

THE ARKANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

**IN RE THE MATTER OF:
MARY SUSAN STEPHENSON
FEBRUARY 8, 2024**

PLSB CASE NO. 24-041

FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW, AND ORDER

At its regular meeting on February 8, 2024, the Arkansas State Board of Education (“Board”) accepted the recommendation of the Professional Licensure Standards Board Ethics Subcommittee (“Ethics Subcommittee”) for disciplinary action against the teaching license of Mary Susan Stephenson (“Educator Stephenson”). Based upon Educator Stephenson’s failure to respond to the Ethics Subcommittee’s recommendation and the evidence presented, in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, Ark. Code Ann. 25-15-101 et seq., the Board hereby states as follows:

I. Findings of Fact

- a. The Arkansas Department of Education issued Educator Stephenson a standard five-year teaching license on January 1, 2021, valid until December 31, 2025.
- b. The Ethics Subcommittee received an allegation that Educator Stephenson violated the Arkansas Department of Education Rules Governing the Code of Ethics for Arkansas Educators promulgated pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. § § 6-17-422 and 6-17-428.
- c. On August 4, 2023, the Ethics Subcommittee authorized an investigation into allegations that Educator Stephenson violated *Standard 2: an educator maintains competence regarding his or her professional practice, inclusive of professional and ethical behavior, skills, knowledge, dispositions, and responsibilities relating to his or*

her organizational position; and Standard 3: an educator honestly fulfills reporting obligations associated with professional practices.

- d. Educator Stephenson was notified on August 8, 2023, of the Ethics Subcommittee's authorization to investigate this allegation.
- e. After considering the investigator's report and evidence on January 5, 2024, the Ethics Subcommittee unanimously found that a preponderance of evidence existed to substantiate violation of Standards 2 and 3 in that Educator Stephenson:
 - Exhibited inappropriate disposition inclusive of professional and ethical behavior.
 - Violated district, state or federal policies or law.
 - Failed to complete IEP documentation.
 - Falsified IEP documentation.
- f. The Ethics Subcommittee recommended that the State Board take the following actions:
 1. Probation of License for 2 years.
 2. Assess a \$250 fine (due within 90 days of the State Board Order);
 3. Require Educator to complete the following coursework/readings:
 - a. Code of Ethics Training Provided by the PLSB (1.5 Hours)
 - b. SPC17008 Foundations in Special Education: Major Components of IDEA (1 Credit Hour)
 - c. SPC17009 Foundations in Special Education: Legal and Ethical Issues (1 Credit Hour)
 - d. SPC17010 Foundations in Special Education: Roles and Responsibilities (1 Credit Hour)
 - e. Title: The 85% Solution: How Personal Accountability Guarantees Success -- No Nonsense, No Excuses (256p) Author: Linda Galindo ISBN 10:ISBN 13: 9780470500163

4. Educator to provide written reflections regarding how each training will impact the educator's professional practices. Due to the PLSB for approval within 90 days of the State Board Order;
 5. Quarterly report from supervisor that the educator is meeting all IDEA timelines. Submitted to the PLSB quarterly for approval; and
 6. Require Educator to pay all associated costs.
- g. On January 5, 2024, Educator Stephenson's attorney, was notified of the Ethics Subcommittee's initial determination and recommendation by secure email. Educator Stephenson failed to respond to the Ethics Subcommittee's recommendation thereby waiving her right to any further notice, hearing, or any other rights she may have under the Administrative Procedure Act, including those rights set forth in Ark. Code Ann. §§ 25-15-211 and 25-15-212.
- h. At today's meeting, the Ethics Subcommittee's recommendation and supporting documentation were presented to the Board as part of its consent agenda.

II. Conclusions of Law

- a. Upon consideration of the evidence presented at the meeting, Ark. Code Ann. §§ 6-11-105, 6-17-401, 6-17-422, 6-17-428 and 25-15-201 et seq., and the Arkansas Department of Education Rules Governing the Code of Ethics for Arkansas Educators, the Board adopts the Ethics Subcommittee's recommendations, and enacts the sanctions accordingly. The Board admonishes Educator Mary Susan Stephenson for her violation of the Code of Ethics.
- b. Educator Stephenson is cautioned that her non-payment of the assessed fine of \$250.00 may result in the suspension of her license until the fine is paid in full.

- c. Educator Stephenson is cautioned that further violations of the Code of Ethics or failure to pay the fine within ninety (90) days from the date of this order may result in more severe discipline including permanent revocation of her license.
- d. This order shall remain permanently in Educator Stephenson's professional licensure file and the confidential files of the Professional Licensure Standards Board.

IT IS SO ORDERED.



Dr. Sarah Moore, Chair
Arkansas State Board of Education