

BEFORE THE SOUTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of the
Disciplinary Action of the
Educator Certificate of
John Meredith Jennings
Certificate 236116

ORDER OF SUMMARY SUSPENSION

SUMMARY OF THE CASE

The Chair of the South Carolina State Board of Education (State Board) considered this matter on July 13, 2021. In accordance with S.C. Code Ann. § 1-23-370(c) (2017), § 59-5-10 (2017), and State Board Rule of Governance BBABA, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) requested that the Chair of the State Board summarily suspend the educator certificate of John Meredith Jennings, educator certificate 236116, as a result of his arrest for the felony charges of criminal sexual conduct with a minor in the first degree, S.C. Code Ann. § 16-3-655(A) (2015), and criminal sexual conduct with a minor in the third degree, S.C. Code Ann. § 16-3-655(C) (2015).

The SCDE has reason to believe that, due to the serious nature of these allegations of misconduct, Mr. Jennings may pose a threat to the health, safety, and welfare of students, who may be under his instruction and that emergency action is required. After considering the evidence presented by the SCDE, the Chair of the State Board finds that Mr. Jennings' educator certificate shall be summarily suspended until a due process hearing is held and/or this matter is otherwise resolved. The SCDE is directed to serve notice on Mr. Jennings of the summary suspension, as well as the possible suspension or revocation of his educator certificate.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Mr. Jennings holds a valid South Carolina professional educator certificate and has over thirteen years of educator experience. At the time of his arrest, Mr. Jennings was a teacher in Richland County School District Two (District).

On or about July 7, 2021, Mr. Jennings was arrested for criminal sexual conduct with a minor in the first degree and criminal sexual conduct with a minor in the third

degree. It was alleged that Mr. Jennings sexually abused two minors whom he knew from outside the school setting.

The SCDE has reason to believe that, due to the serious nature of this allegation of misconduct, Mr. Jennings may pose a threat to the health, safety, and welfare of students who may be under his instruction, and that emergency action is required. After considering the evidence presented by the SCDE, the Chair of the State Board finds that Mr. Jennings' educator certificate shall be summarily suspended until a due process hearing is held and/or this matter is otherwise resolved. The SCDE is directed to serve notice on Mr. Jennings of the summary suspension, as well as the possible suspension or revocation of his educator certificate.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

"The South Carolina Board of Education may, for just cause, either revoke or suspend the certificate of any person." S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-150 (2017); S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (2017). Just cause includes unprofessional conduct, crime against the law of this State, and evident unfitness for position for which employed. S.C. Code Ann. § 59-25-160 (2017); 24 S.C. Code Regs. 43-58 (2017). In accordance with S.C. Code Ann. § 1-23-370(c) (2017), "If the agency finds that the public health, safety or welfare imperatively requires emergency action, and incorporates a finding to that effect in its order, summary suspension of a license may be ordered pending proceedings for revocation or other action." Pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 59-5-10 (2017) and State Board Rule of Governance BBABA, the Chair of the State Board finds that as a result of the allegations of Mr. Jennings' unprofessional conduct, crime against the law of this State or the United States, and evident unfitness for the position for which employed, due to his felony arrest for criminal sexual conduct with a minor in the first degree, S.C. Code Ann. § 16-3-655(A) (2015), and criminal sexual conduct with a minor in third degree, S.C. Code Ann. § 16-3-655(C) (2015), there is reason to believe Mr. Jennings may pose a threat to the health, safety, and welfare of students and emergency action is required.

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Accordingly, the educator certificate of John Meredith Jennings, certificate number 236116, is summarily suspended until a due process hearing is held and/or this matter is otherwise resolved. The SCDE is directed to serve notice on Mr. Jennings of the summary suspension, as well as the possible suspension or revocation of his educator certificate.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED.

South Carolina State Board of Education

s/ Kristi Woodall
Kristi Woodall, Ed.D., Chair

Columbia, South Carolina
July 13, 2021