

Samantha Stephens
Suspension, 2 Years Concurrent with Criminal Probation

The Background:

Prior History: N/A

Facts: Ms. Stephens was convicted of felony theft in violation of T.C.A. § 39-14-103 after an investigation by the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury determined she misappropriated money through compensation for time not worked. She was sentenced to two (2) years of probation beginning May 19, 2025, and ordered to pay restitution.

Applicable Law

/Rule: 0520-02-03-.09(1)(a) provides Conviction, “Means a judgment entered by a court upon a plea of guilty, a plea of nolo contendere, a finding of guilt by a jury or the court notwithstanding any pending appeal or habeas corpus proceeding arising from the judgment. Conviction includes, but is not limited to, a conviction by a federal court or military tribunal, including a court-martial conducted by the armed forces of the United States, and a conviction, whether upon a plea of guilty, a plea of nolo contendere, or a finding of guilt by a jury or the court, in any other state of the United States, other jurisdiction, or other country. Conviction also includes a plea taken in conjunction with Tennessee Code Annotated (“T.C.A.”) § 40- 35-313 or its equivalent in any other jurisdiction.”

0520-02-03-.09(1)(k) defines Other Good Cause as, “Conduct that calls into question the fitness of an educator to hold a license including, but not limited to, 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(1)(p) defines Suspension as, “With regard to licensure action by the State Board, suspension means the nullification of an educator’s license for a predetermined term, after which the license may be reinstated. Reinstatement shall be subject to the completion of any terms and conditions contained in the order of suspension. With regard to employment action taken by a public or non-public school or school district, suspension means the temporary removal of an educator from his or her regular duties with or without pay. Suspension also includes the placement of an educator on administrative leave pending investigation into allegations of misconduct.”

0520-02-03-.09(3)(a) provides, “The State Board may revoke, suspend, formally reprimand, or refuse to issue or renew an educator’s license or may refuse to issue a temporary permit for... [c]onviction of a felony.”

0520-02-03-.09(3)(i) provides, “The State Board of Education may revoke, suspend, formally reprimand, or refuse to issue or renew an educator’s license for . . . [o]ther good cause as defined in subparagraph (1)(k) of this rule.”

0520-02-03-.09(3)(j) provides, “The State Board of Education may revoke, suspend, formally reprimand, or refuse to issue or renew an educator’s license for . . . [a]ny offense contained in paragraphs (4) and/or (5) of this Rule.”

0520-02-03-.09(5)(a)(1) provides, “Upon receiving notification that an individual has been convicted of a felony, the individual shall be subject to disciplinary action within the range of a suspension of not less than two (2) years up to and including permanent revocation of the convicted individual’s educator license. that the State Board may impose disciplinary action for conviction of a felony.”

0520-02-03-.09(5)(a)(9)(i) provides, “An individual holding an educator’s license who is found to have violated the Teacher Code of Ethics contained in T.C.A. Title 49, Chapter 5, Part 10 shall be subject to a disciplinary action within the range of a formal reprimand up to and including revocation.”

T.C.A § 49-5-1004(c)(2) provides that educators shall, “Conduct themselves in a manner that preserves the dignity and integrity of the education profession.”

Status: Respondent was notified by certified mail of the Board’s intent to **suspend** Respondent’s educator license based upon these findings. Respondent received said notice and agreed to the suspension of Respondent’s license.

Board Action Consistency Considerations:

October 2021 – Board approved the suspension of an educator’s license concurrent with educator’s criminal probation for theft.

February 2023 – Board approved the suspension of an educator’s license concurrent with educator’s criminal probation for falsifying academic records.

May 2023 – Board approved the suspension of an educator’s license concurrent with educator’s criminal probation for theft.

November 2024 - Board approved the suspension of an educator’s license concurrent with educator’s criminal probation for theft.

November 2025 - Board approved the suspension of an educator’s license concurrent with educator’s criminal probation for theft.

The Recommendation:

Board counsel recommends the Board approve the signed Consent Order submitted by the Respondent for the two (2) year suspension of Respondent's license, concurrent with Respondent's criminal probation, based upon the facts and applicable rule noted above.