

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CREDENTIAL OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
VANESSA A. MORRISON : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 1718-263

At its meeting of September 21, 2018, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information it received from the Union County Prosecutor's Office and the Office of Student Protection (OSP) regarding Vanessa A. Morrison. On September 24, 2017, Morrison was charged with Possession of a Weapon with Unlawful Purpose (3rd degree), Unlawful Possession of a Weapon (4th degree) and Aggravated Assault (2nd degree). Morrison allegedly hit the victim in the head with a 6-inch glass cup with a weighted bottom, causing lacerations to her forehead and above her right eye. On May 1, 2018, Morrison pled guilty to Disorderly Conduct. The Board finds that Morrison's conduct and conviction provide just cause for consideration of the revocation of her credential.

Morrison currently holds a substitute credential that expires in July, 2022. Upon review of the above information, the Board voted at its meeting of November 1, 2018 to issue Morrison an Order to Show Cause as to why her credential should not be revoked.

The Board sent Morrison the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on November 7, 2018. The Order provided that Morrison must file an Answer within 30 days. Morrison filed an Answer on or about November 27, 2019.

Since there were material facts in dispute, the Board transmitted the matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for hearing as a contested case. On July 23, 2019, the Administrative Law Judge assigned to the case returned it to the Board after Morrison failed to appear for a scheduled hearing. Pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 1:1-3.3, the ALJ provided Morrison with 13 days to submit an explanation for his nonappearance. Morrison did not submit an explanation or otherwise respond to that notice. At its meeting of November 1, 2019, the Board voted not to retransmit the matter to OAL.

On November 4, 2019, the Board sent Morrison a notice by regular and certified mail providing her an additional 15 days to respond before her Answer would be stricken from the record and the allegations in the Order to Show Cause would be deemed admitted. Morrison did not respond to this notice.

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, on December 31, 2019, the Board sent Morrison a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. Morrison 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 credential. Morrison 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. Morrison did not respond.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Morrison's conduct in using a weapon against someone and creating a laceration, resulting in a disorderly conduct conviction constitute conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just cause. Since Morrison did not appear at her hearing, and her Answer was subsequently stricken from the record, at its meeting of June 26, 2020, the Board considered only the allegations in the Order to Show Cause. Moreover, since Morrison is deemed to have failed to file an Answer, the allegations contained in the Order to Show Cause are deemed admitted. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(c)*. Thus, since no material facts related to Morrison's conduct is in dispute, 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 Morrison engaged in unbecoming conduct.

The Board must now determine whether Morrison's conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, represents just cause to act against her credential pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.4*. The Board finds that they do.

The Commissioner's long-standing belief is 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, Morrison's weapon possession and aggravated assault falls far short of a role model. Accordingly, the Board believes that the only appropriate sanction in this case is the revocation of her credential.

Accordingly, on June 26, 2020, the Board voted to revoke Vanessa A. Morrison's substitute credential. On this 30th day of July 2020 the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the revocation of Morrison's credential be effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Morrison return her credential 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.