

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the
Disciplinary Action of the
Educator Certificate of
Tanner Starnes
Certificate 309453

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

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on June 13, 2023. On January 3, 2023, and February 10, 2023, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) sent Tanner Starnes 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. Starnes' address and the letter sent via regular mail has not been returned. On March 9, 2023, the SCDE informed Ms. Starnes via regular and certified mail that the State Board would meet on April 11, 2023, or as soon thereafter as is feasible, to consider action against her educator certification. Under the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure 5(b), Ms. Starnes has been given fair notice of constitutional due process. She 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. Starnes' educator certificate for a period of one year, commencing on June 13, 2023, and ending on June 12, 2024.

FINDINGS OF FACT

This case concerns a formal complaint of the Aiken County Public Schools (District) seeking the suspension of the educator certificate of Ms. Starnes 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 10, 2022, Ms. Starnes signed a contractual agreement with the District to serve as a teacher for the 2022-23 school year. On October 20, 2022, Ms. Starnes submitted her resignation to the District. In the resignation, Ms. Starnes stated she was given the opportunity to pursue a job in her field of study from college. On October 21,

2022, the District informed Ms. Starnes she would not be considered for release from her contract until a suitable replacement was secured. She did not return to fulfil her contract after November 2, 2022. The District Board voted to report Ms. Starnes' breach of contract to the SCDE on December 13, 2022. The District reported the matter to the SCDE on December 14, 2022.

After considering the evidence, the State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Ms. Starnes breached her contract with the District, and that just cause exists to suspend Ms. Starnes' certificate 309453 for a period of one year, commencing on June 13, 2023, and ending on June 12, 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. Starnes 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 Tanner Starnes for a period of one year, commencing on June 13, 2023, and ending on June 12, 2024.

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If Ms. Starnes 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. Starnes shall also pay the applicable reinstatement fee. The suspension of Ms. Starnes' educator certificate 309453 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, Ed.D., Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
June 13, 2023