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OAL Dkt. No. EDU 15159-25
Agency Dkt. No. 232-7/25

New Jersey Commissioner of Education
Final Decision

W.O. and C.O., on behalf of minor child, T.O.,

Petitioners,

v.

Board of Education of the Borough of Haddonfield,
Camden County,

Respondent.

The record of this matter and the Initial Decision of the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) have been reviewed and considered. The parties did not file exceptions.

Upon review, the Commissioner concurs with the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) that petitioners have not demonstrated that respondent acted arbitrarily, capriciously, or unreasonably when it revised the science graduation requirement in Policy 5460 and denied petitioners' request for an exemption therefrom.

Accordingly, the Initial Decision is adopted as the final decision in this matter, and the petition of appeal is hereby dismissed.

IT IS SO ORDERED.¹


COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

Date of Decision: April 15, 2026
Date of Mailing: April 15, 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.



State of New Jersey
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

INITIAL DECISION

SUMMARY DECISION

OAL DKT. NO. EDU 15159-25

AGENCY DKT. NO. 232-7/25

W.O. AND C.O. ON BEHALF OF T.O.,

Petitioners,

v.

**BOROUGH OF HADDONFIELD BOARD OF
EDUCATION, CAMDEN COUNTY,**

Respondent.

W.O. and C.O., petitioners, pro se, on behalf of their minor son **T.O.**

Joseph F. Betley, Esq., and **Crosley L. Gagnon**, Esq. for respondent (Capehart
Scatchard, P.A., attorneys)

Record Closed: January 5, 2026

Decided: February 13, 2026

BEFORE **KATHLEEN M. CALEMMO**, ALJ:

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Respondent Haddonfield Board of Education (Board) approved a revision for a new science course sequence with new science course offerings to Board Policy 5460, which changed the graduation requirements for the graduating Class of 2027. Under the change, as a member of the Class of 2027, petitioners' son, T.O., would be required to

take at least 2.5 credits each in laboratory/inquiry-based environmental science and physics. As T.O. intended to take a full year of physics in his junior year, followed by either Advance Placement (AP) Physics or Advance Placement (AP) Chemistry in his senior year, this curriculum change required him to take an additional semester-long science course that he had not planned or anticipated. The issue is whether the impact of the Board's decision changing the science graduation requirements for the Class of 2027 was arbitrary, unreasonable, and capricious.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On July 14, 2025, petitioners filed their Petition of Appeal of the Board's decision, denying their request for an exemption from the new science policy under revised Board Policy 5460. On August 20, 2025, the Board filed a Motion to Dismiss in lieu of an Answer. On August 21, 2025, the Department of Education, Controversies and Disputes, transmitted the matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) to be heard as a contested case.

After considering petitioners' opposition and respondent's reply, I denied respondent's motion to dismiss by order, dated October 27, 2025.

During our next telephone conference, the parties agreed that there were no material facts in dispute and intended to proceed by motion and cross-motion for summary decision. On November 13, 2025, respondent filed its brief, with supporting exhibits¹ R-A through R-O, Certification of Superintendent Charles Klaus (Cert. Klaus), Certification of Assistant Superintendent Dr. Gino Priolo (Cert. Priolo), and Certification of Board President Jaime Groomett (Cert. Groomett). On December 1, 2025, petitioners filled their opposition and cross-motion for summary decision with exhibits P-1 through P-11, and Certifications from T.O., C.O., and W.O. Replies were filed by respondent on December 12, 2025, and petitioners on December 18, 2025.

¹ As the exhibits filed by the parties in support of their respective positions were considered by me as evidence, the exhibits will be referred to as either "R" followed by the respective exhibit letter or "P" followed by the respective exhibit number.

FACTUAL DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The undisputed material **FACTS** are as follows:

As an incoming freshman in the graduating Class of 2027, at Haddonfield Memorial High School (Haddonfield), T.O. received Haddonfield's Program of Studies 2023-2024, to guide his course selection process to meet his graduation requirements. T.O., with guidance from his parents, charted a four-year course plan that satisfied Haddonfield's requirements and his future college goals. T.O.'s goal is to apply to a competitive college engineering program, which requires a full year of Physics, followed by either AP Physics or AP Chemistry. As required by Haddonfield, T.O. took Biology his freshman year and Chemistry his sophomore year.

During the 2024-2025 school year, Haddonfield School District (District) convened a Science Audit Committee to conduct an audit of the District's science curriculum. Matt DiDonato, the District's Content Area Supervisor for Math and Science, headed the committee. In anticipation of the Board meeting scheduled for December 12, 2024, the curriculum committee met on December 4, 2024, to discuss its recommendations.

At the Board meeting, Mr. DiDonato gave a presentation during public session on the committee's recommendations, focusing on High School science requirements and courses. The committee recommended amending Policy 5460, requiring students to take one physics and one environmental science course and maintaining the requirements that students take biology and chemistry. The recommendation included both full year courses and semester long courses for physics and environmental science to allow flexibility. As part of his presentation, Mr. DiDonato informed the Board that the Audit Committee conducted an analysis of students' schedules to determine the potential impact of the new science requirements. The committee concluded that the students would be able to take the courses they were interested in while still meeting the new science graduation requirements.

In early January 2025, T.O. learned of the new science graduation requirement from his sophomore chemistry teacher, Vincent Gallo. On January 7, 2025, Haddonfield held a Course Selection Information Session for parents, in which the new science graduation requirements were presented.

On January 13, 2025, Mrs. and Mrs. O sent an email to guidance counselor, Ms. Walsh-Lindey, Science Department Supervisor, Mr. DiDonato, and Science Department Facilitator, Mr. Williams, outlining their concerns and the detrimental impact this new science graduation requirement would have on their son. (R-D.) On February 26, 2025, petitioners met with T.O.'s guidance counselor for course selection for the 2025-2026 school year and restated their concerns about the new science requirement and stated their intention to appeal.

At the Board meeting on February 27, 2025, the Board approved on first reading the revised language for Board Policy 5460 – High School Graduation.

On March 11, 2025, Haddonfield convened a Level 1 – Building Level Meeting with the parents to discuss their concerns with the new policy. In attendance were Principal McHale, Mr. DiDonato, and Mr. and Mrs. O. Principal McHale defended the new science offerings and highlighted their value to the students. She also noted that between study halls and summer on-line offerings, there was flexibility in T.O.'s schedule for him to meet this requirement. The parents' counter position was that T.O.'s study halls were intentionally planned to support his ambitious workload. They also questioned whether environmental science was a New Jersey State requirement and whether it was needed for State graduation requirements. With Principal McHale's denial of their request for an exemption, petitioners pursued their appeal to Level 11 - Assistant Superintendent Appeal. (R-J.)

On March 18, 2025, Mr. DiDonato met with the Curriculum Committee, which included the Board President, Jaimie Groomett, Board members, Nousheen Yousuf-

Sadiq, and Jessice Drass, and Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Priolo. At this meeting, the Committee reviewed and discussed feedback, data, reporting, and teacher feedback collected as part of the science audit, and the potential impacts of adopting the Science Audit Committee's recommendations. (R-G.)

At the Board meeting on March 20, 2025, Mr. DiDonato gave a second presentation to the Board and the public on the Science Audit Committee's findings and recommendations. (R-H.) After reviewing the Science Audit Committee's full recommendations and listening to the presentation of the Audit Committee's findings including the data compiled by the Audit Committee, the Board voted in favor of adopting revised Policy 5460 – High School Graduation, including the science curriculum graduation requirements. (Cert, Groomett, par. 14.)

In response to their email request, the parents met with Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Priolo, on March 26, 2025, as their Level II Appeal. By email, dated March 28, 2025, Dr. Priolo denied petitioners request for an exception to the Board's recently approved graduation requirement. Dr. Priolo stated the primary reasons for his decision:

1. **Peer Consistency:** [T.O.'s] current and projected course load is comparable to many of his peers. While we acknowledge that junior and senior years are demanding, the new science requirement applies uniformly to all students in his cohort.
2. **General Stress of Upperclassmen:** We recognize the inherent stress associated with junior and senior years, including standardized testing, college applications, and extracurricular commitments. This is a common experience for most students in this stage of their academic journey.
3. **Study Hall Support:** To help alleviate [T.O.'s] workload, he will have several dedicated weekly study hall periods next year. This structured time will provide him with opportunities for focused study and academic support.
4. **Summer Course Flexibility:** If you and [T.O.] desire additional flexibility in their schedule, we recommend

exploring online summer course options. This allows students to complete required coursework at their own pace and potentially free up space in their regular school year schedule.

[R-K.]

By email, dated March 30, 2025, petitioners stated their position disputing Dr. Priolo's reasoning. Petitioners believed that in its haste to meet New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS), Haddonfield failed to abide by the standard practice of not changing graduation requirements midstream for students. They further argued that the new requirement would add more stress to the inherent stress of junior and senior years, by increasing workload. Using study halls is not an option because these periods were purposely built into T.O.'s schedule as support. Summer is already scheduled and adding an additional cost was not a reasonable or fair option. In closing, petitioners reiterated that T.O. plans to apply to top-tier engineering schools and competing in another international music competition would be jeopardized by adding an additional graduation requirement with only two years left in high school. Ibid. Petitioners requested a meeting with Superintendent Klaus and renewed their request for an exemption.

On April 30, 2025, petitioners met with Superintendent Klaus. After consideration, Mr. Klaus denied petitioners' request. Mr. Klaus provided petitioners with the history and the rationale for the change to the science curriculum. He explained that the District's last science audit was in 2008, which was prior to New Jersey's adoption of the national Next Generation Science Standards in 2014. Various options were considered to bring Haddonfield students up to the required standards. The committee felt immediate action was needed to address the deficiency in state standards. The analysis included an impact on student schedules, which was reviewed with members of the Board. Mr. Klaus explained the justification for starting this program with rising juniors because many seniors would have already fulfilled their old science requirements. While Mr. Klaus empathized with petitioners, he did not see compelling enough arguments and reasons to grant petitioners' request for an exception. Mr. Klaus stressed that the process and

decision-making were thorough and thoughtful. The policy was vetted at several levels, accepted by the Board, and adopted as graduation requirements. (R-L.)

On May 20, 2025, petitioners emailed Board President, Groomett, stating their concerns with the new science requirement because they believed it was unreasonable and undermined T.O.'s legitimate need for reliable scheduling requirements. Id.

Petitioners' appeal to the Board was heard in executive session at the June 12, 2025, Board meeting. Petitioners presented a seven slide PowerPoint. (R-O.) Board President Groomett, in her Certification, stated that the Board discussed the impact of the new science graduation requirements on T.O. as presented by his parents. During deliberations, the Board recognized that when they approved the new policy, they had considered the impact it would have on the Class of 2027 by requiring them to take a physics and an environmental science course during their last two years at Haddonfield. As indicated by the Science Audit Committee findings and the presentations from Mr. DiDonato, it was feasible for students to meet the new requirements as determined from a review of students' schedules. Although the Board commended T.O.'s vigorous academic caseload and extracurricular activities, they did not find extenuating circumstances that would justify an exemption from the new graduation requirements. (Cert. of Groomett.) After deliberation, the Board denied the petitioners' appeal seeking an exemption from Board Policy 5460's science requirements. (R-N.)

Summary Decision

Under the Uniform Administrative Procedure Rules, N.J.A.C. 1:1-1.1 to -21.6, "[a] party may move for summary decision upon all or any of the substantive issues in a contested case." N.J.A.C. 1:1-12.5(a). Summary decision may be granted "if the papers and discovery which have been filed, together with the affidavits, if any, show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact challenged, and that the moving party is entitled to prevail as a matter of law." N.J.A.C. 1:1-12.5(b). Herein, as there is no dispute as to any material fact, summary decision is appropriate.

LEGAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Commissioner will not overturn the decision of a local board in the absence of a finding that the action below was arbitrary, capricious, or unreasonable. T.B.M. v. Moorestown Bd. of Educ., EDU 2780-07, Initial Decision (February 6, 2008), <<http://njlaw.rutgers.edu/collections/oal/>> (citing Thomas v. Morris Twp. Bd. of Educ., 89 N.J. Super. 327, 332 (App. Div. 1965), aff'd, 46 N.J. 581(1966)). The Commissioner will not substitute his judgment for that of the board of education, whose exercise of its discretion may not be disturbed unless shown to be “patently arbitrary, without rational basis or induced by improper motives.” Kopera v. W. Orange Bd. of Educ., 60 N.J. Super. 288, 294 (App. Div. 1960). Our courts have held that “[w]here there is room for two opinions, action is not arbitrary or capricious when exercised honestly and upon due consideration, even though it may be believed that an erroneous conclusion has been reached.” Bayshore Sewage Co. v. Dep’t of Env’tl. Prot., 122 N.J. Super. 184, 199-200 (Ch. Div. 1973), aff’d, 131 N.J. Super. 37 (App. Div. 1974). Thus, to prevail, the petitioner must demonstrate that the Board acted in bad faith, or in utter disregard of the circumstances before it. T.B.M., EDU 2780-07. It is a weighty burden; one which I **CONCLUDE** these petitioners have not met. This record has presented me with no evidence that would suggest that the actions of this Board, the District’s Curriculum Committee, or District Administration, were taken in bad faith or in utter disregard of the circumstances presented when tasked with revising the science curriculum.

In general, a board of education's actions are entitled to a presumption of lawfulness and good faith... Where board actions are challenged, the challenger bears the burden of proving that such actions were unlawful, arbitrary, capricious or unreasonable. Schuster v. Bd. of Educ. Montgomery Twp., 96 N.J.A.R.2d (EDU) 670, 676 (citing Schnick v. Westwood Bd. of Educ., 60 N.J. Super. 448 (App. Div. 1960, and Quinlan v. North Bergen Bd. of Educ., 73 N.J. Super. 40, 46 (App. Div. 1962)). This standard has been defined by the New Jersey courts as follows:

In the law, arbitrary and capricious means having no rational basis. ... Arbitrary and capricious action of administrative bodies means willful and unreasoning action, without consideration and in disregard of circumstances. Where there is no room for two opinions, action is not arbitrary or capricious when exercised honestly and upon due consideration, even though it may be believed that an erroneous conclusion has been reached . . . Moreover, the court should not substitute its judgement for that of an administrative or legislative body if there is substantial evidence to support the ruling. [Piccoli v. Bd. of Educ. of Ramapo Indian Hills Regional School District, OAL Dkt. EDU 1839-98 (January 22, 1999 (citing, Bayshore Sewage Co. v. Dept. of Envir. Protection, 122 N.J. Super. 184, 199-200 (Ch. Div. 1973), aff'd 131 N.J. Super. 37 (App. Div. 1974) (emphasis added).

Absent a clear showing of abuse of discretion, the Commissioner will not substitute his own judgment for that of the Board of Education. Massaro v. Bd. of Educ of the Borough of Bergenfield, 1965 S.L.D. 84, 85. In Kopera v. Bd. of Educ. of West Orange, 60 N.J. Super. 288, 294 (App. Div. 1960), the Appellate Division stated the well-established rule that action of the local board [of education] which lies within the area of its discretionary powers may not be upset unless patently without rational basis or induced by improper motives. See also, G.M. v. Roselle Park Borough Bd. of Educ., 95 N.J.A.R.2d (EDU) 107, 109, (Commissioner adopted the decision of the ALJ when in a challenge to board action, the ALJ stated, it is the management prerogative of boards of education that will not be usurped or assumed by the Commissioner of Education absent a definitive showing of bad faith or arbitrary actions taken in bad faith without a rational basis.)

If the record reflects a rational basis for the action, as well as an absence of bad faith, the board's action shall be upheld. See Red Bank Teachers Ass'n v. Bd. of Educ. of Red Bank, OAL Dkt. EDU 5328-80 (April 30, 1981) adopted Comm. Ed. (June 15, 1981), (where the ALJ upheld a board's approval of a new Mastery Learning curriculum as a valid exercise of managerial prerogative that was rationally determined.); G.M., 95 N.J.A.R. 2d (EDU) 107 (where the ALJ found the board's decision to change geographic boundaries for kindergarten pupil placement, with a goal of evenly

distributing the pupils at different schools within the district, to be a reasonable exercise of authority).

To support their claims, petitioners maintained that it was unfair to T.O. for the Board to change his graduation requirements midway through high school. When T.O. enrolled in Haddonfield, he was given Haddonfield's Program of Studies 2023-2024, to guide his course selection process to meet his graduation requirements and his college plans. Petitioners believed that the Board failed to grasp the impact of this change on T.O.'s already burdened schedule. Petitioners doubted that the analysis by the Curriculum Committee or the data presented to the Board thoroughly considered the real cost of adding an additional semester long class to an overburdened student, who only had two years to comply. The Board's offer to use study hall time or summer vacation to lessen the impact on T.O.'s time constraints was rejected by petitioners as unsatisfactory and not viable. For petitioners, the only fair and sensible approach would have been for the Board to implement the new science graduation requirements with the incoming freshmen class.

Petitioners' claims are two-fold. Their first argument is that they should prevail under the doctrine of promissory estoppel. The elements of promissory estoppel are "1) a clear and definite promise, 2) made with the expectation that the promisee will rely upon it, 3) reasonable reliance upon the promise, 4) which results in definite and substantial detriment." Lobiondo v. O'Callaghan, 357 N.J. Super 488, 497 (App. Div. 2003). I **CONCLUDE** that petitioners have not made out even a prima facie case for promissory estoppel.

Under N.J.S.A. 18A:7C-5, the BOE "shall provide each high school pupil and the parents or legal guardians of such pupil with a copy of said board's policy on graduation, including a clear statement of the proficiencies required for graduation and those programs available to assist in attaining those levels of proficiency." Pursuant to guidelines established by the Commissioner of Education, the BOE must also "establish standards for graduation," which shall include but not be limited to proficiency "in those

subject areas and skills identified by the board as necessary for graduation other than those assessed by the Statewide assessment tests.” N.J.S.A. 18A:7C-2.

The Board’s revised science course sequence and programing did not change the minimum fifteen credit requirement in evidence-based science courses originally stated in Policy 5460 and required under N.J.A.C. 6A:8-5.1. Rather, the revision adopted on March 25, 2025, by the BOE provided as follows:

At least fifteen credits in science, including at least five credits in laboratory biology/life science or the content equivalent; at least five credits in laboratory chemistry or the content equivalent; and at least 2.5 credits each in laboratory/inquiry-based environmental science and physics.

[R-I, Board Policy 5460, Section (A)(1)(d).]

Petitioners recognized that the Board has the power and responsibility to revise curriculum. Petitioners’ argument that T.O. relied upon the Program of Studies 2023-2024, given to him upon enrollment, to plan his four years of high school course work, as the basis for a promissory estoppel claim is based on a faulty premise. (P-7.) The total credits required for graduation did not change. The three-year science requirement of at least fifteen credits did not change. Every year, T.O. participates in the course selection process, where he must decide among a variety of choices. Haddonfield has taken no action that prevents T.O. from achieving his goals and objectives or taking the classes he desired. While graduation requirements through total credit hours required were provided, there was nothing promised about course programing, sequence, or changes to curriculum.

Haddonfield made no promises to T.O. upon enrollment that there would be no change to the science curriculum or course offerings. Moreover, all T.O.’s choices are still available to him. The classes he needs to fulfill his goals remain available. Thus, I **CONCLUDE** that petitioners have not set forth a claim of promissory estoppel.

Petitioners' second argument is that Haddonfield's decision to apply the revised science requirement to the Class of 2027, was arbitrary, capricious and unreasonable. Although petitioners claim that the decision was rushed, and made without proper thought being given to the detrimental impact it would have upon the schedules of juniors and seniors, the Board provided sound, rational basis through the Certifications of Dr. Priolo, Superintendent Klaus, and Board President Groomett to support its decision for the new science course sequence and amend the graduation requirements to include physics and environmental science, beginning with the Class of 2027. More importantly, as stated in the Certifications, due consideration was given to the impact this change would have on the schedules of the members of the Class of 2027. Under T.O.'s stated plan to take a year of physics followed by a year of AP Science, he still had two school years to take the added one semester course in environmental science. Respondent recognized that through study halls, this course could be accommodated within that time frame. Respondent's position was not unreasonable. Petitioners' argument that T.O. had already dedicated his study halls for the next two years to support his overall schedule was not persuasive.

Petitioners have not shown extraordinary circumstances or detrimental impact to T.O. from the Board's decision to revise Policy 5460, effective with the Class of 2027. The Board recounted the decision-making process utilized by the District, which supported the science curriculum change. The implementation of the revised policy also provided flexibility for members of the Class of 2027, to comply with the new requirement over the course of two school years.

I **CONCLUDE** petitioners have not met their burden to demonstrate that the decision of the Board, in adopting the revision to Policy 5460 – High School Graduation was arbitrary, capricious, or unreasonable.

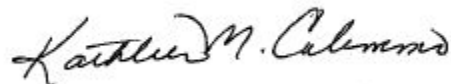
ORDER

Based on the foregoing, it is hereby **ORDERED** that respondent's motion for summary decision is **GRANTED** and petitioner's cross-motion for summary decision is **DENIED**.

I hereby **FILE** this initial decision with the **COMMISSIONER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION** for consideration.

This recommended decision may be adopted, modified, or rejected by the **COMMISSIONER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**, who by law is authorized to make a final decision in this matter. If the Commissioner of the Department of Education does not adopt, modify, or reject this decision within forty-five days and unless such time limit is otherwise extended, this recommended decision shall become a final decision in accordance with N.J.S.A. 52:14B-10.

Within thirteen days from the date on which this recommended decision was mailed to the parties, any party may file written exceptions with the **COMMISSIONER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**. Exceptions may be filed by email to ControversiesDisputesFilings@doe.nj.gov or by mail to Office of Controversies and Disputes, 100 Riverview Plaza, 4th Floor, PO Box 500, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0500. A copy of any exceptions must be sent to the judge and to the other parties.



February 19, 2026

DATE

KATHLEEN M. CALEMMO, ALJ

KMC/tat

APPENDIX

Exhibits

Petitioner:

- P-1 New Jersey State Minimum Graduation Requirements
- P-2 2020 New Jersey Student learning Standards – Science
- P-3 Course Selection for the Class of 2027 email, dated January 17, 2023
- P-4 Directions for course selection, dated January 11, 2023
- P-5 Copy of PowerPoint presentation - dated January 8, 2025
- P-6 2025-2026 Course Information Night
- P-7 Haddonfield 2023-2024 Program of Studies
- P-8 N.J.A.C. 6A:8-5.1 (Graduation requirements)
- P-9 Recommended Course of Study for Princeton University
- P-10 5719 Student Grievance
- P-11 0131 Bylaws and Policies

Respondent:

- R-A 5460 High School Graduation Letter, dated March 15, 2024
- R-B Curriculum Committee – December 4, 2024
- R-C Minutes, Regular Board Meeting – December 12, 2004
- R-D Sophomore course selection counselor meeting, dated February 13, 2025
- R-E Course Selection conference with Mrs. Lindsey
- R-F Minutes, Regular Board Meeting – February 27, 2025
- R-G Curriculum Committee - March 18, 2025
- R-H Minutes, Regular Board Meeting – March 20, 2025
- R-I 5460 High School Graduation – BOE Approval, dated February 28, 2019
- R-J Confidential – Case Summary
- R-K Emails regarding new science requirements
- R-L Emails – Science Class Appeal

R-M Emails – May 20, 2025 – May 28, 2025

R-N Board's decision denying grievance, dated June 12, 2025

R-O Power Point presentation to Board