

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of	)	
	)	ORDER OF SUSPENSION
Sarah Courtney Ritzel	)	
	)	(BREACH OF CONTRACT)
Educator Certificate 289320	)	
_____	)	

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on March 12, 2019. On February 4, 2019, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) notified Sarah Courtney Ritzel, via regular and certified mail, of her right to a hearing regarding the possible suspension of her South Carolina educator certificate regarding her alleged breach of contract with Lexington School District Two (District). Ms. Ritzel received the certified mail. Ms. Ritzel has not contacted the SCDE and is now in default.

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to suspend Ms. Ritzel's educator certificate for a period of one year, commencing on March 12, 2019, and ending on March 11, 2020.

FINDINGS OF FACT

This case concerns a formal complaint by the District, seeking the suspension of the educator certificate of Sarah Courtney Ritzel for breach of contract. The State Board has jurisdiction in this matter pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2017) and S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-530 (2017).

On May 10, 2018, Ms. Ritzel signed a contract with the District for the 2018-2019 school year, agreeing to serve as a teacher at Cayce Elementary School (School). Ms. Ritzel submitted a letter of resignation on September 21, 2018, effective October 5, 2018, due to health issues. On October 23, 2018, the District informed Ms. Ritzel she had breached her contract and was approved by the Board to report to the SCDE on October 18, 2018. On January 28, 2019, the District reported the breach of contract matter to the SCDE.

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to suspend Ms. Ritzel's educator certificate for a period of one year, commencing on March 12, 2019, and ending on March 11, 2020.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

“The State 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) (2017). Pursuant to 24 S.C. Code Regs. 43-58 (2) and (14) (Supp. 2017), the State Board of Education has the legal authority, *inter alia*, to suspend a certificate for “willful neglect of duty” and “failure to comply with the provisions 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 [of her] contract without written consent of the school board shall be deemed guilty of unprofessional conduct.” S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-530 (2017). “Upon the 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. Ritzel breached her contract and engaged in unprofessional conduct, and failed to comply with the provisions of her contract. The evidence presented further supports the State Board’s determination that just cause exists to suspend the educator certificate of Sarah Courtney Ritzel, certificate 289320, for a period of one year, commencing on March 12, 2019, and ending on March 11, 2020. If Ms. Ritzel 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. Ritzel shall also pay all applicable reinstatement fees.

The suspension of Ms. Ritzel’s educator certificate 289320 shall be reported to the NASDTEC Clearinghouse and all South Carolina school districts within 30 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.

(signature page attached)

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South Carolina State Board of Education

By: 
Del-Gratia Jones, Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
March 12, 2019