

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the Revocation or)
Suspension of the Educator Certificate of)
Megan M. Snipes,)
Certificate 256599)
_____)

**ORDER OF
SUMMARY SUSPENSION**

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The Chair of the South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on January 9, 2014. In accordance with S.C. Code Ann. § 1-23-370(c) (2004), § 59-5-10 (2004), and State Board Rule of Governance BBABA, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) requested that the Chair of the State Board summarily suspend the educator certificate of Megan M. Snipes, certificate 256599, as a result of allegations and her admission that she engaged in inappropriate communication and physical contact of a sexual nature with a male student in Beaufort, South Carolina.

The SCDE has reason to believe that, due to the serious nature of these allegations of misconduct, Ms. Snipes may pose a threat to the health, safety and welfare of students that may be under her instruction and that emergency action is required. After considering the evidence presented by the SCDE, the Chair of the State Board finds that Ms. Snipes' educator certificate shall be summarily suspended until a due process hearing is held and/or this matter is otherwise resolved. The SCDE is directed to serve notice on Ms. Snipes of the summary suspension, as well as, the possible suspension or revocation of her educator certificate.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Ms. Snipes holds a professional South Carolina educator certificate and has four years of experience as a school psychologist. Ms. Snipes had been employed by the Beaufort County School District (District) as a school psychologist since August 2011. During the 2013-2014 school year, the District employed Ms. Snipes at Battery Creek High School (School). Ms. Snipes was placed on administrative leave on December 20, 2013, following an investigation into allegations that Ms. Snipes had been involved in a sexual relationship with a male student at Battery Creek High School. On January 7, 2014, Ms. Snipes resigned from employment with the District.

On December 19, 2013, the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office was contacted by the parent of a student at the School. According to the parent, she had access to her son's Facebook account and observed several private conversations of a sexual nature between her son and Ms. Snipes. The parent reported that her son had been meeting with Ms. Snipes in her professional capacity since 2011 when he was a ninth grade student at the School.

An investigator with the Beaufort County Sheriff's office conducted an interview with Ms. Snipes on December 20, 2013. Initially, Ms. Snipes acknowledged corresponding with the student via Facebook, but claimed that the messages may have been on a weekly basis and the contact was random. According to Ms. Snipes, she acknowledged in hindsight that the contact she had with the student may be considered as inappropriate and that the context of her messages could have been considered "flirty." Ms. Snipes claimed that she never saw the student outside of school and that he was the only student she had ever had contact with on Facebook.

Ms. Snipes recanted her version of the events after the investigator confronted her with the messages provided by the student's parent. Ms. Snipes reported that she met with the student outside of school when the student contacted her and gave her the impression that the student was going to hurt himself. According to Ms. Snipes, sometime in the middle of October 2013, she picked up the student at his residence in the evening and took him to Bob Jones Field in Beaufort, South Carolina. Ms. Snipes' statements indicated that she and the student engaged in physical contact of a sexual nature.

Ms. Snipes was arrested on December 20, 2013, and charged with the felony offense of Sexual Battery with a Student, (sixteen or seventeen years of age, no aggravated force or coercion) pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 16-3-755 (B) (Cum. Supp. 2013).

The SCDE has reason to believe that, due to the serious nature of these allegations of misconduct, Ms. Snipes may pose a threat to the health, safety and welfare of students that may be under her instruction and that emergency action is required. After considering the evidence presented by the SCDE, the Chair of the State Board finds that Ms. Snipes' educator certificate shall be summarily suspended until a due process hearing is held and/or this matter is otherwise resolved. The SCDE is directed to serve notice on Ms. Snipes of the summary suspension, as well as the possible suspension or revocation of her educator certificate.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

“The South Carolina Board of Education may, for just cause, either revoke or suspend the certificate of any person.” S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2004). Just cause includes unprofessional conduct, dishonesty, immorality, any conduct involving moral turpitude, and evident unfitness for position for which employed. S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (2004); 24 S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 43-58 (2011). In accordance with S.C. Code Ann. § 1-23-370(c) (2004), “If the agency finds that the public health, safety or welfare imperatively requires emergency action, and incorporates a finding to that effect in its order, summary suspension of a license may be ordered pending proceedings for revocation or other action.” Pursuant to S.C. Code Ann § 59-5-10 (2004) and State Board Rule of Governance BBABA, the Chair of the State Board finds that as a result of Ms. Snipes’ inappropriate communications and physical contact of a sexual nature with a male student and her untruthfulness with the District, she has engaged in unprofessional conduct, dishonesty, immorality, conduct involving moral turpitude, and demonstrated evident unfitness for position for which employed. The Chair also finds that there is reason to believe that Ms. Snipes may pose a threat to the health, safety and welfare of students and that emergency action is required. Accordingly, the educator certificate of Megan M. Snipes, certificate 256599, is summarily suspended until a due process hearing is held and/or this matter is otherwise resolved. The SCDE is directed to serve notice on Ms. Snipes of the summary suspension, as well as the possible suspension or revocation of her educator certificate.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED.

South Carolina State Board of Education

By: 
Barry F. Bolen, Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
January 9, 2014