

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

STATE OF GEORGIA

ROBERT W. COULTER,

Petitioner,

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CASE NO. 1988-27

ORDER

THE STATE BOARD OF EDIJCATION, after due consideration of the record submitted,

DETERMINES AND ORDERS, that the decision of the Special Master be sustained upon the vote of Mr. Abrams, Mr. Sears, Mr. Carrell, Mr. Smith, Mrs. Baranco, and Mrs. Cantrell. Mr. Owens and Mr. Lathem voted no.

Mr. Foster was not present.

This 12th day of January, 1989.

John M. TAYLOR
Vice Chairman for Appeals

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REPORT OF SPECIAL MASTER

PART I

SUMMARY

This is an appeal from a decision by the Georgia Department of Education (“Department”) to deny Robert W. Coulter (“Petitioner”) an NT-5 teaching certificate in elementary education on the grounds that he had not complied with the minimum certification standards required by the State Board of Education. The Special Master recommends granting of the certificate by the State Board of Education.

PART II

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Petitioner is presently employed by the Fulton County Board of Education. He has an M.Ed. in Elementary Education and a professional recommendation from Antioch New England Graduate School. His bachelor’s degree is from the University of Massachusetts/Amherst in sociology, Sociology is not a recognized field for certification in Georgia. Current State Board of Education regulations require Bachelor’s level certification before a master’s level certificate can be granted.

Petitioner was recruited in Massachusetts to take a teaching position in Georgia. Before accepting the position, he requested information from the Department on the requirements for obtaining a master's certification. The Department sent him a document titled "Minimum Certification Standards for General and Professional Education" that set forth the quarter hours required in various fields. The document did not indicate any course content requirements. Based upon this document and his assumption that he fulfilled the requirements, Petitioner accepted a position with the Fulton County Board of Education and made an application for a master's level certificate. The Department informed Petitioner that he would have to complete 25 quarter hours of course content work in order to qualify for an NT-5 certificate. He has completed five quarter hours, thus leaving 20 quarter hours of course content work to be completed.

Petitioner submitted a summary of his courses that showed that he had met all of the minimum certification standards set forth in the document provided to him by the Department. The Department, however, took the position that some of the courses were methods courses, rather than content courses, and refused to give Petitioner credit for all of his courses. The Department determined that there was sufficient content course work in Petitioner's undergraduate and graduate courses to issue an NT-4 certificate, but not enough to issue an NT-5 certificate.

The NT-4 certificate and the NT-5 certificate require a total of 70 quarter hours, or 42 semester hours, in content course work. The Department did not count two courses, Sociology 597 and Sociology 711, towards the credits required. Sociology 597 and Sociology 711 were beginning and intermediate statistics courses. The Department refused to recognize these courses because (1) they were taken at the undergraduate level, and (2) they were taught by the sociology department rather than the mathematics department.

During the course of the hearing before the Special Master, it was determined that, if the Department granted credit for the two statistics courses, then Petitioner could be granted an NT-5

certificate. Petitioner was requested to obtain additional information concerning the content of these courses and to submit that information to the Department. Petitioner obtained further information and submitted it to the Department, but the Department again refused to recognize the courses as graduate level mathematics courses.

PART III

DISCUSSION

Petitioner maintains that the Department should be estopped from denying him an NT-5 certificate because it provided him with an outline of the certification requirements without indicating to him that course content was also required. As a result, he accepted the position with the Fulton County Board of Education when he had an opportunity to accept another job offer in another state. The Department admits that the outline of the certification requirements was incorrectly sent to Petitioner, and he should have been informed that it was necessary for him to submit his transcripts to the Department before a determination could be made whether he satisfied the Georgia requirements for an NT-5 certificate. The Department, nevertheless, argues that a procedural error should not be sufficient grounds for granting Petitioner a certificate.

Petitioner also argues that the content of his statistics courses should be accepted for the math content. The Department maintains that the statistics courses cannot be accepted for their math content because they were taught as sociology courses. The Department speculates that the courses could have been easier than if they had been taught by the mathematics department. Additionally, the Department contends that the courses would have been taught in an undergraduate mathematics program, and would not have been presented in a graduate level mathematics program. The Department contends that it was generous with Petitioner by permitting some of his graduate courses to count towards his undergraduate degree requirements and in granting him an NT-4 certificate.

The Special Master agrees with the Department that it should not be estopped to deny Petitioner a certificate because he was supplied with incomplete information regarding the certification requirements. It may be unfortunate, when school systems have to recruit teachers from out of the state, that information sent to teachers is incomplete and does not explain all of the requirements needed for certification at the various levels, but the necessity of having standards for those who will be teaching outweighs the equity of granting a certificate because of the incomplete information.

The Special Master, however, disagrees with the Department's arguments concerning the statistics courses. Petitioner supplied a course description from his instructor that stated the Sociology 597 course was

“a basic introduction to statistics with an emphasis on the mathematical model and underlying logic of various statistical procedures... This is a ... standard introduction much like one would encounter in a Department of Math and Statistics or in various applied areas that teach statistics.”

The teacher wrote that the Sociology 711 course was “a graduate level course taken by students throughout the social sciences. ... [T]he course emphasizes the underlying logic and mathematical models of the various [statistical] techniques.” Petitioner's professor also wrote that the content of Sociology 597

“makes it clear that this was a course in applied mathematics, not sociology. The textbook and the course outline are essentially the same as would be encountered in the statistics courses taught in many Departments of Mathematics and Statistics. ... [T]he examples and illustrations ... are from a very broad range of applications beyond sociol-..... [The problems, examples, and illustrations] are merely illustrations and applications of the techniques and methods covered in the course and not the central focus. The central focus remains the applied mathematics of probability and statistics.”

The Special Master believes Petitioner has demonstrated that the courses contained sufficient mathematics content to satisfy the certification requirements of the State Board of Education. If Petitioner was being hired to teach a higher level mathematics course in a college setting, then the course content would probably be insufficient. Petitioner, however, is teaching

in the middle grades and is seeking a certificate for the elementary grades. The course has certainly prepared him sufficiently to cope with any level of mathematics he will encounter in teaching in the elementary or middle grades.

PART IV

RECOMMENDATION

Based upon the foregoing, the record submitted, and the arguments and briefs received, the Special Master is of the opinion that Petitioner has submitted sufficient evidence of his qualification to receive an NT-5 certificate. The Special Master, therefore, recommends that the State Board of Education grant petitioner his NT-5 certificate.

This day of _____, 198 8

L. O. Buckland
Special Master

