

Editorial note: While the format of this series is that of a faux court filing, the facts are nonetheless the facts. Much about New Mexico's flirtation with school reform over the last six years has not been closely monitored, particularly regarding the real beneficiaries of millions of dollars spent under the radar - the children of the state, or the contractors and insiders of a complex financing scheme used to benefit cheerleaders of a controversial movement and leader? It's time that former Education Secretary Hanna Skandera's Reform gets its day in the Court of Public Opinion. Judge for yourself.

THE PARTIES

(Part Three)

Golden Parachute: an arrangement between an institution and a high-level executive that provides weighty financial benefits to the executive upon leaving ... at New Mexico's Public Education Department it's a lucrative contract tucked away in an IGA.

70. In July of 2011, Hanna Skandera, Secretary-designate of the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED), promoted Julia Rosa Emslie to the newly created position of Director of Strategic Initiatives.

71. Rosa Emslie had previously served as PED's director of the Quality Assurance Bureau.

72. As reported by the Albuquerque Journal at the time, Rosa Emslie's new salary became \$75,000/year.

73. The promotion made her a key player and advocate of Skandera's controversial agenda. According to other PED employees, her primary qualification for the advancement was her willingness to ask, "How high?" when a boss asked her to jump.

74. And no matter how high she jumped, Rosa Emslie, and others like her, had no fear because her landing would be softened with a lucrative contract when she left her job.

75. Rosa Emslie worked closely with Matthew Montano, a key member of the senior staff, on the development and execution of Skandera's controversial initiatives related to school grading, educator evaluation, charter schools, Reads to Lead, Bilingual Education, and other PED ventures.

"Below the Line" School Funds.

"Below the Line" is a label commonly used to describe the money the legislature approves to be spent outside of the control of school districts and spent by PED and NOT the local school committees.

"Above the Line" refers to dollars distributed to public schools through a state's funding formula.

The distinction is particularly critical for two reasons:

1. As "Below the Line" spending is done by PED (in this case for initiatives which have proved controversial in the New Mexico educational community), the financial and programmatic oversight of PED's special projects has primarily fallen to the state legislature, whose members meet for a short time each year in session, and intermittently the rest of the year in interim committee, which realistically, limits the actual oversight of spending; and,

2. PED controls who participates in the development, review, and marketing of the initiatives it spends millions on – many times picking fights with education leaders in school districts who question the effectiveness and validity of PED's initiatives, and certainly banishing critics from participating in the cheerleading retreats Skandera's office has spent millions of public education dollars on since 2011.

76. Over six years, millions of dollars were spent “below the line” implementing these initiatives - “below the line” spending is the least monitored of public school spending (see sidebar).

77. Below the line spending was treated like a slush fund by PED, evidenced by the way Montano and Skandera ‘*pressed into service*’ the Region 9 Education Cooperative (REC 9) for its intergovernmental agreement (IGA) scheme described in an earlier part of this series (click here for link).

78. What became Rosa Emslie’s personal enrichment is evidence of the abusive use of school resources “below the line.”

79. Rosa Emslie worked at PED from April 2008, through April 2013. She held her position as director of strategic initiatives for approximately twenty-two months.

80. Then she seemed to fall off the radar, with some sources within PED suggesting Rosa Emslie may have left PED for reasons related to pregnancy and child rearing.

81. **The Candle** reached out to Rosa Emslie several times, seeking an interview for this report. We spoke with her once - she was in a meeting and asked us to call her back. She never responded to our follow-up calls, texts, and emails.

82. However, documents from REC 9, provide an interesting trail of payments to Rosa Emslie after she left PED - for work done on the programs she would have overseen as the director of strategic initiatives when she was a state employee - totaling more than \$270,000.00 in just one 21-month period.

83. **The Candle** picked up Rosa Emslie’s trail of post-PED-employee contracts in the Spring of 2014, when she signed a contract in May for \$15,000.00, for work she needed to complete within a month - by June 30, 2014, (hers was a derivative contract from IGA # 14-924-00016 and its many amendments, between PED and REC 9).

[NOTE: For the purpose of this article, when we refer to Rosa Emslie as the recipient of payment for PED derived work, we are referring to either her personally as Julia Rosa Emslie, and/or the company she signed contracts for, which operates as Julia Rosa Solutions, LLC, and which lists addresses on invoices of either Seattle, Washington, or Vista, California.]

84. Rosa Emslie followed that fiscal year-end contract with a new one signed for FY 15, for \$60,000.00.

85. While REC 9 did not send copies of checks for that period, making it difficult to verify if Rosa Emslie was paid the full amount under the FY 15 contract, **The Candle** did obtain copies of invoices and checks for the next two fiscal years, *billed by another player in the procurement scheme*, which contain charges made to REC 9, for other PED work performed by Rosa Emslie.

86. That other player, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), charged REC 9, for work performed by Rosa Emslie which was described in the invoices as “*External Public Relations and Product Development.*”

87. Rosa Emslie was working as yet another subcontractor for SREB (click here for link to previous story about SREB subcontractors NMSLI and Miles Consulting); and according to the SREB invoices to REC 9, she charged \$100/hour, and averaged compensation of about \$12,500/month, for an eighteen-month period from October 2015 through March 2017.

88. But that is not all that Rosa Emslie was making from PED derived work. Her company had another contract with REC 9, for a strategic initiative of PED for the Department’s Bilingual Multicultural Education Bureau (BMEB).

89. The BMEB contract was originally penned on August 2, 2016 (FY 17), and amended at least two times, for an amount not to exceed \$55,750.00.

90. From the copies of checks issued by REC 9, under the FY 17 BMEB contract, Rosa Emslie received at least \$49,000.00, for work from August through May. **The Candle** does not have a copy of an invoice for May 2017, nor of any check which may have been issued by

REC 9 for the last month of FY 17, so the amount paid to her company could be higher.

91. **The Candle** is not certain if Rosa Emslie billed only for her time for these contracts. It is plausible that she had employees working at her company.

92. However, as reported earlier, she refuses to provide **The Candle** any statement regarding her contracts. And the invoices reviewed make no reference of any other employees or contractors.

93. **The Candle** also examined REC 9 records of Rosa Emslie's travel expenses from Seattle and California to New Mexico. The travel receipts list Julia Emslie, or Julia Rosa Emslie, as the only party for whom travel is reimbursed by REC 9.

94. The compensation Rosa Emslie has received under the contracting she had directly with REC 9, for PED work, and that received as a subcontractor for SREB, doing 'public relations,' is equal to more than twice her annual salary as a PED employee in 2011.

95. Officials of PED, REC 9, and SREB refuse to answer any questions about the hiring of Rosa Emslie or any former PED employees and contractors by SREB, nor will they explain the need for tacking on a 10% "indirect" charge to the Rosa Emslie invoices, and those of other subcontractors.

96. As New Mexico schools struggle with reduced resources, no one at PED is willing to explain Skandera's (and now Ruszkowski's) willingness to pay a premium for questionable charges - like the need for SREB to hire Rosa Emslie for "External Public Relations."

In the next report - the focus will be on Pete Goldschmidt, the highly paid 'numbers guru' of Skandera's school reform. After he quit PED in September of 2014, he continued to draw money from New Mexico school budgets - as did his wife. And in other reporting to come soon, emails and other documents sent by and to Matthew Montano, will paint an even clearer picture of how the guy who engineered the PED procurement scheme with REC 9, became PED's godfather for Rosa Emslie, and several other PED alumni.

Click the headlines below for other related stories in this investigative series.

"We know that standardized tests exacerbate opportunity gaps."

Tip of the Iceberg? Skandera Reform, In the Court of Public Opinion. Part 2.

Skandera Reform, In the Court of Public Opinion. Part One.

Skandera Reform Spending - "F" for Frivolous.

Hanna has left the building ... Leaving Behind Six Years of Costly Placebos.