

**STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
BEFORE THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

In the Matter of the Suspension)
)
of the Educator Certificate of)
)
Kelly Lunsford-Thomas,)
)
Educator Certificate #229991)
_____)

**ORDER OF SUSPENSION
(UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT)**

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on November 14, 2017. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) notified Kelly Lunsford-Thomas (Lunsford-Thomas) of her right to a hearing regarding the possible suspension of her South Carolina Educator Certificate via certified letter dated June 1, 2017. Lunsford-Thomas timely requested a hearing and such was held on August 1, 2017. The hearing concerned Lunsford-Thomas' alleged falsification of documents indicating that she completed a practicum for principal's certification, including the completion of an activity log, evaluations and observations for such practicum, and publication of these documents to Western Governor's University (WGU), the SCDE, and the Chester County School District (the District) for the purpose of obtaining a principal's certification.

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to suspend Lunsford-Thomas' educator certificate for a period of one (1) calendar year commencing on June 1, 2018, and ending on June 1, 2019.

FINDINGS OF FACT

This is a matter involving unprofessional conduct in which Lunsford-Thomas falsified certain documents which allowed her to obtain an additional certification to become a school principal and published the falsified documents to WGU, SCDE, and the District. The State Board has jurisdiction in this matter, pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2004) and S.C. Code Ann § 59-25-160 (2004).

Lunsford-Thomas holds a valid South Carolina Educator Certificate and was employed by the District as a Data and Instructional Specialist. In January of 2013, she began a two year course of study with WGU which, with other requirements, would allow her to qualify to be an Assistant Principal or a Principal. The last part of the program required a practicum. This practicum was to be completed by December 2015. Lunsford-Thomas had only completed approximately 10% of the practicum by this date. In order to finish the practicum in a timely manner, Lunsford-Thomas falsified a log of activities, none of which were actually done by Lunsford-Thomas. Her supervisor knowingly signed the false log of activities and forwarded her the links for her to log in under his name and complete the observations and evaluations that were his responsibility to complete. Additionally, Lunsford-Thomas logged in as her supervisor and transmitted the falsified observations and evaluations to WGU with the knowledge and consent of her supervisor. On or about January 27, 2016, paperwork was submitted to SCDE to recognize the additional certification.

In April 2016, the falsified log of events was discovered and Lunsford-Thomas was confronted. She admitted to the falsification and advised the District of the collusion of her

supervisor in the falsification of the observations and evaluations. Both Lunsford-Thomas and her supervisor resigned their positions thereafter.

Lunsford-Thomas was unemployed from May 2016 to September 2016, when she obtained a teaching position in Rock Hill School District 3 teaching social studies. She did not represent herself as having the principal certification in obtaining this position, however, the Rock Hill School District had access to this information through SCDE.

After considering the evidence presented at the August 1, 2017 hearing, the State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Lunsford-Thomas acted in an unprofessional manner. As such, a suspension of her Educator Certificate is warranted. The Board finds that just cause exists to suspend Lunsford-Thomas' Educator Certificate #229991 for a period of one (1) calendar year, commencing on June 1, 2018, and ending on June 1, 2019.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

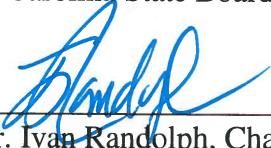
"The State Board of Education may, for just cause, either revoke or suspend the certificate of any person." S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2004). "Just cause" includes, *inter alia*, "incompetence" and "unprofessional conduct." S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (4) (2004).

The State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Lunsford-Thomas engaged in unprofessional conduct in falsifying activity logs, observations and evaluations which allowed her to obtain an additional certification to become a school principal and in publishing the falsified documents to WGU, SCDE, and the District. Accordingly, the evidence presented supports the State Board's determination that just cause exists to suspend the Educator Certificate of Kelly Lunsford-Thomas, Educator Certificate #229991, for a period of one (1) calendar year, commencing on June 1, 2018, and ending on June 1, 2019. If Lunsford-

Thomas wishes to have her Educator Certificate reinstated at the end of the suspension period, she shall make a written request to the SCDE's Office of Educator Certification, Recruitment, and Preparation, and shall meet all certification requirements in effect at the time she requests reinstatement. Lunsford-Thomas shall also pay all applicable reinstatement fees. The suspension of Lunsford-Thomas' Educator Certificate #229991 shall be reported to the NASDTEC Clearinghouse and all South Carolina school districts within thirty (30) days from the date of this order with the reasons stated as "unprofessional conduct".

AND IT IS SO ORDERED.

South Carolina State Board of Education

By: 

Dr. Ivan Randolph, Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
November 14, 2017