THE WEST VIRGINIA PUBLIC EMPLOYEES GRIEVANCE BOARD

GARY WROBLEWSKI, Grievant,

V.

Docket No. 2024-0213-WayED

WAYNE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION, Respondent.

DECISION

Grievant, Gary Wroblewski, is employed by Respondent, Wayne County Board of Education. Grievant filed a level one grievance on September 14, 2023. Grievant stated:

Respondent advertised for a Master Teacher (professional supplemental position) with qualifications listed that the grievant meets, however, a less senior and less qualified applicant was hired with WV Code 18A-4-7a not being followed. Grievant also cites Wroblewski v. Wayne County BOE, Docket #2020-1507-WayED.¹

Grievant seeks instatement into the position, compensation for lost wages with interest, to be made whole and any other relief the grievance evaluator deems appropriate.

The level one conference was held on October 5, 2023, and a decision was issued denying the grievance on November 3, 2023. Grievant appealed to level two on November 9, 2023. Mediation was held on February 7, 2024, but was unsuccessful. Then, Grievant appealed to level three on February 16, 2024. The level three hearing was held before Administrative Law Judge Kimberly D. Bentley on March 10, 2025, at the Grievance Board's Charleston office. Grievant appeared in person and was represented by Randy Halsey, AFT-West Virginia representative. Respondent appeared by Wayne

¹ Grievant's level one and level two grievance forms named "WV Code 18A-4-7a not being followed." Grievant's level three grievance form states "WV Code 18A-4-16 not being followed." However, Grievant's proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law argue West Virginia Code § 18A-4-7a as the controlling statute with no reference to West Virginia Code § 18A-4-16.

County Schools Superintendent, Todd Alexander, and by counsel, Leslie Tyree. This matter became mature for decision on April 7, 2025, upon final receipt of the parties' written Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law.

Synopsis

Grievant is employed by Respondent as a classroom teacher. Grievant applied for an extracurricular position that was posted by Respondent as a "master teacher." Grievant was not the successful applicant for the position. Grievant did not prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the selection of the other qualified applicant for the position was unreasonable, arbitrary and capricious, or constituted an abuse of discretion. Accordingly, the grievance is denied.

The following Findings of Fact are based upon the record of this case.

Findings Of Fact

- Grievant is employed by Respondent, Wayne County Board of Education ("BOE"), as a full-time teacher at Spring Valley High School.
- 2. On July 26, 2023, Respondent posted an extracurricular professional position of "master teacher" which is an itinerant position for the purpose of mentoring new teachers as a role model and resource to encourage excellence in teaching. (Respondent's Ex. 1; Grievant's Ex. 1).
- The terms "extracurricular" and "supplemental" are used interchangeably.
 (C. Marcum testimony).
- 4. Grievant and Robert M. Thompson, teacher at Wayne High School, were the applicants for the extracurricular master teacher position. Both candidates met the minimum qualifications for the position. (T. Bowen testimony; Grievant's Ex. 1).

- 5. The posting requested the applicant to provide their evaluation for the 2022-2023 school year with the application. While Mr. Thompson submitted the requested evaluation, Grievant submitted his evaluation for the 2021-2022 school year, which had two "distinguished" ratings. (T. Bowen testimony; J. Hayes testimony).
- 6. The selection committee consisted of Tonji Bowen, Wayne County Schools Coordinator of Curriculum and Intervention, Greg Miller, Wayne County Schools Director of High Schools, and Mrs. Webb, Wayne County Schools Special Education Director, now retired). (T. Bowen testimony; G. Miller testimony).
- 7. The position of master teacher is critical to fully develop new teachers and part of the new teacher induction program. The chosen candidate must be "the best and brightest," an exemplary and most exceptional teacher. (C. Marcum testimony; T. Bowen testimony; Grievant's Ex. 1).
- 8. Mr. Thompson's letter of reference by Principal Sara Stapleton was a glowing recommendation, which was very complimentary and descriptive of his positive qualities which suit him for the master teacher position. His evaluation for the 2022-2023 school year contained four "distinguished" ratings. (T. Bowen testimony; Respondent's Ex. 3 and 4).
- 9. Grievant's letter of reference by Principal John Hayes contained no recommendation at all. The letter verified his good standing, satisfactory attendance and performance, and participation as a summer school administrator and on the Leadership Team. His evaluation for the 2022-2023 school year contained zero "distinguished"

- ratings.² (J. Hayes testimony; T. Bowen testimony; Respondent's Ex. 3; Grievant's Ex. 2 and 3).
- 10. Principal Hayes does not feel that Grievant would be a good role model for new teachers. (J. Hayes testimony; Grievant's Ex. 3).
- 11. Principal Sara Stapleton and several students of Wayne High School expressed a positive opinion of Mr. Thompson. (T. Alexander testimony; Respondent's Ex. 4).
- 12. Because both applicants met the minimum qualifications, Tonji Bowen, on behalf of the selection committee, contacted the head principals of the candidates by phone to ask specific and identical questions regarding the candidates. (T. Bowen testimony; Respondent's Ex. 5).
- 13. In response to the discussion questions, Principal Stapleton praised Mr. Thompson in the areas discussed. (T. Bowen testimony; Respondent's Ex. 5).
- 14. In response to the discussion questions, Principal Hayes described Grievant as "average" in many of the areas discussed. (T. Bowen testimony; Respondent's Ex. 5).
- 15. Interviews of the candidates were not conducted. (C. Marcum testimony;G. Miller testimony; T. Bowen testimony).
- 16. The committee selected the successful candidate based upon their review of the letters of recommendation, 2022-2023 evaluations, and the responses to discussion questions answered by head principals.

² Neither party entered the Grievant's 2022-2023 school year evaluation into evidence. However, Principal John Hayes testified regarding its content.

- 17. Although Mr. Thompson's letter of recommendation was specifically mentioned by Mr. Miller and Ms. Bowen, the selection committee considered all available information in making the unanimous decision to choose Mr. Thompson for the extracurricular position of master teacher. (G. Miller testimony; T. Bowen testimony).
- 18. Chandra Marcum, Human Resources Director, was not on the selection committee but evaluated and verified that the chosen candidate met the minimum qualifications. (C. Marcum testimony).
- 19. Wayne County Schools Superintendent Todd Alexander agreed with the recommendation of the committee and created the BOE agenda with that recommendation for BOE approval.
 - 20. BOE approved Mr. Thompson to fill the master teacher position.

Discussion

As this grievance does not involve a disciplinary matter, Grievant has the burden of proving his grievance by a preponderance of the evidence. W. VA. CODE ST. R. § 156-1-3 (2018). "The preponderance standard generally requires proof that a reasonable person would accept as sufficient that a contested fact is more likely true than not." Leichliter v. Dep't of Health & Human Res., Docket No. 92-HHR-486 (May 17, 1993), aff'd, Pleasants Cnty. Cir. Ct. Civil Action No. 93-APC-1 (Dec. 2, 1994). Where the evidence equally supports both sides, the burden has not been met. *Id*.

Grievant asserts that, for the position of master teacher, Respondent must consider the provisions of West Virginia Code § 18A-4-7a to hire the applicant with the highest qualifications for this professional position. Further, because Grievant was more experienced, Respondent's hiring of Mr. Thompson was arbitrary and capricious.

Grievant also argues that the testimony of the selection committee was inconsistent and inappropriate, also proving Respondent's decision was arbitrary and capricious. Respondent asserts the most qualified applicant was correctly awarded the extracurricular position of master teacher pursuant to West Virginia Code § 18A-4-16. Respondent further states their decision was not an abuse of the discretion granted to the BOE.

One must first determine the type of position which was posted by Respondent as the parties disagree regarding which statute applies. The job description states "master teacher" is a "supplemental position" for a countywide mentor position to model instructional techniques and provide instructional support to new social studies teachers in their first three years of employment. (Grievant's Ex. 1). Extracurricular assignments are also referred to as "supplemental" assignments. See Barnette v. Putnam County Bd. of Educ., 2022-0867-CONS (June 2, 2023). "Extracurricular duties shall mean, but not be limited to, any activities that occur at times other than regularly scheduled working hours, which include the instructing, coaching, chaperoning, escorting, providing support services or caring for the needs of students, and which occur on a regularly scheduled basis....". W. VA. CODE § 18A-4-16 (1) (2024). In the level three hearing, the evidence presented by both parties supports that the "master teacher" position is a supplemental, or extracurricular, position. The duties of master teacher are in addition to the teacher's classroom duties and may be performed during or outside the teacher's normal contracted hours; thus, the position is considered an extracurricular professional assignment.

Grievant asserts that West Virginia Code § 18A-4-7a (2024) is the controlling statute for the selection of the professional position of master teacher.³ West Virginia Code § 18A-4-7a mandates that a "county board of education shall make decisions affecting the filling of vacancies in professional positions of employment on the basis of the applicant with the highest qualifications..." and enumerates the factors to be considered like the amount of experience, past performance evaluations, and seniority. In support of his argument, Grievant cites his previous grievance, Wroblewski v. Wayne County Bd. of Educ., Docket No. 2020-1507-WayED (Sept. 7, 2021). Grievant applied for the professional position of Summer Food Service Site Supervisor. The chosen candidate had no supervisory experience and no food service experience at the BOE. When he did not receive the job, Grievant asserted that he was more qualified and had the most summer school seniority under the provisions of West Virginia Code § 18-5-39. The Grievance Board held that, despite the BOE's argument that this was not a summer program, this was indeed a summer school position and Grievant had the most summer seniority; therefore, Grievant should have received the position pursuant to § 18-5-39. The Board also determined that, if this was not a summer school position but a professional position other than classroom teacher, Grievant should have been selected as the most qualified under the matrix of factors of West Virginia Code § 18A-4-7a. Id. Wroblewski does not apply as it involved a summer school position and not an

³ Grievant's level one and level two grievance forms alleged "WV Code 18A-4-7a not being followed" in support of his grievance in this matter. Although his level three grievance form referenced "WV Code 18A-4-16 not being followed," Grievant's proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law reverted to the alleged violation of West Virginia 18A-4-7a.

extracurricular assignment. The decision applied West Virginia Code § 18A-4-7a only in the alternative and did not find that it applied to extracurricular assignments.

The Grievance Board has consistently determined that the provisions of West Virginia Code § 18A-4-7a are not applicable in the selection of professional personnel for extracurricular assignments. *Hall v. Mingo County Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 95-29-529 (March 28, 1996); *Wright v. Mason County Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 05-26-367 (January 9, 2006), *aff'd*, Kanawha Cnty. Cir. Ct. Civil Action No. 06-AA-14 (Nov. 30, 2006); *Ruben v. McDowell County Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 2016-0876-McDED (March 31, 2016); *Rapp v. Tucker County Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 2018-1417-TucED (March 27, 2019). Therefore, West Virginia Code § 18A-4-16 (1) (2024) is the applicable statute, which states, in pertinent part,

"The assignment of teachers and service personnel to extracurricular assignments shall be made only by mutual agreement of the employee and the superintendent, or designated representative, subject to board approval."

The statute does not require any particular procedures or requirements for the hiring of professional extracurricular assignments.

"The assignment of teachers to extracurricular duties is a matter of educational policy within the discretion of the county boards of education." Syl. Pt. 2, *State ex rel. Hawkins v. Tyler County Bd. of Educ.*, 166 W. Va. 363, 275 S.E.2d 908 (1980). It has been held that the standard of review for filling professional extracurricular positions is whether the board of education abused its broad discretion in the selection or acted in an arbitrary and capricious manner. *DeGamo v. Wood Co. Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 06-54-025 (Mar. 8, 2006); *Hood v. Brooke Co. Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 07-05-155 (Nov. 30, 2007). *See Dillion v. Bd. of County of Wyoming*, 177 W. Va. 145, 351 S.E.2d 58 (1986).

This Grievance Board has long adhered to the precedent that "'[c]ounty boards of education have substantial discretion in matters relating to the hiring, assignment, transfer, and promotion of school personnel. Nevertheless, this discretion must be exercised reasonably, in the best interests of the schools, and in a manner which is not arbitrary and capricious.' Syl. Pt. 3, Dillon v. Wyoming County Board of Education, 177 W. Va. 145, 351 S.E.2d 58 (1986)." Syl. Pt. 2, Baker v. Bd. of Educ., 207 W. Va. 513, 534 S.E.2d 378 (2000). An action is recognized as arbitrary and capricious when "it is unreasonable, without consideration, and in disregard of facts and circumstances of the case." State ex rel. Eads v. Duncil, 196 W. Va. 604, 474 S.E.2d 534 (1996) (citing Arlington Hosp. v. Schweiker, 547 F. Supp. 670 (E.D. Va. 1982)). "Generally, an action is considered arbitrary and capricious if the agency did not rely on criteria intended to be considered, explained or reached the decision in a manner contrary to the evidence before it, or reached a decision that was so implausible that it cannot be ascribed to a difference of opinion. See Bedford County Memorial Hosp. v. Health and Human Serv., 769 F.2d 1017 (4th Cir. 1985); Yokum v. W. Va. Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, Docket No. 96-DOE-081 (Oct. 16, 1996)." Trimboli v. Dep't of Health and Human Res., Docket No. 93-HHR-322 (June 27, 1997), aff'd Mercer Cnty. Cir. Ct. Docket No. 97-CV-374-K (Oct. 16, 1998).

"[T]he "clearly wrong" and the "arbitrary and capricious" standards of review are deferential ones which presume an agency's actions are valid as long as the decision is supported by substantial evidence or by a rational basis. Syllabus Point 3, *In re Queen*, 196 W.Va. 442, 473 S.E.2d 483 (1996)." Syl. Pt. 1, *Adkins v. W. Va. Dep't of Educ.*, 210 W. Va. 105, 556 S.E.2d 72 (2001) (*per curiam*). "While a searching inquiry into the facts

is required to determine if an action was arbitrary and capricious, the scope of review is narrow, and an administrative law judge may not simply substitute her judgment for that of [the employer]." *Trimboli v. Dep't of Health and Human Res.*, Docket No. 93-HHR-322 (June 27, 1997), *aff'd* Mercer Cnty. Cir. Ct. Docket No. 97-CV-374-K (Oct. 16, 1998); *Blake v. Kanawha County Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 01-20-470 (Oct. 29, 2001), *aff'd* Kanawha Cnty. Cir. Ct. Docket No. 01-AA-161 (July 2, 2002), *appeal refused*, W. Va. Sup. Ct. App. Docket No. 022387 (Apr. 10, 2003).

Furthermore, in a selection case, the grievance procedure is not intended to be a "super interview"; rather, it serves as a review of the legal sufficiency of the selection process. *Thibault v. Div. of Rehab. Serv.*, Docket No. 93-RS-489 (July 29, 1994). To that end, the Grievance Board recognizes selection decisions are largely the prerogative of management, and, absent the presence of unlawful, unreasonable, or arbitrary and capricious behavior, selection decisions will generally not be overturned. *Mihaliak v. Div. of Rehab. Serv.*, Docket No. 98-RS-126 (Aug. 3, 1998). An agency's decision as to who is the best qualified applicant will be upheld unless shown by the grievant to be arbitrary and capricious or clearly wrong. *Thibault, supra.*

If we look at the sufficiency of the selection process in this particular case, there is no dispute that the job was properly posted and no one takes issue with the content of the posting itself. Regarding the application process, Grievant failed to submit the required evaluation for the 2022-2023 school year, which had no 'distinguished' ratings. Instead, Grievant submitted his evaluation for the 2021-2022 school year, which had two 'distinguished' ratings. Mr. Thompson provided the correct evaluation which included four 'distinguished' ratings. The letter of recommendation from Grievant's principal, Mr. Hayes,

merely stated facts of his employment but included no recommendation for the master teacher position. Mr. Thompson's letter of recommendation from Ms. Stapleton included employment details, along with many accolades, compliments, and very positive recommendation regarding his fitness for the master teacher position. During the phase of discussion questions with each candidate's principal, Mr. Thompson again outshined Grievant. The testimony of Mr. Hayes, Grievant's principal, and the testimony regarding the selection committee's discussion with Mr. Hayes heavily reinforced the lack of recommendation and Grievant's "average" abilities. On the other hand, the testimony regarding the selection committee's discussion with Mr. Thompson's principal clearly applauded Mr. Thompson's accomplishments and suitability for the master teacher position. Lastly, in the level three hearing, Grievant elicited no additional accomplishments or compliments regarding his suitability for master teacher. There is nothing arbitrary or capricious, as well as no abuse of discretion by Respondent. Grievant was simply not the best candidate for the master teacher position.

Grievant presented no evidence to support his proposition that Respondent abused their discretion or acted arbitrarily and capriciously in the selection of Mr. Thompson over Grievant. Essentially, no evidence was presented which would have supported the award of the master teacher position to Grievant.

The following Conclusions of Law support the decision reached.

Conclusions Of Law

1. As this grievance does not involve a disciplinary matter, Grievant has the burden of proving her grievance by a preponderance of the evidence. W. VA. CODE ST. R. § 156-1-3 (2018). "The preponderance standard generally requires proof that a reasonable person would accept as sufficient that a contested fact is more likely true than

not." *Leichliter v. Dep't of Health & Human Res.*, Docket No. 92-HHR-486 (May 17, 1993), *aff'd*, Pleasants Cnty. Cir. Ct. Civil Action No. 93-APC-1 (Dec. 2, 1994). Where the evidence equally supports both sides, the burden has not been met. *Id*.

- 2. Extracurricular assignments are also referred to as "supplemental" assignments. See Barnette v. Putnam County Bd. of Educ., 2022-0867-CONS (June 2, 2023). "Extracurricular duties shall mean, but not be limited to, any activities that occur at times other than regularly scheduled working hours, which include the instructing, coaching, chaperoning, escorting, providing support services or caring for the needs of students, and which occur on a regularly scheduled basis....". W. VA. CODE § 18A-4-16 (1) (2024).
- 3. West Virginia Code § 18A-4-7a mandates that a "county board of education shall make decisions affecting the filling of vacancies in professional positions of employment on the basis of the applicant with the highest qualifications..." and enumerates the factors to be considered like the amount of experience, past performance evaluations, and seniority.
- 4. The Grievance Board has consistently determined that the provisions of West Virginia Code § 18A-4-7a are not applicable in the selection of professional personnel for extracurricular assignments. *Hall v. Mingo County Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 95-29-529 (March 28, 1996); *Wright v. Mason County Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 05-26-367 (January 9, 2006), *aff'd*, Kanawha Cnty. Cir. Ct. Civil Action No. 06-AA-14 (Nov. 30, 2006); *Ruben v. McDowell County Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 2016-0876-McDED (March 31, 2016); *Rapp v. Tucker County Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 2018-1417-TucED (March 27, 2019).

- 5. West Virginia Code § 18A-4-16 (1) (2024) is the applicable statute, which states, in pertinent part,
 - "The assignment of teachers and service personnel to extracurricular assignments shall be made only by mutual agreement of the employee and the superintendent, or designated representative, subject to board approval."
- 6. "The assignment of teachers to extracurricular duties is a matter of educational policy within the discretion of the county boards of education." Syl. Pt. 2, *State ex rel. Hawkins v. Tyler County Bd. of Educ.*, 166 W. Va. 363, 275 S.E.2d 908 (1980). It has been held that the standard of review for filling professional extracurricular positions is whether the board of education abused its broad discretion in the selection or acted in an arbitrary and capricious manner. *DeGamo v. Wood Co. Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 06-54-025 (Mar. 8, 2006); *Hood v. Brooke Co. Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 07-05-155 (Nov. 30, 2007). See *Dillion v. Bd. of County of Wyoming*, 177 W. Va. 145, 351 S.E.2d 58 (1986).
- 7. This Grievance Board has long adhered to the precedent that "[c]ounty boards of education have substantial discretion in matters relating to the hiring, assignment, transfer, and promotion of school personnel. Nevertheless, this discretion must be exercised reasonably, in the best interests of the schools, and in a manner which is not arbitrary and capricious.' Syl. Pt. 3, *Dillon v. Wyoming County Board of Education*, 177 W. Va. 145, 351 S.E.2d 58 (1986)." Syl. Pt. 2, *Baker v. Bd. of Educ.*, 207 W. Va. 513, 534 S.E.2d 378 (2000).
- 8. An action is recognized as arbitrary and capricious when "it is unreasonable, without consideration, and in disregard of facts and circumstances of the case." *State ex rel. Eads v. Duncil*, 196 W. Va. 604, 474 S.E.2d 534 (1996) (citing *Arlington Hosp. v. Schweiker*, 547 F. Supp. 670 (E.D. Va. 1982)). "Generally, an action is considered

arbitrary and capricious if the agency did not rely on criteria intended to be considered, explained or reached the decision in a manner contrary to the evidence before it, or reached a decision that was so implausible that it cannot be ascribed to a difference of opinion. See Bedford County Memorial Hosp. v. Health and Human Serv., 769 F.2d 1017 (4th Cir. 1985); Yokum v. W. Va. Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, Docket No. 96-DOE-081 (Oct. 16, 1996)." Trimboli v. Dep't of Health and Human Res., Docket No. 93-HHR-322 (June 27, 1997), aff'd Mercer Cnty. Cir. Ct. Docket No. 97-CV-374-K (Oct. 16, 1998).

- 9. "'[T]he "clearly wrong" and the "arbitrary and capricious" standards of review are deferential ones which presume an agency's actions are valid as long as the decision is supported by substantial evidence or by a rational basis. Syllabus Point 3, *In re Queen*, 196 W.Va. 442, 473 S.E.2d 483 (1996)." Syl. Pt. 1, *Adkins v. W. Va. Dep't of Educ.*, 210 W. Va. 105, 556 S.E.2d 72 (2001) (*per curiam*). "While a searching inquiry into the facts is required to determine if an action was arbitrary and capricious, the scope of review is narrow, and an administrative law judge may not simply substitute her judgment for that of [the employer]." *Trimboli v. Dep't of Health and Human Res.*, Docket No. 93-HHR-322 (June 27, 1997), *aff'd* Mercer Cnty. Cir. Ct. Docket No. 97-CV-374-K (Oct. 16, 1998); *Blake v. Kanawha County Bd. of Educ.*, Docket No. 01-20-470 (Oct. 29, 2001), *aff'd* Kanawha Cnty. Cir. Ct. Docket No. 01-AA-161 (July 2, 2002), *appeal refused*, W. Va. Sup. Ct. App. Docket No. 022387 (Apr. 10, 2003).
- 10. In a selection case, the grievance procedure is not intended to be a "super interview"; rather, it serves as a review of the legal sufficiency of the selection process. *Thibault v. Div. of Rehab. Serv.,* Docket No. 93-RS-489 (July 29, 1994). To that end, the Grievance Board recognizes selection decisions are largely the prerogative of

management, and, absent the presence of unlawful, unreasonable, or arbitrary and

capricious behavior, selection decisions will generally not be overturned. Mihaliak v. Div.

of Rehab. Serv., Docket No. 98-RS-126 (Aug. 3, 1998). An agency's decision as to who

is the best qualified applicant will be upheld unless shown by the grievant to be arbitrary

and capricious or clearly wrong. Thibault, supra.

11. Grievant failed to prove that the hiring of Mr. Thompson for the

extracurricular master teacher position by Respondent violated any rule, law, or policy, or

was arbitrary, capricious, or an abuse of discretion.

12. Grievant failed to prove by a preponderance of the evidence that he was

entitled to the extracurricular master teacher position.

Accordingly, the grievance is DENIED.

"The decision of the administrative law judge is final upon the parties and is

enforceable in the circuit court situated in the judicial district in which the grievant is

employed." W. VA. CODE § 6C-2-5(a) (2024). "An appeal of the decision of the

administrative law judge shall be to the Intermediate Court of Appeals in accordance with

§51-11-4(b)(4) of this code and the Rules of Appellate Procedure." W. VA. CODE § 6C-2-

5(b) (2024). Neither the West Virginia Public Employees Grievance Board nor any of its

Administrative Law Judges is a party to such an appeal and should not be named as a

party to the appeal. However, the appealing party must serve a copy of the petition upon

the Grievance Board by registered or certified mail. W. VA. CODE § 29A-5-4(b) (2024).

DATE: May 20, 2025

Kimberly D. Bentley Administrative Law Judge

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