

Before the School Ethics Commission
Docket No.: C20-26
Decision on Probable Cause

Maria McNeill,
Complainant

v.

Walter Beese,
Carlstadt Board of Education, Bergen County,
Respondent

I. Procedural History

The above-captioned matter arises from a Complaint that was filed with the School Ethics Commission (Commission) on February 27, 2026,¹ by Maria McNeill (Complainant), alleging that Walter Beese (Respondent), a member of the Carlstadt Board of Education (Board), violated the School Ethics Act (Act), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-21 *et seq.* More specifically, the Complaint avers that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i) of the Code of Ethics for School Board Members (Code). On March 20, 2026, Respondent filed a Written Statement.

The parties were notified by correspondence dated July 21, 2026, that the above-captioned matter would be discussed by the Commission at its meeting on July 28, 2026, to determine whether probable cause exists. Following its discussion on July 28, 2026, the Commission adopted a decision at its meeting on August 25, 2026, finding that there are insufficient facts and circumstances pled in the Complaint and in the Written Statement to lead a reasonable person to believe that the Act was violated as alleged in the Complaint.

II. Summary of the Pleadings

A. *The Complaint*

According to Complainant, the Board had a vacancy in November 2025, and in accordance with Board policy, “the vacancy was advertised, applications from potential candidates were received and interviews were scheduled.” Complainant notes that Respondent’s spouse was one of the applicants. Complainant maintains “a Board seat is unquestionably a benefit conferred by Board action,” and Respondent “created a perception of using his own

¹ On February 5, 2026, Complainant filed a deficient Complaint; however, on February 27, 2026, Complainant cured all defects and filed an Amended Complaint that was deemed compliant with the requirements detailed in *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-6.3.

Board seat to the advantage of his spouse and her application to join the Board.” Complainant provides that on November 3, 2025, she “became aware of a group text message made by the Respondent with respect to filling the Board vacancy process.” Complainant further provides the text, which was sent to non-Board members, named the candidates and requested that the recipients of the text, “Please don’t tell anyone that I told you the names.” The text message also stated “[T]he Super said that she never received my wife’s email (bullshit).”

Complainant asserts Respondent violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f) because he used his Board seat for the gain of his spouse in her application for the vacant seat; violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g) because he posted a group text to non-Board members with confidential information as to the identity of other applicants, which was to give the perception that Respondent’s spouse would be favored to fill the vacant seat and also to be a deterrent for other potential candidates to apply for the vacancy before the deadline; and violated *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i) because he failed to support personnel by publicly declaring the Superintendent lied about not receiving his spouse’s application.

B. *Written Statement*

In his Written Statement, Respondent initially notes the Complaint is “clearly motivated by political concerns.” According to Respondent, the Board vacancy did not occur until November 11, not November 3 as Complainant indicated. Respondent admits that his wife submitted an application, and thereafter (December 1) the Superintendent sent Respondent an email with an “opinion from” Board counsel, noting that Respondent could not participate in filling the vacant seat. Respondent notes that he sent a text to Board counsel “requesting clarification about his decision concerning [Respondent’s] wife, since a board trustee is a voluntary position and not paid.” Respondent further notes Board counsel said the decision was to protect Respondent “from any appearance of impropriety concerning [his] wife.” Respondent maintains he was not involved in the interviews, his wife interviewed, but she was not appointed. Thereafter, Respondent provides there were two more Board vacancies, his wife again applied, and the Complaint was filed against him.

As to a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f), Respondent maintains this is “false.” Per Respondent, he did not attempt or intend to use his position to help his wife. Although he admits to sending the text, Respondent argues he “did not realize at the time that this was a group text with a small group of friends.”

Regarding a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), Respondent states that because the Board member resigned at a public meeting, Respondent “assumed it was not confidential” and further notes he did not realize the names of the applicants were confidential.

Finally, as to a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i), Respondent maintains his wife had sent an email to the Superintendent to ensure receipt of her application, but never received a response. Respondent further maintains it was not until his wife did not receive an answer that he inquired about her application. Per Respondent, he sent the application after the Superintendent indicated she did not receive it. Respondent notes his “use of ‘bullshit’” was related to the “email

in a personal text to a friend” and “was not intended to disparage the superintendent but was to show [his] wife’s displeasure in the situation.”

Respondent asserts he “acted in good faith, with the best interests of the district, its students, and the community in mind,” “his actions have been consistent with [his] responsibilities as a board member,” and he “regrets any confusion and remain[s] committed to maintaining transparency, professionalism, and ethical conduct in all board matters.” Respondent “respectfully request[s] that this complaint be reviewed in full context and dismissed based on the facts presented,” and notes he is “willing to cooperate fully with any further review and provide additional documentation as needed.”

III. Analysis

This matter is before the Commission for a determination of probable cause pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-9.7*. A finding of probable cause is not an adjudication on the merits but, rather, an initial review whereupon the Commission makes a preliminary determination as to whether the matter should proceed to an adjudication on the merits, or whether further review is not warranted. Pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-9.7(a)*, probable cause “shall be found when the facts and circumstances presented in the complaint and written statement would lead a reasonable person to believe that the Act has been violated.”

Alleged Violations of the Act

Complainant submits that Respondent violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(f)*, *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(g)*, and *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(i)* and these provisions of the Code provide:

f. I will refuse to surrender my independent judgment to special interest or partisan political groups or to use the schools for personal gain or for the gain of friends.

g. I will hold confidential all matters pertaining to the schools which, if disclosed, would needlessly injure individuals or the schools. In all other matters, I will provide accurate information and, in concert with my fellow board members, interpret to the staff the aspirations of the community for its school.

i. I will support and protect school personnel in proper performance of their duties.

Pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-6.4(a)*, a violation(s) of *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(f)*, *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(g)*, and *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(i)* need to be supported by certain factual evidence, more specifically:

6. Factual evidence of a violation of *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(f)* shall include evidence that Respondent took action on behalf of, or at the request of, a special interest group or persons organized and voluntarily united in opinion and who adhere to a particular political party or cause; or evidence that Respondent used

the schools in order to acquire some benefit for himself, a member of his immediate family or a friend.

7. Factual evidence of a violation of the confidentiality provision of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g) shall include evidence that Respondent took action to make public, reveal or disclose information that was not public under any laws, regulations or court orders of this State, or information that was otherwise confidential in accordance with board policies, procedures or practices. Factual evidence that Respondent violated the inaccurate information provision of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g) shall include evidence that substantiates the inaccuracy of the information provided by Respondent and evidence that establishes that the inaccuracy was other than reasonable mistake or personal opinion or was not attributable to developing circumstances.

9. Factual evidence of a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i) shall include evidence that Respondent took deliberate action which resulted in undermining, opposing, compromising or harming school personnel in the proper performance of their duties.

After review, the Commission finds that there are insufficient facts and circumstances presented in the Complaint and the Written Statement to lead a reasonable person to believe that *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i) were violated. As for a potential violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f), Complainant has not shown what actions Respondent took on behalf of, or at the request of, a special interest group or persons organized and voluntarily united in opinion and who adhere to a particular political party or cause or evidence of how Respondent used the schools in order to acquire some benefit for himself, a member of his immediate family or a friend. With regard to a potential violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), Complainant has not provided evidence that Respondent divulged either confidential information or information that was not public under any laws, regulations or court orders when he shared the names of applicants to a Board vacancy, as such information is not confidential. Lastly, with respect to a violation of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i), the Complaint lacks evidence that Respondent took any action as a Board member to undermine, oppose, compromise or harm school personnel in any way.

Accordingly, and pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-9.7(b), the Commission dismisses the alleged violations of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(f), *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(g), and *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-24.1(i).

IV. Decision

In accordance with *N.J.S.A.* 18A:12-29(b), and for the reasons detailed herein, the Commission hereby notifies Complainant and Respondent that there are insufficient facts and circumstances pled in the Complaint and in the Written Statement to lead a reasonable person to believe that the Act was violated as alleged in the Complaint and, consequently, dismisses the above-captioned matter. *N.J.A.C.* 6A:28-9.7(b).

The within decision is a final decision of an administrative agency and, therefore, it is appealable only to the Superior Court-Appellate Division. *See, New Jersey Court Rule 2:2-3(a)*. Under *New Jersey Court Rule 2:4-1(b)*, a notice of appeal must be filed with the Appellate Division within 45 days from the date of mailing of this decision.

Dennis M. Roberts, Chairperson

Mailing Date: August 25, 2026

***Resolution Adopting Decision
in Connection with C20-26***

Whereas, at its meeting on July 28, 2026, the School Ethics Commission (Commission) considered the Complaint and the Written Statement submitted in connection with the above-referenced matter; and

Whereas, at its meeting on July 28, 2026, the Commission discussed finding that the facts and circumstances presented in the Complaint and the Written Statement would not lead a reasonable person to believe that the Act was violated, and therefore, dismissing the above-captioned matter; and

Whereas, at its meeting on August 25, 2026, the Commission reviewed and voted to approve the within decision as accurately memorializing its actions/findings from its meeting on July 28, 2026; and

Now Therefore Be It Resolved, that the Commission hereby adopts the decision and directs its staff to notify all parties to this action of its decision herein.

Dennis M. Roberts, Chairperson

I hereby certify that the Resolution was duly adopted by the School Ethics Commission at its public meeting on August 25, 2026.

Brigid C. Martens, Director
School Ethics Commission