

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the Revocation)
)
of the Educator Certificate of)
)
Janis Suzanne Cooper)
)
Certificate 117115)
_____)

**ORDER OF
REVOCATION**

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

On April 25, 2013, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) sent notice via certified mail, return receipt, restricted delivery and first class mail to Dr. Janis Suzanne Cooper that the State Board would meet to make a determination regarding the possible suspension or revocation of her educator certificate on the statutory grounds of unprofessional conduct and evident unfitness for position for which employed, pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. Section 59-25-160 (2004) and 24 S.C. Code Regs. 43-58 (2011). The notice informed Dr. Cooper of her right to a hearing. On May 1, 2013, Dr. Cooper received the notice as evidenced by a postal receipt bearing her signature. Dr. Cooper did not request a hearing within the time period specified in the notice and is in default.

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to revoke Dr. Cooper's educator certificate.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Dr. Cooper holds a professional South Carolina educator certificate and has thirty three years of teaching experience. She was employed by the Richland County School District One (District) for over twenty years. Dr. Cooper had been serving as the District School Improvement Grant Coordinator until her retirement effective October 1, 2012, following an investigation by the District into allegations that Dr. Cooper had forged her supervisor's signature on supplemental pay forms which resulted in Dr. Cooper receiving unauthorized additional pay from the District. Prior to this matter, Dr. Cooper had no history of performance issues with the District and had no prior record of disciplinary action with the State Board.

On January 1, 2011, Dr. Cooper started the TERI program with an anticipated date of termination on December 31, 2015. On July 25, 2012, Dr. Cooper reported to her Principal Jeanne Stiglbauer that she had forged Ms. Siglbauer's signature on time sheets which resulted in Dr. Cooper receiving additional pay. During a meeting held on July 26, 2012, with Ms. Stiglbauer and administrative staff, Dr. Cooper admitted that she had signed Ms. Stiglbauer's timesheets for additional pay for several years and that she had signed a contract without getting input from others. On August 8, 2012, Ms. Stiglbauer reviewed the timesheets for the past three years and identified documents that did not have Ms. Stiglbauer's legitimate signature. Ms. Stiglbauer had not given Dr. Cooper permission to sign Ms. Stiglbauer's name on any documents.

On August 14, 2012, the District Human Resources Department filed a report with the Columbia Police Department and informed the police that Dr. Cooper forged multiple payroll documents and unlawfully received over \$24,000 from school grant funds. On August 20, 2012, the District placed Dr. Cooper on administrative leave. On September 27, 2012, the District Superintendent sent Dr. Cooper a letter by certified mail and hand delivery that he would make a recommendation to the District Board of School Commissioners that Dr. Cooper's employment with the District be terminated. Dr. Cooper retired from the District effective October 1, 2012. On October 5, 2012, Dr. Cooper was arrested and charged with Embezzlement of Public Funds, value \$5,000 or more. Dr. Cooper agreed to pay restitution to the District.

On April 25, 2013, the SCDE sent notice via certified mail, return receipt, restricted delivery and first class mail to Dr. Cooper that the State Board would meet to make a determination regarding the possible suspension or revocation of her educator certificate on the statutory grounds of unprofessional conduct and evident unfitness for position for which employed, pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. Section 59-25-160 (2004) and 24 S.C. Code Regs. 43-58 (2011). The notice informed Dr. Cooper of her right to a hearing. On May 1, 2013, Dr. Cooper received the notice as evidenced by a postal receipt bearing her signature. Dr. Cooper did not request a hearing within the time period specified in the notice and is in default.

After considering the evidence presented, the State Board voted to revoke Dr. Cooper's educator certificate.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The State Board has jurisdiction in this matter pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2004), and may, for just cause, either revoke or suspend the certificate of any person. S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2004), S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (2004), 24 S.C. Code Regs. 43-58 (2011). Just cause includes unprofessional conduct and evident unfitness for position for which employed. S. C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (2004); 24 S.C. Code Regs. 43-58 (2011). The State Board finds that the evidence presented by the SCDE demonstrates that Dr. Cooper engaged in unprofessional conduct and demonstrated evident unfitness for position for which employed as a result of her forging Ms. Stiglbauer's signatures on supplemental pay forms and receiving unauthorized additional pay from the District. This evidence presented, which has been admitted by Dr. Cooper, supports the State Board's decision to revoke the educator certificate of Janis Suzanne Cooper, certificate 117115, effective June 12, 2013.

Now, therefore, it is hereby ordered that the educator certificate of Janis Suzanne Cooper, certificate 117115, is hereby revoked. The revocation of this educator certificate shall be reported to the NASDTEC Clearinghouse and all South Carolina school districts within thirty days from the date of this order.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED.

South Carolina State Board of Education


By: David W. Blackmon, Ph.D., Chair

Columbia, South Carolina

June 12, 2013