

New Jersey Commissioner of Education
Final Decision

J.F. on behalf of minor children, G.F. and L.F.,

Petitioner,

v.

Wood-Ridge Board of Education, Bergen 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 G.F. and L.F. are entitled to a free public education in the Wood-Ridge school district. The Commissioner further concurs with the ALJ that the petitioner does not owe the Board tuition.

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

IT IS SO ORDERED.¹


COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

Date of Decision: October 13, 2026
Date of Mailing: October 13, 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

OAL DKT. NO. EDU 05655-26

AGENCY DKT. NO. 101-03-26

J.F. ON BEHALF OF MINOR CHILDREN

G.F. AND L.F.,

Petitioner,

v.

**BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE BOROUGH OF
WOOD-RIDGE, BERGEN COUNTY,**

Respondent.

Krista Haley Rue, Esq., (Rue Law Group, attorneys) for petitioners

Daniel R. Roberts, Esq., (Kenney, Gross, Kovats and Parton, attorneys) for
respondents

Record Closed: August 6, 2026

Decided: August 25, 2026

BEFORE **BARBARA SINGER, ALJ:**

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Petitioners G.F. and L.F., who are over five and under twenty years of age, are domiciled in Wood-Ridge, New Jersey. Are G.F. and L.F. entitled to a free public education in Wood-Ridge, New Jersey? Yes. Public schools must be free to anyone who

is over five and under twenty years of age and is domiciled within that school district. N.J.S.A. 18A:38-1(a).

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On February 9, 2026, respondent, the Wood-Ridge Board of Education, issued a Notice of an Initial Determination of Ineligibility to J.F., asserting that her children were ineligible to attend school in Wood-Ridge because they are not domiciled in Wood-Ridge.

J.F. then requested a hearing with the board of education. On February 26, 2026, the board held the hearing. On February 27, 2026, the board issued a Notice of Final Ineligibility to J.F. concluding that the children were ineligible to attend school in Wood-Ridge because they were not domiciled in Wood-Ridge.

On March 20, 2026, J.F. filed a petition of appeal with the Commissioner of Education.

On April 8, 2026, the board filed an answer with a cross petition seeking tuition reimbursement.

On April 9, 2026, the New Jersey State Department of Education, Bureau of Controversies and Disputes, transmitted this case to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for a hearing as a contested case under N.J.S.A. 52:14B-1 to -15, and the act establishing the office, N.J.S.A. 52:14F-1 to -23, for a hearing under the Uniform Administrative Procedure Rules, M.J.A.C. 1:1-1.1 to -21.6.

On July 27, 2026, I held the hearing. On August 5, 2026, the board submitted its written summation, and on August 6, 2026, J.F. submitted her written summation. On August 6, 2026, I closed the record.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Based upon the testimony the parties provided, and my assessment of their credibility, together with the documents the parties submitted, and my assessment of their sufficiency, I **FIND** the following **FACTS**:

J.F. and S.A., her husband, have two children together, G.F. and L.F. Both children attended the Catherine Doyle Elementary School in Wood-Ridge during the 2025-2026 school year. L.F. was five years old and G.F. was nine years old at the start of the school year.

The family home in Wood-Ridge is in S.A.'s name. The family moved to Wood-Ridge from Jersey City in 2020. The former family home in Jersey City is in J.F.'s name and remains in her name because she still owns it and leases it out. In fact, she has been leasing it out since the family moved to Wood-Ridge from Jersey City in 2020.

In late 2025, the board conducted a residency investigation. The investigation, however, was an investigation in name only. The investigator, Jerome Onnembo, a special law enforcement officer with the Wood-Ridge Police Department, did not know the number of times he visited the Wood-Ridge home or the dates of any visits. He claims that he recalls one visit, a welfare check, but he provided no proof of that visit. In fact, Onnembo produced no proof of any visit and no report of any investigation. Moreover, Onnembo admitted that his welfare check was the only time he left his car to investigate whether the family lived in the home. Ultimately, Onnembo concludes that the family does not live at the home because he parked outside the home from approximately 7:15 a.m. to 8:10 a.m. on numerous but unspecified occasions and he never saw anyone leave the home. He only saw packages on the porch and mail in the mailbox.

The reason Onnembo never saw anyone leave the home between 7:15 a.m. and 8:15 a.m. when he was parked outside the home is because J.F. and the children leave the home before 7:15 a.m. As J.F. explained at the hearing, she and her children leave at approximately 6:00 a.m. in the morning because her mother lives approximately 25 minutes away in Englewood, and she must assist her mother because her mother suffers

from a stroke and needs the assistance. As a result, J.F. and her children not only leave the home early but also often arrive at school late. S.A. also leaves the home at approximately 6:00 a.m. for work.

Additionally, J.F. explained that she and S.A. had marriage difficulties starting in the fall of 2025, so J.F. and the children would spend more time, including overnights, at her mother's home. On February 9, 2026, the day of the welfare check that was recorded on the home's Ring doorbell camera, S.A. was out of the country on a nearly two-week trip. J.F. was at her mother's home that day and took L.F. to an urgent care center near her mother's as that location was closest to where she was.

At no time did J.F. abandon the marital home. At no time did the children set up bedrooms elsewhere or move to another location. The Wood-Ridge home was and continues to be the family home. The parents reconciled after a few months.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

A person over five and under twenty years of age is entitled to a free education in the district in which he or she is domiciled. N.J.S.A. 18A:38-1(a). "A student is domiciled in the school district when he or she is the child of a parent or guardian whose domicile is located within the school district." N.J.A.C. 6A:22-3.1(a)(1). Domicile is defined as the place where a person has his true, fixed, permanent home and principal establishment and to which, whenever he is absent, he has the intention to return. N.J.A.C. 6A:22-3.4(a). State v. Benny, 20 N.J. 238, 250 (1955), D.L. v. Board Of Educ. Of Princeton Regional School Dist., 366 N.J. Super. 269, 273 (App. Div. 2004). The determination is based on the totality of information and documentation. N.J.A.C. 6A:22-3.4(c).

There is no conflicting documentation. The BOE concern over how the water company lists the names on the bill is meritless. The investigator's report is non-existent. His recollection of visiting the home and seeing snow laden walkways on the day he picked up packages and checked the mailbox, is contradicted by the Ring doorbell video showing clear walkways. His recollection of this investigation is minimal, especially with respect to dates of visits. As S.A. generally leaves for work early and J.F. brings the

children with her to her mother's home to assist in the morning, the children do not always leave from the Wood-Ridge home to go directly to school. Furthermore, when they go to their grandmother's house first, they arrive to school from a different direction than their home.

Therefore, I **CONCLUDE** that G.F. and L.F. are entitled to a free public education in the Wood-Ridge school district.

ORDER

I **ORDER** that the petitioner does not owe the respondent the cost of tuition for an out-of-district student.

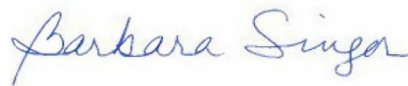
I hereby **FILE** this initial decision with **THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION** for consideration.

This recommended decision may be adopted, modified, or rejected by **THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**, who by law is authorized to make a final decision in this matter. If the Acting 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 under 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 **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.

August 25, 2026

DATE



BARBARA SINGER, ALJ

Date Received at Agency:

8/25/26

Date Mailed to Parties:

8/25/26

BCS:id

APPENDIX

Witnesses

For Petitioner:

K.P., petitioner

L.S.

For Respondent:

Anthony Albro, Superintendent of Schools

Jerry Onnembo, School Resource Officer

Exhibits

For Petitioner:

- P-1 W-2 Wage and Tax Statements for 2023 for J.F.
- P-2 NJMVC Interim Driver License for J.F.
- P-3 Stamped Visa page from L.S.'s passport and Copa Airlines flight itinerary for February 4, 2026, and February 25, 2026
- P-4 Veolia Water NJ bill stubs
- P-5 Envelope with mail from Wood-Ridge Memorial Library
- P-6 Veolia Water NJ bill for July 30, 2025
- P-7 Birth Certificates and school program registration forms for G.F. and L.F. for a September 5, 2025, start date
- P-8 NJ Youth Soccer Player Medical Release Form for L.F., dated May 11, 2026
- P-9 NJMVC Change of Address Acknowledgement for J.F., date of change February 13, 2026
- P-10 PNC Bank statement for J.F., January 8-February 4, 2026
- P-11 Veolia Water NJ bill for January 29, 2026
- P-12 AM/PM Walk In Urgent & Primary Care notes, and screen shots of text messages, all dated February 9, 2026

For Respondent:

- R-1 Initial Notice of Ineligibility, February 9, 2026
- R-2 Final Notice of Ineligibility, February 27, 2026
- R-3 Attendance Records for G.F. and L.F, September 25, 2025 -June 19, 2026
- R-4 Sun-West Mortgage Statement, January 16, 2026
- R-5 NJMVC Change of Address Acknowledgement for J.F., date of change
February 13, 2026
- R-6 Not in evidence
- R-7 Veolia Water NJ bill for January 29, 2026
- R-8 Not in evidence