

IN THE MATTER OF PANIAGUA :
SANTIAGO, NEW HORIZONS : COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION
CHARTER SCHOOL, ESSEX COUNTY. : DECISION
_____ :

Whereas, the School Ethics Commission has acted pursuant to the authority granted to it by *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-21 *et seq.* to recommend removal of the above-named school official for failure to file a personal/relative disclosure statement, pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25 and/or an annual financial disclosure statement required by *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-26;

Whereas, the deadline to file these disclosure statements was April 30, 2003 for school officials in office since January 30, 2003, or 30 days from swearing in or start of service for newly elected or appointed board members and administrators; and

Whereas, the School Ethics Commission was advised by the County Superintendent that this school official did not file a disclosure statement with her school district and the County Superintendent's office, as required by the Act; and

Whereas, the Commission sent a reminder letter to the above-named school official on September 5, 2003, indicating that if the completed statement was not filed by September 15, 2003, the Commission would issue an Order to Show Cause that could result in disciplinary action; and

Whereas, pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-1.5(j), the Commission issued an Order on September 24, 2003 directing this school official to Show Cause why the Commission should not find her in violation of the Act for failing to file the necessary statement(s), with a cover letter

indicating that the Commission would discuss the matter at its October 28, 2003 meeting, that the named official had the right to attend, and that the Commission could, at that meeting, find a violation of the School Ethics Act and recommend a penalty up to removal; and

Whereas, the above-named school official failed to reply to the Order to Show Cause and provided no reason for her failure to comply with the requirement under *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25 and 26; and

Whereas, the Commission found that failure to file a disclosure statement within the designated timeline despite ample opportunity to do so constitutes a clear violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25 and 26; and

Whereas, the Commission voted on October 28, 2003 to recommend suspension of the above-named school official until she files the necessary disclosure statement, and her automatic removal from the Board of Trustees if she fails to file within 30 days, memorializing such decision through a resolution forwarded to the Commissioner, pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-29; and

Whereas, by letter dated November 7, 2003 from the School Ethics Commission, the above-named school official was afforded an opportunity to submit to the Commissioner a response to said resolution recommending removal; and

Whereas, no response was submitted to the Commissioner; and

Whereas, the Commissioner has carefully considered the record of this matter and the decision of the School Ethics Commission; and

Whereas, the Commissioner recognizes that, were the Commission's recommendation to be adopted without modification, school officials filing the requisite disclosure statement prior to the decision of the Commissioner, and hence, prior to imposition of

the recommended suspension, would receive no penalty notwithstanding that the School Ethics Act was violated and the Commission has recommended reprimands for school officials who failed to file until after issuance of the Order to Show Cause; now therefore

IT IS ORDERED that, as recommended by the School Ethics Commission, the above-named school official be suspended until she files the necessary disclosure statement, and automatically removed from the Board of Trustees if she fails to file within 30 days. IT IS additionally ORDERED that even if the above-named school official shall have filed the necessary statement prior to the filing date of this decision, she shall nevertheless be reprimanded for her failure to abide by the requirements of the School Ethics Act despite many opportunities for compliance, thereby causing administrative and adjudicative time to be wasted by local, county and state education officials.*

COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

Date of Decision: December 22, 2003

Date of Mailing: December 24, 2003

* This decision, as the Commissioner's final determination regarding penalty in the instant matter, 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.* Pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:4-1.4(a)*, Commissioner decisions are deemed filed three days after the date of mailing to the parties.