

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
KAREN LEDDEN : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 0910-174

At its meeting of July 22, 2010, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information received from the Gloucester County Office of Education (Gloucester) regarding Karen Ledden. Gloucester reported that Ledden submitted copies of two different standard Teacher of the Handicapped certificates to districts in the county during the 2009-2010 school year while she was seeking employment as a Teacher of the Handicapped. According to the records of the Office of Licensure and Credentials, Ledden was never issued a standard Teacher of the Handicapped certificate. Ledden was issued an emergency Teacher of the Handicapped certificate in January 1991, which expired in July 1991. The certificate number which appears on one of the Teacher of the Handicapped certificates Ledden submitted for employment is the certificate number of her expired emergency certificate. Currently, Ledden legitimately holds a Teacher of Elementary School certificate, issued in June 1988 and a Teacher of Nursery School certificate, issued in June 1989. Upon review of the above information, at its September 16, 2010 meeting, the Board voted to issue Ledden an Order to Show Cause why her certificates should not be revoked.

The Board sent Ledden the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on September 23, 2010. The Order provided that Ledden must file an Answer within 30 days. Ledden filed an Answer on October 13, 2010. In that Answer, Ledden admitted that her emergency Teacher of the Handicapped certificate expired in July 1991 and that she was never issued a standard Teacher of the Handicapped certificate. (Answer, ¶¶ 1, 2, 4.) She also acknowledged that she misrepresented her credentials while seeking employment with the Glassboro School District. (Answer, ¶ 3.) Ledden added that she “deeply regretted this action”

and went of her own volition to the Superintendent of Glassboro schools to explain the misrepresentation and resign her position, which had not yet commenced, as a Preschool Teacher of the Handicapped. (Answer, ¶ 3.) Ledden was also asked to resign from the position she then held in Glassboro as a one-to-one aide. (Answer, ¶ 3.) In the remainder of her Answer, Ledden asked for leniency from the Board for her “lapse of judgment.” (Answer, ¶ 7.) She indicated that before any harm was done, she removed herself from the situation and reported the misrepresentation. (Answer, ¶ 7.)

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.7(e)*, on November 3, 2010, the Board sent Ledden a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that it appeared that no material facts were in dispute. Thus, Ledden 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 determined to take action against her certificates. It also explained that upon review of the charges against her and the legal arguments tendered in her defense, the Board would determine if Ledden’s conduct warranted action against her certificates. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Ledden was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. Ledden filed her response on November 22, 2010. She did not request to appear before the Board.

In her response, Ledden stated that she had been a teacher in good standing for the past 22 years. (Hearing Response, p. 1.) She indicated that her husband’s job loss, the devastating job market and her family’s financial inability to pay for her son’s medication led to her lapse in judgment in accepting a job with Glassboro for which she did not hold an appropriate certificate. (Hearing Response, p. 1.) Ledden reiterated that she resigned the position two weeks after accepting it because she did not want to jeopardize “the children, the school, or my career.”

(Hearing Response, pp. 1-2.) She argued that her actions did not necessitate the revocation of her teaching certificates since she had not engaged in criminal behavior. (Hearing Response, pp. 2-4.) Ledden claimed that revocation in her case “would be harsh and unjustified and would deter individuals coming forward and being truthful.” (Hearing Response, p. 4.) Finally, she emphasized her deep regret, reminded the Board that she “came forward on [her] own volition,” and asked the Board to allow her to keep her teaching certificates. (Hearing Response, pp. 4-5.)

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Ledden’s conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, constitutes conduct unbecoming a certificate holder. At its meeting of January 20, 2011, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause and Ledden’s responses. The Board determined that no material facts related to Ledden’s conduct were in dispute since she admitted to the allegations in the Order to Show Cause. Thus, the Board determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.7(h)*. It is therefore ORDERED that the charges in the Order to Show Cause are deemed admitted for the purpose of this proceeding.

The Board must now determine whether Ledden’s conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, represents just cause to act against her certificates pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.5*. 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:9-17.5*. “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, the Commissioner has long held that teachers serve as role models for their students.

In the past the Board of Examiners has ordered revocation of an individual's legitimately-held certificates where a certificate had been altered in order to secure employment in an area for which the individual was not certified. *See, e.g., In re Shaffer, supra*, (New Jersey teacher altered Pennsylvania certificate to include Teacher of the Handicapped authorization); *State Bd. of Examiners v. Kaufman*, Dkt. No. 226-8/93-15 (Examiners Feb. 24, 1994) (health teacher fabricated certificate to seek employment as a school psychologist); *In re Certificate of Nieves*, OAL Dkt. No. EDE 7908-88, *adopted* (Examiners March 3, 1989) (teacher of cosmetology presented falsified elementary education certificate). This case presents similar concerns. A teacher who knowingly forges a certificate in order to teach a subject matter for which she is not qualified does a great disservice to her students and her school district. That individual has no place in a classroom.

Ledden's conduct in altering her expired emergency Teacher of the Handicapped certificate in order to secure employment in a position for which she was not qualified was inappropriate and potentially harmful to students. Although Ledden argues that no harm was committed, the Board disagrees. Ledden's act of fraud has irrevocably damaged her status as a role model for students. Moreover, while it is true that Ledden was not accused of a crime as were many of the teachers cited in her Hearing Response brief, the Board is not limited to revoking certificates only in those cases where a crime has been committed. In this instance, there is no doubt that Ledden's lack of professional judgment warrants revocation.

Accordingly, on January 20, 2011, the Board voted to revoke Karen Ledden's Teacher of Elementary School and Teacher of Nursery School certificates. On this 31st day of March 2011 the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the revocation of Ledden's certificates be effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Ledden return her certificates to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of

Licensure, 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

Date of Mailing:

Appeals may be made to the Commissioner of Education pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38.4.