

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of	)	
	)	ORDER OF SUSPENSION
Maria Christine Fields	)	
	)	(BREACH OF CONTRACT)
Educator Certificate #281734	)	
_____	)	

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (“State Board”) considered this matter on January 7, 2019. The South Carolina Department of Education (“SCDE”) notified Maria Christine Fields (Fields) of her right to a hearing regarding the possible suspension of her South Carolina Educator Certificate by letter dated May 7, 2018, via certified and regular U.S. Mail. Fields timely requested a hearing. On November 2, 2018, a hearing was held concerning Fields’ alleged Breach of Contract with Lexington School District Two (District).

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board hereby voted to suspend Goodman’s educator certificate for a period of ten calendar months, commencing on January 8, 2019, and ending on November 7, 2019.

FINDINGS OF FACT

This case concerns a formal complaint by the District seeking the suspension of the Educator Certificate of Fields for breach of contract. The State Board has jurisdiction in this matter, pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2004) and S.C. Code Ann § 59-25-530 (2004).

Fields holds a valid South Carolina Educator Certificate and was employed by the District as an English Language Arts (ELA) Teacher at Northside Middle School (Northside). She signed a contract with the District for the 2017-2018 school year on April 28, 2017. Fields became pregnant during the previous school year and began maternity leave on August 28, 2017. At that time, Fields worked with her substitutes by providing lesson plans and materials to ensure proper instruction. However, school administrators were forced to rearrange classes in order that a properly credentialed educator was teaching Honors English. Due to the reshuffling of classes, Fields returned from maternity leave with one new class whom she had not met before leaving for maternity, and she was no longer teaching Honors English. Additionally, new policies and procedures were in place for Fields to learn and she also received an evaluation based on a new model almost immediately upon her return from maternity leave. Fields perceived these events to

be a threat to her position. On December 5, 2017, during an active shooter drill, Fields' class was cited for a violation. Fields filed a grievance alleging that she felt threatened relating to a disagreement on the conduct of school administration during the drill, as well as her perception of being demoted during the rearrangement of classes. Fields met with school and District administration about her concern. Fields did not agree with the outcome of the meetings.

As Christmas break approached, Fields left the school Ipad and keys in her desk drawer prior to leaving on December 20, 2017, her effective last day of work. Fields did not provide the District with any prior notice that she intended to resign. On January 2, 2018, Fields officially resigned her teaching position, citing a negative impact on her health and well-being stemming from perceived issues with the school and District regarding teaching reassignments, struggles with the new administration upon her return from maternity leave, an unfair observation, and unsubstantiated physical threats related to an active shooter drill.

On January 18, 2018, the Lexington District Two Board of Trustees voted to report Fields' breach of contract to SCDE.

After considering the evidence presented at the November 2, 2018, hearing and the Hearing Officer's Report and Recommendation, the State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Fields breached her contract with the District. Accordingly, the Board finds that just cause exists to suspend Fields' Educator Certificate for a period of ten calendar months, commencing on January 8, 2019, and ending on November 7, 2019.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

"The State Board of Education may, for just cause, either revoke or suspend the certificate of any person." S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2004). Just cause includes, *inter alia*, "unprofessional conduct". S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (4) (2004).

S. C. Code Ann. §59-25-530 (2004) provides that a teacher who fails to comply with the provisions of his or her contract without the written consent of the school board is deemed guilty of unprofessional conduct and subject to suspension of the educator certificate for up to one calendar year.

The State Board finds that the evidence presented demonstrates that Fields engaged in unprofessional conduct by failing to comply with the provisions of her contract without the

written consent of the District. Accordingly, the evidence presented supports the State Board's determination that just cause exists to suspend the Educator Certificate of Maria Christine Fields, Educator Certificate #281734, for a period of ten calendar months, commencing on January 8, 2019, and ending on November 7, 2019. If Fields 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 Certification, Recruitment, and Preparation, and shall meet all certification requirements in effect at the time she requests reinstatement. Fields shall also pay all applicable reinstatement fees. The suspension of Fields' Educator Certificate #281734 shall be reported to the NASDTEC Clearinghouse and all South Carolina school districts within thirty (30) days from the date of this order with the reason stated as "unprofessional conduct for breach of contract 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

By 
Del-Gratia Jones, Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
January 8, 2019