

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the

Disciplinary Action of the

Educator Certificate of

Suzanne Brown Atkinson

Certificate 108207

CONSENT ORDER OF PUBLIC REPRIMAND

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on February 11, 2020. On September 26, 2018, and October 29, 2018, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) sent Suzanne Brown Atkinson a notice letter by certified mail, return receipt, restricted delivery, and regular mail, regarding possible action against her educator certificate. After receiving the notice letter, Ms. Atkinson's legal counsel contacted the SCDE and advised that she desired to waive her right to a hearing and wished to pursue an alternative resolution in this matter. Ms. Atkinson has agreed to this Consent Order of Public Reprimand.

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to accept the Consent Order of Public Reprimand.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Ms. Atkinson holds a valid South Carolina professional educator certificate and has over twenty-six years of educator experience. She has no prior record of disciplinary action with the State Board. At the time of the incident, Ms. Atkinson was employed by Florence County School District One (District) as a first grade teacher at Carver Elementary School (School).

On May 21, 2018, a news article reported that Ms. Atkinson was arrested on two counts of cruelty to children, a misdemeanor offense that has since been dismissed. The arrest related to the allegation that on two separate occasions, Ms. Atkinson grabbed a first grade student by their hair. She then walked the student down the School hallway

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while continuing to hold them by their hair. The first incident was reported by a coworker and confirmed after District personnel reviewed surveillance cameras from the hallway. The District continued viewing the surveillance footage and found a second incident with the same student. At the end of the second incident, the student appeared to be crying. Ms. Atkinson was placed on administrative leave and subsequently resigned from the District.

Ms. Atkinson has agreed to waive her right to a hearing and to resolve this disciplinary matter by entering into this Consent Order of Public Reprimand, subject to the following terms: (1) a Public Reprimand shall be issued by the State Board, (2) the Public Reprimand shall be reported to the NASDTEC Clearinghouse and all South Carolina school districts within thirty days from the date of this order, and (3) the Consent Order of Public Reprimand shall be posted on the SCDE's website and shall be maintained as a public record in the SCDE's Office of General Counsel. After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to accept the Consent Order of Public Reprimand with the terms set forth above.

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 (2017); S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (2017). Just cause includes unprofessional conduct. S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (2017); 24 S.C. Code Regs. 43-58 (2017). The State Board finds that the evidence presented by the District would not support a conclusion that just cause exists to suspend or revoke the educator certificate of Suzanne Brown Atkinson; however, the evidence that would be presented would support a conclusion that Ms. Atkinson engaged in unprofessional conduct as result of inappropriate physical contact with a student. The State Board further finds that just cause exists for the issuance of a Public Reprimand to Ms. Atkinson by the State Board.

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Now, therefore, it is ordered that the State Board hereby issues a Public Reprimand to Suzanne Brown Atkinson, certificate 108207. The Public Reprimand shall be reported to the NASDTEC Clearinghouse and all South Carolina school districts within thirty days from the date of this order with the grounds listed as “unprofessional conduct.” This Consent Order of Public Reprimand shall be posted on the SCDE’s web site and shall be maintained as a public record in the SCDE’s Office of General Counsel.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED.

South Carolina State Board of Education

s/Michael Brennan
Michael Brennan, Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
February 11, 2020

I, Suzanne Brown Atkinson, S.C. Educator Certificate 108207, understand there has been an investigation concerning alleged violations of the laws and regulations governing the practice of educator certificate holders and that I have waived my right to a hearing in this matter. I understand that the terms set forth in this Consent Order of Public Reprimand are not subject to reconsideration, collateral attack or judicial review. I have read the Consent Order of Public Reprimand, consisting of three pages, and I freely and voluntarily agree to the terms set forth therein. Although I disagree with the allegation as set forth in the arrest warrant, I agree that my conduct can be construed as unprofessional conduct, and I believe entry of this Consent Order of Public Reprimand is in the best interests of everyone involved. I understand that this Order will be presented to the South Carolina State Board of Education for approval on Tuesday, February 11, 2020. I understand this Consent Order will not become effective until approved by the State Board and, if not approved, it shall not constitute an admission against interest in this proceeding or prejudice the right of the State Board to adjudicate this matter. If approved by the State Board, I give the SCDE permission to use my electronic signature in the style of “/s/ name” for required website publication.

s/Suzanne Brown Atkinson
Suzanne Brown Atkinson

01/30/2020
Date