

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

STEVEN BROOKS : ORDER OF REVOCATION

_____ : DOCKET NO: 2324-165

At its meeting of May 23, 2024, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information from the Office of Student Protection (OSP) regarding Steven Brooks. Brooks currently holds a Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-6 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, issued January 2015; a Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certificate of Eligibility, issued December 2015; and a standard Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-6 certificate, issued June 2017.

On February 16, 2021, Brooks was federally charged with Production of Child Pornography, 18 U.S.C. § 2251(a) and (e) and 18 U.S.C. § 2; Possession of Child Pornography, 18 U.S.C. § 2252A(a)(5)(B) and 18 U.S.C. § 2; and Mailing Child Pornography, 18 U.S.C. § 2252A(a)(1) and 18 U.S.C. § 2. On February 16, 2021, Brooks consented to detention and an Order of Detention Pending Trial was entered by the Honorable Cathy L. Waldor, U.S.D.J. It was alleged that Brooks produced and possessed child pornography, as well as attempted online enticement concerning a total of seventy additional minor victims. On January 27, 2023, Brooks signed a plea agreement. On April 5, 2023, Brooks pled guilty to Production of Child Pornography, 18 U.S.C. § 2251(a) and (e) and 18 U.S.C. § 2; and Possession of Child Pornography, 18 U.S.C. § 2252A(a)(5)(B) and 18 U.S.C. § 2.

On April 11, 2023, OSP notified the Board that, pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq.*, Brooks was disqualified from public school employment as the result of his convictions.

On April 3, 2024, Brooks signed a supplemental agreement to his plea agreement in advance of his sentencing. In the supplemental agreement, Brooks acknowledged that he agreed

in the plea agreement to the production and possession of child pornography, as defined in 18 U.S.C. § 2256(8), as well as attempted online enticement concerning a total of seventy additional minor victims, and agreed to make full restitution to all minor victims of his offenses. Further, he acknowledged that, subsequent to his guilty plea, he produced or possessed child pornography, as well as attempted online enticement, concerning eight additional witnesses/victims, by accessing and utilizing social media applications on his computer to misrepresent himself by pretending to be a woman when he communicated with these eight victims. On April 18, 2024, he was sentenced to 204 months in federal prison, \$237,000 in restitution, and forfeiture of property, as detailed in the Judgment signed by United States District Court Judge Brian R Martinotti.

Upon review of the above information, the Board voted at its June 27, 2024 meeting to issue Brooks an Order to Show Cause as to why his certificates should not be revoked. The Board sent Brooks the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested, on July 2, 2024. The Order provided that Brooks had 30 days to respond pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(b)*. The certified mail copy was signed and returned, and the regular mail copy was not returned. Brooks did not file a response.

On August 14, 2024, the Board sent Brooks another notice by certified and regular mail providing him with an additional 15 days to respond to the Order to Show Cause pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(c)*. The certified mail copy was signed and returned, and the regular mail copy was not returned. Brooks did not file a response.

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, the Board sent Brooks a hearing notice by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested, on October 30, 2024. The notice explained that because no answer was filed there appeared to be no dispute as to material facts in this matter. Thus, Brooks 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. Brooks 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. Brooks did not file a response or request to appear before the Board.

The Board has the authority to “issue appropriate certificates to teach or to administer” and “may revoke the same under rules and regulations prescribed by the State board.” *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38; *see also N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-3.2 and -4.4); *Morison v. Willingboro Bd. of Educ.*, 478 N.J. Super. 229 (App. Div. 2024), *cert. denied* 258 N.J. 143 (July 11, 2024). The Board may take action against a 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; *see also Morison*, 478 N.J. Super. at 246, 248 (the Board is responsible for protecting schoolchildren from improper teacher conduct and may suspend or revoke an educator’s continued ability to serve as a teacher at any public school based on unbecoming conduct).

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Brooks’ actions here constitute conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just cause. Because Brooks failed to respond to the Order to Show Cause, the allegations are deemed admitted. *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(c). Consequently, at its meeting of May 22, 2025, the Board considered only the allegations in the Order to Show Cause and the information received from OSP. Because the allegations were deemed admitted, the Board concluded that no material facts related to Brooks’ offenses were in dispute. And because no material facts related to Brooks’ conduct are in dispute, the Board determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(h).

The Board finds that Brooks engaged in conduct unbecoming of an educator. Unbecoming conduct is defined as “conduct ‘which adversely affects the morale or efficiency of the [department]’ or ‘has a tendency to destroy public respect for [government] employees and confidence in the operation of [public] services.’” *Bound Brook Bd. of Educ. v. Ciripompa*, 228

N.J. 4, 13 (2017) (quoting *In re Young*, 202 N.J. 50, 66 (2010); citing *Karins v. Atl. City*, 152 N.J. 532, 554 (1998)). “[A] finding of unbecoming conduct ‘need not be predicated upon the violation of any particular rule or regulation, but may be based merely upon the 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 legal correct.’” *Id.* at 13-14 (quoting *Karins*, 152 N.J. at 555). “It focuses on the morale, efficiency, and public perception of an entity, and how those concerns are harmed by allowing teachers to behave inappropriately while holding public employment.” *Id.* at 14. “The touchstone of the determination lies in the certificate holder’s ‘fitness to discharge the duties and functions of one’s office or position.’” *Young*, 202 N.J. at 66 (quoting *In re Grossman*, 127 N.J. Super. 13, 29 (App. Div. 1974)).

Here, the Board finds that convictions for Production of Child Pornography, 18 U.S.C. § 2251(a) and (e) and 18 U.S.C. § 2, and Possession of Child Pornography, 18 U.S.C. § 2252A(a)(5)(B) and 18 U.S.C. § 2 clearly demonstrate violations of the implicit standard of good behavior expected of public school teachers. Brooks’ admitted conduct of producing and possessing child pornography, as well as attempting online enticement concerning a total of seventy additional minor victims, along with his continued conduct to engage in the same egregious conduct after pleading guilty also demonstrates unbecoming conduct. Further, 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. 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. OSP determined that Brooks’ convictions permanently disqualify him from public school employment. *See N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-7.1(c)(2) and (d). Thus, the Board finds that Brooks engaged in conduct unbecoming an educator and provides the basis for the Board’s finding.

Having found that Brooks engaged in unbecoming conduct, the Board must now determine

the appropriate penalty to be applied. In doing so, the Board considers the “nature and gravity of the offenses under all the circumstances involved, any evidence as to provocation, extenuation or aggravation,” and any “harm or injurious effect” on the maintenance of discipline and the proper administration of the school system. *In re Fulcomer*, 93 N.J. Super. 404, 422 (App. Div. 1967). “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. Fitness to teach depends on a broad range of factors, including the teacher’s impact and effect upon the students, because a “teacher works in a sensitive area in a schoolroom” and “shapes the attitude of young minds toward the society in which they live.” *Grossman*, 127 N.J. at 30 (*quoting Adler v. Bd. of Educ. of City of New York*, 342 U.S. 485 (1952)). Importantly, unfitness to hold a position in a school system may be shown by one incident if sufficiently flagrant. *Fulcomer*, 93 N.J. Super. at 421; *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, the Board concludes that the appropriate response to Brooks’ breach in conduct of an educator is revocation of his certificate. Brooks’ conduct in producing and possessing child pornography, attempting online enticement of seventy additional minor victims, and then attempting online enticement of eight additional minor victims after a plea agreement and before sentencing demonstrates he is unfit to discharge the duties and functions as a public school teacher. Allowing him to maintain certification to teach in a public school would have a negative impact on the proper administration of the school system. Further, the record established that, as a result of his convictions for Production of Child Pornography, 18 U.S.C. § 2251(a) and (e) and 18 U.S.C. § 2, and Possession of Child Pornography, 18 U.S.C. § 2252A(a)(5)(B) and 18 U.S.C. § 2, Brooks is disqualified from public school employment. An educator who is not qualified for public school employment should not be able to hold himself out as a public educator. Thus,

revocation of his certificates is the appropriate response in this matter.

Accordingly, on May 22, 2025, the Board voted to revoke Steven Brooks' Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-6 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certificate of Eligibility, and standard Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-6 certificate. On this 26th day of June 2025, the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision, and it is therefore ORDERED that Brooks' certificates are REVOKED, effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Brooks return his paper certificates, if issued, 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

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