

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CREDENTIAL OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
MARCUS J. BRIDGERS : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 2223-138

At its meeting of December 9, 2022, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information received from the Atlantic County Prosecutor’s Office and the Office of Student Protection (OSP) regarding Marcus J. Bridgers. On August 17, 2021, Bridgers was Accused of Conspiracy (2nd degree), Prohibited Weapons and Devices – Large Capacity Ammunition (4th degree), Prohibited Weapons and Devices – Hollow Nose (4th degree), Possession of Weapon for Unlawful Purpose (2nd degree), Unlawful Possession of a Weapon without Permit (2nd degree), and Aggravated Assault with a Firearm (4th degree). The Accusation is the result of a physical altercation involving Bridgers and two (2) other men. On or about November 17, 2022, Bridgers pled guilty to Unlawful Possession of a Weapon – Handguns without a Permit (2nd degree). As a result, he was sentenced to two (2) years’ probation. The OSP notified the Board that, as a result of his conviction, Bridgers is disqualified from public employment pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-7.1 *et seq.* Bridgers currently holds a substitute teaching credential.

Bridgers 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 26, 2023 to issue Bridgers an Order to Show Cause as to why his credential should not be revoked.

The Board sent Bridgers the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on January 31, 2023. The Order provided that Bridgers had 30 days to respond. The certified mail copy was returned as “Unclaimed” and the regular mail copy was not returned. Bridgers did not file a response.

Thereafter, on April 5, 2023 the Board sent Bridgers another notice by certified and regular mail providing him an additional 15 days to respond to the Order to Show Cause. The certified mail was delivered and the regular mail copy was not returned. Bridgers did not file a response.

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(e), on July 25, 2023, the Board sent Bridgers 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, Bridgers 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 credential. 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 credential. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Bridgers was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. Both the certified and regular mail copies were not returned. Once again, Bridgers did not file a response.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Bridgers's conviction and subsequent disqualification constitute conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just cause. Since Bridgers 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 August 4, 2023, the Board considered only the allegations in the Order to Show Cause and the information received from the Prosecutor's Office and the OSP. The Board concluded that no material facts related to Bridgers' offense were in dispute since he never denied that he had 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 Bridgers had engaged in unbecoming conduct.

The Board must now determine whether Bridgers' conviction and resulting disqualification, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, represent just cause to act against his credential 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 Unlawful Possession of a Weapon 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, Bridgers' 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 Bridgers's offense so significant, the Board believes that the only appropriate sanction in this case is the revocation of his credential.

Accordingly, on August 4, 2023, the Board voted to revoke Marcus J. Bridgers' substitute credential. On this 21st day of September 2023, the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the revocation of Bridgers' credential be effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Bridgers return his credential, if applicable, 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.