

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the
Disciplinary Action of the
Educator Certificate of
Shannon Erica Connolly
Certificate 284646

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

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on September 12, 2023. On February 7, 2022, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) sent a notice via regular and certified mail, return receipt requested, to Shannon Erica Connolly concerning the pending action against educator certificate 284646. Ms. Connolly thereafter timely requested a hearing which was held on August 14, 2023. This matter is properly before the State Board pursuant to S.C Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2020) and referred to a hearing officer pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. 59-5-70 (2004). After considering the evidence, testimony, and the report and recommendations presented, the State Board voted to suspend Ms. Connolly's educator certificate 284646, for a period of one year, commencing on September 12, 2023, and ending on September 11, 2024.

FINDINGS OF FACT

This case concerns a formal complaint of Greenville County School District (District) seeking the suspension of the educator certificate of Ms. Connolly 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 12, 2021, Ms. Connolly signed a contractual agreement with the District to serve as an agriculture teacher for the 2021-22 school year. On December 25, 2021, Ms. Connolly submitted her resignation to the District, effective January 3, 2022. She did not provide a reason for the resignation at the time. However, during the hearing, Ms. Connolly stated she felt mistreated during the 2020-21 school year. That year, agriculture teachers were required to be present during the school closure and tasked with non-instructional duties. There was also miscommunication about her hours of work performed at a separate worksite.

After the resignation, Ms. Connolly was notified she would not be released from her 2021-22 contract until a suitable replacement was found. She did not return to fulfill her contract at the end of winter break. The District Board voted to report Ms. Connolly's breach of contract to the SCDE on January 22, 2022. On February 3, 2022, the District reported the matter to the SCDE.

The Hearing Officer found conclusive evidence that Ms. Connolly breached her contract, and further found Ms. Connolly's defenses did not justify the breach of contract. After considering the evidence presented, the State Board finds just cause for the suspension of Ms. Connolly's educator certificate for a period of one year, commencing on September 12, 2023 and ending on September 11, 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 (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. Connolly 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 28646, in the name of Shannon Erica Connolly, for a period of one year, commencing on September 12, 2023, and ending on September 11, 2024.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED.

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South Carolina Board of Education

s/Crystal F. Stapleton, Ed.D.
Crystal F. Stapleton, Ed.D., Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
September 12, 2023