

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS  
MARGARET CHAPLIN (SCRIMALI) : ORDER OF SUSPENSION  
\_\_\_\_\_ : DOCKET NO: 2223-127

At its meeting of December 9, 2022, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information received from the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, and the Florida Education Practices Commission (Florida), regarding Margaret Chaplin (Scrimali).

On September 15, 2019, Chaplin emailed a previous employer and requested that the previous employer submit false information regarding her employment history. Specifically, Chaplin asked her former employer to complete a form she would submit to a new employing school district. She asked that the form reflect teaching for four (4) years even though she acknowledged she was a full-time substitute for one (1) year. She indicates that fabricating the information will reduce the number of years before she can retire. She further states that the employing district would not call to question the previous employer as they do not call outside the country. The fabrication of information may result in more money added to her salary. As a result of this conduct, Florida issued her a formal reprimand.

Chaplin currently holds a Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-8 certificate. Upon review of the above information, at its January 26, 2023 meeting, the Board voted to issue Chaplin an Order to Show Cause as to why her certificates should not be revoked.

The Board sent Chaplin the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on January 31, 2023. The Order provided that Chaplin had 30 days to respond. Chaplin filed an Answer.

In that Answer, Chaplin admits to writing a deceitful email perpetrating a fraud on her teaching license in Florida. She states this was done because she was in a precarious situation at the time. She indicates there is no excuse for her actions, and it was poor judgment. However, this incident is isolated and does not reflect her exemplary and stellar teaching career where she demonstrated integrity and

professionalism. Chaplin provides information on her passion for teaching and some brief information on her career along with evaluations.

Chaplin notes that she is now in a better place mentally and has taken several social-emotional learning professional development courses and has learned through all of this that it is important to maintain integrity in all circumstances.

Based upon the answer, there are no material facts in dispute as Chaplin admits the conduct. Accordingly, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, on March 24, 2023, the Board sent Chaplin a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that there were no material facts in dispute. Thus, Chaplin 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 Chaplin's conduct warranted action against her certificates. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Chaplin was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. Chaplin filed another statement and indicated she wished to appear before the Board.

The hearing submission indicated that there is "no excuse" for her actions. She also states the incident was isolated and will never happen again. She suffered shame as a result of this lapse in judgment. The incident has taught her that integrity is important. She further states that this is the first disciplinary action against her in 27 years of teaching.

The hearing was scheduled for the Board's meeting on May 18, 2023. Chaplin appeared and reiterated much of what was in her submissions. She did not deny the conduct, but rather provided information to mitigate the penalty, including personal health situations and other life circumstances.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Chaplin's conduct constitutes conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just cause. At its meeting of June 29, 2023, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause as well as Chaplin's Hearing Submission and testimony. The Board determined that no material facts related to Chaplin's offense were in dispute since she admitted that she engaged in 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 Chaplin engaged in unbecoming conduct.

The Board must now determine whether Chaplin's conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, provides just cause to act against her 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). Chaplin's conduct in requesting that a former employer provide false information regarding her employment history, clearly indicates a serious lapse in judgment. Issues of fraud involving employment forms or certification forms commonly result in revocation of licensure in New Jersey. However, given Chaplin's presentation of mitigation, specifically her explanation of her remorse, her passion for teaching, the fact that this was her first disciplinary action, and that she maintained an exemplary record prior to this incident, the Board concludes that the appropriate response to her breach is a two-year suspension of her certificate.

Accordingly, on June 29, 2023, the Board voted to suspend Margaret Chaplin Scrimali's Teacher of Elementary School in Grades K-8 certificate for a period of two years. On this 4<sup>th</sup> day of August 2023, the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that Chaplin's certificates are hereby suspended for a period of two years, effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Chaplin return her certificate 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.

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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.