

Ryan Cooper
Revocation/Voluntary Surrender

The Background:

Prior History: N/A

Facts: During the 2019-2020 school year, Mr. Cooper, a high school teacher with Unicoi County Schools, sent his former student, an eighth-grade female student, messages via Instagram. Specifically, during the fall of 2019, Mr. Cooper sent said former female student various Instagram messages including, but not limited to, “[p]robably wrong for me to say. But you are just beautiful. Wish you were older;” “Can’t stop looking at you. . .;” “Mmmm so sexy;” kissing face emojis; and asking said female student to “post more pics of [her] pretty face. There was no investigation of this matter by the Department of Children’s Services. Additionally, no criminal charges were filed against Mr. Cooper. Mr. Cooper resigned from his position with Unicoi County Schools.

Applicable Rule: 0520-02-03-.09(1)(d) defines non-explicit inappropriate communication as any communication between an educator and a student that is beyond the scope of the educator’s professional responsibilities. Examples of such non-explicit inappropriate communications include, but are not limited to, those communications that discuss the teaching staff member’s or student’s past or current romantic relationships; those that include the use of profanities or obscene language; those that are harassing, intimidating, or bullying; those that attempt to establish an inappropriate personal relationship with a student; and those that are related to personal or confidential information regarding another school staff member or student.

0520-02-03-.09(1)(k) defines good cause as conduct that calls into question the fitness of an educator to hold a license including, but not limited to, noncompliance with security guidelines for Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) or successor tests pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-1-607, failure to report licensure actions as required under paragraph (2), or violation of any provision in the Teacher Code of Ethics as contained in T.C.A. §§ 49- 5-1001, et seq.

0520-02-03.09(3)(g) provides that the Board may revoke, suspend, formally reprimand, or refuse to issue or renew an educator’s license for other good cause as defined in subparagraph (1)(k) of this rule.

0520-02-03-.09(3)(h) provides that the Board may revoke, suspend, formally reprimand, or refuse to issue or renew an educator’s license for any offense contained in paragraphs (4) and/or (5) of this rule.

0520-02-03-.09(5)(a)(5)(i) provides that an individual holding an educator's license who is found to have engaged in non-explicit inappropriate communication with a student shall be subject to a disciplinary action within the range of a suspension for no less than three (3) months up to and including revocation.

0520-02-03-.09(5)(a)(8) provides that an individual holding an educator's license who is found to have violated the teacher code of ethics shall be subject to a disciplinary action within the range of a suspension for no less than one (1) year up to and including revocation.

Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-5-1003(b)(14), (15) and (19) provides that an educator shall - ensure interactions with the student take place in transparent and appropriate settings; not engage in any sexually related behavior with the student, whether verbal, written, physical, or electronic, with or without the student's consent. Sexually related behavior includes, but is not limited to, behaviors such as making sexual jokes or sexual remarks; engaging in sexual kidding, sexual teasing, or sexual innuendo; pressuring the student for dates or sexual favors; engaging in inappropriate physical touching, groping, or grabbing; kissing; rape; threatening physical harm; and committing sexual assault; and maintain a professional approach with the student at all times.

Status: Respondent was notified by certified mail of the Board's intent to **revoke** his educator license based upon these findings. Respondent received said notice.

Board Action Consistency Considerations:

February 2019 – Board approved the revocation of an educator's license for texting and emailing a female student about non-school related items causing student to become uncomfortable. Emails and texts all happened after hours of school in the late night/evening hours.

The Recommendation:

The Board staff recommends that the Board approve the signed Consent Order submitted by the Respondent based upon the facts and applicable rule noted above.