

New Jersey Commissioner of Education
Final Decision

In the Matter of Lisa Ditchkus, East Newark Board
of Education, Hudson County

The record of this matter and the decision of the School Ethics Commission (SEC) have been reviewed. The SEC found that respondent violated N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33 by failing to timely complete the required board member training. The SEC's decision was forwarded to the Commissioner for final determination on the recommended penalty pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:12-29(c). The SEC recommended a penalty of censure. Respondent has neither filed exceptions to the recommended penalty, nor instituted an appeal of the SEC's underlying finding of violation pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:4-1 *et seq.*

Upon review, the Commissioner concurs with the penalty recommended by the SEC for respondent's failure to timely honor an obligation placed upon school officials by law. Accordingly, respondent is censured for violating the School Ethics Act.

IT IS SO ORDERED.¹



COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

Date of Decision: January 9, 2026
Date of Mailing: January 12, 2026

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.

Before the School Ethics Commission
Docket No.: T14-25
Amended Decision for Failure to Complete Mandatory Training
Requirement in a Timely Manner

I/M/O Lisa Ditchkus,
East Newark Board of Education, Hudson County

I. Procedural History

This matter arises from an Order to Show Cause (OTSC) that was issued by the School Ethics Commission (Commission) in connection with the above-captioned matter at its meeting on May 20, 2025, directing Lisa Ditchkus (Respondent), a “board member” as defined in *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-23* of the School Ethics Act (Act), *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-21 et seq.*, to show cause as to why the Commission should not find Respondent in violation of the Act, for failing to complete training as required by *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33* and *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-4.1*.

In the OTSC that was served on May 20, 2025, the Commission notified Respondent that she had twenty (20) days to respond to the OTSC. Respondent was further advised that failure to respond would be deemed an admission of the facts set forth in the OTSC, and the Commission may take action on a summary basis, in accordance with *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-1.6(c)*.

Following review on this matter, the Commission adopted a decision at its meeting on June 17, 2025, finding that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33* by failing to complete the mandated training, and recommending a penalty of removal. However, the Commission advised that if Respondent completed the training prior to the Commissioner of Education’s (Commissioner’s) final decision, the Commission recommended a penalty of a 30-day suspension in lieu of removal.

The Commissioner issued a final decision on August 4, 2025, concurring with the Commission’s recommended penalty of removal because Respondent had not completed the training. Thereafter, on August 27, 2025, Respondent filed a motion for reconsideration of the Commissioner’s August 4, 2025, decision, arguing that the OTSC had been sent to the wrong email address due to a misspelling in the email address by the Board Secretary. Subsequently, Respondent completed her training on September 5, 2025. By decision dated October 24, 2025, the Commissioner granted Respondent’s motion for reconsideration and remanded the matter to the Commission for issuance of a new decision.

At its meeting on November 25, 2025, and after considering the record in this matter, the Commission issued an amended decision finding that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33*, and recommending a penalty of censure.

II. Analysis

The Act was enacted by the New Jersey State Legislature to ensure and preserve public confidence in members of local boards of education and local school administrators. *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33* and *N.J.A.C.*

6A:28-4.1 require every board member to complete a training program prepared and offered by the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA).

Respondent is a member of the East Newark Board of Education, located in Hudson County. As a result of her position as a board of education member, and in accordance with *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33* and *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-4.1*, Respondent is required to complete a mandated training program on an annual basis. For convenience and ease, the training is offered online so any board member may complete it at any time, from anywhere. According to NJSBA, Respondent was required to complete the Governance 1 training program by December 31, 2024.

Thereafter, an OTSC was issued by the Commission at its meeting on May 20, 2025, and emailed to the address on file in the New Jersey Department of Education's Homeroom application. Inadvertently, the email address entered into the Homeroom application by the Board Secretary was misspelled, and therefore, Respondent did not receive the OTSC.

To date, there is no dispute that Respondent did not complete her required training by December 31, 2024, and did not complete the training prior to the Commission's final deadline of May 13, 2025, and therefore, the Commission issued an OTSC at its meeting on May 20, 2025. As a school official, it is Respondent's responsibility to be aware of her requirements and to complete her required training by the statutory deadline.

Although Respondent did not receive the Commission's decision dated June 17, 2025, as it was also sent to the same incorrect email address, it is clear that Respondent received the Commissioner's decision, dated August 4, 2025, as that matter was sent to the correct email address. Thereafter, Respondent filed a motion for reconsideration with the Commissioner of Education, and completed her training on September 5, 2025. Notably, Respondent did not dispute that she did not complete her mandatory training by the deadline. Upon review and consideration of the filings, the Commissioner of Education granted Respondent's motion for reconsideration and remanded the matter to the Commission for further proceeding.

III. Decision/Penalty Recommendation

N.J.A.C. 6A:28-4.2(d) provides that school board members and charter school trustees who fail to comply with their training mandate shall be considered in violation of *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33*. Respondent's training was due on December 31, 2024, and it was not completed until September 5, 2025, nine months after the deadline, and a month after she received the Commissioner's decision. Further, Respondent did not dispute that she did not complete training in a timely fashion. Therefore, at its meeting on November 25, 2025, the Commission finds that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33*.

Where a violation of the Act is found by the Commission, it may recommend to the Commissioner of Education that a penalty be imposed. The recommended penalty can include a censure, suspension or removal of the school official. *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-4.3*. Specifically, unless good cause is shown or the school official previously has been the subject of an OTSC, "the Commission shall recommend that a board member or trustee who completes training after the issuance of an Order to Show Cause, but before the Commission issues its decision, receives a censure." *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-4.3(b)*. While Respondent did not timely receive the OTSC, it is undisputed that she only completed the training after receipt of the Commissioner's decision. Because the minimum penalty for failure to complete mandated training under *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-4.3* is censure, the Commission finds that a censure is appropriate in this circumstance.

For the reasons set forth above, the Commission recommends that the Commissioner of Education impose a penalty of **censure**.

Pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-29(c)*, this decision shall be forwarded to the Commissioner of Education for review of the Commission's recommended penalty. Respondent may either: 1) file exceptions to the recommended sanction; 2) file an appeal of the Commission's finding of a violation; or 3) file both exceptions to the recommended sanction together with an appeal of the finding of a violation.

Parties taking exception to the recommended sanction of the Commission but *not disputing* the Commission's finding of a violation may file, within **thirteen (13) days** from the date the Commission's decision is forwarded to the Commissioner, written exceptions regarding the recommended penalty to the Commissioner. The forwarding date shall be the mailing date to the parties, as indicated below. Such exceptions must be forwarded to: Commissioner of Education, c/o Bureau of Controversies and Disputes, P.O. Box 500, Trenton, New Jersey 08625, marked "Attention: Comments on Ethics Commission Sanction." as well as to (ControversiesDisputesFilings@doe.nj.gov). A copy must also be sent to the Commission (school.ethics@doe.nj.gov) and all other parties.

Parties seeking to appeal the Commission's finding of violation *must* file an appeal pursuant to the standards set forth at *N.J.A.C. 6A:4:1 et seq.* within **thirty (30) days** of the filing date of the decision from which the appeal is taken. The filing date shall be three (3) days after the date of mailing to the parties, as shown below. In such cases, the Commissioner's review of the Commission's recommended sanction will be deferred and incorporated into the Commissioner's review of the finding of violation on appeal. Where a notice of appeal has been filed on or before the due date for exceptions to the Commission's recommended sanction (thirteen (13) days from the date the decision is mailed by the Commission), exceptions need not be filed by that date, but may be incorporated into the appellant's briefs on appeal.



Robert W. Bender, Chairperson

Mailing Date: November 25, 2025

***Resolution Adopting an Amended Decision for Failure to Complete Mandatory
Training Requirement in a Timely Manner
Docket No.: T14-25***

Whereas, Lisa Ditchkus (Respondent) is a “board member” as defined in *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-23* of the School Ethics Act (Act); and

Whereas, as a board member, Respondent is required to complete a training program prepared and offered by the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) on an annual basis; and

Whereas, Respondent failed to complete her training program by December 31, 2024; and

Whereas, at its meeting on May 20, 2025, the School Ethics Commission (Commission) issued an Order to Show Cause (OTSC) directing Respondent to show cause as to why she failed to complete his mandatory training by December 31, 2024, as required by *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33* and *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-4.1*; and

Whereas, at its meeting on June 17, 2025, the Commission found that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33* and *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-4.1* by failing to complete the training requirement she was obligated to complete; and

Whereas, at its meeting on June 17, 2025, the Commission recommended that the Commissioner of Education impose a penalty of removal, with such removal to become effective immediately upon issuance of a final decision by the Commissioner of Education; and

Whereas, on August 4, 2025, the Commissioner of Education issued a decision removing Respondent from her position on the Board; and

Whereas, Respondent submitted a motion for reconsideration to the Commissioner of Education; and

Whereas, Respondent completed the training on September 5, 2025; and

Whereas, on October 24, 2025, the Commissioner of Education granted Respondent’s motion for reconsideration based upon the record and remanded the matter to the Commission; and

Whereas, after reviewing Respondent’s motion for reconsideration and supporting documentation, Respondent did not dispute that she did not complete training in a timely fashion; and

Whereas, at its meeting on November 25, 2025, the Commission found that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-33* and *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-4.1* by failing to complete the training requirement she was obligated to complete; and

Whereas, at its meeting on November 25, 2025, the Commission recommended that the Commissioner of Education impose a penalty of censure on Respondent; and

Whereas, at its meeting on November 25, 2025, the Commission agreed that the within amended decision accurately memorializes its findings and recommendations; and

Now Therefore Be It Resolved, that the Commission hereby adopts the within amended decision and directs its staff to notify all parties to this action of the decision.

Robert W. Bender

Robert W. Bender, Chairperson

I certify that the within Resolution was duly adopted
by the School Ethics Commission at its public meeting
on November 25, 2025.

Brigid C. Martens

Brigid C. Martens, Director
School Ethics Commission