

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
ALEX RAMADANIS : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 1617-205

At its meeting of March 3, 2017, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information regarding Alex Ramadanis. In 2013, the City of New York Department of Education brought tenure charges against Ramadanis following an incident where he used excessive force with a student. In the tenure decision (which is incorporated herein by reference), Ramadanis was found to have restrained a student by forcefully grabbing him and placing his arm around the student's neck and continuously choking him. This caused the student to turn blue, his eyes to bulge and to lose consciousness and eventually fall to the floor. Ramadanis did not call 911 or allow anyone else to do so and therefore the police or emergency services were never called. He also later misled the student's parents by saying that the student's injuries were inflicted during an altercation with another student. Ramadanis lost his tenure as a result of the incident.

In 2015, the New York State Department of Education instituted an action for suspension or revocation of his education certificates. On October 26, 2016, Ramadanis entered into a Suspension Agreement which suspended his New York educational certificates for a period of three years. Ramadanis currently holds School Administrator and Principal Certificates of Eligibility, both issued in September 2012 and Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-5 and Teacher of Students with Disabilities certificates, both issued in September 2012. Upon review of the above information, the Board voted at its meeting of April 6, 2017 to issue Ramadanis an Order to Show Cause as to why his certificates should not be revoked.

The Board sent Ramadanis the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on April 10, 2017. The Order provided that Ramadanis must file an Answer within 30 days. Ramadanis filed an Answer on May 11, 2017.

In his Answer, Ramadanis admitted that tenure charges were brought against him in New York which resulted in his termination. (Answer, ¶ 2). However, he denied the determination that was reached and claimed that he had restrained a student who was physically assaulting a female student and did so in compliance with laws that allowed him to protect himself or others. (Answer, ¶ 2). Ramadanis contended that allegations regarding his refusal to allow the police or emergency services to be called or descriptions of the student's condition were "simply untrue." (Answer, ¶ 2). He added that other than this incident he had never been charged or accused of such conduct over the course of his long and successful career. (Answer, ¶ 2). He admitted that he had entered into a Suspension Agreement but claimed that it should not be construed as an admission of wrongdoing but rather a means to finally move on with his life. (Answer, ¶ 3). Ramadanis denied that there was just cause to take action against his New Jersey certificates and welcomed the opportunity for a hearing to "further inform the Board as to the realities of the situation." (Answer, ¶ 4).

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, on October 30, 2017, the Board sent Ramadanis a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that it appeared that no material facts were in dispute. Thus, Ramadanis 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. Ramadanis was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. Ramadanis filed a response on November 29, 2017, asking to appear before the Board.

In testimony before the Board, Ramadanis stated that he had been an educator for 28 years and this was the only incident in his career. He explained that he had to restrain a male student who was attacking a female student and he felt compelled to act. He said he thinks about the incident every day and wished he could have handled it differently. He asked the Board to consider his long career and what he had stated in testimony and requested that it not impose any additional discipline. In response to Board questioning, Ramadanis noted that he have never been trained in how to restrain a student. He

added that he remembered the student speaking throughout the incident and that after the child was seated in a chair he went after the female student again. Ramadanis stated that the school nurse assessed the child and that the parent cancelled the EMTs who had been called and instead took the child to a private doctor.

Ramadanis' attorney, Thomas Ricotta, also spoke on his behalf. He added that Ramadanis was a passionate educator and administrator for 28 years and that he had accepted New York's suspension of his certificates there and that no further discipline was warranted. Ricotta explained that when Ramadanis restrained the male student he lifted the student up to be cuffed by the security officers and that he therefore had the student in a chokehold for a brief period of time.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Ramadanis' conduct constitutes conduct unbecoming a certificate holder. At its meeting of April 13, 2018, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause as well as Ramadanis' Answer and testimony. The Board determined that it was constrained by collateral estoppel to accept the facts as found in the tenure hearing and therefore no material facts related to Ramadanis' offense were in dispute. *See In the Matter of the Certificates of Richard Barnes-Bey*, Dkt. No. 1314-194 (Bd. Of Examiners September 17, 2015) (Collateral estoppel applies to facts established in a prior tenure hearing for Board revocation proceedings). Thus, the Board determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(h)*.

The Board must now determine whether Ramadanis' conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, represents just cause to act against his certificates 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). In this matter, Ramadanis' actions in choking a student and refusing to call for help is conduct that indicates a serious lapse in judgment. Regardless of his motivation in trying to safeguard another student, it is clear that Ramadanis acted irresponsibly and even dangerously. The Board therefore concludes that the appropriate response to Ramadanis' breach is a revocation of his certificates.

Accordingly, on April 13, 2018, the Board voted to revoke Alex Ramadanis' School Administrator and Principal Certificates of Eligibility and his Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-5 and Teacher of Students with Disabilities certificates. On this 24th day of May 2018 the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the revocation of Ramadanis' certificates be effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Ramadanis 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.