BEFORE THE KANSAS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

In the Matter of
the License of
Christopher Sohm

KSDE No. 22-PPC-03
OAH No. 22ED0011 ED

FINAL ORDER

NOW, on the 11th day of July 2023, the above-captioned matter comes for consideration by the Kansas State Board of Education (Board). Appearing for the Board are Chairwoman, Melanie Haas, and members, Betty Arnold, Dennis Hershberger, Michelle Dombrosky, Cathy Hopkins, Deena Horst, Jim McNiece, Ann Mah, Jim Porter and Danny Zeck.

WHEREUPON the Professional Practices Commission (Commission) considered the matter on November 18, 2022 and was completed December 16, 2022. Licensee appeared by and through counsel Blake A. Bittel. The Kansas State Department of Education appeared through its attorney, R. Scott Gordon. After reviewing the evidence, the Commission voted 7 – 0, to recommend the Board suspend Christopher Sohm’s professional teaching license for a definite period of time to conclude at the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

WHEREUPON the Board reviewed all of the evidence in the case, including the exhibits that were offered by the parties and admitted during the Commission’s hearing. The evidence included the redacted information and other material presented under seal due to the sensitive nature of evidence that was intended to prevent disclosure of students, including several video recordings.

WHEREUPON the Board reviewed the following documents and supplemental materials in the case:

1. Formal Complaint in 22PPC03
2. Answer to Complaint filed by Licensee
3. Exhibits admitted and reviewed by the Professional Practices Commission
4. Initial Order of the Professional Practices Commission
5. Petition for Review and Request for Oral Argument submitted by Kansas State Department of Education
6. Licensee’s Response to KSDE Petition
7. KSDE Rebuttal
8. Petition for Review and Request for Oral Argument submitted by Licensee
9. KSDE Response to Licensee Petition
10. Licensee Rebuttal

WHEREUPON the Board permitted oral argument from counsel for the parties.

WHEREUPON Board Attorney Mark Ferguson explained to the Board that oral arguments have been requested by both parties and that Executive Session will be necessary after the oral arguments are presented. In addition to the briefing provided by both parties adhering to all deadlines, the Board was provided video access to the previous hearing, extensive documentation/evidence that was provided under seal and not part of public record. KSDE appeared by and through its general
counsel R. Scott Gordon. Licensee Christopher Sohm appeared in person and with his attorney Blake Bittle.

WHEREUPON after both parties presented their oral argument Mr. Porter moved to recess from public meeting to executive session as a quasi-judicial body for the purpose of deliberations on the Licensure Matter designated as PPC case no 22-PPC-03. Dr. Horst seconded. Motion carried 10-0. Invited into the executive session is Commissioner Watson and Board Attorney Ferguson.

WHEREUPON the Board recessed into executive session at 5:10 p.m. for the purpose of deliberation for 20 minutes. At 5:41 p.m. the Board returned to open session after deliberations in private for 20 minutes and an extension of 10 minutes.

WHEREUPON after concluding the executive session the Board returned to the open meeting. Board members described their detailed and extensive review of the record, including watching the videos provided and reviewing the documents and briefing submitted. The Board did not feel that the request of KSDE to revoke the license was warranted; nor was the request of the Licensee to reject discipline and grant a license was warranted. Ultimately, after significant discussion, the Board supported the compromise decision arrived at by the PPC. The Board expressed appreciation for the hard work performed by the PPC in licensure cases in general, and in this case specifically. Ultimately, after significant discussion and debate on the issues and facts in this case, the Board relied upon the recommendation of the PPC.

WHEREUPON the Board took formal action through discussion and deliberations of the PPC initial order, the requests of the parties and the evidence in the PPC matter.

WHEREUPON Mr. Hershberger moved that the Kansas State Board of Education adopt the findings of fact and conclusions of law of the Professional Practices Commission and suspend the professional license in case 22-PPC-03 through the remainder of 2023-2024 school year. Dr. Horst seconded. Motion carried 9-1 with Mrs. Arnold in opposition.

WHEREUPON the Board reviewed the Commission’s Initial Order. All findings set forth in the Commission’s Initial Order attached hereto are incorporated by reference and made a part of this Final Order as though fully set forth at length herein.

IT IS THEREFORE CONCLUDED by the Kansas State Board of Education that Christopher Sohm’s professional teaching license is suspended for a definite period of time to conclude at the end of the 2023-2024 school year which shall be reflected as May 17, 2024 since that is the last day of school for the Spearville school district.

This Final Order is made and entered this 13th day of September 2023.

Kansas State Board of Education

[Signature]

BY: Melanie Haas, Chairwoman
Signed September 13, 2023
NOTICE TO LICENSEE/APPLICANT

This is a Final Order and is effective upon service.

To request reconsideration of this order, you must file a Petition for Reconsideration with the Secretary to the State Board of Education, at the address below, within 15 days after service of this Final Order. The Petition must state the specific grounds upon which relief is requested.

To request a stay of effectiveness of this order, you must file a Petition for Stay with the Secretary to the State Board of Education at the address below. A petition can be filed until the time which a petition for judicial review would no longer be timely.

To seek judicial review of a Final Order, you must file a petition in the District Court as authorized by K.S.A. 77-601, et seq. within 30 days following the service of the Final Order. Filing a Petition for Reconsideration is not a prerequisite for seeking judicial review. A copy of any Petition for Judicial Review must be served upon the Secretary to the State Board of Education at the address below.

Makayla Auldridge,  
Interim Secretary,  
Kansas State Board of Education  
Landon State Office Building  
900 SW Jackson Ave. Suite 600N  
Topeka, Kansas 66612

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on this 13th day of September 2023, a true and correct copy of the above and foregoing was mailed by certified mail, return receipt requested, to:

Blake A. Bittel  
Kennedy Berkley Law Firm  
119 W. Iron Ave, 7th Floor  
P.O. Box 2567  
Salina, Kansas 67402

And via interoffice mail to:

R. Scott Gordon  
Kansas State Department of Education  
900 SW Jackson Street, Ste. 102  
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Mark A. Ferguson,  
Board Attorney, for  
Makayla Auldridge,  
Interim Secretary  
Kansas State Board of Education