

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the
Disciplinary Action of the
Educator Certificate of
Mary Elizabeth Buckner
Certificate 295024

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

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on May 17, 2022. On February 15, 2022, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) sent Mary Elizabeth Buckner a notice via regular and certified mail of her right to a hearing regarding the possible suspension of her South Carolina educator certificate based on her breach of contract. Ms. Buckner timely requested a hearing in the matter. Prior to the hearing, Ms. Buckner contacted Richland School District Two (District) to discuss an alternate resolution. Ms. Buckner has agreed to waive her right to a hearing and enter into this Consent Order of Suspension.

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to suspend Ms. Buckner's educator certificate for a period of four months, commencing March 30, 2022, and ending July 30, 2022.

FINDINGS OF FACT

This case concerns a formal complaint from the District seeking the suspension of the educator certificate of Ms. Buckner 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 21, 2021, Ms. Buckner signed a contractual agreement with the District to serve as a school psychologist for the 2021-22 school year. Ms. Buckner submitted her resignation on January 4, 2022, effective January 14, 2022. The District notified Ms. Buckner of the District policies and possible consequences of breaching the contract. She did not return to work on January 18, 2022. On February 8, 2022, the School Board of

Mary Elizabeth Buckner
295024
s/MEB
Initial
4/10/2022
Date

Trustees voted to report Ms. Buckner's breach of contract to the SCDE. On February 10, 2022, the District reported the matter to the SCDE.

After being notified of the pending action against her educator certificate, Ms. Buckner contacted the SCDE to discuss an alternate resolution. Ms. Buckner has agreed to the suspension of her educator certificate for a period of four months. After considering the evidence, the State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Ms. Buckner breached her contract with the District, and that just cause exists to suspend Ms. Buckner's certificate 295024 for a period of four months, commencing on March 30, 2022, and ending July 30, 2022.

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."

The State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Ms. Buckner 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 Mary Elizabeth Buckner for a period of four months,

Mary Elizabeth Buckner
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s/MEB
Initial
4/10/2022
Date

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commencing on March 30, 2022, and ending July 30, 2022. If Ms. Buckner 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. Buckner shall also pay the applicable reinstatement fee. The suspension of Ms. Buckner's educator certificate 295024 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
May 17, 2022

I, Mary Elizabeth Buckner, S.C. Educator Certificate 295024, 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 Suspension are not subject to reconsideration, collateral attack, or judicial review. I have read the Consent Order of Suspension, consisting of three pages, and I freely and voluntarily agree to the terms set forth therein. I understand that this Order will be presented to the South Carolina State Board of Education for approval on Tuesday, May 17, 2022. 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/ Mary Elizabeth Buckner
Mary Elizabeth Buckner

4/10/2022
Date

Mary Elizabeth Buckner
295024
s/MEB
Initial
4/10/2022
Date

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