## IN THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

KIMBERLY JONES,

Appellant

V.

Teacher Tenure Appeal

No. 03-2022

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA,

Appellee

#### **OPINION AND ORDER**

Kimberly Jones (Ms. Jones) has appealed to the Secretary of Education (Secretary) the decision of the School District of Philadelphia (District) to discharge her from her employment as a professional employee.

## **Findings of Fact**

- 1. Kimberly Jones (Ms. Jones) was hired by the District in 1994. K JONES, page 262.
- 2. Ms. Jones was assigned to Cook-Wissahickon Elementary School (Cook-Wissahickon), which serves grades kindergarten through eighth grade, for more than seven years. K JONES, page 12.
  - 3. Ms. Jones is certified to teach early childhood education. K JONES, page 55.
  - 4. Ms. Jones was recently recertified as a national board-certified teacher. K JONES, page

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> As used throughout, "K JONES" refers to the record of proceedings in this matter that occurred before the School District of Philadelphia's Board of Education.

- 5. Michael Lowe (Mr. Lowe) has been the principal at Cook-Wissahickon for more than seven years and has been a District employee for 22 years. K JONES, page 12.
- 6. Mr. Lowe gave Ms. Jones a congratulatory note and a \$15.00 gift card regarding her recertification. K JONES, page 74.
- 7. As principal, Mr. Lowe conducts performance evaluations for the school's 30 teachers. They are evaluated on a three-year rotating cycle. For two years, teachers simply submit professional development plans. In the third year, they receive formal evaluations in both the fall and spring, K JONES, page 12.
- 8. The District's Office of Teaching and Learning houses directors of teacher coaches. Daria Silvestro is a director of teacher coaches who directly manages 21 coaches and plays a role in administering the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program. K JONES, page 4.
- 9. The PAR program was created in 2013 as part of the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) between the District and the teacher's union, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT). K JONES, pages 4, 129-133.
- 10. The PAR program was established to provide coaching support for new, nontenured teachers and tenured teachers whose job performance has been rated as unsatisfactory. K JONES, page 4, 129-133.
- 11. Participation in PAR may also be requested by a tenured teacher who believes that their teaching competence will benefit from PAR. K JONES, pages 5, 129-133.
  - 12. Ms. Jones received a needs improvement rating from Mr. Lowe during the 2017-18

school year. K JONES, pages 5-6, 12.

- 13. After receiving the needs improvement rating, Ms. Jones was assigned a teaching coach. However, she was not placed in the PAR program. K JONES, pages 8-9.
- 14. In the fall of 2018, Mr. Lowe formally evaluated Ms. Jones. Based on his formal evaluation in January of 2019, Mr. Lowe gave Ms. Jones failing marks on setting instructional outcomes, designing coherent instruction, and reflecting on teaching. The overall rating was a needs improvement. K JONES, pages 12-13, 134-43.
- 15. Mr. Lowe timely submitted Ms. Jones' January 2019 evaluation into the software system on January 27, 2019. K JONES, page 79.
- 16. Ms. Jones did not see her January 2019 formal evaluation until just before her Spring 2019 formal evaluation. K JONES, pages 74-75.
- 17. Ms. Jones admitted that the January 2019 formal evaluation may have been submitted for weeks before she noticed it. K JONES, pages 74-75.
- 18. Ms. Jones also received a needs improvement for the Spring 2019 formal evaluation, K JONES, page 13.
- 19. Ms. Jones was entered into the PAR program after receiving two needs improvement ratings within a four-year period, constituting an unsatisfactory rating. The two needs improvement ratings occurred during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. K JONES, pages 5-6, 12-13, 76, 134-43.
- 20. Ms. Jones would have been entered into the PAR program for the 2019-20 school year, but she took a year-long sabbatical. K JONES, page 13.

- 21. When Ms. Jones returned to Cook-Wissahickon, she was not immediately entered into the PAR program due to an administrative error. K JONES, page 6.
- 22. In the fall of 2020, Mr. Lowe noticed problems with Ms. Jones' performance and contacted the PAR program to see if Ms. Jones had been assigned a consulting teacher. Mr. Lowe discovered that Ms. Jones had not been placed in the PAR program. K JONES, pages 6, 13-14.
- 23. In November 2020, Mr. Lowe conducted an informal evaluation and observed some problems with Ms. Jones' performance. Mr. Lowe created a chart listing behavior that he had witnessed in which Ms. Jones did not meet expectations of proper teaching. Mr. Lowe also made supports available to help Ms. Jones meet the proper teaching expectations. K JONES, pages 13, 15-16, 144-46.
- 24. Ms. Jones was placed into the PAR program for the second half of the 2020-21 school year, and she continued in the program in the first half of the 2021-22 school year. K JONES, pages 6, 13-14.
- 25. While a teacher is participating in the PAR program, the teacher does not receive formal performance evaluations. K JONES, page 77.
- 26. In the PAR program, a tenured consulting teacher is assigned to each teacher previously rated as unsatisfactory to provide coaching aligned to the teacher's Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). The PIP is drafted by the consulting teacher in collaboration with the PAR program teacher and that teacher's principal. The consulting teacher meets with the PAR program teacher weekly to provide coaching aligned with the PIP. K JONES, pages 6, 133.

- 27. Ms. Jones' consulting teacher in the spring semester of the 2020-21 school year was Michelle Shields. Ms. Shields documented that she met with Ms. Jones on a weekly basis for PAR program coaching. K JONES, pages 6-7, 153.
- 28. Michelle Shields created a PIP for Ms. Jones in April 2021 with input from Mr. Lowe. K JONES, pages 15-16, 147-152.
- 29. For the fall semester of the 2021-22 school year, Ms. Jones' consulting teacher was Jennifer Schneider. K JONES, page 10.
- 30. Ms. Schneider created an updated PIP for Ms. Jones in October 2021. K JONES, pages 17, 154-61.
- 31. In October 2021, while Ms. Jones was in the PAR program, Mr. Lowe conducted an informal review of Ms. Jones's performance. He rated her performance as needs improvement, with failing marks in two domains. K JONES, pages 17, 19, 162-71.
- 32. In December 2021, Mr. Lowe conducted another informal review of Ms. Jones' performance by observing her teaching and by taking notes. K JONES, pages 19, 172-203.
- 33. Mr. Lowe again rated Ms. Jones's performance as needs improvement. K JONES, pages 20, 197.
- 34. Mr. Lowe was in Ms. Jones' kindergarten classroom quite frequently during the first half of the 2021-22 school year, in part, due to quite a number of behavior issues. K JONES, page 80.
- 35. Once Ms. Jones had completed her year in the PAR program, Mr. Lowe conducted a formal evaluation of her performance. K JONES, pages 20-21, 204-44.

- 36. Prior to the formal evaluation, Ms. Jones completed a pre-observation form detailing what students would be learning in the observed lesson and what Ms. Jones wanted Mr. Lowe to focus on. Mr. Lowe and Ms. Jones also met to discuss the pre-observation. K JONES, pages 20-21, 230.
  - 37. Mr. Lowe conducted the observation on December 15, 2021. K JONES, page 229.
- 38. Mr. Lowe took handwritten notes, marking on one side of the note pages how Ms. Jones was teaching the lesson, and on the other side of the note pages, the students' reactions to the lesson. K JONES, pages 21, 206-26.
  - 39. The lesson that Mr. Lowe observed was 90 minutes long. K JONES, page 77-78.
- 40. Within five days of observing Ms. Jones's class, Mr. Lowe completed the formal observation. K JONES, pages 21-22.
- 41. The formal observation was submitted to the District on or about January 20, 2022. K JONES, pages 22-23.
- 42. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as proficient in the setting instructional outcomes domain of the evaluation. K JONES, pages 23, 230-31.
- 43. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as needs improvement in the designing coherent instruction domain of the evaluation. K JONES, pages 232, 233.
- 44. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as needs improvement in the establishing a culture for learning domain of the evaluation because she had the students play a game that was not planned and the students had not been taught how to play the game. K JONES, pages 23, 232-33.

- 45. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as needs improvement in the managing classroom procedures domain of the evaluation because the transitions were not smooth. Once the students were finished work, the students who finished early had nothing to do, so they were unengaged. The students who were still trying to finish, were still trying to work while other students in the class were finished and unengaged. K JONES, pages 23-24, 233.
- 46. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as needs improvement in the managing student behavior domain of the evaluation, because Ms. Jones' lesson was executed incorrectly and was not presented well. K JONES, pages 24, 233-34.
- 47. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as needs improvement in the communicating with students' domain of the evaluation because Ms. Jones was not holding students accountable to behavior other than repeatedly redirecting them. K JONES, pages 24, 235-36.
- 48. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as needs improvement in the questioning and discussion techniques domain of the evaluation because Ms. Jones' activity for students did not have clear directions. K JONES, pages 24, 236.
- 49. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as needs improvement in the engaging students in learning domain of the evaluation because during the whole group instruction anywhere from 35 to 44 percent of the students were not paying attention to the lesson. K JONES, pages 24-25, 237.
- 50. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as failing in the reflecting on teaching domain of the evaluation because she did not focus on what the students were doing in the classroom. Ms. Jones spent her post-observation explaining to Mr. Lowe how she understood the card game and did not understand the point that Mr. Lowe was trying to make regarding her teaching. K

JONES, pages 25, 238.

- 51. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as proficient in the communicating with families domain of the evaluation. K JONES, pages 25, 238-39.
- 52. Ms. Jones received needs improvement ratings in three of the four domains and an overall needs improvement rating. K JONES, pages 25, 240.
- 53. Ms. Jones provided some post-observation comments to Mr. Lowe, and they met to discuss those comments and the evaluation. Ms. Jones' comments did not persuade Mr. Lowe to change the evaluation. K JONES, pages 25, 241-44.
- 54. As a result of receiving a needs improvement evaluation, Ms. Jones' final performance rating was unsatisfactory. K JONES, pages 26, 247.
- 55. After a teacher has been in the PAR program for a year, the teacher's consulting teacher and the principal each make recommendations to the PAR Panel on whether the teacher should be retained or discharged. K JONES, pages 7, 132.
- 56. The PAR Panel has eight members. Four members are appointed by the District, and four are appointed by the PFT. K JONES, pages 7, 132.
  - 57. The director of teacher coaches is not a member of the PAR Panel. K JONES, page 8.
- 58. The PAR Panel votes on whether each teacher in the PAR program is retained or recommended for discharge. It takes five votes from the eight-member panel to recommend a teacher for discharge. One PFT appointee must vote for termination to recommend a teacher for discharge. K JONES, page 7.
  - 59. The PAR Panel's decision is based upon classroom performance and information

provided by the consulting teacher and the principal. K JONES, page 132.

- 60. The principal's recommendation is not given more weight than that of the consulting teacher. K JONES, page 10.
- 61. In addition to submitting written recommendations to the PAR Panel, the consulting teacher and principal each get ten minutes to give an oral presentation to the PAR Panel prior to its vote. K JONES, page 10.
- 62. Both Jennifer Schneider and Mr. Lowe provided written recommendations and made oral presentations to the PAR Panel on January 11, 2022. K JONES, pages 10, 26, 28,256,267.
- 63. In his presentation, Mr. Lowe described the issues that had been raised in Ms. Jones' PIP that had not been corrected. K JONES, 26, 256.
- 64. The PAR Panel does not issue a written decision when recommending a teacher for discharge. K JONES, pages 7, 8.
- 65. Instead, the PAR Panel notifies the director of teacher coaches and her co-director, who then communicate with the District's Office of Employee Relations to issue a Statement of Charges in anticipation of discharge. K JONES, pages 7, 132.
- 66. Because Ms. Jones had two unsatisfactory ratings, the PAR Panel notified the director of teacher coaches that it was recommending that she be discharged. K JONES, pages 6-8, 133.
- 67. On or about February 9, 2022, the District issued a Statement of Charges for the recommended discharge of Ms. Jones on the grounds of willful violation or failure to comply with the school laws of the Commonwealth, unsatisfactory teaching performance, and

incompetence under Section 1122 of the School Code of 1949, 24 P.S. § 11-1122 (School Code). K JONES, pages 8, 262-264.

- 68. The Statement of Charges advised Ms. Jones of her right to a hearing before the Philadelphia School Board of Education (Board). K JONES, pages 8, 262-264.
- 69. Ms. Jones elected to challenge the Statement of Charges at a hearing. K JONES, page 2.
  - 70. The hearing was held on May 19, 2022. K JONES, page 1.
  - 71. At the hearing, Ms. Jones was represented by counsel. K JONES, page 3.
- 72. The hearing officer issued findings of fact and conclusions of law on August 1, 2022, recommending that the Board discharge Ms. Jones from her employment. K JONES, pages 386-401.
- 73. The Board adopted a resolution on August 18, 2022, discharging Ms. Jones's from her employment. K JONES, page 285.<sup>2</sup>

#### Conclusion of Law

Ms. Jones was properly discharged for incompetency and unsatisfactory teaching performance.

#### Legal Standard

A tenured professional employee has a property interest in continued employment. *School District of Phila. v Jones*, 139 A.3d 358, 366 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2016). A tenured professional employee

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In her brief, Ms. Jones has alleged that Mr. Lowe discriminated against her regarding her EEOC Claim. However, this issue was raised for the first time in her Brief and, therefore, the Secretary will not consider this issue.

may only be dismissed for the reasons set forth in Section 1122 of the School Code, 24 P.S. § 11-1122 (Section 1122). Foderaro v. Sch. Dist. of Phila., 531 A.2d 570, 571 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1987). "It is thus apparent that the legislature intended to protect tenure except for the serious charges listed."

Lauer v. Millvale Area Sch. Dist., 657 A.2d 119, 121 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1995).

#### Section 1122 provides as follows:

The only valid causes for termination of a contract heretofore or hereafter entered into with a professional employe shall be immorality; incompetency; unsatisfactory teaching performance based on two (2) consecutive ratings of the employe's teaching performance that are to include classroom observations, not less than four (4) months apart, in which the employe's teaching performance is rated as unsatisfactory; intemperance; cruelty; persistent negligence in the performance of duties; wilful neglect of duties; physical or mental disability as documented by competent medical evidence, which after reasonable accommodation of such disability as required by law substantially interferes with the employe's ability to perform the essential functions of his employment; advocation of or participating in un-American or subversive doctrines; conviction of a felony or acceptance of a guilty plea or nolo contendere therefor; persistent and wilful violation of or failure to comply with school laws of this Commonwealth (including official directives and established policy of the board of directors); on the part of the professional employe:

## 24 P.S. § 11-1122.

The purpose of Section 1122 is to provide "the greatest protection possible against dismissal." *McFerren v. Farrell Area Sch. Dist.*, 993 A.2d 344, 353 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2010) (quoting *Lauer v. Millville Area Sch. Dist.*, 657 A.2d 119, 121 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1995)). "Section 1122 was not intended to provide a school district with an arsenal of weapons to use when it wishes to relieve itself of its contractual obligations to a professional employee." *Id.* "[T]o dismiss a professional employee protected by contract requires a serious reason, not 'picayune and unwarranted criticisms." *Id.* (quoting *Lauer*, 657 A.2d at 123). In short, the grounds for dismissal listed in Section 1122 must be strictly construed in favor of the professional employee and against the school district. *McFerren v. Farrell Area Sch. Dist.*, 993 A.2d 344, 353 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2010).

The term incompetency within the context of a professional employee dismissal, has acquired the limited denotation of two consecutive unsatisfactory ratings. 22 Pa. Code § 351.26; Hamburg v. North Penn Sch. Dist., 484 A.2d 867, 869 (Pa. Cmwlth 1984). Two unsatisfactory ratings and testimony about poor performance are sufficient to establish incompetency under the School Code. See Steffen v. Bd. of Dirs. of S. Middletown Twp. Sch. Dist., 377 A.2d 1381, 1384 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1977); see also Bruckner v. Lancaster Cnty. Area Vocational-Tech. Joint Sch. Operating Comm., 467 A.2d 432, 435 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1983). "The important, indeed vital, portion of any unsatisfactory rating is the accompanying anecdotal records." Hamburg v. North Penn Sch. Dist., 484 A.2d 867, 869 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1984) (citing English v. Northeast Bd. of Educ., 348 A.2d 494 (Pa. Cmwlth 1975)).

Due process requires that Ms. Jones be given notice of the charges against her and an opportunity to be heard. 2 Pa. C.S. § 501; *McCoy v. Lincoln Intermediate Unit No. 12*, 391 A.2d 1119 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1978). Due process also requires that Ms. Jones have a neutral factfinder. *Katruska v. Bethlehem Center Sch. District*, 767 A.2d 1051 (Pa. 1997).

Section 1131 of the School Code, 24 P.S. § 11-1131, vests the Secretary with authority to hear appeals brought by professional employees from actions of local school entities. The Secretary has the authority to review the school board's termination decision *de novo*. *Belasco v. Board of Public Educ. of the Sch. Dist. of Pittsburgh*, 510 A.2d 337, 343 (Pa. 1986). The credibility of witnesses and the weight to be accorded their testimony is within the exclusive province of the Secretary. *Rhodes v. Laurel Highlands Sch. Dist.*, 544 A.2d 562 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1988). Furthermore, the Secretary is the ultimate fact finder when, as here, he decides to make findings of fact. *Belasco v. Board of Public Educ. of the Sch. Dist. of Pittsburgh*, 510 A.2d 337 (Pa. 1986). The Secretary makes findings of fact

based on the preponderance of the evidence. Fisler v. State System of Higher Educ., 78 A.3d 30, 47 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2013).

#### **Discussion**

### The Record Clearly Shows that Ms. Jones Received Two Unsatisfactory Ratings

The District set out the grounds for the dismissal of Ms. Jones in the Statement of Charges as a willful violation of or failure to comply with the school laws of this Commonwealth, unsatisfactory teaching performance, and incompetence such as to constitute cause pursuant to 24 P.S. Section 11-1122 of the Public School Code of 1949, as amended. K JONES, page 262. The District presented sufficient and credible evidence that supported the Ms. Jones' consecutive unsatisfactory evaluations.

The District discharged Ms. Jones because she received two consecutive ratings of the employe's teaching performance not less than four (4) months apart, in which the employe's teaching performance is rated as unsatisfactory. Indeed, Ms. Jones has never challenged the fact that she received such ratings, but rather she argues that Mr. Lowe was biased against her in issuing his ratings of her.

Ms. Jones presented no credible evidence to show that Mr. Lowe was biased against her, including that he was resistant to her recertification as a nationally board certified teacher K JONES, page 55; that he blamed her for the problems of a difficult class in 2016-17 K JONES, page 52-54; and that he held unreasonable expectations for the yearly progress in language skills for an EL student in 2018-19. K JONES, page 60. None of these allegations refute the validity of the two needs improvement ratings that led to Ms. Jones' first unsatisfactory rating. Ms. Jones did not receive a needs improvement rating from Mr. Lowe in

2016-17, the year in which it was alleged she had a difficult class. Meanwhile, expectations related to the EL student arose at the end of the 2018-19 school year, and Ms. Jones had already received her second needs improvement rating in the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. K JONES, page 12, 60. As for recertification, there is no allegation that issue played any role in any of Ms. Jones' evaluations. Ms. Jones admitted that upon recertification, Mr. Lowe sent her a handwritten congratulatory note and a \$15 gift card. K JONES, page 74.

For the 2018-19 school year, Ms. Jones received two needs improvement formal evaluations. K JONES, page 13. Ms. Jones was on sabbatical leave for the 2019-20 school year. K JONES, page 13. She did not receive a formal evaluation for the 2020-21 school year because she was placed in the PAR program to improve her teaching performance, and teachers in the PAR program do not receive formal evaluations. K JONES, page 77. Ms. Jones continued in the PAR program for the first half of the 2021-22 school year. Although she did not receive a formal evaluation during that time, Mr. Lowe did conduct two informal evaluations that informed Ms. Jones that her performance was not meeting the District's standards.

In December 2021, when Ms. Jones completed the PAR program, Mr. Lowe conducted a formal evaluation based on his observation of Ms. Jones teaching on December 15, 2021. Mr. Lowe rated Ms. Jones as needs improvement, which once again constituted an unsatisfactory rating pursuant to 24 P.S. § 11-1138.7. However, Ms. Jones was not immediately terminated. Instead, pursuant to the terms of the collective bargaining agreement between the District and its teachers, the PAR Panel evaluated Ms. Jones' progress based on submissions and presentations by Mr. Lowe and Ms. Jones' consulting teacher, Jennifer Schneider. The eight-member PAR Panel recommend that she be discharged from her employment. Ms. Jones presented no evidence alleging any possible

bias or arbitrary action by the PAR Panel in recommending her discharge.

Ms. Jones' ratings were issued based on numerous formal and informal observations of Ms. Jones' classroom are more than adequate to support the validity of the two consecutive unsatisfactory ratings. These anecdotal records and the corroborating witness testimony are "specific in detail and contemporaneous in nature so as to secure 'the justified discharge of the incapable' and avoid 'the unjustified discharge of the capable." *Mastro v. Board of Public Educ., Sch. Dist. of Pittsburgh*, Teacher Tenure Appeal No. 1-98, p. 7 (quoting *Augustine v. Turkeyfoot Valley Area Sch. Dist.*, 9 Pa. D. & C. 3d 147, 173-74 (CCP 1977)).

Accordingly, because Ms. Jones received two consecutive unsatisfactory ratings more than four months apart, and because Ms. Jones presented no credible evidence of bias or arbitrary action in issuing those ratings by either Mr. Lowe or the PAR Panel, Ms. Jones' discharge must be upheld pursuant to the terms of the CBA and Section 1122 of the School Code.

#### Ms. Jones Received Due Process of Law

Due process requires that Ms. Jones be given notice of the charges against her and an opportunity to be heard. 2 Pa. C.S. § 501; *McCoy v. Lincoln Intermediate Unit No. 12*, 391 A.2d 1119 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1978). Due process also requires that Ms. Jones have a neutral factfinder. *Katruska v. Bethlehem Center Sch. District*, 767 A.2d 1051 (Pa. 1997).

The District fully complied with the procedural requirements in the School Code for dismissal of a professional employee, including giving Ms. Jones (a) a detailed written statement of the charges upon which her proposed dismissal was based; (b) timely written notice of the hearing; (c) an opportunity to be heard; and (d) a recording of all the testimony offered by a

competent disinterested public stenographer. See K JONES generally.

The Board appointed a hearing officer to conduct the hearing on its behalf, and reviewed the hearing officer's findings of facts, conclusions of law and recommendation, then made an independent ruling based on the entire record. *Lewis v. School District of Philadelphia*, 690 A.2d 814, 817 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1997). The hearing was properly conducted pursuant to the Local Agency Law. 2 Pa. C.S. § 751, *et seq*.

In her brief, Ms. Jones argues that the District violated procedural due process by not providing her with the results of a formal evaluation until shortly before her next evaluation.

Mr. Lowe provided the evaluation in a timely manner on January 27, 2019. K JONES, page 79. Ms. Jones admitted that by the time she first saw the evaluation results, they may have been delivered to her weeks earlier without her noticing. K JONES, pages 74-75. Even if Mr. Lowe had not provided the results, this would not violate procedural due process because the School Code does not mandate that performance evaluations be provided to teachers in any specific timeframe to justify discharge. Instead, the District must merely comply with the dictates of Section 1127 of the School Code, which was followed.

Ms. Jones also argues that she was deprived of substantive due process because Mr. Lowe did not apply a fair and objective measure to his evaluations and that his sole purpose was to end Ms. Jones's teaching career.

To establish a substantive due process claim, a party must prove that it was deprived of a protected property interest by arbitrary or capricious government action. *See Taylor Inv., Ltd. v. Upper Darby Twp.*, 983 F.2d 1285, 1290 (3d Cir. 1993). A substantive due process violation is

established if "the government's actions were not rationally related to a legitimate government interest" or "were in fact motivated by bias, bad faith or improper motive." *Parkway Garage, Inc.* v. City of Philadelphia, 5 F.3d 685, 692 (3d Cir. 1993) (quoting Midnight Sessions, Ltd. v. City of Philadelphia, 945 F.2d 667, 683 (3d Cir.1991))

Ms. Jones offers only her opinion that Mr. Lowe was biased against her and that the bias was reflected in her performance evaluations. Ms. Jones also argues that Mr. Lowe intended to discharge her. However, this argument overlooks the fact that the ultimate decision to discharge Ms. Jones was made by the PAR Panel. Ms. Jones has not argued that the PAR Panel was biased in any way. As Ms. Jones has failed to argue bias by the PAR Panel that recommended her discharge, her substantive due process claim fails.

I affirm the Board's decision to terminate Ms. Jones employment as a tenured professional employee pursuant to Section 1122 of the School Code. Accordingly, the following order is entered.

# IN THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

KIMBERLY JONES,

Appellant

v. : Teacher Tenure Appeal

No. 03-2022

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA,

Appellee

### **ORDER**

AND NOW this \_\_\_\_\_ day of April, 2023, the Acting Secretary affirms the School District of Philadelphia's decision to dismiss Kimberly Jones, a tenured professional employee.

Khalid N. Mumin, Ed. D. Acting Secretary of Education

Date Mailed: April 7, 2023