

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the
Disciplinary Action of the
Educator Certificate of
Jennifer W. Ridings
Certificate 273085

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

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on March 8, 2022. On January 25, 2022, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) sent Jennifer W. Ridings a notice via regular and certified mail, return receipt requested, of her right to a hearing regarding the possible suspension of her South Carolina educator certificate. Ms. Ridings received the notice on January 29, 2022, as evidenced by signed postal receipt. On February 16, 2022, the SCDE sent notice to Ms. Ridings that the action against her certification would be presented to the State Board on March 8, 2022. She has not contacted the SCDE to request a hearing and is now in default.

Considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to suspend Ms. Ridings's educator certificate for a period of one year, commencing March 8, 2022, and ending on March 7, 2023.

FINDINGS OF FACT

This case concerns a formal complaint of Fort Mill School District (York 4) (District) seeking the suspension of the educator certificate of Ms. Ridings 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 April 15, 2021, Ms. Ridings signed a contractual agreement with the District to serve as a Food and Nutrition Teacher for Fort Mill High School for the 2021-22 school year. On September 28, 2021, Ms. Ridings submitted her resignation to the District, effective immediately. Ms. Ridings informed the District she was resigning for personal reasons. Ms. Ridings was notified she would not be released from her contract until a suitable replacement

was found. On October 4, 2021, Ms. Ridings returned to fulfill her contract at Fort Mill High School. On October 25, 2021, Ms. Ridings again submitted her letter of resignation, effective immediately. She did not return to fulfill her contract after October 25, 2021. The District Board voted to report Ms. Ridings's breach of contract to the SCDE on December 7, 2021. On January 25, 2022, the District reported the matter to the SCDE.

After considering the evidence, the State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Ms. Ridings breached her contract with the District, and that just cause exists to suspend Ms. Ridings, certificate 273085, for a period of one year, commencing on March 8, 2022, and ending on March 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 Ms. Ridings breached her 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 Jennifer W. Ridings for a period of one year, commencing on March 8, 2022, and ending on March 7, 2023.

If Ms. Ridings 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

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and shall meet all certification requirements in effect at the time she requests reinstatement.

Ms. Ridings shall also pay the applicable reinstatement fee. The suspension of Ms. Ridings's educator certificate 273085 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/Alan Walters

Alan Walters, Chair

Columbia, South Carolina

March 8, 2022