



State of New Jersey
STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PO Box 500
TRENTON NJ 08625-0500

JON S. CORZINE
Governor

LUCILLE E. DAVY
Commissioner

December 7, 2006

TO: Members, State Board of Examiners

FROM: Robert R. Higgins, Acting Secretary RH

RE: CHRISTOPHER RIVERA

DKT. NO. 0607-145 COUNTY SUBSTITUTE CERTIFICATE 11/05

INITIAL REVIEW

The Office of Compliance Investigation in the Department of Education has forwarded to the State Board of Examiners a copy of a report of an investigation that it recently conducted of Christopher Rivera.

This matter is before you for whatever action you deem appropriate.

RRH/AGL/riverachristopher-initial review
Attachment



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PO Box 500
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JON S. CORZINE
Governor

October 26, 2006

TO: Jay Doolan, Acting Chairperson
State Board of Examiners

FROM: Ray Montgomery, Director
Office of Compliance Investigation

SUBJECT: Inappropriate Teacher-Student Contact - Christopher Rivera/Rochelle Park
High School, OCI Case #1111

The above captioned matter is being forwarded for referral to the State Board of Examiners for whatever action they deem appropriate. This matter was assigned for investigation by this office based upon a letter submitted to the Attorney General, dated July 23, 2006, reporting inappropriate contact by a teacher with a student from the Rochelle Park School District. The letter was submitted by the student's father, J. A. [REDACTED] who indicated that a young male teacher assigned to [REDACTED] visited [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] mother's home shortly after midnight in the early part of May 2006.

Mr. A. [REDACTED]'s letter indicates that he is not satisfied with what he termed inaction by the school district, police, Bergen County Prosecutor's Office, state county school board, social services offices and the Office of Criminal History Review. His dissatisfaction is based upon the fact that the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office closed the file without filing any criminal charges. Since no criminal contact was alleged and the teacher has not been charged or convicted of a disqualifying offense, action was not taken by the remaining agencies.

OCI's investigation of this matter has been completed and although there isn't any evidence indicating ill intent by Mr. Rivera, based upon his poor judgment in his interaction with the student, a review of the matter by the State Board of Examiners seems most appropriate. The complete reporting on this matter is attached.

RM/I:\kfeltes\Rochelle Park - Rivera\Referral to State Board.doc
c: Penelope Lattimer
Albert Monillas
Kim C. Belin
Aaron R. Graham
Karl T. Feltes

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE INVESTIGATION
INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

CHRISTOPHER RIVERA – SUBSTITUTE TEACHER
INAPPROPRIATE TEACHER-STUDENT CONTACT

REPORT OF EXAMINATION
OCTOBER 2006

**STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE INVESTIGATION
INVESTIGATIONS UNIT**

**REPORT OF EXAMINATION – OCTOBER 2006
CHRISTOPHER RIVERA – SUBSTITUTE TEACHER
INAPPROPRIATE TEACHER-STUDENT CONTACT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 1, 2006, the above captioned matter was assigned for investigation based upon a letter submitted to the Attorney General, dated July 23, 2006, reporting inappropriate contact by a teacher with a student from the Rochelle Park School District. The letter was submitted by the student's father, [REDACTED] who indicated that a young male teacher at [REDACTED] visited [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] mother's home shortly after midnight in the early part of May 2006.

Mr. A [REDACTED]'s letter indicates that he is not satisfied with what he termed inaction by the school district, police, Bergen County Prosecutor's Office, state county school boards, social services offices and state investigator's office responsible for conducting teacher background checks. Included with the July letter was a copy of a letter dated August 6, 2006, addressed to the Department of Education, Office of Criminal Investigations indicating that he had called the Office and reported the incident in May 2006.

Investigation of this allegation confirmed that Christopher Rivera, approved as a substitute teacher by the Bergen County Superintendent's Office on November 29, 2005, had engaged in ongoing communications with a [REDACTED] student whom he had taught at [REDACTED]. Those conversations culminated in his visiting [REDACTED] home after midnight in the early part of May 2005. The child's mother notified the Rochelle Park School District. Mr. Rivera was contacted and explained that he went to the child's home after [REDACTED] contacted him and indicated that [REDACTED] wanted to leave home. Mr. Rivera drove to the student's home to counsel [REDACTED] not to leave home and work through [REDACTED] problems. He was advised by the school principal that such contact is inappropriate and his name was removed from the Rochelle Park substitute teacher list.

Based upon the information obtained during the investigation I recommend that this matter be forwarded to the State Board of Examiners for review and whatever action they deem appropriate. A synopsis of the investigative steps and information obtained that serves as the basis for this recommendation follows.

INVESTIGATIVE SYNOPSIS AND RECOMMENDATION

Mr. and Mrs. A [REDACTED] do not live together. According to Mr. A [REDACTED] and the investigator from the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office, [REDACTED] has a history of behavioral issues. At the time of the incident [REDACTED] was living with [REDACTED] mother, J [REDACTED] A [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

The father, J [REDACTED] A [REDACTED] stated that he has spoken with [REDACTED] and parents of students who also attend [REDACTED]. He stated that [REDACTED] and the other parents claim that this teacher has a very friendly relationship with students. He counsels them with problems and has offered students rides home from school events and to the mall for shopping trips. When he approached the school principal and other officials, he reports that they could do nothing since no wrongful acts occurred. The school district has discontinued using Mr. Rivera as a substitute teacher. Mr. A [REDACTED] reported the incident to the local police who referred the case to the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office.

The mother, J [REDACTED] A [REDACTED] stated that around midnight on a date in the early part of May she heard [REDACTED] leaving the house. She observed [REDACTED] outside talking to someone in a car. The individual drove off and [REDACTED] returned to the house and told [REDACTED] mother that it was a substitute teacher from school. Mrs. A [REDACTED] was informed by [REDACTED] [REDACTED] that [REDACTED] had been communicating with the teacher online. Mrs. A [REDACTED] contacted the school the next morning.

The school principal, Mark Monyon, stated that when he was advised of the incident by Mrs. A [REDACTED] he contacted the teacher who reported to the school within the hour. Mr. Rivera stated that the student contacted him indicating that [REDACTED] could no longer stay in [REDACTED] home and wanted to go to a friend's house. [REDACTED] requested a ride. Mr. Rivera stated that [REDACTED] seemed desperate so he drove to [REDACTED] house to reason with [REDACTED]. Mr. Rivera stated that he never got out of his car and did not allow [REDACTED] to enter his car. After speaking with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] returned to [REDACTED] house and he drove off. Mr. Monyon stated that there wasn't any conflicting information from the parties involved. He advised Mr. Rivera that he exercised poor judgment and would be removed from the substitute teachers list.

Subsequently, Mr. A [REDACTED] arrived at the school and indicated his dissatisfaction with the action taken by principal. Mr. Monyon offered to allow Mr. A [REDACTED] to use the school phone to contact the police, however, he indicated that he would go to the Lodi Police Department in person.

Principal Monyon also contacted the County Superintendent Aaron Graham who suggested he contact the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS). During a conversation with DYFS they indicated that there was no cause of action.

Investigator Kristin Mecionils, Bergen County Prosecutor's Office, stated that her investigation failed to reveal any criminal wrongdoing. Her investigation included an interview with Mr. Rivera and a forensic examination of his personal computer. The computer review confirmed that Mr. Rivera and the student were communicating via email. All of the emails involved [REDACTED] expressing [REDACTED] discontent with [REDACTED] life. Mr. Rivera's responses were supportive and suggested [REDACTED] resolve [REDACTED] conflicts in an appropriate manner. While interviewing Mr. Rivera, he stated to Mrs. Mecionils that he was raised in an abusive home and sympathizes with [REDACTED] and others in [REDACTED] situation. He seeks to offer them appropriate support. Mrs. Mecionils also stated that there was a recent issue with [REDACTED]. It was observed that [REDACTED]

Investigator Mecionils stated that based on her interview of Mr. Rivera, his full cooperation and the examination of his personal computer that failed to reveal any pornography or inappropriate communications, she believes that he did the wrong thing for the right reasons.

Other information – student's "Confession":

On September 28, 2006, Mr. A [REDACTED] forwarded, by facsimile, a copy of a "Confession Letter" reportedly authored by [REDACTED] (See attached). The letter was part of [REDACTED] Pages five and six include references to the incident involving Mr. Rivera and the student. In this letter the student indicates that:

[REDACTED]

On October 6, 2006, a telephone interview was conducted with the teacher, Christopher Rivera. Mr. Rivera acknowledged that he had given his cell phone number to the student so that [REDACTED] could contact him when in need. The student had obtained his screen name and began contacting him online. Mr. Rivera claims that he has a graduate degree in psychology and has worked with the social services team at the school on cases involving students who have behavioral issues. During conversation with the student he became aware that [REDACTED] was crying out for help. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Although he claims none of the other individuals will come forward, school children and their parents were aware of the problems and did nothing.

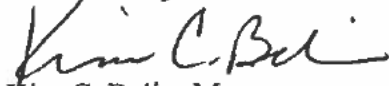
Mr. Rivera claims he verbally reported his concerns to Ms. Lender, the social services worker at the school who stated that she would forward the information to the appropriate individuals. When nothing was done, he offered her counseling. It is his belief that the appropriate individuals had failed to intervene. Based on information from the child and information he received from other children and parents, he was informed that the parents failed to provide proper parenting including a failure to provide food for the child. According to Mr. Rivera, [REDACTED] In closing, Mr. Rivera asserted that his relationship with the student was to provide for [REDACTED] wellbeing; he only offered [REDACTED] counseling. There was no malicious intent. His visit to the house that night was based on his belief [REDACTED]

Mr. Rivera was advised that the student had claimed that he permitted [REDACTED] to cheat, listen to music in his class, offered to take [REDACTED] places, and use his phone. Mr. Rivera denied that he permitted her to cheat and indicated that [REDACTED] had obtained his phone during class. He took the phone from [REDACTED] Mr. Rivera claims that [REDACTED] contacted him often and he offered [REDACTED] support.

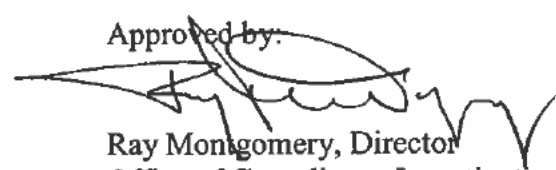
Recommendation

Based upon the information obtained during the investigation and Mr. Rivera's acknowledgement that he maintained contact with the student over a period of time and on one occasion visited the student at [REDACTED] home when in fear for [REDACTED] safety, it is recommended that this report be forwarded to the State Board of Examiners for review and whatever action, if any, the board deems appropriate.

Submitted by:


Kim C. Belin, Manager
Investigations Unit

Approved by:


Ray Montgomery, Director
Office of Compliance Investigation

Investigator:

Karl Feltes