

Before the School Ethics Commission
Docket No.: C29-25
Decision on Probable Cause

Gerard Taraschi,
Complainant

v.

Carol Chila, Pamela Nathan and Eric Hibbs
Washington Township Board of Education, Gloucester County,
Respondents

I. Procedural History

The above-captioned matter arises from a Complaint that was filed with the School Ethics Commission (Commission) on April 4, 2025,¹ by Gerard Taraschi (Complainant), alleging that Carol Chila (Respondent Chila), a member of the Washington Township Board of Education (Board), as well as Pamela Nathan (Respondent Nathan) and Eric Hibbs (Respondent Hibbs), administrators employed by the Board, violated the School Ethics Act (Act), *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-21 et seq.* More specifically, the Complaint avers that all Respondents violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)*. Respondent Chila filed a Written Statement on June 2, 2025. Respondents Nathan and Hibbs filed Written Statements on May 14, 2025.

The parties were notified by correspondence dated November 17, 2025, that the above-captioned matter would be discussed by the Commission at its meeting on November 25, 2025, in order to make a determination regarding probable cause. Following its discussion on November 25, 2025, the Commission adopted a decision at its meeting on December 16, 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 Chila (Board President) has a child who attended the high school. Complainant further maintains that at the conclusion of the 2022-2023 school

¹ The Complaint was originally filed by two Complainants. On March 17, 2025, Complainants filed a deficient Complaint; however, on April 4, 2025, 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*. Thereafter, on May 5, 2025, one Complainant withdrew, leaving Mr. Taraschi as the sole Complainant.

year, Respondent Chila's child received an "Incomplete" final mathematics grade. As a result, Complainant provides that Respondent Chila emailed the teacher requesting that "multiple assignments for [her child] be marked 'exempt.'" Per Complainant, the teacher changed several grades to "exempt" in September 2023. However, "[u]nbeknownst" to the teacher, Respondent Nathan (Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction) made additional changes by contacting "a data entry specialist at the district's central office who maintained student grades with top level permissions in the electronic gradebook program called PowerSchool." Thereafter, on September 29, 2023, Complainant provides that Respondent Nathan initiated a meeting with the teacher, the mathematics supervisor and the high school principal, "specifically admitting that she didn't want to tell either the teacher or anyone about the grade change because she didn't want anyone to know about it." Complainant further provides that Respondent Nathan "expressed that she felt forced to make it known because of language in the teachers' collective bargaining agreement." However, according to Complainant, the Board policies and procedures were not followed with regard to the proposed grade change. Per Complainant, Respondent Nathan ended by "threatening that no one was allowed to repeat these facts around the grade change to anyone." Complainant notes the grade change that Respondent Nathan made "was drastically increased to well-beyond passing grade, though no new work was submitted." Complainant further notes the teacher did not divulge the information for fear of retaliation at the time of the incident.

With the above in mind, in Count 1, Complainant asserts Respondent Chila, Respondent Nathan and Respondent Hibbs violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)* because a reasonable person can conclude that Respondent Chila "circumnavigated the regular procedures for grade changes and used her position as a" Board member/President to secure unwarranted privileges for her child in the form of an increased mathematics grade. Moreover, Respondent Nathan "attempted to improperly coerce district employees not to disclose these actions in order to purposely conceal and cover up this grade change; this coordinated effort was grade tampering and malpractice of the highest degree." Further, "a reasonable person can conclude that Respondent Nathan would include and confer with Respondent Hibbs as Superintendent on the particulars of this matter in relationship to a [Board] member and president." Ultimately, Complainant contends Respondent Hibbs "directed and was the intermediary for his unethical behavior."

Per Complainant, during the 2022-2023 school year, Respondent Chila's child was being considered for acceptance into the National Honor Society (NHS); however, the child was not admitted. After three appeals, all of which were denied, the decision remained, and the matter was closed. Thereafter, in March 2023, Respondent Hibbs became the new Superintendent. Complainant provides that "at the behest of Respondent Hibbs" a meeting was held in April 2023, to review the student denials for the NHS. Consequently, Respondent Hibbs "changed the procedures by which personnel for extracurricular positions such as [the] NHS were approved," withheld formal approval of the NHS advisors causing the NHS advisors to resign because they felt that they were being harassed by Hibbs, and ultimately Respondent Chila's child was accepted into the NHS.

In Count 2, Complainant contends that Respondent Chila and Respondent Hibbs violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)* because there is "a clear, unethical nexus between Respondent Chila and Respondent Hibbs successfully securing a tangible, unwarranted privilege for Respondent

Chila's child, [] in the form of an ill-gotten admittance into the NHS." Complainant further contends Respondent Chila "orchestrated multiple improper attempts to administer the schools through multiple Superintendents to interfere with [the] NHS procedures to benefit her child until she was successful." Per Complainant, Respondent Hibbs "directed and personally oversaw these improper acts in coordination with Respondent Chila."

B. *Written Statement*

Respondent Chila

In Respondent Chila's Written Statement, Respondent Chila asserts the Complaint is time barred, specifically noting that Complainant asserts "that the statute of limitations should begin not when [the individuals involved] allegedly learned of the conduct, but only when he himself was allegedly informed – an interpretation that would eviscerate the time limits imposed by the [Act]." Respondent Chila maintains it is telling that none of the teachers or advisors who were named by Complainant provided certifications to support the allegations.

As to Count 1, Respondent Chila asserts the Complaint "fails to allege specific conduct by Respondent Chila, instead offering vague and conclusory assertions of unethical behavior." Respondent Chila provides that her child had a 504 Plan (Plan) due to suffering a concussion, and as a result submitted grades and received an updated final grade based upon the accommodations in the Plan.

Regarding Count 2, Respondent Chila argues it "lacks any factual allegations that Respondent Chila used her position to secure unwarranted privileges or advantages." According to Respondent Chila, 47 students were subsequently inducted into the NHS after the review, and just because her child was one, does not mean that Respondent violated the Act. Respondent denies the allegations in the Complaint and offers nine Affirmative Defenses in her defense.

Respondent Nathan

Respondent Nathan initially argues that the Complaint is time barred. In addition, Respondent Nathan further argues that Complainant fails to show that Respondent Chila (or her child) are an "other" to Respondent Nathan, nor do they even identify who the "other" is. Respondent also argues that Complainant also fails to identify the unwarranted privilege, advantage or employment that Respondent Chila received. Ultimately, Respondent Nathan denies the allegations in the Complaint, and notes that Respondent Chila's child was out of school for an extended amount of time due to a medical issue, and therefore, was unable to complete the work during the school year, and "similar accommodations" have been made for "countless other students throughout [her] career."

Respondent Hibbs

Respondent Hibbs denies the allegations in the Complaint and also notes it is time barred. Moreover, as to Count 1, Respondent Hibbs argues that Complainant does not "make any specific allegations against Respondent Hibbs," and merely infers that because Respondent

Nathan reports to him, he is also guilty. Therefore, Respondent Hibbs contends Count 1 should be dismissed. As to Count 2, the “allegations rely entirely upon an alleged conversation between” Complainant and the former NHS advisors. Respondent Hibbs notes Complainant was not involved in any of the alleged meetings, nor has he provided any evidence to support his allegations, and therefore, Count 2 should also be dismissed.

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 Respondents may have violated any Board policies, 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 Untimeliness

In Count 1 of the Complaint, Complainant alleges that Respondents violated the Act relating to actions on or about September 29, 2023. In Count 2, Complainant alleges that Respondents Chila and Hibbs violated the Act on August 10, 2023. However, Complainant filed the Complaint on April 4, 2025, which would be 553 and 603 days, respectively, after the actions allegedly occurred.

The Commission’s regulations provide a one hundred eighty (180) day limitation period for filing a complaint. More specifically, *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-6.5(a)* provides, in relevant part:

- (a) Complaints shall be filed within 180 days of notice of the events which form the basis of the alleged violation(s). A complainant shall be deemed to be notified of events that form the basis of the alleged violation(s) when the

complainant knew of the events, or when such events were made public so that one using reasonable diligence would know or should have known (emphasis added).

With the above in mind, and pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-6.5(a)*, the Commission must determine when Complainant knew of the events which formed the basis of the Complaint, or when such events were made public so that one using reasonable diligence would know, or should have known, of such events.

Complainant argues that he first became aware of the incidents in Count 1 on or about February 26, 2025. Following a Board meeting, Complainant alleges that some colleagues decided to speak up about unethical behaviors. After that same Board meeting, Complainant alleges that the teacher referenced in Count 1 spoke to him about the incident and expressed that “they never shared these details out of extreme fear of retaliation.” Complainant argues that “grade changes for other students, and specifically the conversations around what we believe to be the unscrupulous nature of the grade changes here, were neither known to us nor were they ever made public.” (emphasis theirs)

As to Count 2, Complainant argues that he first became aware on or about March 6, 2025. According to Complainant, “the NHS advisors recounted to us that they felt not only harassed by Respondent Hibbs, but that they feared retaliation from him.” As a result, they did not tell anyone about the allegations in Count 2.

After review, the Commission finds that there is not a credible basis upon which to find that Complainant was unaware of Respondents’ actions or conduct until the date when he filed the Complaint. For the first incident, Complainant only provides hearsay from unnamed staff members who could have come forward before. The names of students who were admitted into the NHS were publicly available. Although the Commission recognizes that the regulatory time period may be relaxed, in its discretion, in any case where strict adherence may be deemed inappropriate or unnecessary or may result in injustice, it does not find extraordinary circumstances in the within matter that would compel relaxation.

Therefore, the Commission finds that the allegations in Count 1 and Count 2 alleging Respondent violated the Act should be dismissed as untimely. However, given the nature of the allegations, for this Complaint, the Commission will still review the merits of these counts.

Alleged Violations of the Act

Complainant submits that, based on the conduct more fully detailed above, Respondents violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)*, and this provision of the Act states:

- b. No school official shall use or attempt to use his official position to secure unwarranted privileges, advantages or employment for himself, members of his immediate family or others;

In order to credit a violation of *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)*, Complainant must provide sufficient factual evidence that Respondents used or attempted to use their official position to secure an unwarranted privilege, advantage or employment for themselves, members of their immediate family, or “others.”

Count 1

In Count 1, Complainant contends Respondent Chila violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)* when she emailed her child’s teacher asking that some assignments be marked as “exempt,” Respondent Nathan violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)* as she instructed staff to change the grades, and Respondent Hibbs violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)* as he “directed and was the intermediary for [the] unethical behavior” of Respondents Chila and Nathan. Respondent Chila maintains that she was asking the teacher as a parent, based on her child’s 504 Plan, and therefore, did not violate the Act. Respondent Nathan argues that she was following school policy and that similar accommodations have been made for other students with similar accommodations. Respondent Hibbs asserts that the Complaint does not make any specific allegations against him.

After review, the Commission finds that there are insufficient facts and circumstances presented in the Complaint and the Written Statements to lead a reasonable person to believe that *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)* was violated in Count 1. Board members are allowed to consult with teachers and staff on behalf of their own child regarding their child’s education. Therefore, Complainant has not shown how Respondent Chila tried to use her position to secure unwarranted privilege or advantage for herself or her child by asking about a grade change given that her child had a 504 Plan. As for Respondent Nathan, Complainant has not shown how she provided any person with an unwarranted privilege or advantage when other students with similar accommodations have also received similar grade changes. Regarding Respondent Hibbs, Complainant has not articulated what actions Hibbs has taken related to this matter.

Therefore, 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(b)* in Count 1 for all Respondents.

Count 2

In Count 2 Complainant contends that Respondents Chila and Hibbs violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)* when Respondent Hibbs reviewed the denials for the NHS and subsequently allowed Respondent Chila’s child into the NHS. Respondent Chila counters that the Complaint lacks any allegations of action she took related to her child and the NHS while Respondent Hibbs notes that Complainant has not provided any evidence related to the allegation.

Following its assessment, the Commission finds that there are insufficient facts and circumstances presented in the Complaint and the Written Statements to lead a reasonable person to believe that *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24(b)* was violated. The Complaint lacks any details regarding any actions that Respondent Chila took that would demonstrate she used or attempted to use her official position to secure unwarranted privileges or advantages for herself or her child. As for Respondent Hibbs, Complainant has not shown how Respondent Hibbs’ actions were to secure

an unwarranted privilege or advantage for any particular student when 47 students were subsequently admitted into the NHS upon review of the denials.

Consequently, 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(b)* in Count 2 for Respondents Chila and Hibbs.

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 Respondents that there are insufficient facts and circumstances pled in the Complaint and in the Written Statements 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: December 16, 2025

***Resolution Adopting Decision
in Connection with C29-25***

Whereas, at its meeting on November 25, 2025, the School Ethics Commission (Commission) considered the Complaint and the Written Statements submitted in connection with the above-referenced matter; and

Whereas, at its meeting on November 25, 2025, the Commission discussed finding that the facts and circumstances presented in the Complaint and the Written Statements 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, the Commission reviewed and voted to approve the within decision as accurately memorializing its actions/findings from its meeting on December 16, 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 December 16, 2025.

Brigid C. Martens, Director
School Ethics Commission