

475-03SEC

IN THE MATTER OF JULIA HANKERSON, :
WOODBINE BOARD OF EDUCATION, : COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION
CAPE MAY COUNTY. : DECISION

SYNOPSIS

The School Ethics Commission determined that respondent Board member committed numerous violations of the School Ethics Act, *i.e.*, N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(c), (d), (e), (g) and (h), many of which occurred even after her Board member training. The Commission found her behavior so egregious that it recommended respondent be removed from her position on the Board.

Upon review of the record, the Commissioner, whose decision was restricted solely to a review of the Commission's recommended penalty, concurred with the Commission's recommendation and, thus, ordered respondent removed from the Board as of the date of this decision.

This synopsis is not part of the Commissioner's decision. It has been prepared for the convenience of the reader. It has been neither reviewed nor approved by the Commissioner.

August 14, 2003

AGENCY DKT. NO. 231-7/03

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IN THE MATTER OF JULIA HANKERSON,

:

WOODBINE BOARD OF EDUCATION,

: COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

CAPE MAY COUNTY.

:

DECISION

The record of this matter and the decision of the School Ethics Commission (“Commission”), finding that Julia Hankerson, member of the Woodbine Board of Education, violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(c), (d), (e), (g) and (h)*, set forth in the Code of Ethics for School Board Members of the School Ethics Act, and recommending a penalty of removal from her position as a Board member have been reviewed. Upon issuance of the decision of the Commission, respondent was provided 13 days from the mailing date of the decision to file written comments on the recommended penalty for the Commissioner’s consideration.

Respondent’s comments set forth her disagreement with and defenses to the Commission’s findings on each of the ethics violation charges addressed in its decision. She maintains that such findings were not founded on valid evidence but, to the contrary, were “based on misinformation, unsubstantiated and blatantly erroneous statements, unreported information and an assumption that a denial is not an appropriate response to an untrue statement or situation, and most horrifying; THAT A SUPERINTENDENT HAS MORE CREDIBILITY THAN A BOARD MEMBER.” (Respondent’s Comments at 7) She, additionally, argues that some of the allegations here arose during her first four months as a new Board member, with two of those months having been prior to her receiving Board Member Training. She proposes that “[i]t is unreasonable to believe that a new Board Member and President of a troubled school would have a working knowledge of all School Board processes and procedures immediately.”

(*Id.* at 2) Respondent, therefore, urges that if any “penalty” is to be imposed, removal is entirely too harsh.

Initially, it must be emphasized that, pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-29(c)* and *N.J.A.C. 6A:3-9.1*, the determination of the Commission as to violation of the School Ethics Act **is not reviewable by the Commissioner** herein. Only the Commission may determine whether a violation of the School Ethics Act occurred. The Commissioner’s jurisdiction is limited to reviewing the sanction to be imposed based upon a finding of a violation by the Commission. Therefore, this decision is restricted solely to a review of the Commission’s recommended penalty.

Upon a thorough review of the record and full consideration of respondent’s comments, the Commissioner concurs with the Commission that respondent’s blatant disregard of the Code of Ethics evidenced herein warrants no less a penalty than removal from her position as a Board member. The Commissioner is unpersuaded by respondent’s attribution of her offenses here to her newness as a Board member. Rather, he concurs with the Commission, respondent repeatedly acted outside her authority and “in blatant disregard of the Code of Ethics even after she had been trained as to its provisions.” (Commission’s Decision at 16)

Accordingly, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that Julia Hankerson is removed from the Board of Education of Woodbine as of the date of this decision.*

COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

Date of Decision: August 14, 2003

Date of Mailing: August 15, 2003

* This decision may be appealed to the State Board of Education pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-27 et seq.* and *N.J.A.C. 6A:4-1.1 et seq.*