

BEFORE THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
STATE OF NEBRASKA

Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D.)
Commissioner of Education)
P.O. Box 94933)
Lincoln, NE 68509-4933,)
)
Petitioner,)
)
v.)
)
Christopher J. Eckrich)
2704 S. 12th Street)
Omaha, NE 68108,)
)
Respondent.)

NDE Case No. 23-04

FINAL ORDER

This matter came before the State Board of Education ("State Board"), Lincoln, Nebraska, on May 8, 2023, upon the recommendation of the Nebraska Professional Practices Commission ("NPPC") that the Nebraska Special Services Coaching permit of Respondent, Christopher J. Eckrich, be permanently revoked. The parties were notified of the State Board's consideration in this matter. Appearing before the State Board was Tamra L. Walz, General Counsel, on behalf of the Commissioner of Education. NPPC Clerk Kelly Muthersbaugh appeared and provided a summary of the NPPC's recommendation in this matter. The Respondent did not appear.

The record of the NPPC proceeding, containing the "Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Recommendation of the Commission," and all of the pleadings, exhibits, and a written transcript of the NPPC hearing, was received by the State Board into evidence as "Exhibit 1." The Notice of Disposition and the certified return receipt were received into evidence as "Exhibit 2." Upon its independent review of the entire record, the State Board finds, concludes, and orders as follows:

1. The State Board has jurisdiction in this case pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-866(2) (2014);

2. The Petitioner is Matthew L. Blomstedt, Ph.D., Commissioner of Education, P.O. Box 94933, Lincoln, NE 68509-4933;

3. The Respondent is Christopher J. Eckrich, 2704 S. 12th Street, Omaha, NE 68108;

4. The Respondent holds a public Nebraska Special Services Coaching permit number 20220000217, endorsed in Special Services Coaching 7-12, with an expiration date of August 31, 2027;

5. On January 4, 2022, the Nebraska Department of Education (“NDE”), Educator Certification Office erroneously issued Respondent’s permit while his application was under legal review;

6. On or about April 11, 2016, the Respondent’s Iowa teaching license was indefinitely suspended by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (“Iowa Board”). The Iowa Board found, in part, that on May 27, 2015, Respondent entered a guilty plea to First Degree Harassment, an aggravated misdemeanor in the State of Iowa. The conviction related to Respondent sending a threatening text message to a co-worker at a high school where they both worked, which stated: “be down tom [sic] with a gun to make a scene. I Am not dealing with this anymore!” The Respondent received a deferred judgment and was placed on supervised probation for a period of two years. Respondent was further ordered to have no direct or indirect contact with the school district where he had been employed or from possessing firearms for five years. The Iowa Board also found that the

Respondent was experiencing physical and mental health issues which were key factors leading up to Respondent's conduct;

7. On June 26, 2020, the Iowa Board denied the Respondent's request for reinstatement finding that "the information provided [by Respondent] did not establish that the basis for suspension no longer exists and that it will be in the public interest for the license to be reinstated." Exhibit 1 at 79. The Iowa Board stated that "[g]iven the serious nature of the violation, [it was] unwilling to reinstate Respondent's license without more extensive documentation of mental health treatment and/or information supporting a conclusion that similar events would not occur in the future." *Id.* On December 10, 2021, the Iowa Board denied Respondent's second application for reinstatement for the same reasons set out in its June 26, 2020, order. *Id.* at 82;

8. The Respondent did not accurately or completely submit either of his applications to the NDE, on or about July 30, 2021, or January 5, 2022, or applications to various schools in Nebraska, failing to accurately disclose his criminal history, suspension of his license, or work history;

9. During July-November 2021, the Respondent applied for education positions across the State of Nebraska and ultimately obtained a coaching position at Elba Public Schools ("Elba") in August 2021. While working at Elba, the Respondent made suicidal statements to a colleague as well as a student at the school. After the Respondent was let go from his position at Elba, he applied for another coaching position in another school district but was declined an offer. In response to not receiving a job offer, the Respondent sent an email to the superintendent indicating he was going to self-harm and was suicidal;

10. The Respondent has violated Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-866(2) (2014), which states, in part: “The board may, for just cause, revoke or suspend any teacher’s or administrator’s certificate. Violation of the standards established pursuant to this section, commission of an immoral act, or conviction of a felony under the laws of this state shall constitute just cause for the revocation or suspension of a teacher’s or administrator’s certificate by the board”; Title 92, *Nebraska Administrative Code*, Chapter 27, Section 004.02D (effective date: November 12, 2003) (“the educator: Shall not make any fraudulent statement or fail to disclose a material fact for which the educator is responsible”); Section 004.02G (same effective date) (“the educator: Shall not have had revoked for cause a teaching certificate, administrative certificate, or any certificate enabling a person to engage in any of the activities for which a special services certificate is issued in Nebraska”); Section 004.02H (same effective date) (“the educator: Shall not engage in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation in the performance of professional duties”); Section 004.02I (same effective date) (“the educator . . . Shall report to the Commissioner any known violation of Sections 004.02G, 004.04E, or 004.05B of this chapter”); Section 004.03C (same effective date) (“the educator: Shall make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions which interfere with the learning process or are harmful to health or safety”); Section 004.03D (“the educator: Shall conduct professional educational activities in accordance with sound educational practices that are in the best interest of the student”); Section 005.06A (same effective date) (“The educator shall: Resolve discipline problems in accordance with law, school board policy, and administrative regulations and policies”); Section 005.06D (same effective date) (“The educator shall: Develop and maintain positive standards of


conduct”); and Section 005.10C (same effective date) (“each educator . . . shall: Appropriately control his or her emotions”);

11. By a preponderance of the evidence, just cause exists pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-866(2) (2014) to permanently revoke the Respondent’s Special Services Coaching permit; and

12. The public Nebraska Special Services Coaching permit of Christopher J. Eckrich, number 20220000217, endorsed in Special Services Coaching 7-12, with an expiration date of August 31, 2027, shall be permanently revoked from and after the date of this order.

Dated this 8th day of May, 2023.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

BY: 
Patti Gubbels, President

The vote by the State Board of Education to approve the Final Order in Case No. 23-04, on May 8, 2023, was 6 in favor, _____ against, _____ abstaining, and 2 absent. Individual State Board members voted as follows:

IN FAVOR: E. Tegtmeier, P. Koch Johns, K. Penner, P. Gubbels, S. Jones, L. Fricke

AGAINST: _____

ABSTAINING: _____

ABSENT: D. Neary, J. Morrison

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned hereby certifies that a copy of the foregoing Final Order was served upon the Respondent, Christopher J. Eckrich, 2704 S. 12th Street, Omaha, NE 68108, by regular U.S. Mail; Kelly Muthersbaugh, NPPC Clerk, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lower Level, Lincoln, NE 68509, via interoffice mail; and Tamra L. Walz, General Counsel, Nebraska Department of Education, 500 S. 84th Street, 2nd Floor, Lincoln, NE 68510-2611, via interoffice mail, all on this 10th day of May, 2023.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Anna B. Sydal", is written over a horizontal line.

49-3213-30