

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the
Disciplinary Action of the
Educator Certificate of
Shannon Taylor Jones
Certificate 247066

AMENDED ORDER OF SUSPENSION
(Breach of Contract)

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on July 14, 2020. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) notified Shannon Taylor Jones of potential disciplinary action against her teaching certificate and informed her of her right to a hearing via a certified letter dated January 31, 2020. Ms. Jones timely requested a hearing and such was initially scheduled for March 26, 2020. However, in response to measures implemented by Governor Henry McMaster to prevent the spread of the COVID- 19 virus that hearing was canceled. By stipulation of the parties, a Hearing on the Documents, defined as “the prehearing statement and any accompanying exhibits relevant to the proceeding that the parties wish to be presented to the hearing officer for review to make a determination of the disciplinary matter” was held. On June 3, 2020, the SCDE and Ms. Jones received the hearing officer’s final report and recommendation. After considering the evidence presented, the State Board hereby voted to suspend Ms. Jones’ educator certificate for a period of one year, commencing on July 14, 2020 and ending on July 13, 2021.

FINDINGS OF FACT

This case concerns a formal complaint by the Aiken County Public School District (District) seeking the suspension of Ms. Jones’ educator certificate for breach of contract. The State Board has jurisdiction in this matter, pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2004). Ms. Jones holds a valid South Carolina professional educator certificate and has over two years of experience. She has no prior record of disciplinary action with the State Board.

The hearing officer reviewed the prehearing statements and exhibits submitted by the parties and made a recommendation based upon her Findings of Fact. On June 3,

2019, Ms. Jones signed a written contract for employment as a teacher for the 2019-20 school year. On September 29, 2019, Ms. Jones resigned and submitted a letter of resignation, effective October 11, 2019. The District acknowledged receipt of the resignation and notified Ms. Jones she was not released from her contract. She did not return to work for the District. On December 17, 2019, the District reported Ms. Jones to the SCDE as a breach of contract. The Hearing Officer found Ms. Jones breached her contract with the District by failing to continue her obligations as a teacher after leaving before her official release. In determining the length of suspension, the hearing officer considered mitigating evidence as offered by Ms. Jones. In reviewing the hearing officer's report and recommendation, the State Board did not find Ms. Jones' arguments sufficient to mitigate her breach of contract.

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board finds that Ms. Jones breached her contract with the District. Accordingly, the State Board finds that just cause exists to suspend Ms. Jones' educator certificate for a period of one year, commencing on July 14, 2020, and ending on July 13, 2021.

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); The State Board may, for just cause, issue a public reprimand. S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 43-58 (2018). Just cause includes unprofessional conduct. S.C. Code Ann. §59-25-160. The State Board finds that the evidence presented supports its conclusion that just cause exists to suspend the professional educator certificate of Shannon Taylor Jones in this matter. The State Board finds that just cause exists to suspend Ms. Jones' educator certificate for a period of one year, commencing on July 14, 2020, and ending on July 13, 2021.

If Ms. Jones 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 Services, and shall meet all certification requirements in effect at the time she requests reinstatement. Ms. Jones shall also pay the applicable reinstatement fee. The suspension

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of Shannon Taylor Jones' educator certificate 247066 shall be reported to the NASDTEC Clearinghouse and all South Carolina school districts within thirty days from the date of this order, with the reason stated as "unprofessional conduct, breach of contract, willful neglect of duty, and failure to comply with the provisions of a contract without the written consent of the local school board."

AND IT IS SO ORDERED.

South Carolina State Board of Education

s/Michael Brennan
Michael Brennan, Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
July 20, 2020