

Before the School Ethics Commission
OAL Docket No.: EEC-04093-25
SEC Docket No.: C37-24
Final Decision (Settlement)

**Stephanie Marquard,
Complainant**

v.

**Kate Romeo,
West Milford Board of Education, Passaic County,
Respondent**

I. Procedural History

The above-captioned matter arises from a Complaint that was filed with the School Ethics Commission (Commission) on April 11, 2024, by Stephanie Marquard (Complainant), alleging that Kate Romeo (Respondent), a member of the West Milford 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(b)* (Count 2), *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(e)* (Count 1), *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(f)* (Count 1), and *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(g)* (Count 2) of the Code of Ethics for School Board Members (Code). Respondent filed a Written Statement, and also alleged that the Complaint is frivolous, on May 28, 2024. Complainant filed a response to the allegation of frivolous filing on June 4, 2024.

At its meeting on February 18, 2025, the Commission adopted a decision finding that there were sufficient facts and circumstances pled in the Complaint and in the Written Statement to lead a reasonable person to believe that *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(e)* and *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(f)* were violated as set forth in Count 1 of the Complaint, but insufficient facts and circumstances to lead a reasonable person to believe that *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(b)* and *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(g)* were violated as alleged in Count 2. The Commission also adopted a decision finding the Complaint not frivolous and denying Respondent's request for sanctions. Based on its finding of probable cause, the Commission transmitted the matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for a plenary hearing where Complainant had the burden to prove the remaining allegations that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(e)* and *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(f)*.

At the OAL, the parties agreed to settle the matter and, on or about August 27, 2025, the parties filed a fully executed settlement agreement and stipulation of facts. The Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) issued an Initial Decision (Settlement) on August 27, 2025, which concluded that the settlement agreement is voluntary, consistent with the law, and should be approved.

At its meeting on September 23, 2025, the Commission reviewed the Initial Decision (Settlement), and at its meeting on October 28, 2025, the Commission voted to adopt the Initial Decision (Settlement) as its Final Decision.

II. Analysis

In their fully executed settlement agreement and stipulation of facts, the parties set forth the terms of their settlement. More specifically, Respondent acknowledged that she contacted the Superintendent on a private administrative matter using her “Board member privileged access” and that this action may reasonably appear to the public as preferential and beyond the appropriate boundaries of her role as a Board member. *Initial Decision (Settlement)* (attachment). Despite this acknowledgement, Respondent “affirms that she acted with the sincere belief she was engaging with the Superintendent as a parent, not a Board member, and was not attempting to improperly influence the outcome.” *Ibid.* However, Respondent further acknowledged that her action resulted in the appearance of impropriety and may be construed as a technical violation of *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(e)*, but the parties agree that there is not enough evidence to support a violation of *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(f)*. *Ibid.* Because Respondent does not have any prior violations and is no longer serving on the Board, the parties agreed that “this Agreement shall serve as a reprimand and that no other penalty or sanction shall be imposed.” *Ibid.* Further, Respondent does not admit to any willful, intentional, or malicious misuse of her position. *Ibid.*

After reviewing the terms of the parties’ settlement agreement, the ALJ found that the “settlement is voluntary, consistent with the law, and fully dispositive of all issues in controversy between the parties in this case” and that the “agreement acknowledges that the agreement serves as a reprimand.” *Initial Decision (Settlement)* at 1. As such, the ALJ approved the settlement agreement. *Id.* at 2.

III. Decision

Following its review, the Commission does not find a reason why it should not defer to the parties’ mutual decision to amicably resolve their dispute. The Commission adopts the *Initial Decision (Settlement)* as its Final Decision.

Consequently, the above-captioned matter is hereby dismissed.

Robert W. Bender, Chairperson

Mailing Date: October 28, 2025

***Resolution Adopting Final Decision (Settlement)
in Connection with C37-24***

Whereas, at its meeting on February 18, 2025, the School Ethics Commission (Commission) voted to transmit the above-captioned matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for a hearing; and

Whereas, while at the OAL, the parties submitted a duly executed settlement agreement to the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) for review; and

Whereas, the ALJ issued an Initial Decision on August 27, 2025, concluding that the settlement agreement is voluntary, consistent with the law, and should be approved; and

Whereas, at its meeting on September 23, 2025, the Commission considered the Initial Decision and discussed adopting the Initial Decision as its Final Decision, and dismissing the 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, the Commission hereby adopts the within decision as its Final Decision, and directs its staff to notify all parties to this action of its decision herein.

Robert W. Bender, Chairperson

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

Brigid C. Martens, Director
School Ethics Commission