

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
THE CERTIFIATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS  
VIRGINIA VERTETIS : ORDER OF REVOCATION  
\_\_\_\_\_ : DOCKET NO: 1314-214

At its meeting of July 27, 2017, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information received from the Criminal History Review Unit (CHRU) regarding Virginia Vertetis. On April 3, 2017, after a jury trial, Vertetis was convicted of Murder and Possession of a Weapon for Unlawful Purposes. On May 23, 2017, Vertetis was sentenced to 30 years in prison. The CHRU notified the Board that, as a result of her conviction, Vertetis was disqualified from public school employment pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq.* Vertetis currently holds a Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-8 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, issued in July 2003 and a Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-8 certificate, issued in September 2004.

Vertetis did not challenge the accuracy of her criminal history record before the Commissioner of Education. Upon review of the above information, the Board voted at its meeting of September 15, 2017 to issue Vertetis an Order to Show Cause as to why her certificates should not be revoked.

The Board sent Vertetis the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on September 22, 2017. The Order provided that Vertetis had 30 days to respond. Vertetis filed a response on October 3, 2017.

In that Answer, Vertetis indicated that, in addition to her certificates, she had earned a Master's in Education, was one course away from a Master's in Administrative Leadership, had passed the Principal's exam and was planning to pursue a doctorate in Administrative Leadership after completing the Master's. (Answer, ¶ 1.) Vertetis insisted that the judge had denied

presentation of a lot of information at the trial and that the weapon belonged to her abuser and victim. (Answer, ¶ 3.) She added that she had been attacked by the victim and she was pursuing an appeal of the verdict. (Answer, ¶ 3.) Vertetis stated that her disqualification had no relationship to her history as an educator and added that “there are no signs of anything like this every [*sic*] happening in the classroom.” (Answer, ¶ 4.) Vertetis noted that she had never been involved with the legal system and that many of her students’ parents either testified or wrote letters on her behalf. (Answer, ¶ 5.) She added that teaching was her life and that she continued to tutor GED students. (Answer, ¶ 5.) Vertetis stated that she gave up a six-figure job to teach “because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of children’s futures.” (Answer, ¶ 5.)

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(e), on December 5, 2017, the Board sent Vertetis a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that it appeared no material facts were in dispute. Thus, Vertetis was offered an opportunity to submit written arguments on the issue of whether the conduct addressed in the Order to Show Cause constituted conduct unbecoming a certificate holder, as well as arguments with regard to the appropriate sanction in the event that the Board found just cause to take action against her certificates. It also explained that, upon review of the charges against her and the legal arguments tendered in her defense, the Board would determine if her offense warranted action against her certificates. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Vertetis was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. The certified mail receipt was signed and returned and the regular mail copy was not returned. Vertetis did not file a response.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Vertetis’ conviction and subsequent disqualification constitute conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just

cause. At its meeting of March 1, 2018, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause as well as Vertetis' Answer. The Board concluded that no material facts related to Vertetis' offense were in dispute since she never denied that she engaged in the conduct alleged and had been convicted. Thus, the Board therefore determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(h)*. After reviewing the allegations, the Board found that Vertetis had engaged in unbecoming conduct.

The Board must now determine whether Vertetis' conviction and resulting disqualification, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, represent just cause to act against her certificates pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.4*. The Board finds that they do.

In enacting the Criminal History Review statute, *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq.* in 1986, the Legislature sought to protect public school pupils from contact with individuals whom it deemed to be a danger. Individuals convicted of crimes such as Murder and Possession of a Weapon for Unlawful Purposes fall squarely within this category. The strong legislative policy statement is also in accord with the Commissioner's long-standing belief that teachers must serve as role models for their students. "Teachers... are professional employees to whom the people have entrusted the care and custody of ... school children. This heavy duty requires a degree of self-restraint and controlled behavior rarely requisite to other types of employment." *Tenure of Sammons*, 1972 *S.L.D.* 302, 321. Moreover, unfitness to hold a position in a school system may be shown by one incident, if sufficiently flagrant. *Redcay v. State Bd. of Educ.*, 130 *N.J.L.* 369, 371 (1943), *aff'd*, 131 *N.J.L.* 326 (E & A 1944). In this instance, Vertetis' conviction demonstrates behavior that falls far short of a role model.

The strong policy statement on the part of the Legislature set forth in *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1(b)* also offers guidance to the Board as to the appropriate sanction in this matter. An

individual whose offense is so great that he or she is barred from service in public schools should not be permitted to retain the certificate that authorizes such service. Nor should a person who has been disqualified from teaching in a public school be permitted to continue to hold herself out as a teacher. Thus, because the Legislature and the Commissioner consider Vertetis' offense so significant, the Board believes that the only appropriate sanction in this case is the revocation of her certificates.

Accordingly, on March 1, 2018, the Board voted to revoke Virginia Vertetis' Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-8 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing and her Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-8 certificate. On this 13th day of April 2018, the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the revocation of Vertetis' certificates be effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Vertetis return her certificates to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Certification and Induction, P.O. Box 500, Trenton, NJ 08625-0500 within 30 days of the mailing date of this decision.

---

Robert R. Higgins, Secretary  
State Board of Examiners

RRH/MZ/th

Date of Mailing:

Appeals may be made to the Commissioner of Education pursuant to the provisions of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38.4.