

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the
Disciplinary Action of the
Educator Certificate of
Stephen Middleton Ruxton
Certificate 291901

**ORDER OF SUSPENSION
(BREACH OF CONTRACT)**

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on February 8, 2022. On November 3, 2021, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) sent Stephen Middleton Ruxton a notice via regular and certified mail of his right to a hearing regarding the possible suspension of his South Carolina educator certificate. The letters have not been returned. On December 31, 2021, the SCDE sent Mr. Ruxton notice that the action against his certification would be presented to the State Board on February 8, 2022. He has not contacted the SCDE to request a hearing and is now in default.

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to suspend Mr. Ruxton educator certificate for a period of one year, commencing February 8, 2022, and ending on February 7, 2023.

FINDINGS OF FACT

This case concerns a formal complaint of the Orangeburg County School District (District) seeking the suspension of the educator certificate of Mr. Ruxton for breach of contract. The State Board has jurisdiction in this matter pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2018) and S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-530 (2018).

On May 5, 2021, Mr. Ruxton signed a contractual agreement with the District to serve as a teacher for 2021-22 school year. On August 9, 2021, Mr. Ruxton submitted his resignation to the District, effective immediately. Mr. Ruxton was informed his resignation would not be accepted until a suitable replacement was found. He did not report to work. On September 14, 2021, the District Board of Trustees voted to report Mr. Ruxton's breach of contract to the SCDE.

After considering the evidence, the State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Mr. Ruxton breached his contract with the District, and that just cause exists to suspend Mr. Ruxton's certificate 291901 for a period of one year, commencing on February 8, 2022 and ending on February 7, 2023.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

"The South Carolina Board of Education may, for just cause, either revoke or suspend the certificate of any person." Just cause includes, *inter alia*, "unprofessional conduct" and "willful violation of the rules and regulations of the State Board of Education." S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (3) and (4) (2018). Pursuant to 24 S.C. Code Regs. 43-58 (2) and (14) (2018), the State Board of Education had the legal authority to suspend a certificate for "failure to comply with the provision of a contract without the written consent of the local school board." With respect to breach of contract, "any teacher who fails to comply with the provisions of his [or her] contract without written consent of the school board shall be deemed guilty of unprofessional conduct." S. C. Code Ann. § 59-25-530 (2018). "Upon formal complaint of the school board, substantiated by conclusive evidence, the state board shall suspend or revoke the teacher's certificate, for a period not to exceed one calendar year." *Id.*

The State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Mr. Ruxton breached his contract without the consent and/or approval of the District. Accordingly, the evidence presented supports the State Board's determination that just cause exists to suspend the educator certificate of Stephen Middleton Ruxton for a period of one year, commencing on February 8, 2022, and ending on February 7, 2023.

If Mr. Ruxton wishes to have his educator certificate reinstated at the end of the suspension period, he shall make a written request to the SCDE's Office of Educator Services, and shall meet all certification requirements in effect at the time he requests reinstatement. Mr. Ruxton shall also pay the applicable reinstatement fee. The suspension of Mr. Ruxton's educator certificate 291901 shall be reported to the NASDTEC Clearinghouse and all South Carolina school districts within thirty days from the date of

Stephen Middleton Ruxton, Certificate 291901

ORDER OF SUSPENSION

February 8, 2022

Page 3 of 3

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/Alan Walters

Alan Walters, Chair

Columbia, South Carolina

February 8, 2022