

Jason Sweeton
Suspension, 3 Months with Professional Development

The Background:

Prior History: N/A

Facts: Mr. Sweeton sent text messages to a student about topics unrelated to school. In the messages, Mr. Sweeton referred to the student as “sweetie,” “dear,” “punkin,” “beautiful,” and “dumplin.” Mr. Sweeton also apologized in one text message for kissing the student on the forehead.

Applicable Law

/Rule: 0520-02-03-.09(1)(e) defines “Inappropriate Communication (Non-Explicit)” 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 educator’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)(f) defines “Inappropriate Physical Contact” as unlawful and/or unjustified physical contact with a student. Examples of such inappropriate physical contact include, but are not limited to, sexual contact, physical altercations, horseplay, tickling, improper use of corporal punishment, improper restraint or isolation of a student receiving special education services, and rough housing.

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(3)(e) provides that the State Board of Education may revoke, suspend, formally reprimand, or refuse to issue or renew an educator’s license for inappropriate physical contact with a student.

0520-02-03-.09(3)(i) provides that the State Board of Education may revoke, suspend, formally reprimand, or refuse to issue or renew an educator’s license for other good cause.

0520-02-03-.09(5)(a)(6)(i) provides, “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)(7)(i) provides, “an individual holding an educator’s license who is found to have engaged in inappropriate physical contact with a student that does not result in harm or potential harm to the student shall be subject to a disciplinary action within the range of a formal reprimand up to and including suspension for two (2) years.”

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 § 49-5-1003(b)(7) states that educators shall “make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions harmful to learning or to health and safety.”

T.C.A § 49-5-1003(b)(14) states that educators shall “ensure interactions with the student take place in transparent and appropriate settings.”

T.C.A § 49-5-1003(b)(19) states that educators shall “maintain a professional approach with the student at all times.”

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:

August 2025 – Board approved the three (3) month retroactive suspension, and required professional development, of an educator’s license for excessive texting with a student about topics that go beyond the scope of educational duties and responsibilities.

October 2022 – Board approved the six (6) month suspension, and required professional development, of an educator’s license for initiating numerous inappropriate non-explicit communications with a student via social media that were outside the scope of the educator’s professional relationship.

The Recommendation:

Board counsel recommends the Board approve the signed Consent Order submitted by the Respondent for the 3-month suspension of Respondent’s license, with reinstatement contingent upon Respondent completing professional development, based upon the facts and applicable rule noted above.