

***Before the School Ethics Commission  
OAL Docket No.: EEC-11079-22  
SEC Docket No.: C24-22  
Final Decision***

---

**Lisa Strutin, Mary Renaud, Craig Green, Abigail Christmann,  
Harriett Gaddy, and Stephen Bienko,  
*Complainants***

v.

**Lisa A. Moyer,  
Allamuchy Township Board of Education, Warren County,  
*Respondent***

---

**I. Procedural History**

The above-captioned matter arises from a Complaint that was filed on March 13, 2022,<sup>1</sup> by Lisa Strutin (Complainant Strutin), Mary Renaud, Craig Green, Abigail Christmann, Harriett Gaddy, and Stephen Bienko (collectively, Complainants) alleging that Lisa A. Moyer (Respondent), a member of the Allamuchy Township Board of Education (Board), violated the School Ethics Act (Act), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-21 *et seq.* More specifically, the Complaint avers that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24(b) (in Count 3), as well as *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(a) of the Code of Ethics for School Board Members (Code) (in Counts 1-3, Count 5, and Counts 7-8), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(b) of the Code (in Count 1 and Count 7), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c) of the Code (in Count 1, Count 3, and Counts 5-6), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(d) of the Code (in Count 1, Count 6, and Counts 9-10), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e) of the Code (in Count 1, Counts 4-6, and Counts 9-10), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f) of the Code (in Count 7, and Counts 9-10), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g) of the Code (in Counts 1-2), and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i) of the Code (in Counts 1-2, Count 4, Counts 8-9, and Count 11).

On May 23, 2022, the Commission voted to place this matter in abeyance, pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-32. Following resolution of the conflicting matter on or about September 6, 2022, the instant ethics case proceeded.

At its special meeting on October 17, 2022, and after reviewing Respondent's Motion to Dismiss in Lieu of Answer (Motion to Dismiss) and allegation of frivolous filing, as well as Complainants' response thereto, the Commission voted to grant the Motion to Dismiss as to the alleged violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(a) in Count 1 and as to Counts 2-11 (in their entirety);

---

<sup>1</sup> On March 13, 2022, Complainants filed a deficient Complaint; however, on March 24, 2022, Complainants cured all defects and filed an Amended Complaint that was deemed compliant with the requirements detailed in *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-6.3.

but deny the Motion to Dismiss as to Count 1 (excluding the alleged violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(a)). The Commission voted to find the Complaint not frivolous, and to deny Respondent’s request for sanctions. Based on its decision, the Commission also directed Respondent to file an Answer to Complaint (Answer) as to the remaining allegations (*N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(b), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(d), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i) in Count 1). In light of the fact that the only remaining allegations involved violations of the Code, the Commission voted to transmit the above-captioned matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) following receipt of the Answer, which the Commission received on December 1, 2022.

At the OAL, a hearing was held on June 22, 2023, and July 24, 2023. Thereafter, the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) issued an Initial Decision on December 22, 2023, finding that Respondent violated the remaining allegations in Count 1 of the Complaint, and recommended that only the “minimum monetary penalty” be imposed.”<sup>2</sup> The parties did not file exceptions to the Initial Decision.

At its meeting on January 23, 2024, the Commission considered the full record in this matter. Thereafter, at its special meeting on February 27, 2024, the Commission voted to modify the Initial Decision, finding that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(d) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e) in Count 1, but did not violate *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(b), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), and/or *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i) in Count 1. The Commission also voted to recommend a penalty of reprimand.

## **II. Initial Decision**

This matter involves allegations that Respondent and her spouse were involved in “ongoing efforts to negotiate with the District Administration to reverse a determination that their child had committed a [Harassment Intimidation and Bullying (HIB)] violation, as well as a Code of Conduct violation, which became part of [their child’s] school record.” *Initial Decision* at 2.

Prior to the Board’s reorganization meeting on January 4, 2022, Respondent’s child had been “deemed liable for a Code of Conduct violation for an incident that occurred in District.” *Id.* at 6. The Superintendent testified that she denied Respondent’s request to have the Code of Conduct violation removed, and she also denied the request to have the matter brought before the full Board. *Id.* at 4. Nevertheless, Respondent communicated directly with the Superintendent several times “seeking her direct intervention and a reversal of the finding” against her child. *Id.* at 6. The Superintendent testified that Respondent “pressed on to the point of threatening her, saying . . . in the presence of others that ‘she could not stand her’ and that the Board ‘needed to hold her accountable.’” *Id.* at 4. The Superintendent felt threatened by the tone of Respondent’s accusations and retained counsel. *Id.* at 4, 6.

---

<sup>2</sup> Pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-29(c), the Commission may recommend penalties including the reprimand, censure, suspension or removal of a school official, but does not have the authority to issue monetary penalties.

In addition, Respondent also sent an email regarding the topic to each Board member, and did not indicate that she was doing so as a parent and not as a Board member. *Id.* at 6. Furthermore, Board counsel testified that he received emails from Respondent regarding her child, which “is not standard protocol since usually [B]oard member inquiries go through [a]dministration first.” *Id.* at 4. The email stated, among other things, “No offense . . . but my legal counsel runs rings around you and your firm . . . Besides the obvious that I am a client there is also a moral obligation that a normal person would naturally feel after hearing what happened to a child. But because your client is devoid of any of those natural feelings we are now all in the mess that we are finding ourselves in.” *Exhibit P-8.*

Respondent’s husband raised the subject of their child’s punishment at the same Board meeting, during public session, and sought clarification on the Board policy related to the subject. *Initial Decision* at 6. Respondent and her spouse continued their advocacy for their child directly with the administration and the Board until they secured private counsel some time after the January 4, meeting. *Ibid.* Respondent and her spouse filed suit against the Board, which was ultimately resolved. *Ibid.* Respondent testified that “everything she did was to advocate on behalf of her [child] who she feels was being unfairly treated.” *Id.* at 5.

Based on the testimony of six witnesses, including Complainant Strutin and Respondent, the ALJ finds “there is clear evidence of personality conflicts and disputes over [B]oard policy between a majority of the members of the Board and Respondent which explains in part why the Complaint was filed by multiple [Complainants].” *Id.* at 7. The ALJ further finds Respondent acted inappropriately at the meeting on January 4, by communicating directly with the Superintendent, as well as sending an email about the situation to the entire Board, even if the email was sent as a parent and not as a Board member. *Ibid.* The ALJ also finds there were at least two other Board members who shared concerns during the public meeting related to Respondent’s conduct at the meeting, and that despite warnings, Respondent’s spouse still discussed the matter in public. *Ibid.* Finally, the ALJ finds sending a letter to the entire Board without indicating in which role it was being sent, parent or Board member, is a violation of the Act. *Ibid.*

The ALJ concludes Complainants have met their burden as to Count 1, namely that Respondent violated the alleged provisions of the Code. *Id.* at 11. The ALJ further concludes Respondent’s actions were self-serving in nature and she would secure a personal benefit if the Code of Conduct violation were changed. *Ibid.* According to the ALJ, Respondent’s conduct “constitutes bad judgment in violation of the School Ethics training she received and is obligated to follow by circulating an email to the entire Board, by communicating directly with the Superintendent about a private matter, by not stopping or cautioning her husband from bringing a private confidential matter into an open forum, and by not recusing herself or stepping aside when her husband went forward with his presentation to the entire [B]oard during the January 4, meeting.” *Ibid.*

The ALJ asserts that although he finds that the remaining allegations in the Complaint have been sustained, “by way of mitigation, due to the emotional nature of the incident involving her [child] . . . Respondent felt that she was acting in [the child’s] best interests and was simply unable to separate the two roles” of parent and Board member. *Id.* at 7. The ALJ notes that “this

is an unfortunate situation where Respondent and her spouse got carried away in what they thought was zealous advocacy for their [child], which was compounded by Respondent's refusal to adhere to instructions from [B]oard counsel and other members of the Board." *Id.* at 8. Therefore, and although Respondent violated the alleged violations of the Code, the ALJ recommends that only the "minimum monetary penalty" should be imposed against her. *Ibid.*

### III. Analysis

Upon a careful, thorough, and independent review of the record, the Commission finds that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(d) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e) in Count 1, but did not violate *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(b), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), and/or *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i) in Count 1. Accordingly, the Commission recommends a penalty of reprimand for the violations.

Under *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(b), board members must make decisions "in terms of the educational welfare of children" and "seek to develop and maintain public schools that meet the individual needs of all children regardless of their ability, race, creed, sex or social standing." The Commission finds that Respondent's attempts to advocate for her child, including any contact made to the Superintendent, Board members, or Board counsel, while it may have been inappropriate or a violation of the Act, it does not establish that Respondent made a decision contrary to the educational welfare of children, or that she took deliberate action to obstruct the programs and policies designed to meet the individual needs of *all children*, regardless of their ability, race, color, creed, or social standing. Respondent's behaviors stemmed from an attempt to advocate for her child, not contrary to the needs of all children, which does not arise to a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(b).

Pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c), board members must confine board action to "policy making, planning, and appraisal" and "frame policies and plans only after the board has consulted those who will be affected by them." The Commission finds that Respondent used her position as a Board member to contact Board counsel to further her personal agenda regarding her child's disciplinary record. A non-Board member parent would not have the ability or opportunity to reach out directly to Board counsel, and as such, Respondent's actions in doing so for personal reasons stemmed from her Board membership and is action unrelated to her duties as a Board member, in violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c).

Under *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(d), board members must not "administer the schools," but instead "see that they are well run." The Commission finds that Respondent's direct communication, on multiple occasions, with the Superintendent to seek "direct intervention and a reversal of the finding" against her child, was a direct order to school personnel to alter her child's disciplinary record. By contacting individual members of the Board and Board counsel, in addition to the Superintendent, to lobby for a change to her child's disciplinary record, Respondent became involved in the functions that are the responsibility of school personnel. Although it was a highly emotional situation for Respondent, she attempted to administer the schools by insisting that the Superintendent remove her child's Code of Conduct violation and/or bring the matter to the full Board, and by pressing the issue with individual Board members and Board counsel, in violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(d).

Pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e), a board member must “recognize that authority rests with the board” and a board member shall not make any “personal promises nor take any private action that may compromise the board.” The Commission finds that Respondent’s efforts to persuade individual Board members and Board counsel to advocate for her personal agenda, namely the reversal of her child’s Code of Conduct and HIB violations, was action beyond the scope of her duties as a Board member. Although parents may contact the Superintendent regarding their children, Respondent was only able to contact individual Board members and Board counsel regarding her child’s disciplinary record due to her Board member status. Such action has the potential to compromise the Board as she was attempting to influence Board members to overturn a decision regarding her child that the chief school administrator made. Additionally, when Board counsel receives emails, counsel may charge the Board for the time spent reading and/or responding to communications stemming from matters involving the Board, so Respondent’s email to Board counsel for a personal matter may cost the Board money. As such, Respondent’s actions went beyond the scope of her duties, and by its nature, that action had the potential to compromise the Board, in violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e).

As set forth in *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), board members must “hold confidential all matters pertaining to the schools which, if disclosed, would needlessly injure individuals or the schools” and in all other matters, board members must “provide accurate information and . . . interpret to the staff the aspirations of the community for its school.” The Commission finds that Respondent’s discussion of her child’s matter in public does not amount to disclosing confidential information. It does not appear that Respondent disclosed any information that she learned through her position on the Board, but rather she discussed information involving her own child that she learned as a parent. As such, Respondent’s advocacy for her child does not violate *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g).

According to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i), Board members must support and protect school personnel in the proper performance of their duties. Respondent’s contact and tension with the Superintendent stemmed from the sensitive and emotionally charged topic of disciplinary action involving her child. As such, the Commission finds her communications were not deliberate action that resulted in undermining, opposing, compromising, or harming school personnel in the proper performance of their duties, and therefore, did not violate *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i).

With respect to a penalty, the Commission finds that a reprimand is appropriate. The Commission understands the need for a parent to advocate on behalf of her child and recognizes that Respondent was highly emotional given her concerns surrounding what she felt was an incorrect outcome that would have a lasting impact on her child’s disciplinary record. However, the Commission notes that in doing so, a school official must adhere to the Act. Given Respondent’s violations of the Code, balanced with the unique mitigating circumstances present in this matter, the Commission recommends a penalty of reprimand.

#### **IV. Decision**

For the aforementioned reasons, the Commission modifies the Initial Decision of the OAL and finds that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(d) and

*N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e) in Count 1, but did not violate *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(b), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), and/or *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i) in Count 1. Additionally, the Commission recommends a penalty of reprimand for the violations.

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. The parties 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](mailto:ControversiesDisputesFilings@doe.nj.gov)). A copy must also be sent to the Commission ([school.ethics@doe.nj.gov](mailto: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: February 27, 2024

***Resolution Adopting Decision  
in Connection with C24-22***

***Whereas***, at its special meeting on October 17, 2022, the School Ethics Commission (Commission) voted to transmit the above-captioned matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for a plenary hearing; and

***Whereas***, the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) issued an Initial Decision dated December 22, 2023; and

***Whereas***, the ALJ found that Respondent violated the remaining allegations in Count 1 of the Complaint, and recommended that only the “minimum monetary penalty” be imposed; and

***Whereas***, the parties did not file exceptions to the Initial Decision; and

***Whereas***, at its meeting on January 23, 2024, the Commission reviewed the record in this matter, and discussed modifying the Initial Decision to find that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(d) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e) in Count 1, but did not violate *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(b), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), and/or *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i) in Count 1; and

***Whereas***, at its meeting on January 23, 2024, the Commission discussed recommending a penalty of reprimand for the violations; and

***Whereas***, at its special meeting on February 27, 2024, the Commission reviewed and voted to approve the within decision as accurately memorializing its actions/findings from its meeting on January 23, 2024; and

***Now Therefore Be It Resolved***, the Commission hereby adopts the within decision.

---

Robert W. Bender, Chairperson

I hereby certify that this Resolution was duly adopted by the School Ethics Commission at its special meeting on February 27, 2024.

---

Brigid C. Martens, Director  
School Ethics Commission