

New Jersey Commissioner of Education
Final Decision

Alyssa Danielle DeBlasis,

Petitioner,

v.

New Jersey Department of Education, State
Board of Examiners,

Respondent.

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

In this matter, petitioner challenges the denial of her application for a Teacher of Elementary K-6 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing (CEAS). Upon review of the expanded record developed on remand, and for the reasons expressed in the comprehensive Initial Decision issued after remand, the Commissioner adopts the findings and conclusions of the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ).

The Commissioner concurs with the ALJ that petitioner failed to prove by a preponderance of the credible evidence that she satisfied the liberal arts and/or science credit requirement for certification found at *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-10.2(b)(2)*, or that her alternative education and experience demonstrated a one-to-one correspondence with the credit deficiency. The



State of New Jersey
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

INITIAL DECISION

DISMISSAL

OAL DKT. NO. EDU 16435-25

AGENCY DKT NO. 407-12/24

ALYSSA DANIELLE DeBLASIS,

Petitioner,

v.

**NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION, STATE BOARD OF
EXAMINERS,**

Respondent.

ON REMAND

OAL DKT. NO. EDU 02645-25

Alyssa Danielle DeBlasis, petitioner, pro se

Nataly K. Dennis, Deputy Attorney General, for respondent (Jennifer Davenport,
Attorney General of New Jersey, attorney)

Record Closed: April 22, 2026

Decided: June 8, 2026

BEFORE **IRENE JONES**, ALJ/(Ret., on recall):

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Petitioner, Alyssa Danielle DeBlasis, filed an application with the New Jersey Department of Education, State Board of Examiners, seeking a Teacher of Elementary

K-6 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing ("CEAS"). At its meeting on September 19, 2024, the State Board of Examiners ("Board") considered petitioner's application pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.12 and the certification requirements set forth in N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-8.2 and N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-10.2. Petitioner appeared at the meeting.

The Board determined that petitioner satisfied some of the requirements for certification but was deficient twenty-one and one-half (21.5) semester-hour credits in liberal arts and/or sciences. In lieu of the missing credits, petitioner asked the Board to consider her teaching experience in a parochial school, nine and one-half (9.5) instructional hours from Hillsdale College, and professional development seminars. The Board denied petitioner's request after concluding that the submitted experience, instructional hours, and professional development did not establish a one-to-one equivalency with the missing liberal arts and/or science credits.

Following the denial, petitioner filed a pro se Petition of Appeal with the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) on December 30, 2024. The DOE filed a Motion to Dismiss in Lieu of an Answer. On February 3, 2025, the matter was transmitted to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) as a contested case. Petitioner was given time to retain counsel but ultimately elected to proceed pro se and filed a response to the motion.

On July 25, 2025, the undersigned granted the Board's motion to dismiss. On September 12, 2025, the Commissioner rejected the initial decision and remanded the matter to develop a more comprehensive record. The matter was thereafter assigned OAL Docket No. EDU 16435-2025. A prehearing conference was held on October 8, 2025. A virtual evidentiary hearing was conducted on January 27, 2026.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Based upon the record, I FIND the following facts:

1. Petitioner is a 2022 graduate of Cabrini University. She graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in Education and a certification focus in special education.

2. In 2023, petitioner applied to the New Jersey Department of Education for a Teacher of Elementary K-6 CEAS.
3. Petitioner passed all required Praxis assessments.
4. Petitioner has teaching experience at a Catholic school, completed 9.5 instructional hours, and attended or completed professional development seminars.
5. The DOE examiner credited petitioner with 38.5 acceptable liberal arts and/or science credits, leaving a deficiency of 21.5 credits.
6. The Board denied petitioner's request because petitioner did not meet the required number of liberal arts and/or science credits and did not demonstrate that her alternative education or experience was equivalent, on a one-to-one basis, to the 21.5-credit deficiency.

TESTIMONY

Rani Singh, Director of the Office of Recruitment, Preparation and Certification ("RCP") and Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, testified on behalf of respondent. Singh has worked for the DOE for approximately twenty-five years and has held various positions, including lead examiner. Prior to joining the DOE, Singh was a biology and elementary education teacher.

Singh explained that examiners are responsible for reviewing educator certification applications to determine whether applicants satisfy the requirements imposed by statute and regulation. Lead examiners are responsible for ensuring consistency in application review and compliance with applicable regulations.

Singh reviewed the requirements for a K-6 CEAS. She testified that an applicant must possess a bachelor's degree with a minimum GPA of 3.0, complete the required

educator preparation program, complete all required assessments, and satisfy the applicable liberal arts and/or science credit requirement. Singh explained that the regulations define liberal arts as coursework intended primarily to provide general knowledge and develop a person's general intellectual capacities to reason and evaluate, as opposed to coursework directed primarily toward professional or vocational skills.

Singh identified respondent's exhibits, including petitioner's credential review appeal. The Board denied the appeal because petitioner had an insufficient number of acceptable liberal arts and/or science credits. The Board concluded that petitioner's proposed alternative education, teaching experience, instructional hours, and professional development did not establish an equivalency to the missing 21.5 credits.

Singh acknowledged that the Board may consider alternative education or experience where the applicant demonstrates a one-to-one equivalency with the identified deficiency. She explained that, in evaluating alternative education or experience, the examiner reviews the applicant's transcripts, course titles, syllabi, course descriptions, course coding, and any supporting documentation. The examiner evaluates whether the claimed alternative education or experience is equivalent in substance and scope to the missing liberal arts and/or science credits.

Because petitioner requested credit for work experience and professional development, the examiner also reviewed documentation concerning petitioner's teaching position and professional development. The examiner concluded that petitioner's teaching experience and professional development did not correspond, on a one-to-one basis, to the missing 21.5 liberal arts and/or science credits.

Singh further testified that, although petitioner earned a Bachelor of Science in Education, several courses on petitioner's transcript were not credited toward the liberal arts and/or science requirement because they did not satisfy the regulatory definition. Some courses were not credited because the syllabi or course descriptions did not provide sufficient information to determine that the coursework developed general intellectual capacities rather than professional or vocational skills. Other courses were not counted because they were pedagogical or institution-specific. Singh also testified

that certain religious studies courses were not accepted because the DOE determined that they were specific to religious instruction rather than general liberal arts coursework under the applicable regulatory criteria. Singh noted that, given their specific instructional material, religious courses are generally not accepted as suitable liberal arts credits.

Petitioner testified on her own behalf. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Education from Cabrini University, where she majored in PreK-4 Education with a focus on Special Education. She graduated cum laude in May 2022. Petitioner testified that her transcript reflects seventy-one liberal arts credits and that, although she attended college in Pennsylvania, she always intended to teach in New Jersey. She stated that she was unaware that certain credits would not be accepted by the New Jersey Department of Education.

Petitioner maintained that the exclusion of her religious studies coursework was improper because those courses were rigorous and developed general knowledge in the humanities. She also disputed the Board's refusal to give additional credit for her teaching experience and professional development. Petitioner emphasized that New Jersey is experiencing a teacher shortage and argued that denying her certification despite her education, experience, and Praxis scores was unfair.

ARGUMENTS OF THE PARTIES

Petitioner argues that the purpose of the liberal arts and/or humanities requirement is to ensure that teachers possess the broad intellectual preparation necessary to guide students in understanding human culture, ideas, and values. She contends that her coursework provided that preparation, even though some credits were categorized as religious studies or education rather than as traditional liberal arts or humanities courses.

Petitioner asserts that her religious studies and teaching-focused coursework required critical thinking, textual analysis, ethical reasoning, cultural understanding, historical context, analytical writing, and engagement with philosophical and historical ideas. She argues that religious studies is closely connected to history, philosophy, ethics, literature, and cultural studies, all of which are central to the humanities.

Petitioner further argues that her education and pedagogy courses strengthened her ability to interpret complex material, communicate ideas clearly, and translate knowledge into effective instruction. According to petitioner, these courses were not merely professional training but also required engagement with educational philosophy, the history of education, and critical thinking concerning how knowledge is taught and understood. (“PB”)¹

Respondent argues that petitioner has not established that she satisfied the applicable 60-credit liberal arts and/or science requirement. Respondent maintains that petitioner seeks a re-review of her transcript and asks the Board to treat her proposed alternative education and experience as equivalent to the missing credits. However, respondent asserts that petitioner has not explained how her teaching experience, instructional hours, or professional development equals the 21.5-credit deficiency.²

Respondent further argues that petitioner’s documentation does not demonstrate a one-to-one correspondence between the claimed alternative education or experience and the missing liberal arts and/or science credits. Respondent contends that petitioner’s financial concerns regarding additional coursework and her references to a teacher apprenticeship program are not relevant to whether she satisfied the applicable regulatory requirements.

Respondent concludes that the Board followed the governing regulations and reasonably determined that petitioner’s experience and professional development were insufficient to satisfy the liberal arts and/or science credit requirement.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Board of Examiners is responsible for determining whether an instructional teaching certificate may be issued to an applicant. N.J.S.A. 18A:6-38. When an applicant

¹ “PB” refers to the petitioner’s letter brief.

² “RB” refers to the respondent’s letter brief.

is advised of a deficiency in certification requirements, the applicant may provide evidence of alternative education and/or experience that the applicant believes is equivalent to the area of deficiency. N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.12(b). However, the Board is not authorized to waive certification requirements. Rather, it may consider alternative education or experience only where the applicant demonstrates that the alternative education or experience is equivalent to the identified deficiency.

The applicable regulations require a candidate for a K-6 CEAS to satisfy the liberal arts and/or science coursework requirements documented on a transcript from an accredited college or university. N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-8.2; N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-10.2. The regulations define a liberal arts major as one that includes, but is not limited to, philosophy, history, literature, sociology, world language, mathematics, science, or engineering, and that is intended primarily to provide general knowledge and develop an individual's general intellectual capacities to reason and evaluate, as opposed to professional or vocational skills. N.J.A.C. 6A:9-2.1.

Petitioner bears the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the credible evidence, that she is entitled to the certification she seeks. See Walder v. N.J. Dep't of Educ., State Bd. of Exam'rs, EDU 08530-14, Initial Decision (Nov. 10, 2014), adopted, Comm'r (Dec. 29, 2014). Respondent, by contrast, must demonstrate that its determination was consistent with the applicable statutory and regulatory provisions and supported by the record.

The issue here is not whether petitioner is devoted, capable, or experienced. Nor is the issue whether petitioner's teaching experience has practical value. The issue is whether petitioner satisfied the specific certification requirements established by regulation or, alternatively, demonstrated that her proposed alternative education and experience were equivalent to the 21.5 missing liberal arts and/or science credits.

I **FIND** Singh's testimony credible and persuasive. Singh explained the review process, the regulatory distinction between liberal arts coursework and pedagogy or vocationally directed coursework, and the manner in which petitioner's transcript and

supporting documentation were evaluated. Her testimony was consistent with the regulatory scheme and supported by the record.

I further **FIND** that petitioner did not establish that the Board improperly excluded the disputed credits. Although petitioner testified that her religious studies courses were rigorous and involved humanities-related skills, the relevant inquiry is not merely whether a course was challenging or intellectually meaningful. The inquiry is whether the course satisfies the regulatory definition of liberal arts and whether the record contains sufficient documentation for the Board to make that determination. I am persuaded that where course descriptions or syllabi were missing, incomplete, institution-specific, pedagogical in nature, or otherwise insufficient to establish that the course primarily developed general intellectual capacities, the examiner had a reasonable basis to decline credit.

Similarly, petitioner's teaching experience and professional development are admirable but do not, without more, establish one-to-one equivalency with 21.5 liberal arts and/or science credits. Teaching experience may demonstrate classroom skills, professional growth, and commitment to students. However, the liberal arts and/or science requirement serves a distinct purpose: ensuring that elementary teachers possess a broad academic foundation across subject areas they may be required to teach, including language arts literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, world languages, computer literacy, and basic skills in reading, writing, and spelling. Petitioner did not present evidence demonstrating that her teaching experience, instructional hours, or professional development covered the substance, scope, academic rigor, and credit equivalency of 21.5 semester hours in liberal arts and/or science coursework.

Petitioner's arguments concerning fairness, teacher shortages, and financial burden are understandable. However, those concerns do not authorize the Board or this tribunal to disregard or waive mandatory certification requirements. The Board's authority is limited by regulation. Therefore, even where an applicant presents sympathetic circumstances, the Board may only grant relief if the applicant satisfies the regulatory requirements or proves qualifying alternative education or experience equivalent to the deficiency.

Based on the credible evidence in the record, I **FIND** and **CONCLUDE** that petitioner failed to prove by a preponderance of the credible evidence that she satisfied the liberal arts and/or science credit requirement or that her alternative education and experience were equivalent to the 21.5-credit deficiency. I further **CONCLUDE** that the Board's denial of petitioner's application was supported by the record and consistent with the applicable statutory and regulatory framework.

Accordingly, the petition for appeal is hereby **DISMISSED**.

ORDER

It is hereby **ORDERED** that petitioner's appeal is **DISMISSED**.

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.

June 8, 2026

DATE



IRENE JONES, ALJ (Ret., on recall):

Date Received at Agency:

June 8, 2026

Date Mailed to Parties:

June 8, 2026

IJ/Ir

EXHIBITS

Witnesses

For petitioner:

Alyssa Danielle DeBlasis, petitioner

For respondent:

Rani Singh

Exhibits in Evidence

Joint Exhibits:

J-1 Official university transcript

For petitioner:

P-1 DeBlasis/DOE e-mail of 5/13/24

P-2 DOE response to DeBlasis

P-3 Apprenticeship newspaper article

For respondent:

R-1 Petitioner's appeal of July 2024

R-2 Board denial, dated 11/1/24