

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
JOSEPH PIPARO : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 1415-215

At its meeting of April 17, 2015, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed the decision it received in *In the Matter of the Tenure Hearing of Joseph Piparo* (Decision Approving Settlement Agreement, December 26, 2014). The Lodi Public Schools Board of Education (Lodi) certified tenure charges against Joseph Piparo on or about August 26, 2014, for alleged insubordination, offensive and unprofessional conduct, and conduct unbecoming an educator. Specifically, it was alleged that Piparo was reprimanded for making inappropriate statements to students regarding personal matters; the district imposed a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP); Piparo made numerous unprofessional and inappropriate statements regarding student D.S. whom he coached and who was the son of a former Lodi employee with whom Piparo had a romantic relationship, many of which included foul language and disparaging statements against D.S.; Piparo was found, following a six day court trial, to have committed harassment under the domestic violence statute after he refused to cease contact and communications with a former Lodi employee after their romantic relationship ended, which resulted in the issuance of a final restraining order; Piparo made numerous disparaging, unprofessional and inappropriate statements regarding other district staff members, including foul language, racial slurs and name calling; Piparo sent text messages threatening violence towards others and made numerous unprofessional statements regarding Lodi administrators, including name calling, foul language, and exhibited an unhealthy

anger toward those in positions of authority in the district; Piparo violated district policy regarding the use of cell phones during class time by sending and receiving numerous text messages during his teaching assignment periods; had threatened violence towards others in the district; and failed to submit to a psychological examination with Lodi's approved physician. On December 26, 2014, the Arbitrator approved a Settlement Agreement wherein Piparo resigned from his position with Lodi.

Piparo currently holds a Teacher of Social Studies Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, a Teacher of Social Studies certificate, a Supervisor certificate, a Principal Certificate of Eligibility, a Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certificate of Eligibility, and a Provisional Teacher of Students with Disabilities certificate. After reviewing the above information, at its May 21, 2015 meeting, the Board voted to issue an Order to Show Cause (OSC) to Piparo as to why his certificates should not be revoked.

The Board sent Piparo the OSC by regular and certified mail on June 9, 2015. The OSC provided that Piparo must file an Answer within 30 days pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(b)*. Piparo responded on August 5, 2015.

In his Answer, Piparo vigorously denied the truth of the allegations in the tenure charges, states he had been working in a hostile environment of which he made his administrators aware of the issues, claims all of the charges were dismissed by Lodi who gave him a monetary settlement, and states that he resigned from Lodi in good standing. *See Answer*. Piparo claims that he received an email from his attorney, that was sent by the arbitrator in his tenure proceeding, stating that "the State Board indeed approved the settlement" and was shocked when he received the OSC. *Id.* at ¶ 2&3. Piparo acknowledges he was issued a PIP and states he "never signed [his] name to the

plan, but [he] did follow what was stated.” *Id.* at ¶ 4. He further claims that the “only reason that [his] text messages have been put into question is because **[he] provided them to the Hackensack Court and paid a forensic analyst [himself] so that I could prove that there were lies being told regarding the context of those texts**” and that the former employee was never threatened by him in any way. *Id.* at ¶ 4B (emphasis in original). He further states that the presentation of those text messages to Lodi was politically motivated. *Ibid.*

Additionally, Piparo acknowledges sending text messages regarding student D.S. to his mother, and claimed they were private texts between two adults. *Id.* at ¶ 5&6. He denies sending text messages to D.S. or ever threatening D.S., and claims he never acted in any inappropriate manner where D.S. or any other student was concerned. *Ibid.* Piparo claims that certain testimonies presented at his tenure proceeding were fraudulent and politically motivated, that the text messages presented had been “altered[,]” and that he was never given the opportunity to testify. *Ibid.* He also claims that the judicial process relating to the restraining order issued against him was politically motivated. *Ibid.* Further, he claims that student D.S., the wrestling coach and athletic director made up the story about going to D.S.’s lunch table and making him cry, to try to harm him. *Ibid.* Piparo states that he never once acted unprofessionally in or out of school and that there is nothing in his personnel file at Lodi stating otherwise. *Ibid.* He acknowledges that texting and emailing during class time was prohibited by district policy. *Ibid.* Piparo claims that he offered to pay for a neutral psychological evaluation from a “list of three neutral doctors” that he provided to Lodi and that Lodi never responded. *Ibid.* Lastly, he claims that all of his observations show that he was a good educator with high regards for his students, even though he

worked in a hostile environment, and asks that he be given the opportunity to continue teaching and providing for his family. *Ibid.*

Since there were material facts in dispute, on January 12, 2016, the Board transmitted the matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for hearing as a contested case. On February 20, 2024, Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Danielle Pasquale issued an Initial Decision in the case. *In the Matter of the Certificates of Joseph C. Piparo*, Dkt. No. EDE 01620-16 (Initial Decision, February 20, 2024).

After reviewing the testimony and the record, the ALJ found that the “sheer volume and the racist and threatening language of the texts paint a picture of a teacher who refused to take accountability for anything at his job or in his relationships, and who was unrelenting in his pursuits of the women, inappropriate with the student in question and racist and insubordinate with his co-workers.” *Id.* at 27. The ALJ found that most of Piparo’s behavior occurred during the school day or during school-sponsored activities. *Ibid.* Further, the ALJ found the Board’s witnesses “extremely credible and forthright” and harbored no motive or bias to fabricate their testimony. *Id.* at 31. And that Piparo’s testimony was “entirely lacking in credibility.” *Ibid.*

The ALJ’s findings of fact included, among many others, that Piparo refused to testify truthfully even when presented with documents at the hearing, his unwarranted advances toward Ms. Melissa Grant, a former colleague with whom he had an intimate relationship, after she discontinued the relationship led to the PIP, the investigation before the PIP required at least eight students to be interviewed who confirmed Piparo attempted to dispel rumors of his relationship and that it was part of his history lesson, he violated the PIP by going into her classroom and involving students in an attempt to rekindle that relationship, and he pushed and shoved Ms. Grant

during arguments in school during school hours. *Id.* at 31-32. Further, he interrupted the school day by pestering his co-workers and supervisors because he was unsatisfied with the PIP and the fact that he was made a scout rather than an assistant coach; he failed to appear at his scheduled psychological examination; he appeared in the Head Coach's office knowing from L.S. that D.S. was extremely upset in an effort to confront the distraught and understandably angry D.S., his student and athlete; and he "lurked" over D.S. during his lunch period after his supervisors told him not to. *Id.* at 32-33. He sent and received over 30,000 texts during school hours, used harassing language against D.S., made inappropriate statements against Lodi staff, including racial slurs, and threatening language, threatened violence against D.S.'s father, and used offensive language to school administrators exhibiting contempt for them. *Id.* at 33.

As to his conduct, the ALJ found Piparo's behavior toward student D.S. was "reprehensible and totally inappropriate, particularly for someone who was his teacher and coach and who stood in a position of trust and respect." *Id.* at 28. Piparo's interactions with his students, co-workers and Principals were also "totally inappropriate and crossed the permissible line of his duties as a teacher and coach." *Id.* at 29. Further, "Piparo exhibited extremely poor judgment by becoming an active participant in a personal relationship with co-workers, especially the married parent of his student and star wrestler" and "represented a significant departure from what the public is to expect from those who teach their children." *Id.* at 29-30. The ALJ also found that Piparo retaliated against individuals who tried to stop him from discrediting others and that his behavior was not confined to a single incident but evolved into a pattern. *Id.* at 30.

According to the ALJ, Piparo should have used restraint in his reactions to the situations that he created rather than engage in egregious, continuing conduct. *Ibid.* He should not have

been in the locker room knowing that D.S. learned of Piparo's relationship with his mother and knowing that he was devastated and angry and told by other school personnel not to be present for fear of escalation. *Ibid.* He also should not have shown outward contempt for his co-workers, boldly violated his PIP, harassed D.S., eventually requiring a Final Restraining Order. *Ibid.* The ALJ even notes that she had to conduct the hearing with the student and mother separated from Piparo in order not to run afoul of that order. *Id.* at 39.

Accordingly, the ALJ found that "Piparo's continued harassment and anger toward co-workers, administrators, parents and students through offensive, racist, homophobic and distasteful comments showed that Mr. Piparo failed to meet the standard of certificate holders as role models." *Id.* at 38. And Piparo's unfitness to teach was shown through his continued harassment of D.S., both in school and through the unrelenting texts to his mother. *Id.* at 38. The ALJ concluded that Piparo engaged in conduct unbecoming a teacher and that his conduct was so "unrelenting, wide-ranging and flagrant as to warrant the revocation of his teaching certificates" as well as any other supervisory certificates he holds. *Id.* at 30, 37, 41.

Neither party filed exceptions to the ALJ's Initial Decision.

The Board must now determine whether to adopt, modify, or reject the Initial Decision in this matter. At its meeting of April 11, 2024, the Board reviewed the Initial Decision. After full and fair consideration of the Decision, the Board voted to adopt the Initial Decision and accept the recommended penalty of revocation.

The Board's long-standing belief is that teachers must serve as role models for their 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. A “violation of the implicit standard of good behavior which devolves upon one who stands in the public eye as an upholder of that which is morally and legally correct” may provide the basis for a finding of unbecoming conduct. *Bound Brook Bd. of Educ. v. Ciripompa*, 228 N.J. 4, 14 (2017) (quoting *Karins v. City of Atlantic City*, 152 N.J. 532, 555 (1998)) (internal quotation marks omitted). The “elastic” concept of “conduct unbecoming” includes “conduct which adversely affects the morale or efficiency” of the public entity or “which has a tendency to destroy public respect for . . . [public] employees and confidence in the operation of [public] services.” *In re Emmons*, 63 N.J. Super. 136, 140 (App. Div. 1960) (internal quotations and citations omitted); *see also Bound Brook Bd. of Educ.*, 228 N.J. at 13.

As noted above, after reviewing the record, the ALJ concluded that the record established that Piparo continued a pattern of totally inappropriate and unacceptable behaviors in his dealings with students, staff, and administrators. In this case, Piparo’s interactions with, and behavior towards, his students, coworkers, and administrators were completely unacceptable and certainly unbecoming of a teacher. There were numerous opportunities for Piparo to change the course of events by his reactions or inaction to certain situations and instead he made poor choices to continue his inappropriate behavior which exacerbated the situations. The Board finds that Piparo’s conduct, harassing students and co-workers, blatantly violating district policy, using disparaging and demeaning language to and against students and co-workers, does not comport with “role model” behavior. Thus, the Board finds Piparo engaged in unbecoming conduct. The Board agrees with the ALJ that the only appropriate penalty in this matter is revocation of his educator certificates.

Accordingly, on April 11, 2024, the Board voted to adopt the Initial Decision and ordered a revocation of Piparo's certificates. On this 23rd day of May 2024, the Board formally adopted its written decision to adopt the Initial Decision in this matter and it is therefore ORDERED that Joseph C. Piparo's Teacher of Social Studies Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, Teacher of Social Studies certificate, Supervisor certificate, Principal Certificate of Eligibility, Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certificate of Eligibility, and Provisional Teacher of Students with Disabilities certificate are hereby REVOKED, effective immediately. It is further ordered that Piparo return his certificates to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Certification and Induction, P.O. Box 500, Trenton, NJ 08625-0500 within 30 days of the mailing date of this decision.

Rani Singh, Secretary
State Board of Examiners

**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.