administration, it has never been more important to uphold the principle of honesty in journalism. Moreover, this is part of a troubling pattern where Superintendent Lindsey sends out representatives who speak of and to students in a manner that many would find disparaging.

Politifact defines fake news as "made-up stuff, masterfully manipulated to look like credible journalistic reports." Fake news is not poorly sourced journalism: it is wholly fictitious.

Ms. DeSanctis is therefore not accusing us of being wrong; she is accusing us of purposefully making up lies and reporting them as news. If we were fabricating our material, we would be able to leave school far earlier than we do. However, our editors and staff remain in school for countless hours in order to confirm every detail of what we write, the kind of work the word "dedication" falls short to describe. Ms. DeSanctis herself has witnessed us waiting in Ms. Jahoda's office for over six hours in the course of three days seeking a comment.

To label our reporting as "fake" is to disparage all our hard work.

We have some questions on this:

[Was our very first live-stream](#), which depicted Deputy Superintendent Leticia Pineiro speaking to students in a manner the community labeled offensive, along with Ms. Jahoda standing silently by

her side, a distortion of the truth? Did we hire actors to portray Ms. Pineiro and Ms. Jahoda and direct them to act as they did in our video?

Are [audio recordings](#) of Ms. Jahoda's statements, in which she disdains the idea of spending time with students and uses particular language in response to suggestions by subordinates, fake? Are [audio recordings](#) of Ms. Jahoda's statements in which she calls the chapter leader of our school "useless," fake?

Are a [visually impaired star athlete and her mother](#), who shared their situation with us, liars? Were the [co-presidents of the Muslim Student Association](#) lying about their interactions with Ms. Jahoda, a story that they publicly shared on numerous occasions? [Was the Stuyvesant Spectator lying](#) in 2003 when they published an article regarding Ms. Jahoda's insensitivity to the Day of Silence for closeted gay teens?

If you believe that we are trying to misinform the public with our "fake news," then we find it surprising that our news has led to change within the community.

If our news is so "fake," then why did Ms. Jahoda suddenly return to observing classes following [an article we wrote comparing her lack of observations to those of our former principal](#)? If our reporting is "fake," then why is the [Office of Special Investigations](#) currently looking into the accusations alleged by Anna Schuchmann and Eva Hangartner?

It seems as if someone in the DOE is in fact listening to our "fake" news since our reporting yields results.

We can therefore only conclude that demeaning us as "fake news" is a tactic, the same ploy that President Trump uses to confuse the public and manipulate language to his benefit.

Consider the following:

The DOE has repeatedly told the public that they are engaging the Townsend Harris community regarding their concerns. The word "engage" in this case should include a sense of "getting involved" or "dealing with" the community by interacting with its members. Yet, [we have spoken to numerous members of the community](#) who have said that they have never been contacted by the DOE.

In a December PEP meeting held before reposting the principal position, Chancellor Fariña spoke generally of the hiring process and said that "even for schools like Townsend Harris" the DOE normally gets only "five, ten applications." However, only after Queens Borough President Melinda Katz demanded to know the number of applicants for the principal position in February did we learn that 38 individuals applied.

In an interview with Ms. Jahoda, we read to her a quotation she had said, yet she denied saying it. However, she later admitted to saying it when questioned in front of the student body.

Who exactly is misleading the public here? *The Classic* or the New York City Department of Education?

We have been given the honor of being in charge of one of the most respected newspapers in New York City schools. Yet, some members of our federal government would look at us and think that we would disparage the freedoms that make America great, considering we come from Muslim backgrounds. We

know all too well that there are few places where our story would be possible, and we think that our accomplishments as two female high school journalists who come from Muslim backgrounds are what really defines the essence of America. And yet, even in New York, we might never have had this experience because most schools aggressively censor student journalists. We have these freedoms not because of the DOE, but because Townsend Harris has famously protected our constitutional rights to freedom of the press for over thirty years.

We would hope that the DOE would encourage, rather than demean, all that we have done.

Superintendent Lindsey, Chancellor Fariña, and Mayor de Blasio, you all have been silent to our students, teachers, and parents throughout this ongoing controversy and it is clear that the DOE, through a person representing the Superintendent's office, is now willing to use President Trump's tactics to characterize members of *The Classic* as liars. Thus, we are calling on all three of you to meet with us and answer our questions without hiding behind bureaucratic "C-30 regulations" that you yourselves have control over. This entire ordeal has made us seriously question the process the DOE uses to determine principals and the perverseness with which it fights back at communities who dare question the secrecy involved. We have questions, and we want real answers.

You can contact us at thhsclassic@gmail.com. If there are any public officials, activists, or "real" journalists willing to circulate our message, we would greatly appreciate it.

Sincerely,



Sumaita Hasan
Editor-in-Chief, *The Classic*



Mehrose Ahmad
Managing Editor, *The Classic*