

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
BRIAN L. HURFF : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 1617-161

At its meeting of December 9, 2016, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information received from the Criminal History Review Unit (CHRU) regarding Brian L. Hurff. On May 6, 2016, Hurff pled guilty to an amended charge of Cruelty and Neglect of Children as a result of an accident which occurred while he was driving under the influence with two children in the car. On June 24, 2016, Hurff was sentenced to two years' non-custodial probation, conditioned upon alcohol and CDS evaluation. The CHRU notified the Board that, as a result of his conviction, Hurff was disqualified from public school employment pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq.* Hurff currently holds a Teacher of Biological Science Certificate of Eligibility, issued in April 2002 and a Teacher of Biological Science certificate, issued in September 2003.

Hurff did not challenge the accuracy of his criminal history record before the Commissioner of Education. Upon review of the above information, the Board voted at its meeting of January 19, 2017 to issue Hurff an Order to Show Cause as to why his certificates should not be revoked.

The Board sent Hurff the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on January 24, 2017. The Order provided that Hurff must file an Answer within 30 days. The certified mail receipt was signed and returned and the regular mail copy was not returned. Hurff did not file a response. Thereafter, on March 2, 2017, the Board sent Hurff another notice by certified and regular mail providing him an additional 15 days to respond to the Order to Show Cause. The

certified mail receipt was signed and returned and the regular mail copy was not returned. Hurff did not file a response.

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, on March 27, 2017, the Board sent Hurff a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that the allegations in the Order to Show Cause were deemed to be admitted as a result of his failure to file an Answer. Thus, Hurff 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. Hurff was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. Neither the certified nor regular mail copy was returned. Once again, Hurff did not respond.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Hurff's conviction and subsequent disqualification constitute conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just cause. Since Hurff failed to respond to the Order to Show Cause, the allegations therein are deemed admitted. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(c)*. Consequently, at its meeting of June 15, 2017, the Board considered only the allegations in the Order to Show Cause and the information received from the CHRU. The Board concluded that no material facts related to Hurff's offense were in dispute since he never denied that he engaged in the conduct alleged and 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 Hurff had engaged in unbecoming conduct.

The Board must now determine whether Hurff's conviction and resulting disqualification, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, represent just cause to act against his 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 Cruelty and Neglect of Children 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, Hurff's 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 himself out as a teacher. Thus, because the Legislature and the Commissioner consider Hurff's offense so significant, the Board believes that the only appropriate sanction in this case is the revocation of his certificates.

Accordingly, on June 15, 2017, the Board voted to revoke Brian D. Hurff's Teacher of Biological Science Certificate of Eligibility and his Teacher of Biological Science certificate. On this 27th day of July 2017 the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the revocation of Hurff's certificates be effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Hurff 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.

Robert R. Higgins, Secretary
State Board of Examiners

RRH/MZ/th

Date of Mailing:
via 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.