

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the
Disciplinary Action of the
Educator Certificate of
Lauren Michaela Byars
Certificate 246721

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

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on January 17, 2023. On August 9, 2022, October 12, 2022, and October 25, 2022, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) sent Lauren Michaela Byars a notice via regular and certified mail of her right to a hearing regarding the possible suspension of her South Carolina educator certificate. The SCDE has verified Ms. Byars' address and Ms. Byars' agent signed for the third notice on November 9, 2022. Under the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure 5(b), Ms. Byars has been given fair notice of constitutional due process. Ms. Byars 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 Ms. Byars' educator certificate for a period of one year, commencing January 17, 2023, and ending on January 16, 2024.

FINDINGS OF FACT

This case concerns a formal complaint of the Fort Mill School District (District) seeking the suspension of the educator certificate of Ms. Byars 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 9, 2022, Ms. Byars signed a contractual agreement with the District to serve as a teacher for the 2022-23 school year. On August 8, 2022, Ms. Byars submitted her resignation to the District. In her resignation, Ms. Byars stated she was accepting a job offer outside of public education. The District informed Ms. Byars she would not be released from her contract until a qualified and suitable replacement was found. She did not return to fulfill her contract with the District. The District Board voted to report Ms.

Byars's breach of contract to the SCDE on August 23, 2022. The District reported the matter to the SCDE on September 2, 2022

After considering the evidence, the State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Ms. Byars breached her contract with the District, and that just cause exists to suspend Ms. Byars' certificate 246721 for a period of one year, commencing on January 17, 2023, and ending on January 16, 2024.

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) (2020). Pursuant to 24 S.C. Code Regs. 43-58 (2) and (14) (2021), the State Board of Education has 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 (2020). "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. Byars 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 Lauren Michaela Byars for a period of one year, commencing on January 17, 2023, and ending on January 16, 2024.

If Ms. Byars 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 he requests reinstatement. Ms. Byars shall also pay the applicable reinstatement fee. The suspension

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of Ms. Byars' educator certificate 246721 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/Crystal F. Stapleton, Ed.D.
Crystal F. Stapleton, Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
January 17, 2023