



Minnesota Board of Teaching

September 11, 2017

Tim Vetscher, Senior Reporter
KSTP-TV
3415 University Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55114

Mr. Vetscher:

Thank you for offering the opportunity to respond to your letter dated September 6, 2017. The Minnesota Board of Teaching (the Board) kindly declines your invitation for an on-camera interview but offers the following written response:

The Board is responsible for ensuring that students in Minnesota have qualified and effective teachers. This includes ensuring that teachers who have engaged in violations of Minnesota State Statute § 122A. 20, or the Minnesota Teacher Code of Ethics are subject to fair and appropriate disciplinary action.

Regarding the Jon Hughes matter, back in 2001 the Board did enter into an agreement with Mr. Hughes whereby his teaching license was revoked. In 2001, the Board's practices did not involve sharing disciplinary action with law enforcement. Changes in Minnesota state statute during the 2017 legislative session will require the Board to provide law enforcement with all disciplinary action taken against licensed teachers imposed by the Board. These notifications will occur prior to the July 1, 2018 effective enactment of this legislation.

With regard to the 22 cases addressed in your letter, the Board believes that it is important to provide you with further context. Of the cases that you have highlighted, only three have been reviewed by current Board staff and current members of the Board's disciplinary committee. Many of these cases were processed up to 30 years ago and under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education. (The Minnesota Board of Teaching was established on December 31, 1999.) Additionally, over time there have been amendments in state statute, changes in the composition of Board members, replacements in Board staff and variations in legal counsel from the Minnesota Attorney General's Office. These changes have all impacted and influenced the disciplinary process and interpretation of statute, including reporting requirements.

Unfortunately, data privacy regulations do not permit the Board to comment on details and investigative details for the specific cases noted in your letter. More generally, the Board assesses reports regarding a range of behaviors and conduct. The specifics behind some of this conduct often may reflect unacceptable and unprofessional behavior and/or boundary violations, but do not constitute criminal conduct and law enforcement involvement. Typically, prior to the Board's receipt of information in cases that may result in a criminal investigation, law enforcement has already been notified by mandatory reporting sources.

The Board has an obvious interest in ensuring that the teachers who have engaged in inappropriate or illegal conduct are appropriately disciplined when warranted. The Board believes it has a fair process and effective protocols to review each matter based on the individual merits of each case. Since January, the Board's Disciplinary Committee has reviewed the conduct and/or the background of 197 licensure applicants or licensees. Of these cases, disciplinary action such as the denial, surrender, suspension, or revocation of the teaching license has been administered for 37 of these applicants or licensees.

There are currently over 56,000 licensed teachers in Minnesota. Teacher misconduct involves a very small percentage of Minnesota's licensed teachers and is not reflective of the majority of Minnesota's teacher work force which is committed to ethical and professional practices.

Sincerely,



Alex Liuzzi, Interim Executive Director



John Bellingham, Board Chairperson