

New Jersey Commissioner of Education

Final Decision

In the Matter of the Tenure Hearing of Debra Graham, School District of the City of Newark, Essex County.

For the Petitioner, Sabrina Styza, Esq.

No appearance by or on behalf of Respondent, Debra Graham

This matter was opened before the Commissioner of Education on March 1, 2022, through tenure charges of unbecoming conduct certified Roger Leon, Superintendent of the Newark School District (“District”), together with supporting evidence against respondent, Debra Graham, a tenured teaching staff member in the District’s employ. The District provided respondent with written notice of such certification at the respondent’s current known address, via certified mail. The District also provided the tenure charges to the attorney for the Newark Teachers Union.

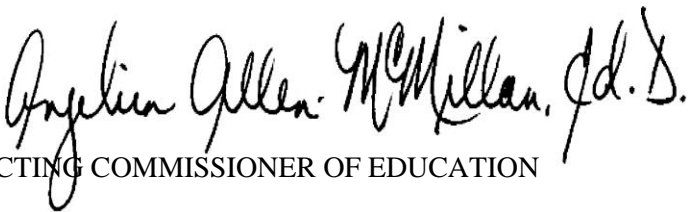
On March 2, 2022, the Commissioner directed the respondent via regular mail to file an answer to the charges. This communication clearly provided notice to respondent that, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:3-5.3 and 6A:3-5.4*, an individual against whom tenure charges are certified “*shall have 15 days from the day such charges are filed with the Commissioner to file a written response to the charges with the Commissioner,*” and that failure to answer within the prescribed period would – absent granting of an extension for good cause shown – result in the charges being deemed admitted. No reply to the tenure charges was received from or on behalf of the respondent.

The certified tenure charges and statement of supporting evidence filed by the District in this matter indicate that the respondent was employed by the District as a tenured teacher. The

Statement of Evidence indicates that the respondent has a history of excessive absenteeism and has been in AWOL status since March 2020.

Deeming the allegations to be admitted and noting that the respondent has failed to respond to the charges certified against her at the District level and before the Commissioner, the Commissioner finds that the District's charge of unbecoming conduct has been proven and overwhelmingly warrants the respondent's dismissal. Accordingly, summary decision is hereby granted to the District, and the respondent is dismissed from her tenured position with the Newark School District. This matter will be transmitted to the State Board of Examiners for action against respondent's certificate(s) as that body deems appropriate.

IT IS SO ORDERED.¹


ANGELINA ALLEN-McMILLAN, J.D.
ACTING COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

Date of Decision: April 12, 2022
Date of Mailing: April 12, 2022

¹ This decision may be appealed to the Appellate Division of the Superior Court pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-9.1. Under *N.J.Ct.R.* 2:4-1(b), a notice of appeal must be filed with the Appellate Division within 45 days from the date of mailing of this decision.