

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
RAYMOND G. MORISON : AMENDED ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 2122-102

Raymond G. Morison is the holder of a Teacher of Health and Physical Education Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, issued July 2001, a Teacher of Health and Physical Education standard certificate, issued July 2003, and a Teacher of Driver Education certificate, issued January 2004.

At its meeting of September 17, 2021, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed the Arbitration decision in *In the Matter of the Tenure Charges Against Raymond G. Morison* that it received from the Commissioner of Education regarding Morison.

On or about December 15, 2020, the Willingboro Board of Education (Willingboro) certified tenure charges against Morison for unbecoming conduct and other just cause for allegedly engaging in inappropriate communications/conduct with former student(s); violation of Willingboro staff conduct and social media policies, and code of ethics; as well as insubordination. On April 29, 2021, the Arbitrator in the tenure matter, Ruth Moscovitch, found that Willingboro demonstrated Morison engaged in unbecoming conduct.

Specifically, the Arbitrator found that in April 2016, Morison initiated contact with former student K.P, who had graduated from Morison's district in June 2014, that was unprovoked and unwanted. *See* Arbitration Decision at pp. 12, 35. Morison had been K.P.'s teacher and softball coach. *Ibid.* Morison had messaged K.P. "Hey" and "What u doing" and K.P. responded "I was sleeping, Lol[.]" *Ibid.* Morison then messaged K.P. "I want to fuck u" and "I saw u were sleeping[.]" K.P. reported the messages to the district. *Id.* at 13-14.

Further, the Arbitrator found that in August 2020, Morison initiated contact with former student C.H., who had graduated from the district in 2013, that was unprovoked and unwanted. *Id.* at 15-16, 35. Morison had been C.H.’s teacher and soccer coach and C.H. had not seen Morison since she graduated. *Ibid.* The dialogue between Morison and C.H. was as follows:

Morison:	How u been
C.H.:	Hey mr. Morison! I’ve been good! How are you?
Morsion:	I’m good. Down the shore laying here! Lol. My parents have a house down here so I spend my summers down here
Morison:	U have any plans
C.H.:	Just relaxing I go back to grad school tomorrow.
Morison:	Where’s that at
C.H.	[] University
Morison:	I should’ve gotten u earlier. Relaxing is always good!! I’ve bee relaxing on the beach all summer! Lol

[*Ibid.*]

Based on the testimony provided, the Arbitrator found Morison intended to invite C.H. to meet up with him at the shore and it was reasonable for C.H. to interpret his messaging as an overture for that purpose. *Id.* at 32. Further, Morison did reach out to other former students. *Id.* at 33.

The Arbitrator also found that Morison “simply has no understanding of why his conduct was unwanted, unprofessional and inappropriate.” *Id.* at 35. She further found that Morison found “nothing wrong” with reaching out to former students or how that overture could be perceived or that they could be disturbing. *Ibid.* He was “insensitive – even oblivious – to how his conduct as a white man of middle years would be perceived by the young black women he approached, whom he knew only because he was their teacher.” *Ibid.*

The Arbitrator found that Morison engaged in unbecoming conduct when he engaged in inappropriate online conversations with two former students, K.P. and C.H. *Id.* at 38-40. Additionally, the Arbitrator found that Morison violated Willingboro’s staff conduct and social

media policies and the code of ethics. *Ibid.* As a result of her findings of unbecoming conduct, the Arbitrator suspended Morison without pay for the 2020-21 school year and restricted his online activities with current or former students of the district. *See* Arbitration Decision, pp. 40-41.

Upon review of the above information, the Board voted at its October 28, 2021 meeting to issue Morison an Order to Show Cause as to why his certificates should not be revoked. The Board sent Morison the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on November 3, 2021. The Order provided that Morison had 30 days to respond pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(b).

On December 28, 2021, Morison submitted an Answer to the Order to Show Cause. In his answer, Morison states that the Arbitration Award speaks for itself. (Answer, ¶¶ 2-6). He denies that his conduct provides just cause for consideration of the suspension or revocation of his certificates. *Id.* at ¶ 7. In his separate defenses, Morison argues the Order to Show Cause is barred by the doctrines of res judicata, equitable estoppel, collateral estoppel, and industrial double jeopardy, and because a binding arbitration award has already been entered regarding the same controversy. (First through Fifth Affirmative Defenses).

On January 12, 2022, the Board sent Morison a hearing notice. The notice explained that there appeared to be no material facts in dispute. Thus, Morison 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 his certificates. It also explained that, upon review of the charges against him and the legal arguments tendered in his defense, the Board would determine if his offense warranted action against his certificates. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Morison was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction

issue.

On February 2, 2022, Morison requested that the briefing schedule and hearing be stayed pending the resolution of a related Superior Court matter, wherein he was appealing the arbitration award and seeking to enjoin the Board from proceeding with the Order to Show Cause against him. On February 8, 2022, the Board agreed to hold this matter in abeyance.

On November 18, 2022, Burlington County Superior Court confirmed the Arbitration Award and refused to enjoin the Board from proceeding with the Order to Show Cause against him. *Morison v. Willingboro Bd. of Educ. and New Jersey Dep't. of Educ., State Bd. of Exam'rs.*, BUR-L-92-22 (Order, Nov. 18, 2022). On December 19, 2022, the Board notified Morison that this matter was removed from the abeyance list and set a briefing schedule for the hearing.

On December 29, 2022, Morison again requested an abeyance while he appealed the Burlington County Superior Court's decision to the Superior Court, Appellate Division. On January 31, 2023, the Board agreed to hold this matter in abeyance again.

On March 28, 2024, the Superior Court, Appellate Division issued a decision confirming the arbitration award and the dismissal of the claims against the Board. *Morison v. Willingboro Bd. of Educ.*, 478 N.J. Super. 229 (App. Div. 2024). The court also found that the tenure arbitrator's determination of discipline does not prevent the Board and Commissioner from imposing a more severe sanction of suspending or revoking a licensee's certificate and thus, Morison could not enjoin the Board's Order to Show Cause. *Id.* at 251.

Thereafter, on April 22, 2024, the Board sent Morison another hearing notice. On April 19, 2024, Morison requested a third abeyance while his petition for certification to the New Jersey Supreme Court was pending. On April 22, 2024, the Board agreed to hold the matter in abeyance for the third time.

On July 18, 2024, the New Jersey Supreme Court denied Morison's petition for certification, concluding his appeal. *Morison v. Willingboro Bd. of Educ.*, 317 A.3d 941 (2024). On July 26, 2024, the Board notified Morison that this matter was removed from the abeyance list and provided him the opportunity to provide a written submission and appear before the Board. On August 26, 2024, Morison filed a written hearing submission and requested to appear before the Board.

In his hearing submission, Morison argued that he already served a thirty-day suspension for communications in 2016 with former student K.P. that were sent in error and that action on his teaching certificates was not warranted for his "careless act." (Morison Hearing Submission, pp. 3-4). He also argued that the communications in 2020 with former student C.H. were misinterpreted and do not warrant action against his certificates because he already served a one-year suspension for the same offense. *Id.* at 4-6.

Further, Morison argued that his conduct does not warrant action on his certificates due to his lengthy, effective career, his coaching and volunteer efforts in the district, and that he provides homebound instruction for students who were out of school due to disciplinary reasons. *Id.* at 9. With regard to his actions, he argued that his communication in 2016 was careless and his 2020 words were misconstrued. *Ibid.* He also pointed out that he has complied with the Arbitrator's restrictions on his online activities. *Id.* at 10. As a result, Morison argues any suspension or revocation of his certificates "would simply be too harsh a penalty." *Ibid.*

On November 1, 2024, Morison and his attorney, Dean R. Wittman, Esq., appeared before the Board on this matter. Morison provided testimony on the sanction issue. In his testimony, Morison spoke of mitigation as to his actions. Specifically, his continuing support for the students and how he goes above and beyond for them. He continued to dispute the testimony from the

tenure hearing and deny that he did anything inappropriate.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Morison's conduct constitutes conduct unbecoming a certificate holder. At its meeting of December 6, 2024, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause, as well as Morison's Answer, Hearing Response, and testimony. The Board determined that no material facts related to Morison's offense were in dispute since the facts were determined at the Arbitration hearing in the tenure matter and the decision in that matter was affirmed on appeal. *See Morison v. Willingboro Bd. of Educ.*, 478 N.J. Super. 229 (App. Div. 2024), *cert. denied Morison v. Willingboro Bd. of Educ.*, 317 A.3d 941 (2024). Thus, the Board determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(h).

The Board finds that Morison engaged in conduct unbecoming of an educator. Pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.4, the Board may take action against a certificate holder on the basis of conduct unbecoming a teacher. The "elastic" concept of "conduct unbecoming" includes "conduct which adversely affects the morale or efficiency" of the public entity or "which has a tendency to destroy public respect for . . . [public] employees and confidence in the operation of [public] services." *In re Emmons*, 63 N.J. Super. 136, 140 (App. Div. 1960); *accord Bound Brook Bd. of Educ.*, 228 N.J. at 13. "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.

A "violation of the implicit standard of good behavior which devolves upon one who stands in the public eye as an upholder of that which is morally and legally correct" may provide the basis for a finding of unbecoming conduct. *Bound Brook Bd. of Educ. v. Ciripompa*, 228 N.J. 4, 14

(2017) (quoting *Karins v. City of Atlantic City*, 152 N.J. 532, 555 (1998)). 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). The inappropriateness of unprovoked and unwarranted messages to former students for whom he was formerly charged with the care and custody provides the basis for the Board's finding. Using a previous teacher-student and coach-student player relationship to initiate a new personal relationship is highly inappropriate and unprofessional behavior in that it crosses the line from friendly, professional, and supportive of former students to extremely poor judgment and potentially predatory behavior. When Morison used his prior relationships with these former students to begin new adult relationships, he took advantage of his position as a teacher, failed to exhibit the mature self-control required of an educator, and violated the public trust.

Having found that Morison engaged in unbecoming conduct, the Board must now determine the appropriate penalty to be applied. The Board may revoke or suspend the certification of any certificate holder if the certificate holder engages in conduct unbecoming a teacher. *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.4. In this instance, the Board concludes that the appropriate response to Morison's breach in conduct of an educator is revocation of his certificates. Specifically, Morison's actions in sending unprovoked and unwarranted messages to at least two former students for whom he was formerly charged with the care and custody and his failure to understand and appreciate the ethical and professional boundaries of his role as a teacher, mentor and coach warrants revocation of his New Jersey certificates. His messages to both students were inappropriate and both of the former students felt the need to report the messages to their former school. An educator's position of authority that develops during the relationship between a student and teacher, mentor, and/or coach does not end when the student leaves the school. The educator should be able to appreciate that

authority and act appropriately when interacting with former students.

Accordingly, on December 6, 2024, the Board voted to revoke Raymond Morison's Teacher of Health and Physical Education Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, Teacher of Health and Physical Education Certificate, and Teacher of Driver Education Certificate. On this 28th day of February 2025, the Board voted to adopt its amended formal written decision, and it is therefore ORDERED that Morison's certificates be REVOKED, effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Morison return his 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.



Rani Singh, Secretary
State Board of Examiners

Date of Mailing:
By Certified and Regular mail
Revised 2/7/2025

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