

IN THE MATTER OF	:	NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATES OF	:	STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
LAUREN COYLE-MITCHELL	:	ORDER OF SUSPENSION
_____	:	DOCKET NO: 1516-226

At its meeting of September 16, 2016, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information received from the Department of Children and Families, Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit (IAIU) and the Criminal History Review Unit regarding Lauren Coyle-Mitchell. On or about June 22, 2015, Coyle-Mitchell was arrested and charged with 1st degree Aggravated Sexual Assault and 2nd degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child. The charges resulted from her inappropriate interactions with a 15-year-old student. If convicted, Coyle-Mitchell would be disqualified from public employment pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq.* Coyle-Mitchell was arrested again on July 16, 2016 for contacting the victim in defiance of a judicial order. Coyle-Mitchell currently holds a Teacher of Elementary School in Grades N-8 Certificate of Eligibility With Advanced Standing, issued in July 2006, a Teacher of Elementary School in Grades N-8 certificate, issued in July 2007 and a Teacher of Students With Disabilities Certificate of Eligibility, issued in May 2013. Upon review of the above information, at its meeting of November 1, 2016, the Board voted to issue Coyle-Mitchell an Order to Show Cause as to why her certificates should not be suspended pending the resolution of the criminal proceedings against her. Due to a technical error, the Board voted to revise the Order to Show Cause at its meeting on January 19, 2017.

The Board sent Coyle-Mitchell the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on January 24, 2017. The Order provided that Coyle-Mitchell must file an Answer within 30 days. Coyle-Mitchell filed an Answer on January 31, 2017. In that Answer, Coyle-Mitchell acknowledged her arrest and the nature of the allegations made against her but denied the truth of

the charges. (Answer, ¶ 3). After admitting her second arrest, she denied having made contact with the alleged victim in defiance of a judicial order. (Answer, ¶ 4). Coyle-Mitchell also denied engaging in conduct that would justify the revocation or suspension of her teaching certificates and stated that the Board should not revoke or suspend her certificates pending resolution of the criminal charges against her. (Answer, ¶¶ 5, 6).

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, on February 14, 2017, the Board sent Coyle-Mitchell a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that it appeared that no material facts were in dispute. Thus, Coyle-Mitchell 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 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 her offense warranted action against her certificates. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Coyle-Mitchell 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. Coyle-Mitchell did not respond.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter, therefore, is whether there is just cause to take action against Coyle-Mitchell's certificates. At its meeting of May 12, 2017, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause and Coyle-Mitchell's Answer. The Board determined that no material facts related to Coyle-Mitchell's offense were in dispute since she admitted that she had been arrested and charged for the offenses listed in the Order Show

Cause. Thus, the Board determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(h)*.

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

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*. 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 dangerous. Individuals convicted of crimes such as Aggravated Sexual Assault and Endangering the Welfare of a Child fall squarely within this category. This strong legislative policy statement is in accord with the Commissioner's long-held belief that teachers must serve as role models for 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 (Sup. Ct. 1943), *aff'd*, 131 *N.J.L.* 326 (E & A 1944). In this case, Coyle-Mitchell has been arrested and charged for an offense involving sexual conduct with a minor. The Board therefore finds that Coyle-Mitchell's potential disqualification from service in the public schools of this State because of her indictment for various sexual offenses provides just cause to take action against her certificates.

Accordingly, on May 12, 2017, the Board voted to suspend Coyle-Mitchell's certificates pending resolution of the criminal proceedings against her. On this 15th day of June 2017, the Board formally adopted its written decision to suspend and it is therefore ORDERED that Lauren Coyle-Mitchell's Teacher of Students With Disabilities Certificate of Eligibility, Teacher of Elementary School in Grades N-8 Certificate of Eligibility With Advanced Standing and Teacher of Elementary School in Grades N-8 certificate be suspended, effective immediately. If the charges are resolved in her favor, she shall notify the Board for appropriate action regarding the suspension order. It is further ORDERED that Coyle-Mitchell return her certificates to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Certification and Induction, PO Box 500, Trenton, NJ 08625-0500 within 30 days of the mailing date of this decision.

Robert R. Higgins, Secretary
State Board of Examiners

RRH/MZ/th

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.