

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
ALYSSA CIARROCCHI : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 1617-249

At its meeting of May 12, 2017, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information the Camden City School District provided to the State Board of Examiners (Board) regarding Alyssa Ciarrocchi. Pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.3(a)(2)*, Camden reported that, on March 3, 2016, it terminated Ciarrocchi from her position in the district following allegations of unbecoming conduct, gross misconduct, leave of absence fraud, impersonating a doctor, impersonating a clinical therapist, unjust enrichment, lying to and attempting to deceive district personnel, insubordination, gross neglect, attendance fraud, violation of various district policies, and numerous other allegations of wrongdoing. Specifically, the district alleged that Ciarrocchi lied about the death of family members to use bereavement leave, took trips out of state in lieu of using the leave for cancer treatment, did not appear for work and did not use paid time off and failed to complete work as represented to her supervisor. The district's investigative materials are incorporated herein by reference.

Camden alleged that Ciarrocchi, a Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant (LDTC), attempted to take 14 days of bereavement leave between June 2015 and February 2016. Those leaves were retroactively denied for various reasons. In one instance, Ciarrocchi applied for bereavement leave due to her brother's purported suicide after the death of his daughter. She later admitted that the individual was, in fact, her step-brother. The Camden Education Association's (CEA) agreement did not allow for bereavement leave for step siblings. Upon investigation, the district determined that Ciarrocchi's step-brother was alive and that no such death of, or memorial for, his daughter had occurred. Ciarrocchi also requested bereavement leaves for the deaths of her great-uncle and great-great grandmother, neither of which was covered by the CEA contract. Moreover, Ciarrocchi's great-great grandmother was still alive, and her great uncle's funeral was actually scheduled for a district holiday, not on the day for which she requested leave. Ciarrocchi was also denied leave for the deaths of another great-uncle and her alleged great-great grandmother, who was, in fact, a live-in companion of her great-uncle and who was still alive.

Camden also retroactively denied most of Ciarrocchi's sick leave requests for 2014-15 and 2015-16, due to fraud. In 2014-15 Ciarrocchi took 10 sick days from May 11-15 and May 18-22, 2015. Upon being notified that she needed a doctor's note for her absences, Ciarrocchi submitted a letter that purported to be from her doctor, Melissa C. Rosato, M.D., but with an email address for a Melissa Stevens. Upon investigation, the district discovered that Stevens was a therapist and not a medical doctor. When questioned, Ciarrocchi lied and stated that Rosato was Stevens' married name and stated that Stevens was an OB/GYN who had diagnosed her breast cancer. Ciarrocchi later admitted that Stevens was her therapist. The email address Ciarrocchi had submitted was fabricated. Ciarrocchi also submitted a request for sick leave between November 19 and 25, 2015. Camden discovered that she was actually vacationing in Chicago during that time. Ciarrocchi claimed that she was undergoing breast cancer treatments but could not describe the building or provide an address for the hospital where the treatments purportedly occurred. The name of the facility Ciarrocchi noted does not exist. The district also searched Ciarrocchi's drive on her work desktop and found that she had planned a Chicago vacation on October 19, 2015. Her public Facebook page also showed pictures of her vacationing in Chicago during days in which she misrepresented that she was out sick.

Camden also reported several instances where Ciarrocchi misrepresented herself as working when, in fact, she was not. For example, on February 12, 2016, Ciarrocchi told a supervisor who needed to see her that she was out testing students and conducting observations. When the supervisor asked specifically where she was, Ciarrocchi stated she was testing at the Rutgers pre-school. When questioned by the district in March, 2016, Ciarrocchi could not recall the two students' names or the name of the teacher from whom she purportedly took the students. She also gave a vague description of what the teacher looked like and stated that she tested each student for 2.5 to 3 hours. Camden's investigation revealed that on February 11 and 12, 2016, Ciarrocchi was actually vacationing in Nashville. The district obtained the drive from her work desktop and discovered that Ciarrocchi created a Nashville itinerary on her computer which included her flight to Nashville on February 11, 2016 and her return flight home on February 16, 2016. Pictures on Ciarrocchi's public Facebook page showed her flight leaving for Nashville on February 11, 2016 and also showed pictures of her vacationing in Nashville. On March 1, 2016, Ciarrocchi sent an email stating that

she spent a half day at a school with another colleague. The district had surveilled Ciarrocchi that day and the investigator revealed that Ciarrocchi did not leave her home until after noon that day.

Camden also alleged that Ciarrocchi claimed that she performed work such as writing reports and evaluations which she did not do. When the district investigated her work computer, no assessments or spreadsheets were present, as Ciarrocchi had claimed. Moreover, the evidence showed that Ciarrocchi did not conduct any student evaluations after October 2015. Thus, for every student Ciarrocchi claimed to have tested from November 2015 through February 2016, there was no proof that those evaluations actually took place. The district concluded that Ciarrocchi had fabricated assessments and scores of students since she had little to no work product to show for the 9+ months she had been employed in Camden.

Ciarrocchi currently holds a Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-6, Teacher of Reading and Teacher of Students With Disabilities Certificates of Eligibility With Advanced Standing, a Teacher of Reading certificate, Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-6 and Teacher of Students With Disabilities certificates, and a Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant certificate. Upon review of the above information, at its June 15, 2017 meeting, the Board voted to issue Ciarrocchi an Order to Show Cause as to why her certificates should not be revoked.

The Board sent Ciarrocchi the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on June 19, 2017. The Order provided that Ciarrocchi had 30 days to respond. After receiving extensions, Ciarrocchi filed an Answer on October 2, 2017.

In that Answer, Ciarrocchi denied the allegation that she fabricated the death of family members. (Answer at ¶ 3). She stated that she made numerous reports of hostile work environment in the Camden City School District. She claimed she was continuously harassed by a building principal. She also stated that in 2007 she was diagnosed with severe obsessive-compulsive disorder and major depressive disorder which, when combined with the hostile work environment, was very detrimental to her mental and physical health. *Id.* Ciarrocchi admitted that she partially planned a trip to Chicago during the work day, but that the trip was scheduled during the teacher's convention when she was off from school. *Id.* at ¶ 5.

Thereafter, the matter was transmitted to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) after it was determined that material facts were in dispute. On May 6, 2019, via letter Ciarrocchi withdrew her answer

and the OAL returned the matter to the Board. Accordingly, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, on May 7, 2019, the Board sent Ciarrocchi a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that there were no material facts in dispute in light of the withdrawn Answer. Thus, Ciarrocchi was offered an opportunity to submit written arguments on the issue of whether the conduct addressed in the Order to Show Cause provided just cause to take action against her certificates as well as arguments with regard to the appropriate sanction in the event that the Board determined to take action against her certificates. It also explained that upon review of the charges against her and the legal arguments tendered in his defense, the Board would determine if Ciarrocchi's conduct warranted action against her certificates. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Ciarrocchi was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. Ciarrocchi filed a written response on July 22, 2019.

In that response, Ciarrocchi stated she knew at an early age she wanted to be a teacher. She has always been an "effective, responsible, honest and caring teaching professional." (Hearing Submission, p. 2). Ciarrocchi states that employment with the Camden City School District was "hostile, toxic, and unprofessional." *Id.* at p. 4. She alleges that she had virtually no support from administration and was continuously harassed by a building principal without supervisory authority over her. *Id.* at p. 5.

She further states that she battled anxiety, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder, all of which were amplified while employed with the Camden City School District. *Id.* Ciarrocchi left employment in Camden and went on to be an effective teacher at Clearview Regional High School. *Id.* at p. 6.

The hearing was scheduled for the Board's January 23, 2020 meeting. Prior to that meeting, Ciarrocchi submitted an additional statement and indicated she no longer wished to appear before the Board. In this statement she wrote that the information before the Board occurred during a ten month period where her behaviors were out of character. She states that the "pile of paperwork" contains "some truths, some mistakes, and many life lessons." Ciarrocchi indicates that she grew up with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression. She struggled behind closed doors. While employed in Camden she experienced a lapse of judgment due to severe depression and anxiety and was confronted with triggers that

caused her PTSD to come to the forefront. She felt like she could not ask for help because she would seem weak. She also detailed experiences with an administrator who “continuously harassed me in front of parents, co-workers, and students.”

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Ciarrocchi’s conduct constitutes conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just cause. At its meeting of January 23, 2020, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause as well as Ciarrocchi’s Hearing Response and additional submission. The Board determined that no material facts related to Ciarrocchi’s offenses were in dispute since she withdrew her answer and did not dispute the alleged conduct. Thus, the Board 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 Ciarrocchi engaged in unbecoming conduct.

The Board must now determine whether Ciarrocchi’s conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, provides 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). Ciarrocchi’s gross misconduct, leave of absence fraud, impersonating a doctor, impersonating a clinical therapist, unjust enrichment, lying to and attempting to deceive district personnel, insubordination, gross neglect, attendance fraud, violation of various district policies, and numerous other allegations of wrongdoing clearly indicates a serious lapse in judgment. The Board therefore concludes that the appropriate response to her breach is the revocation of her certificates.

Accordingly, on January 23, 2020, the Board voted to revoke Alyssa Ciarrocchi's Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-6, Teacher of Reading and Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certificates of Eligibility With Advanced Standing, a Teacher of Reading certificate, Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-6 and Teacher of Students With Disabilities certificates, and a Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant certificate. On this 28th day of February, 2020 the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that Ciarrocchi's certificates are hereby revoked effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Ciarrocchi return her 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:
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.