

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the Suspension of)
)
the Educator Certificate of)
)
Lavonette T. Jones)
)
Certificate 253082)
_____)

**ORDER OF
SUSPENSION**

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on May 9, 2017. On July 29, 2016, October 3, 2016, December 13, 2016 and March 13, 2017, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) served Lavonette T. Jones a notice of her right to a hearing regarding the possible suspension of her South Carolina educator certificate, by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested, delivery restricted to addressee. SCDE has verified Ms. Jones' address and the letters sent via regular mail have not been returned. Ms. Jones declined to sign for the notice letters sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, delivery restricted to addressee. On March 23, 2017, the SCDE informed Ms. Jones via regular and certified mail that the State Board would meet on May 9, 2017, to consider the circumstances surrounding her unprofessional conduct. On April 24, 2017, Ms. Jones contacted the SCDE to acknowledge receipt of the notice letter, to confirm she has moved to Alabama, and that she did not want a hearing as she no longer wished to teach. After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to suspend Ms. Jones' educator certificate for a period of two (2) years commencing on May 9, 2017, and ending on May 8, 2019. Ms. Jones will also be required to successfully a SCDE approved course in classroom management prior to the reinstatement of her educator certificate.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Ms. Jones holds a professional educator certificate and has over twenty years of teaching experience. She received her educator certification through reciprocity with the state of Georgia. She began employment with the Richland County School District Two

(District) in 2012. The District employed Ms. Jones as a second grade teacher at Killian Elementary School (School) during the 2015-2016 school year.

In March 2016, allegations arose that Ms. Jones made insulting and threatening remarks to students in her classroom. When interviewed, students advised they were scared of Ms. Jones because she often yelled at them. Several students alleged they were the victims of or witnesses to Ms. Jones “flicking,” “grabbing”, and “plucking” students. Ms. Jones discussed the individual student grades out loud in class and called some students “dumb” for getting low marks and she also commented on student appearances, calling them “funny looking” or overweight. The students expressed a fear that Ms. Jones would carry out some of the threats she used in the classroom. These threats allegedly included the statements: “If you were my child I would beat you” and “You are lucky I can’t spank you.”

The District had previously investigated Ms. Jones earlier during the school year, after a parent complained she had slammed a notebook on a student’s hands. During this investigation, several students complained Ms. Jones would dig her fingernails into their skin when she grabbed them. During this investigation, Ms. Jones inappropriately discussed the investigation with her students and told them she did not mean to hurt them. The District issued a letter of reprimand to Ms. Jones. On January 26, 2016, Ms. Jones informed the District that she was resigning from the District at the end of the 2015-16 school year. After the second set of allegations arose in March, 2017, the District placed Ms. Jones on administrative leave through the conclusion of the 2015-2016 school year.

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to suspended Ms. Jones’ educator certificate for a period of two (2) years commencing on May 9, 2017, and ending on May 8, 2019. Ms. Jones will also be required to successfully complete a SCDE approved course in classroom management.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

“The South Carolina Board of Education may, for just cause, revoke or suspend the certificate of any person.” S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2016); S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (2016). Just cause includes unprofessional conduct and evident unfitness for position for which employed. S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (2016). The State Board finds that the evidence presented by the SCDE demonstrates that Ms. Jones engaged in

unprofessional conduct and demonstrated unfitness for teaching as a result of her inappropriate comments about and in front of her students, as well her inappropriate physical contact with her students. The State Board finds that the information presented supports its conclusion that just cause exists to suspend the educator certificate of Lavonette T. Jones on the grounds of unprofessional conduct and evident unfitness for teaching, for a period of two (2) years commencing on May 9, 2017, and ending on May 8, 2019.

Now, therefore, it is hereby ordered that the educator certificate of Lavonette T. Jones, certificate 253082, is suspended for a period of two (2) years commencing on May 9, 2017, and ending on May 8, 2019. Ms. Jones will also be required to successfully complete a SCDE approved course in classroom management. If Ms. Jones wishes to have her certificate reinstated at the conclusion of the period of suspension, she shall make a written request to the SCDE's Office of Educator Services and provide documentation of her successful completion of the SCDE approved course in classroom management. Ms. Jones shall be responsible for meeting all certification requirements in effect at the time she requests reinstatement and for the payment of any applicable reinstatement fees. The suspension of Ms. Jones' educator certificate shall be reported to the NASDTEC Clearinghouse and all South Carolina school districts within thirty days from the date of this order.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED.

South Carolina State Board of Education

By:


Ivan Randolph, Ph.D., Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
May 9, 2017