

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATE OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
DENNIS WRIGHT : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 0910-159

At its meeting of January 7, 2010, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information the Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit (IAIU) of the Department of Children and Families had forwarded regarding Dennis Wright. IAIU found that allegations of sexual abuse/sexual exploitation against Wright had been substantiated. IAIU reported that there had been sexual/genital contact between Wright and a female student, T.G. Wright allegedly was rubbing T.G.'s arm, back and side while other students were watching a movie in the classroom. Later, while Wright and T.G. were alone in the classroom, he French kissed T.G. and touched her on her breasts over her clothes. Wright currently holds a Teacher of Social Studies Certificate of Eligibility, issued in September 2004. Upon review of the above information, at its March 25, 2010 meeting, the Board voted to issue Wright an Order to Show Cause.

The Board sent Wright the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail several times but all copies were returned as "Undeliverable," including copies of the Order mailed to an address provided by the Motor Vehicle Commission. The Board could not secure a current address for Wright and, accordingly, the Order was published in the New Jersey Star Ledger on July 12 and 13, 2010. Wright did not file a response to that notice. Thereafter a second notice was published in the Star Ledger on August 30 and September 6, 2010. Wright did not file a response to the second notice.

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.7(e)*, on February 13 and 14, 2014, the Board published a hearing notice in the Star Ledger, allowing Wright 30 days to respond. Once again, Wright did not respond.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Wright's conduct constitutes conduct unbecoming a certificate holder. Since Wright failed to respond to the Order to Show Cause or the hearing notice, at its meeting of May 22, 2014, the Board considered only the allegations in the Order to Show Cause. The Board determined that no material facts related to Wright's offense were in dispute since he never denied that he had engaged in the alleged behavior. 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 Wright's conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, provides just cause to act against his certificate 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, 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 matter, Wright kissed and fondled a student. His actions were not merely inappropriate, but egregious. His conduct demonstrates behavior that falls so far short of a role model that the Board believes that the only appropriate sanction in this case is the revocation of Wright's certificate.

Accordingly, on May 22, 2014, the Board voted to revoke Wright's Teacher of Social Studies Certificate of Eligibility. On this 15th day of July 2014 the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the revocation of Dennis Wright's certificate be effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Wright return his certificate 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 the provisions of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38.4.

RRH:MZ:th