

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CREDENTIAL OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
OTTO RITTER, JR. : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 1213-171

At its meeting of April 12, 2013, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information the Camden County Technical Schools (CCTS) had forwarded pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.4* regarding Otto Ritter, Jr. CCTS reported that Ritter had resigned and acknowledged that he had submitted a falsified college transcript from Lehigh University when he applied for a teaching certificate. The Office of Certification and Induction confirmed that Ritter did not receive a degree from Lehigh and that he had submitted a falsified transcript with his certification application. Ritter returned the Certificate of Eligibility he had been issued pursuant to the misrepresentation and it was invalidated. Ritter currently holds only a Substitute Credential, which was issued in August 2012. Upon review of the above information, at its May 16, 2013 meeting, the Board voted to issue Ritter an Order to Show Cause.

The Board sent Ritter the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on May 20, 2013. The Order provided that Ritter had 30 days to respond. On June 20, 2013, Ritter's counsel responded, indicating that "I believe that Mr. Ritter's best course is to default." (Letter from Jeremy Frey, Esq., June 20, 2013).

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.7(e)*, on July 2, 2013, the Board sent Ritter a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that it appeared that no material facts were in dispute. Thus, Ritter was offered an opportunity to submit written arguments on the issue of whether the conduct addressed in the Order to Show Cause constituted conduct unbecoming a certificate holder as well as arguments with regard to the appropriate sanction in the event that the Board determined to take action against his credential. It also explained that upon review of the charges against him and the legal arguments tendered in his defense, the Board would determine if Ritter's offenses warranted action against his credential. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Ritter was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue.

The certified mail receipt was signed and returned and the regular mail copy was not returned. Ritter did not respond.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Ritter's conduct constitutes conduct unbecoming a certificate holder. Since Ritter failed to respond to the allegations in the Order to Show Cause or the hearing notice, at its meeting of November 1, 2013, the Board considered only the allegations in the Order to Show Cause. The Board determined that no material facts related to Ritter's offense were in dispute since he never denied that he had engaged in the alleged behavior and elected to default. Thus, the Board determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.7(h)*. It is therefore ORDERED that the charges in the Order to Show Cause are deemed admitted for the purpose of this proceeding.

The Board must now determine whether Ritter's conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, provides just cause to act against his credential pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.5*. The Board finds that it does.

The Board may revoke or suspend the certification of any certificate holder on the basis of demonstrated inefficiency, incapacity, conduct unbecoming a teacher or other just cause. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.5*. "Teachers... are professional employees to whom the people have entrusted the care and custody of ... school children. This heavy duty requires a degree of self-restraint and controlled behavior rarely requisite to other types of employment." *Tenure of Sammons*, 1972 *S.L.D.* 302, 321. Moreover, the Commissioner has long held that teachers serve as role models for their students. Ritter's fraud negates his position as a role model and undermines the notion of trust that is an essential quality necessary to teach children. The Board believes that the only appropriate response to Ritter's breach is the revocation of his credential.

Accordingly, on November 1, 2013, the Board voted to revoke Ritter's Substitute Credential. On this 6th day of December 2013 the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the revocation of Otto Ritter, Jr.'s credential be effective immediately. It is further

ORDERED that Ritter return his credential to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Licensure, P.O. Box 500, Trenton, NJ 08625-0500 within 30 days of the mailing date of this decision.

Robert R. Higgins, Secretary
State Board of Examiners

Date of Mailing:

Appeals may be made to the Commissioner of Education pursuant to the provisions of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38.4.

RRH:MZ:th