

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
THE CERTIFICATE OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS  
SANDI I. TANNEN : ORDER OF REVOCATION  
\_\_\_\_\_ : DOCKET NO: 471-04/98-161

This case arose when the State Board of Examiners received information from the Gloucester County Superintendent of Schools indicating that Sandi I. Tannen had presented a fraudulent Teacher of Mathematics certificate on two separate occasions in order to obtain employment in the West Deptford Township Public Schools. Prior to that, Tannen had applied for a Teacher of Mathematics certificate evaluation on or about February 22, 1985 through the Middlesex County Office of Education. She was advised by the Office of Licensing and Credentials on or about June 7, 1985 that she needed to successfully complete the National Teachers' Examination (NTE) in mathematics and to secure an additional nine credits in the subject field of mathematics. Tannen took the mathematics NTE twice, in 1990 and in 1997, but failed to pass the test on either occasion. At no time has the Office of Licensing and Credentials issued a Teacher of Mathematics certificate to Tannen. Based upon all of the foregoing information, at its meeting of April 2, 1998 the State Board of Examiners issued an Order that Tannen show cause why her properly-held Teacher of Elementary School certificate should not be revoked or suspended.

The Order to Show Cause was mailed to Tannen by regular and certified mail on May 4, 1998. The Order provided that if Respondent desired to file an Answer, it must be filed within twenty (20) days. Tannen's Answer was received on May 15, 1998.

In her Answer Tannen alleged that she received both an Elementary Education certificate and a Mathematics certificate in 1985. She said she now realized "that the mathematics

certificate was an error” but claimed that at the time she thought it might be a temporary certificate. (Answer, para. 1). Tannen also asserted that when she was hired by the West Deptford Public school district to teach general math classes in October 1996, she gave her certificate to the Superintendent’s secretary. Tannen believed that the secretary had returned the certificate to her, but when she was asked to produce it by the High School principal because the State had no record of it, she could not locate it. She averred that she sought advice from Trenton and was told “they had no record of my certificate.” (Answer, para. 2). Tannen was repeatedly told by the Office of Licensing and Credentials in Trenton and the County Superintendent’s Offices in both Gloucester and Camden Counties to apply for a Mathematics certificate. She claims the reason she did apply again for this certificate was to clear up the matter. Tannen claimed that the incident was an “unfortunate series of blunders and misunderstandings.” (Answer, para. 10).

Thereafter, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6:11-3.6(a)1, on June 22, 1998, the Board of Examiners sent Tannen a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that since it appeared that no material facts were in dispute, respondent 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. It also explained that upon review of the charges against her and the legal arguments tendered in her defense, the State Board of Examiners would determine if the conduct warranted action against her certificate. If so, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any.

Tannen responded to the hearing notice on July 10, 1998. In her letter, Tannen recounted her successful stay in West Deptford and all she did to help her math students. She stated that she never engaged in impropriety or conduct unbecoming a teacher: “Rather I was held up as an

example of what a good teacher is and should be.” (Response, p. 2). Tannen also stated that she never misrepresented herself in any situation because she “never had to do that. My work experience and performance speak for itself [*sic*].” (Response, p. 3).

At its meeting of September 24, 1998, the State Board of Examiners reviewed all of the information before it regarding Tannen’s conduct. The Board determined that no material disputes existed relating to Tannen’s conduct. Tannen never denied that she was not entitled to a Teacher of Mathematics certificate. Moreover, she never alleged that anyone else had forged her certificate. Indeed, she even admitted to being in possession of the bogus certificate since she was the one to submit it to her employing district. Based upon all of these uncontested facts, the Board of Examiners proceeded to hear the matter directly.

The issue before the State Board of Examiners in this matter, therefore, is to determine whether Tannen’s conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, represents just cause to act against Respondent’s certificate pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6:11-3.6(a)1. The State Board of Examiners finds that it does.

In this case, Tannen has presented a bogus certificate in order to obtain employment. The Office of Licensing has no record of ever having issued Tannen a Teacher of Mathematics certificate. In fact, in its contact with Tannen, that Office indicated that she did not qualify for a Mathematics certificate without additional coursework and a passing score on the NTE.

The State Board of Examiners 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. 6:11-3.4. The system of certification in this State ensures the public that each certificate holder is properly qualified for the position held. Any certificate fraudulently obtained “demeans the value of all certificates” and “harms the integrity of the teacher

certification system.” In re Williams, No. 214-2/94 (Examiners Dec. 14, 1995)(decision on remand).

Although Tannen alleges that she received a Teacher of Mathematics certificate in error, that statement is not credible. The Office of Licensing and Credentials has no record of such a certificate. Moreover, Tannen could not produce a copy of it. Rather, she later sought to secure a legitimate mathematics certification. Thus, at best Tannen taught mathematics with a certificate she knew was issued in error. At worst, she taught mathematics with a fraudulent certificate. In either case, she obviously knew she was not qualified to teach mathematics. Tannen’s failure to offer a credible explanation of where she obtained her bogus certificate is sufficient to impute guilty knowledge to her. See In re Shaffer, 92 N.J.A.R. 2D (EDE) 1, 2 (St. Bd. May 2, 1991)(teacher argued unsuccessfully that proofs against him were hearsay and that his certificate was altered by unknown others but not by him).

Thus, the only issue that remains in this matter is the imposition of the appropriate sanction. 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 alters her 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.

Accordingly, it is therefore ORDERED that Sandi I. Tannen's Teacher of Elementary School certificate be revoked on this 24th day of September 1998. It is further ORDERED that Sandi I. Tannen return her certificate to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Licensing, CN 500, Trenton, NJ 08625-0500 within fourteen (14) days of receipt of this letter.

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Secretary  
State Board of Examiners

Date of Mailing: October 23, 1998

Appeals may be made to the State Board of Education pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:6-28.

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