

Before the School Ethics Commission
Docket No.: C64-25
Decision on Probable Cause

Andrew Meehan,
Complainant

v.

**Jennifer Harris, Kenneth Martin, Demetrius Carroll, Eugenia Gilmore, Leila,
Amirhamzeh and Andrea Oates-Parchment,**
Hackensack Board of Education, Bergen County,
Respondents

I. Procedural History

The above-captioned matter arises from a Complaint that was filed with the School Ethics Commission (Commission) on July 15, 2025,¹ by Andrew Meehan (Complainant), alleging that Jennifer Harris, Kenneth Martin, Demetrius Carroll, Eugenia Gilmore, Leila Amirhamzeh, (collectively Respondents), members of the Hackensack Board of Education (Board), and Andrea Oates-Parchment, administrator of the Board, violated the School Ethics Act (Act), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-21 *et seq.* More specifically, the Complaint avers that Respondent Oates-Parchment violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24(b), as well as *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(a) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(c) and Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(a), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f) of the Act and Code of Ethics for School Board Members (Code).

Respondents filed a Written Statement on August 26, 2025, and also alleged that the Complaint is frivolous. On October 4, 2025, Complainant filed a response to the allegation of frivolous filing.

The parties were notified by correspondence dated January 20, 2026, that the above-captioned matter would be discussed by the Commission at its meeting on January 27, 2026, in order to make a determination regarding probable cause and the allegation of frivolous filing. Following its discussion on January 27, 2026, the Commission adopted a decision at its meeting on February 24, 2026, finding that the Commission does not have jurisdiction over the allegations in Count 1 and there are insufficient facts and circumstances in the remaining allegations 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. The Commission also adopted a decision finding the Complaint not frivolous, and denying Respondent's request for sanctions.

¹ On July 9, 2025, Complainant filed a deficient Complaint; however, on July 18, 2025, Complainant 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.

II. Summary of the Pleadings

A. The Complaint

Complainant provides the following timeline to support his assertions:

- January 8, 2025 – Respondent Harris is elected Board President. The Hackensack Education Association’s (HEA) President endorsed and supported Respondent Harris during her re-election campaign. Respondent Harris is also a member of the personnel committee and negotiates contracts with the HEA.
- February 26, 2025 – the Board “hired a new attorney . . . led by Jason Nunnermacker through a [Request for Proposals (RFP)] process.” The new attorney was the most expensive choice. According to Complainant, attorney Nunnermacker is not an education attorney, helped with the democratic campaign and is friends with Respondent Stein, Respondent Martin and Respondent Harris, as well as other Board members.
- March 5, 2025 – the HEA President “petitioned the [B]oard to allow [the Hackensack Association Office Professionals (HAOP)] to join the HEA union.” In April 2025, the Board approved the combination of the HEA with the HAOP to strengthen the HEA.
- April 24, 2025 – the Board replaced the existing auditor with a company they are connected to, despite Board member Outen’s objections.
- May 13, 2025 – the HEA President is elected as the Mayor of Hackensack.
- May 14, 2025 – the Board sought to remove the current insurance broker and replace it with their colleague and friend, despite the current broker having a contract through 2026.
- June 3, 2025 – the Bergen Record reported that Board members Harris, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhanzeh made political endorsements as Board members for State Assembly candidates without using a disclaimer to the article.
- June 11, 2025 – Despite indicating that they would not make a decision at the special meeting, the Board suspended Dr. McBride, the Superintendent, the next day as confirmed by Respondent Harris’ statement at the June 18, 2025, Board meeting.
- June 11, 2025 – Acting Superintendent Oates-Parchment becomes the Interim Superintendent. Respondent Oates-Parchment has relatives employed within the District and has failed to report them on her Personal/Relative Financial Disclosure Statement (FDS). In addition, Respondent Oates-Parchment’s ex-husband (and they share a child) is Board member/Respondent Martin and he did not recuse himself from voting for her as the Interim Superintendent.
- July 1, 2025 – the newly elected Mayor, identified Hackensack High School as the swearing in location and have requested use of the District’s IT and security teams, and the Board appears to be incurring the cost for the event.

With the above in mind, in Count 1 (May 13, 2025), Complainant asserts Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(a), because although they went through the RFP process, the Board hired the least qualified, most expensive attorney, who was a friend, in violation of contract law, which “seeks to protect the public against the squandering of public funds.” In addition, Respondents violated the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) and Sunshine Law, when they stated at the June 11, 2025, meeting that they would not take action and then on June 12 informed the public that the Superintendent was suspended without public notice on the agenda 72 hours in advance.

In Count 2 (June 3, 2025), Complainant contends Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c), when they endorsed candidates for State Assembly on flyers and on social media, using their Board titles without a disclaimer.

In Count 3 (January 8-June 2025), Complainant maintains Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f), because the Board elected Respondent Harris to be Board President, and the HEA President supported Respondents Harris, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh to gain influence over the Board and negotiations. Complainant further maintains the HEA President is Respondent Carroll’s cousin, and Respondent Carroll’s spouse and cousins are employed in the District; Respondent Martin’s ex-wife is the Interim Superintendent; they hired a less qualified, more expensive attorney because he was a close friend; and the HEA President is now the mayor. Complainant asserts that Respondents’ independent judgment is thus impaired, and they are using the school for personal gain or for the gain of friends.

In Count 4 (April 30, 2025), Complainant asserts Respondent Oates-Parchment (Interim Superintendent) violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(a) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(c), because she failed to report that she has relatives working in the District. According to Complainant, Respondent Oates-Parchment only reported her cousin, Dave Sims, but not until April 2025, and he was employed in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Complainant further asserts Respondent Oates-Parchment is also related to two teachers (Casseen Gaines (HEA President and mayor) and Andrew Goodman (cousin)), two paraprofessionals (Darlen Carroll (cousin) and Dave Sims (cousin)) and the attendance officer (Vanessa McCue (cousin)).

In Count 5 (June 11, 2025), Complainant maintains that Respondent Oates-Parchment violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24(b), because she “orchestrated with her family members who work within the school district to ‘secure unwarranted privileges, advantages or employment for herself or members of her immediate family.’” Complainant further maintains Respondent Oates-Parchment worked against the former Superintendent, which led to his suspension, by using her family members in the district to make it difficult for the former Superintendent to do his job.

B. *Written Statement and Allegation of Frivolous Filing*

Respondents deny that Mr. Nunnermacker is “close friends” with any of the Respondents. Respondents further deny that there was an election in the City of Hackensack (City) on May 31, 2025, because the City does not elect a mayor, but rather the City elects five city council members who then appoint the mayor on July 1, 2025.

Respondent Harris admits that she was appointed as Board President and that she is a teacher in another school district in Bergen County but denies the remainder of the assertions by Complainant.

As to a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(a), Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh note Complainant has not provided a copy of a final decision and/or court order to sustain this allegation.

Regarding a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c), Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh deny that they made any “political endorsements as board members.” Respondents note they did not prepare nor approve any campaign literature and/or press release identifying their role as a Board member. Moreover, Respondent Martin argues Complainant did not attribute any specific conduct to him.

As to a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f), Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh contend Complainant has not provided any evidence to demonstrate they have “surrendered” their own judgment simply because Mr. Gaines may or may not have voted for them.” Furthermore, Complainant did not provide any proof to show that Mr. Gaines “endorsed” their respective candidacies.

Regarding a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(a) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(c), Respondent Oates-Parchment argues the named employees “do not, at all, satisfy the statutory definition of ‘immediate family’ or ‘Relative.’” Specifically, Mr. Gaines, Ms. Goodman and Ms. McCue are all second cousins to Respondent Carroll, and all were employed before Respondent Carroll was elected to the Board. Further, Respondents Martin and Oates-Parchment do share an adult child; however, they do not “co-mingle funds,” and both have remarried. Respondents note that Complainant has not indicated how Respondent Martin’s judgment is impaired just because he has a child with Respondent Oates-Parchment. Notably, Respondent Martin avers that he “abstained from the vote to appoint Ms. Parchment as Acting Superintendent and recused himself from any discussion” regarding her contract.

As to a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24(b), Respondent Oates-Parchment admits that she was promoted to Interim Superintendent on or about June 11, 2025. However, she asserts she has no relatives working in the District, and there is “absolutely no evidence, that she ever used or attempted to use her official position to secure unwarranted privileges or advantages of employment for herself.”

In sum, Respondents assert the Complaint is frivolous because it is speculative and the allegations are “legal impossibilities and completely unsupported.”

C. *Response to Allegation of Frivolous Filing*

In response to the allegation of frivolous filing, Complainant asserts the Complaint was filed in “good faith, with the intent to hold elected officials and school administrators accountable to the ethics standards and statutory obligations,” “within the statutory timeframe” and with “legal standing as a resident of Hackensack and a member of the public entitled to petition” the Commission.

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 the Public School Contracts Law (*N.J.S.A.* 18A:18A-1 *et seq.*), OPMA, and/or any Board policies, the Commission advises that such determinations fall beyond the scope, authority, and jurisdiction of the Commission. As the allegations in Count 1 solely pertain to alleged violations of Public School Contracts Law, OPMA, and/or Board policies, Count 1 is dismissed.

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, based on the conduct more fully detailed above, Respondent Oates-Parchment 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 Respondent used or attempted to use her official position to secure an unwarranted privilege, advantage or employment for herself, members of her immediate family, or “others.”

Complainant also alleges that Respondent Oates-Parchment violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(a) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(c), and these provisions provide:

a. On a form to be prescribed by the commission and to be filed annually with the commission, each school official shall state:

- (1) whether any relative of the school official or any other person related to the school official by marriage is employed by the school district with which the school official holds office or employment or, for officers or employees of the New Jersey School Boards Association, any school district, and, if so, the name and position of each such relative;
 - (2) whether the school official or a relative is a party to a contract with the school district with which the school official holds office or employment or, for officers or employees of the New Jersey School Boards Association, any school district, and, if so, the nature of the contract; and
 - (3) whether the school official or a relative is employed by, receives compensation from, or has an interest in any business which is a party to a contract with the school district with which the school official holds office or employment or, for officers or employees of the New Jersey School Boards Association, any school district, and, if so, the name of each such business.
- c. A school official who fails to file a statement or who files a statement containing information which the school official knows to be false shall be subject to reprimand, censure, suspension, or removal pursuant to the procedures established in section 9 of P.L.1991, c.393 (C.18A:12-29). Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to prevent or limit criminal prosecution.

Complainant further submits that the Board member Respondents violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f), and these provisions of the Code provide:

c. I will confine my board action to policy making, planning, and appraisal, and I will help to frame policies and plans only after the board has consulted those who will be affected by them.

f. I will refuse to surrender my independent judgment to special interest or partisan political groups or to use the schools for personal gain or for the gain of friends.

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

3. Factual evidence of a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c) shall include evidence that Respondents took board action to effectuate policies and plans without consulting those affected by such policies and plans, or took action that was unrelated to Respondents' duty to (i) develop the general rules and principles that guide the management of the school district or charter school; (ii) formulate the programs and

methods to effectuate the goals of the school district or charter school; or (iii) ascertain the value or liability of a policy.

6. Factual evidence of a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f) shall include evidence that Respondents took action on behalf of, or at the request of, a special interest group or persons organized and voluntarily united in opinion and who adhere to a particular political party or cause; or evidence that Respondents used the schools in order to acquire some benefit for themselves, a member of their immediate family or a friend.

Count 2

In Count 2, Complainant contends Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c), when they endorsed candidates for State Assembly on flyers and on social media, using their Board titles without a disclaimer. Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh deny that they made any “political endorsements as board members.”

Following its assessment, 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(c) was violated in Count 2. Complainant has not demonstrated how endorsing a candidate, on a flyer or on social media, constitutes board actions that Respondents took to effectuate policies and plans without consulting those affected by such policies and plans, or took action that was unrelated to Respondents’ duty to (i) develop the general rules and principles that guide the management of the school district or charter school; (ii) formulate the programs and methods to effectuate the goals of the school district or charter school; or (iii) ascertain the value or liability of a policy as an endorsement is not official Board action. The Commission also notes that Respondent Martin was not listed on the flyer or in the social media posts. Therefore, and pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-9.7(b), the Commission dismisses the alleged violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(c) in Count 2.

Count 3

In Count 3, Complainant maintains Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f), because the Board elected Respondent Harris to be Board President, and HEA President Gaines supported Respondents Harris, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh to gain influence over the Board and negotiations. Respondents contend Complainant has not provided any evidence to demonstrate they have “‘surrendered’ their own judgment simply because Mr. Gaines may or may not have voted for them.”

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(f) was violated in Count 3. Complainant has not provided any evidence that Respondents took action on behalf of, or at the request of, a special interest group or persons organized and voluntarily united in opinion and who adhere to a particular political party or cause. The mere fact that the HEA president endorsed Respondents Harris, Martin, Carroll, Gilmore and Amirhamzeh does not mean, without more, that Respondents will take any action on behalf of, or favorable to, the HEA. Complainant has also not provided evidence of what benefit Respondents, a

member of their immediate family or a friend received. Accordingly, and pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-9.7(b), the Commission dismisses the alleged violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f) in Count 2.

Count 4

In Count 4, Complainant asserts Respondent Oates-Parchment violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(a) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(c), when she failed to report that she has relatives working in the District on her FDS. Respondent Oates-Parchment argues the named employees “do not, at all, satisfy the statutory definition of ‘immediate family’ or ‘Relative.’”

After 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 Respondent Oates-Parchment violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(a) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(c) in Count 4. The Act defines “relative” as the spouse, natural or adopted child, parent, or sibling of a school official. The Act requires a school official to disclose whether any relative of the school official or any other person related to the school official by marriage is employed by the school district with which the school official holds office or employment (*N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(a)(1)), whether the relative is a party to a contract with the school district with which the school official holds office or employment (*N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(a)(2)), or whether the school official or a relative is employed by, receives compensation from, or has an interest in any business which is a party to a contract with the school district with which the school official holds office (*N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25(a)(3)). Respondent Oates-Parchment reports that the named employees are not her spouse, natural or adopted child, parent, or her siblings as they are her second cousins and, therefore, do not have to be disclosed on the Financial Disclosure Statement. Consequently, and pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-9.7(b), the Commission dismisses the alleged violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25.5(a) and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-25.5(c) in Count 4.

Count 5

In Count 5 (June 11, 2025), Complainant maintains that Respondent Oates-Parchment violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24(b) when she was promoted to Acting Superintendent as she “orchestrated with her family members who work within the school district to ‘secure unwarranted privileges, advantages or employment for herself or members of her immediate family.’” Respondent argues that she never used or attempted to use her official position to secure unwarranted privileges or advantages of employment for herself.

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(b) was violated in Count 5. Complainant has not articulated what specific actions Respondent Oates-Parchment took to secure an unwarranted privilege, advantage, or employment for herself simply by being promoted to Acting Superintendent. Therefore, and pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-9.7(b), the Commission dismisses the alleged violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24(b) in Count 5.

IV. Request for Sanctions

At its meeting on January 27, 2026, the Commission considered Respondents’ request that the Commission find the Complaint frivolous, and impose sanctions pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-29(e). Despite Respondents’ argument, the Commission cannot find evidence that might show that

Complainant filed the Complaint in bad faith or solely for the purpose of harassment, delay, or malicious injury. The Commission also does not have information to suggest that Complainant knew or should have known that the Complaint was without any reasonable basis in law or equity, or that it could not be supported by a good faith argument for an extension, modification or reversal of existing law. *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-1.2. Therefore, at its meeting on February 24, 2026, the Commission adopted a decision finding the Complaint not frivolous, and denying the request for sanctions.

V. 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 the Commission does not have jurisdiction over the allegations in Count 1 and 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 Commission further advises the parties that, following its review, it voted to find that the Complaint is not frivolous, and to deny Respondents' request for sanctions.

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: February 24, 2026

***Resolution Adopting Decision
in Connection with C64-25***

Whereas, at its meeting on January 27, 2026, the School Ethics Commission (Commission) considered the Complaint, the Written Statement and allegation of frivolous filing, and the response to the allegation of frivolous filing submitted in connection with the above-referenced matter; and

Whereas, at its meeting on January 27, 2026, the Commission discussed finding that it does not have jurisdiction to enforce or review Public School Contracts Law, the Open Public Meetings Act, and/or Board policies and procedures, and therefore, the entirety of Count 1 is dismissed; and

Whereas, at its meeting on January 27, 2026, 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 January 27, 2026, the Commission discussed finding the Complaint not frivolous, and denying the request for sanctions; and

Whereas, at its meeting on February 24, 2026, the Commission reviewed and voted to approve the within decision as accurately memorializing its actions/findings from its meeting on January 27, 2026; 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 February 24, 2026.

Brigid C. Martens, Director
School Ethics Commission