

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS  
SHANNON E. LAMASTER : ORDER OF SUSPENSION  
\_\_\_\_\_ : DOCKET NO: 1920-144

At its meeting of January 22, 2021, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information regarding Shannon E. Lamaster. The Office of Student Protection (OSP) provided information to the State Board of Examiners (Board) regarding Lamaster. On September 30, 2019, Lamaster was initially charged with Endangering the Welfare of a Child – Abuse/Neglect (2<sup>nd</sup> degree) along with Leaving the Scene of an Accident, Failure to Report an Accident, Reckless Driving, and Driving Under the Influence with a Minor in the Vehicle. These charges were the result of allegations that Lamaster was driving the vehicle which was involved in a motor vehicle accident with children in the car while under the influence of alcohol at the time of the accident.

On October 29, 2019, law enforcement responded to a call at 3:32 am at Lamaster’s residence. Upon arrival law enforcement determined that Lamaster consumed morphine, and that the medication caused her to become unresponsive. At approximately 3:00 am one of Lamaster’s children could not wake Lamaster. Lamaster was initially unresponsive but eventually became conscious and was taken to the hospital due to labored breathing.

The Department of Children and Families, Division of Child Protection and Permanency (Division), investigated the incident and did not establish child abuse but determined that two of Lamaster’s children were in the same room at the time of the incident. On November 18, 2019, the Division was granted Care and Supervision of Lamaster’s children. On December 9, 2019, Lamaster was permitted contact with the children but she could not drive with them. The Division transferred the case to permanency for ongoing supervision.

On November 22, 2019, Lamaster received 12 months pretrial intervention for the Child Abuse (4<sup>th</sup> degree) charge after she pled guilty to Driving Under the Influence (DUI) stemming from the conduct charged on September 30, 2019.

Shannon E. Lamaster is the holder of a Teacher of Elementary Grades K-6 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, and Teacher of Preschool Through Grade 3 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing. After reviewing the above information, at its January 22, 2021 meeting, the Board voted to issue an Order to Show Cause to Lamaster as to why her certificates should not be revoked.

The Board sent Lamaster the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on January 27, 2021. The Order provided that Lamaster must file an Answer within 30 days. Lamaster filed an Answer on February 23, 2021.

In her Answer, Lamaster admitted to the conduct at issue (*see* Answer at ¶ 3, 4, 5, 6) and indicated that she sought professional medical help to cope with stress, anxiety and pressures of parenting. She has never been in trouble before and believes that the Order should be vacated because she has abstained from alcohol and is using techniques for treatment of a medical issue.

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, on March 11, 2021, the Board sent Lamaster a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that it appeared that no material facts were in dispute. Thus, Lamaster 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. Lamaster was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. Lamaster filed a response on April 28, 2021, asking to appear before the Board.

The submission indicated that Lamaster entered an intensive outpatient program with Hunterdon Drug Awareness. She completed the program and took steps to enter an in-person rehabilitation program in 2020. She continues in private counseling. She also submitted a detailed letter wherein she expresses what was going on her life that led her to the conduct detailed in the Order. She also explains the steps she has taken to obtain necessary help.

In testimony before the Board at its September 17, 2021 meeting, Lamaster was present with her counsel, Edward Hesketh. Mr. Hesketh requested that the Board consider the papers submitted. He also

stated that Lamaster has taken responsibility for her action and requested the Board consider a less harsh punishment because of the work she has done.

Lamaster thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak. She indicated that the past year has been very difficult, and it would have been easy to not be successful. She has a substance abuse counselor whom she meets with weekly. She abstains from all substances. She wishes to return to teach; remote instruction for her children has shown her that she enjoys it. She stated that she refuses to fail.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Lamaster's conduct constitutes conduct unbecoming a certificate holder. At its meeting of October 28, 2021, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause as well as Lamaster's Answer and testimony. The Board concluded that no material facts related to Lamaster's offenses were in dispute since she did not deny that she engaged in the alleged conduct. Thus, the Board 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 Lamaster engaged in unbecoming conduct.

The Board must now determine whether Lamaster's conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, provides just cause to act against her certificate(s) pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.4*. The Board finds that it does.

The Board may revoke or suspend the certification of any certificate holder on the basis of demonstrated inefficiency, incapacity, conduct unbecoming a teacher or other just cause. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.4*. "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). Lamaster's actions of driving while intoxicated with minors in her vehicle and being under the influence of controlled substances and unresponsive in the presence of minors clearly demonstrate conduct that is unacceptable for a role model. Lamaster, however, presented information of her ongoing efforts to rehabilitate and abstain from the use of

controlled substances. The presentation of this information mitigates the penalty in this matter. The Board therefore concludes that the appropriate response to her breach is a two (2) year suspension of her certificates.

Accordingly, on October 28, 2021, the Board voted to suspend Shannon E. Lamaster's Teacher of Elementary Grades K-6 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, and Teacher of Preschool-Grade 3 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing. On this 21<sup>st</sup> day of January 2022, the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the two-year suspension of Lamaster's certificates be effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Lamaster 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.

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Rani Singh, Secretary  
State Board of Examiners

RS/KAG/cf

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.