

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

REBECCA J. COUGHLIN : ORDER OF REVOCATION

_____ : DOCKET NO: 2324-170

At its meeting of June 27, 2024, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information from the Office of Student Protection (OSP) and the Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office (MCPO) regarding Rebecca J. Coughlin. Coughlin currently holds a Teacher of Elementary School Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, issued in April 2006; a standard Teacher of Elementary School certificate, issued in March 2010; and a Teacher of Middle School with Subject Matter Specialization: Mathematics in Grades 5-8 certificate, issued in November 2022.

On January 26, 2023, Coughlin was charged with DUI (2nd offense), N.J.S.A. 39:4-50; Reckless Driving, N.J.S.A. 39:4-96; Open Container, N.J.S.A. 39:4-51B; Refusal to Submit to Chemical Test, N.J.S.A. 39:4-50.4A; and Endangering the Welfare of a Child (2nd degree), N.J.S.A. 2C:24-4A(2). It was alleged that Coughlin drove a vehicle while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, with a minor child in the car, and struck another vehicle.

On November 30, 2023, Coughlin pled guilty to DUI (2nd offense), N.J.S.A. 39:4-50, and Endangering the Welfare of a Child (2nd degree), N.J.S.A. 2C:24-4A(2). On February 2, 2024, she was entered into the Pre-Trial Intervention (PTI) program for 36 months. The PTI was conditioned on a guilty plea to DUI (2nd offense), N.J.S.A. 39:4-50; drug/alcohol testing and/or counseling as directed; an 18 month suspension of her driving license, followed by a 2-year installation of an interlock device; completion of the 48-hour Intoxicated Drivers Resource Center program; and other fines, fees and penalties.

Upon review of the above information, the Board voted at its September 19, 2024 meeting to issue Coughlin an Order to Show Cause as to why her certificates should not be revoked. The

Board sent Coughlin the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested, on September 20, 2024. The Order provided that Coughlin had 30 days to respond pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(b)*. The certified mail copy was returned and marked “Unclaimed[,]” and the regular mail copy was not returned. Coughlin did not file a response.

On October 30, 2024, the Board sent Coughlin another notice by certified and regular mail providing her with an additional 15 days to respond to the Order to Show Cause pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(c)*. On November 1, 2024, Coughlin submitted an Answer to the Order to Show Cause. In her answer, Coughlin stated she was not contesting the facts and that she was currently in treatment and can provide an update. *See Answer*. She further stated that she was not currently working as a teacher and asked the Board to reconsider suspending her certification. *Ibid*.

Pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, on March 21, 2025, the Board sent Coughlin a hearing notice by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested. The notice explained that there appeared to be no dispute as to material facts in this matter. Thus, Coughlin 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. Coughlin was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. The certified mail receipt was returned and marked “Unclaimed[,]” and the regular mail copy was not returned. Coughlin 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 (explaining 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 Coughlin’s actions here constitute conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just cause. Coughlin did not dispute the allegations in the Order to Show Cause. Consequently, at its meeting of June 26, 2025, the Board considered only the allegations in the Order to Show Cause and the information received from OSP and MCPO. Because the allegations were not disputed, the Board concluded that no material facts related to Coughlin’s offenses were in dispute. And because no material facts related to Coughlin’s conduct were 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 Coughlin 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 actions of driving under the influence with a child in the car, especially without the child being properly restrained, clearly demonstrate conduct that is unacceptable for a role model and violates the implicit standard of good behavior expected of a public school teacher. Thus, the Board finds that Coughlin engaged in conduct unbecoming an educator and provides the basis for the Board's finding.

Having found that Coughlin 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). Central to this evaluation is the understanding that "[t]eachers... 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 Coughlin's breach in conduct of an educator is revocation of her certificates. Coughlin's conduct in driving under the influence with a child in the car demonstrates she is unfit to discharge the duties and functions as

a public school teacher. Further, although she was offered the opportunity to submit a written statement and appear before the Board regarding the sanction imposed if the Board found unbecoming conduct, Coughlin did not offer any testimony or evidence as to why her certificates should not be revoked. Allowing her to maintain certification to teach in a public school would have a negative impact on the proper administration of the school system. Thus, revocation of her certificates is the appropriate response in this matter.

Accordingly, on June 26, 2025, the Board voted to revoke Rebecca Coughlin's Teacher of Elementary School Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, standard Teacher of Elementary School certificate, and Teacher of Middle School with Subject Matter Specialization: Mathematics in Grades 5-8 certificate. On this 8th day of August 2025, the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision, and it is therefore ORDERED that Coughlin's certificates are REVOKED, effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Coughlin 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.