

Before the School Ethics Commission
Docket No.: C102-24
Decision on Probable Cause

Sharnell Morgan,
Complainant

v.

Doris Rowell,
Pleasantville Board of Education, Atlantic County,
Respondent

I. Procedural History

The above-captioned matter arises from a Complaint that was filed with the School Ethics Commission (Commission) on November 15, 2024, by Sharnell Morgan (Complainant), alleging that Doris Rowell (Respondent), a member of the Pleasantville 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:12-24.1(e)* and *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(g)* of the Code of Ethics for School Board Members (Code). Respondent filed a Written Statement on January 30, 2025.

The parties were notified by correspondence dated September 16, 2025, that the above-captioned matter would be discussed by the Commission at its meeting on September 23, 2025, in order to make a determination regarding probable cause. Following its discussion on September 23, 2025, the Commission adopted a decision at its meeting on October 28, 2025, finding that there are insufficient facts and circumstances pled in the Complaint and in the Written Statement to lead a reasonable person to believe that the Act was violated as alleged in the Complaint.

II. Summary of the Pleadings

A. *The Complaint*

Complainant maintains that Respondent (Board President) directed the Business Administrator (BA) to send a text message to the Board members to cancel the July 2024, Board meeting “for personal reasons.” According to Complainant, a “huge presence [was] expected” to attend the July Board meeting and Respondent “lied by advising the public that the meeting was canceled because” the Board did not have a quorum. Complainant asserts Respondent violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(e)*, because she “misused her power as the [Board] President to cancel a meeting, which was a private action: the [B]oard did not get to meet to cancel the meeting to

attempt to have [a] quorum because of her actions,” and therefore, she compromised the entire Board. Additionally, Complainant asserts Respondent violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g) because she “lied and said it was because of a lack of a quorum and not personal reasons.” Further, Complainant asserts Respondent “did not follow protocols, policies, or the By-Laws of NJ Board of Education” and violated Board policies with her cancellation of the meeting.

B. *Written Statement*

Respondent argues that Complainant has failed to demonstrate that Respondent’s “alleged cancellation of the” July meeting violated the Act.

As to a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e), Respondent maintains that Complainant did not provide any evidence to support that Respondent “made a personal promise to anyone or that [she] took action beyond the scope of her duties that would compromise the [B]oard.” Further, Respondent argues that Board Policy No. 161 provides that the Board President may cancel a Board meeting. Moreover, Respondent maintains that monthly meetings are “only required when school is in session.”

Regarding a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), Respondent argues her actions “were within the scope of her duties as President and thus did not constitute ‘personal action’” as alleged. Further, Respondent asserts Complainant did not provide any evidence to demonstrate that Respondent made any confidential information public.

III. Analysis

This matter is before the Commission for a determination of probable cause pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-9.7. A finding of probable cause is not an adjudication on the merits but, rather, an initial review whereupon the Commission makes a preliminary determination as to whether the matter should proceed to an adjudication on the merits, or whether further review is not warranted. Pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-9.7(a), probable cause “shall be found when the facts and circumstances presented in the complaint and written statement would lead a reasonable person to believe that the Act has been violated.”

Jurisdiction of the Commission

In reviewing the allegations in this matter, the Commission notes that its authority is limited to enforcing the Act, *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-21 *et seq.*, a set of minimum ethical standards by which all school officials must abide. In this regard, the Commission has jurisdiction only over matters arising under the Act, and it may not receive, hear, or consider any matter that does not arise under the Act, *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-1.4(a).

With the jurisdiction of the Commission in mind, to the extent that Complainant seeks a determination from the Commission that Respondent may have violated any Board policies or regulations, the Commission advises that such determinations fall beyond the scope, authority, and jurisdiction of the Commission. Although Complainant may be able to pursue a cause of

action(s) in the appropriate tribunal, the Commission is not the appropriate entity to adjudicate those claims. Accordingly, those claims are dismissed.

Alleged Violations of the Act

Complainant submits that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e), and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), and these provisions of the Code provide:

e. I will recognize that authority rests with the board of education and will make no personal promises nor take any private action that may compromise the board.

g. I will hold confidential all matters pertaining to the schools which, if disclosed, would needlessly injure individuals or the schools. In all other matters, I will provide accurate information and, in concert with my fellow board members, interpret to the staff the aspirations of the community for its school.

Pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-6.4(a), a violation(s) of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e) and/or *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g) need to be supported by certain factual evidence, more specifically:

5. Factual evidence of a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e) shall include evidence that Respondent made personal promises or took action beyond the scope of her duties such that, by its nature, had the potential to compromise the board.

7. Factual evidence of a violation of the confidentiality provision of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g) shall include evidence that Respondent took action to make public, reveal or disclose information that was not public under any laws, regulations or court orders of this State, or information that was otherwise confidential in accordance with board policies, procedures or practices. Factual evidence that Respondent violated the inaccurate information provision of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g) shall include evidence that substantiates the inaccuracy of the information provided by Respondent and evidence that establishes that the inaccuracy was other than reasonable mistake or personal opinion or was not attributable to developing circumstances.

Based on its review, the Commission finds that there are insufficient facts and circumstances presented in the Complaint and the Written Statement to lead a reasonable person to believe that *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e) and/or *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g) were violated. With respect to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e), Complainant has not shown that Respondent made any personal promises or took action beyond the scope of her duties when she canceled the Board meeting in her capacity as Board president. Moreover, Complainant did not explain how Respondent's cancellation of the meeting did or would have compromised the Board. As for *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), the Complaint lacks evidence that establishes Respondent made any false or inaccurate statements to the general public.

Accordingly, and pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-9.7(b), the Commission dismisses the alleged violation(s) of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(e) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g).

IV. Decision

In accordance with *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-29(b), and for the reasons detailed herein, the Commission hereby notifies Complainant and Respondent that there are insufficient facts and circumstances pled in the Complaint and in the Written Statement to lead a reasonable person to believe that the Act was violated as alleged in the Complaint and, consequently, dismisses the above-captioned matter. *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-9.7(b).

The within decision is a final decision of an administrative agency and, therefore, it is appealable only to the Superior Court-Appellate Division. *See, New Jersey Court Rule 2:2-3(a)*. Under *New Jersey Court Rule 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.

Robert W. Bender, Chairperson

Mailing Date: October 28, 2025

***Resolution Adopting Decision
in Connection with C102-24***

Whereas, at its meeting on September 23, 2025, the School Ethics Commission (Commission) considered the Complaint and the Written Statement submitted in connection with the above-referenced matter; and

Whereas, at its meeting on September 23, 2025, the Commission discussed finding that the facts and circumstances presented in the Complaint and the Written Statement would not lead a reasonable person to believe that the Act was violated, and therefore, dismissing the above-captioned matter; and

Whereas, at its meeting on October 28, 2025, the Commission reviewed and voted to approve the within decision as accurately memorializing its actions/findings from its meeting on September 23, 2025; and

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

Robert W. Bender, Chairperson

I hereby certify that the Resolution was duly adopted by the School Ethics Commission at its public meeting on October 28, 2025.

Brigid C. Martens, Director
School Ethics Commission