



Mission Statement

The purpose of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) is to serve as a shared ethical guide for future and current educators faced with the complexities of P-12 education. The code establishes principles for ethical best practice, mindfulness, self-reflection and decision-making, setting the groundwork for self-regulation and self-accountability. The establishment of this professional code of ethics by educators for educators honors the public trust and upholds the dignity of the profession.

Introduction

The MCEE was developed by a diverse and representative MCEE Task Force under the leadership of the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC). The Task Force consisted of practicing P-12 educators representing paraprofessionals, teachers, principals, superintendents, and state departments of education representatives from across the country. Members were selected after a nomination process, which included a number of national education groups. All participants have been recognized as highly effective educators and leaders.

The following set of principles define ethical behavior, ethical best practice, and ethical responsibilities held in common by P-12 educators¹. The MCEE is comprised of five principles, which broadly define critical dimensions of ethical practice expected of the professional educator:

- Responsibility to the Profession
- Responsibility for Professional Competence
- Responsibility to Students
- Responsibility to Parents/Guardians, Colleagues, the Community and Employers
- Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology

Each principle begins with an introduction that provides the context for that particular principle. There are performance indicators that more specifically define aspects within each principle. A glossary is provided to define terminology included in this principles document. Jurisdictions may adopt or adapt this Model Code of Educator Ethics, a model of best practice that equips educators in ethical understanding, reflection, and guides ethical decision-making.

¹ For the purposes of the MCEE, professional educators are primarily licensed educators and include paraprofessionals, teachers, teacher leaders, student support personnel and administrators. However, those who interact with students who are not under the auspices of a licensing organization are encouraged to adopt or adapt this *Model Code of Ethics for Educators*.

History of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators

Although the inaugural edition of the MCEE is being released in 2015, NASDTEC has a rich history of attention to educators' ethical conduct that reaches back at least 87 years.

NASDTEC, which has led the development of the MCEE, has been at the forefront of promoting high standards for educator conduct, teacher mobility across state lines, and comprehensive personnel screening by maintaining a Clearinghouse on teacher discipline. The organization represents bodies responsible for the preparation, licensure and discipline of educational personnel, including professional standards boards and commissions and state departments of education in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, the U.S. Territories, Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. NASDTEC's core mission is to exercise leadership in matters related to the preparation and certification of effective and ethical professional school personnel.

Since 1928, NASDTEC has convened annual conferences designed to foster communication regarding professional practices across jurisdictional lines. In the 1960s, NASDTEC formed a Revocation Committee, which led to the development of the NASDTEC Educator Identification Clearinghouse. Fully operational since 1987, this national collection point for professional educator disciplinary actions provides each NASDTEC member state/jurisdiction with notifications of actions taken against the certificate/license of educators by other member states/jurisdictions.

In 1996, NASDTEC created the Professional Practices Institute (PPI), which began with a vision that state education agencies needed to focus on the problem of educator misconduct. With an annual meeting held since its inception, the PPI provides a forum dedicated to facing the challenges of educator misconduct and examining possible prevention strategies.

The work toward a Model Code of Ethics, which initially began within the PPI membership in 2009, gained much momentum in 2012, when an Ethics Teaching Symposium was convened by Educational Testing Service (ETS). The purpose of this symposium was to bring together a group of national experts on educator ethics, representatives of state education agency representatives and national organizations, and other interested parties to look at the current state of educator ethics, to determine what constitutes educator ethics, and to examine how educator ethics might be measured. The following were key recommendations to emerge from the symposium: (1) there is a critical need to develop "model" or national standards for ethics in teaching; (2) a critical component of "professionalizing teaching" is developing a common vocabulary and understanding about ethics; (3) targeted research into the ethical dilemmas faced by educators is needed; and (4) training and assessment of ethical understandings should be developed as part of pre-service preparation or in-service professional development; and (5) NASDTEC—a key player in representing educator licensing bodies—was identified as needing to play a critical role in this work.

In 2013, NASDTEC's Preparation Program and Continuing Development Committee selected educator ethics preparation as its central focus. A nationwide survey was distributed to jurisdictions regarding policies and practice in the preparation of educator candidates and practitioners related to educator ethics. Survey results were shared at the annual PPI Conference

and further ignited interest and dialogue on educator ethics within educational agencies and organizations.

In 2013, The National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY), published a white paper on “Re-Imagining Teaching: Five Structures to Transform the Profession,” in which teacher preparation, evaluation, and the characteristics of effective teaching were discussed as the center of contemporary education research and policymaking. In the document, NNSTOY outlined five key structures—found in almost every other field—that have the potential to transform teaching into a profession that fosters continuous improvement, high expectations, and shared accountability. One of these structures was the development of Guiding or Ethical Principles to be developed by education practitioners and to which the profession would be held accountable.

In 2013, a core group consisting of members of the NASDTEC Executive Board began targeted discussion on actualizing the vision of creating a Model Code of Ethics for Educators. Later that year, the NASDTEC Executive Board appointed the NASDTEC Model Code of Ethics Steering Committee to guide the work. In 2014, NASDTEC convened an MCEE Communication Partners’ meeting in Washington, D.C., to learn about the coming work. Nominations for practitioners to serve on the MCEE Task Force were secured and invitations sent and accepted.

On September 26-28, 2014, the Task Force convened for its first meeting under the leadership of NASDTEC with support from ETS, NNSTOY, and the University of Phoenix. Over the next seven months, the Task Force examined the research on educator ethics and other professions’ ethics codes, developed a draft Code which was released for public comment in February 2015, and finalized the Code in April.

In June 2015, the MCEE was brought to the NASDTEC Executive Board for adoption. It is the expectation of NASDTEC and its partners that the MCEE will be a living document that will be enhanced as needed to respond to emerging issues in the education profession.

Context for the Development of a Model Code of Ethics for Educators

Why the Education Profession Needs a Nationally Recognized Model Code of Ethics

A profession is generally defined as a vocation or calling requiring specialized knowledge and training and a formal credentialing process. For most professions, it also entails the ability to self-regulate and hold its members accountable for high standards of professional and ethical conduct. Professions such as medicine, the law, psychology and counseling have long recognized the need for a universally adopted Code of Ethics. The American Medical Association first developed their Code of Ethics in 1847; the American Bar Association in 1932; the American Psychological Association in 1952; the American Counseling Association in 1961; and the American School Counseling Association in 1984. These codes are regularly updated to reflect changes in societal and professional expectations.

One reason the education profession has a particular need for a universally adopted code of ethics is that educators exercise a unique fiduciary²responsibility. The relationship between student and teacher differs from other professional/client relationships (e.g., attorneys, physicians, clergy). Educators are entrusted with the safety and welfare of students during school hours and during activities both within and outside of the regular school day and often serve “*in loco parentis*.”

In the absence of a commonly accepted set of ethical standards, the education profession has often defaulted to judicial decisions and legislative action to govern the conduct of its members. This is despite the fact that there are numerous educator organizations that have developed their own “Codes of Ethics” such as the National Education Association, Association of American Educators (AAE), and American Association of School Administrators (AASA). In addition, many subject specific professional associations such as the National Science Teacher Association (NSTA), National Council of Measurement in Education (NCME), National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and National Association of Music Educators (NAME) have incorporated guidelines for ethical or professional conduct into their standards. Because these “codes” or guidelines are neither uniform nor address the profession as a whole, there has been an inconsistent use and sometimes absence of ethical standards in guiding professional preparation, ongoing professional development, or educators’ decision-making on a day-to-day basis.

It should be noted that most states have adopted through their state boards, professional standards commissions or through regulation/statute “Codes of Ethics” or “Codes of Conduct” created specifically for educators. However, the focus, content and specificity of language vary greatly from state-to-state. Some represent aspirational standards (dispositions); other states use their codes to delineate what teachers should not do (forming the basis for licensure sanction); still others combine both aspects. Further, some states entitle their enforceable standards a “Code of Ethics,” when the term “Code of Conduct” more accurately describes a regulatory document that defines behavior absolutes.

How Does a Code of Ethics Differ from Personal Morality, Beliefs or Laws?

In the absence of a Code of Ethics, educators often default to either their personal values and beliefs or the law. But ethics are neither personal morality nor a belief system, but rather a common language shared by the profession. There is also a distinction between ethics and the law, violation of which often leads to sanctions or criminal action.

Professional ethics are principles that are designed to promote student safety and welfare, guide educator decision-making, foster public confidence in the profession and advance the profession’s ability to withstand public scrutiny. Codes of ethics are commonly agreed upon standards that inform the course of action related to ethical practice. Codes of ethics are the

²Fiduciary professions are those in which a relationship is created where one person places confidence in another whose aid, advice or protection is sought in some matter and there is an imbalance of power inherent in that relationship. Examples of fiduciary relationships include teacher/student, attorney/client, physician/patient, priest/parishioner, trustee/beneficiary. .

collective values of a profession. They set a higher threshold than codes of conduct, help guide discussions of ethical dilemmas, and establish a framework for ethical decision-making.

The Role of a Code of Ethics in Establishing a Framework for Ethical Decision-making

Teaching is a highly nuanced profession, involving complex relationships with students, colleagues, and other members of the school community. This involves making hundreds of nontrivial decisions in the course of a workday. Educators are often faced with “gray” areas where there are no clear distinctions or delineations between right and wrong, appropriate or inappropriate conduct. For example, educators must understand the verbal, physical, emotional and social distances that must be maintained in order to ensure structure, security and predictability in an educational environment—what we term “boundaries.” The concepts of time, place and role³ are important components in making decisions regarding those boundaries. Educators need to consider such questions as: Is it an appropriate time for this? Is this an appropriate place for this? What is my role in regards to this purpose? Am I being transparent in my purpose and interactions with others?

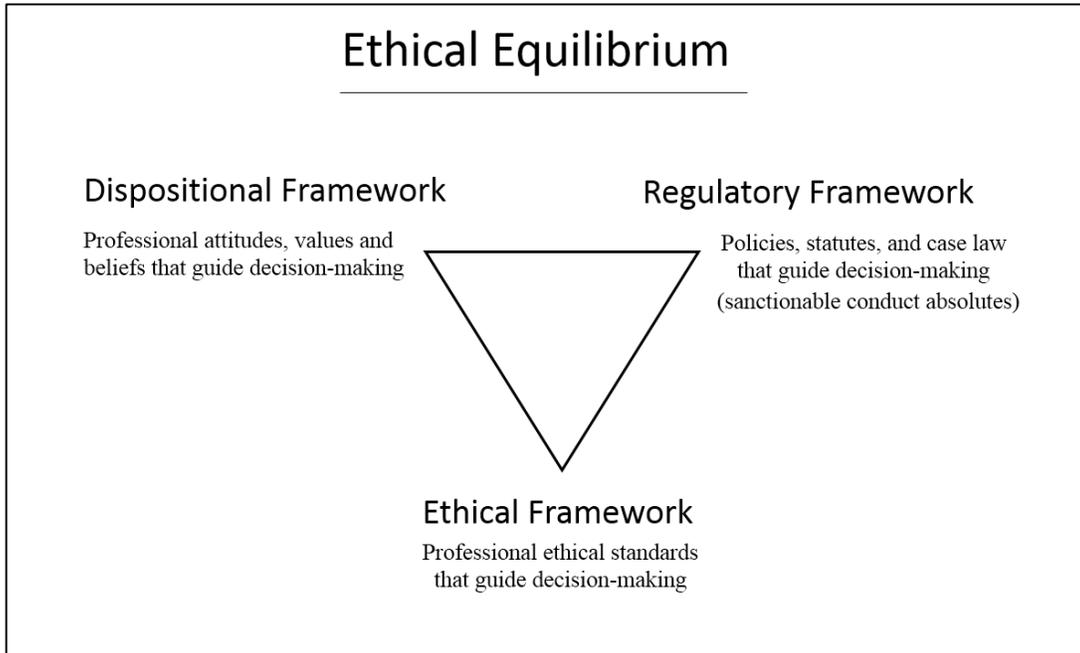
Establishing an ethical framework with guiding principles can serve to offer direction to educators when the path to ethical decision-making becomes murky. Professional ethical standards help provide consistent guidance for educators’ interactions and professional relationships by providing a common framework to make critical decisions.

The components of a framework for ethical decision-making, or what is also called an ethical equilibrium, is composed of the interactions between a *dispositional framework* (or the personal and professional attitudes, values and beliefs educators hold), a *regulatory framework* (which encompasses “codes of conduct” and case law that guides school and district policies and provides for various levels of sanctions for misconduct), and *professional ethics* (found in the guiding principles of a Code of Ethics). The dispositional framework has typically been addressed by education preparation providers (EPPs) during pre-service preparation and sometimes reinforced during in-service training. However, educators have historically been given little substantive training in the policies, statutes and case law that govern the education profession. Likewise, the profession has created few opportunities to fully discuss the ethical dilemmas that educators regularly face, as well as the risks and vulnerabilities inherent in the profession. Understanding all three frameworks is imperative to guide educators as they navigate the complexities of the profession.

This ethical framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

³For a description of the concepts of time, place and role in relation to boundary violations, see Stone, Carolyn (2015) “Boundary Crossing: The Slippery Slope.” *ASCA School Counselor*. American School Counseling Association.
<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/magazine/blogs/july-august-2011/boundary-crossing-the-slippery-slope>

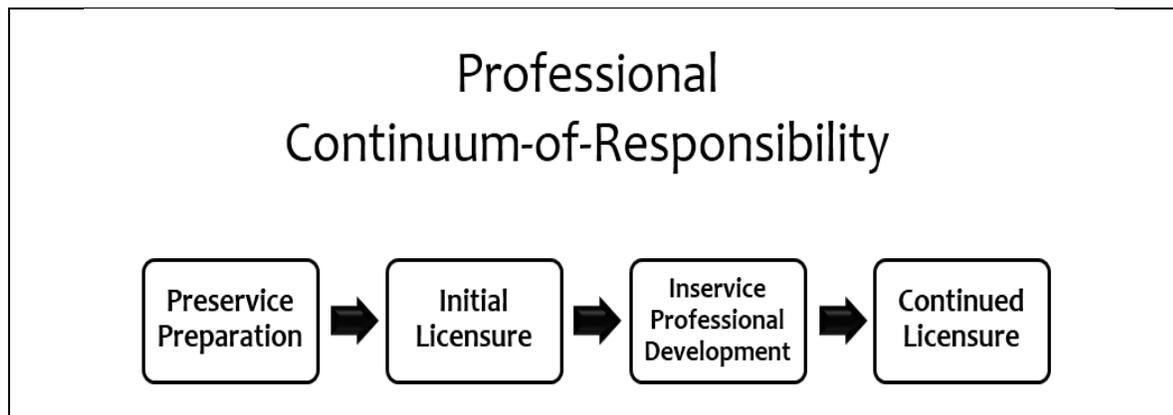


A Continuum of Responsibility to Promote Educator Ethics

There is a need for EPPs, educator licensing bodies, school districts and members of the education profession to work together to ensure educators understand what constitutes ethical decision-making, how to hold themselves and their colleagues accountable for ethical practice, and to ensure these understandings are reinforced throughout their careers as the education system and profession evolves.

This continuum of responsibility is shown on Figure 2.

Figure 2



It is our goal that the MCEE will foster conversations among and between education preparation providers, state agencies, local school districts and educator organizations about the importance of having a common language of ethics, understanding of what constitutes ethical best practice and ensuring that educators are equipped with a framework for ethical decision-making. As noted earlier, states and organizations can adapt or adopt these model standards to meet their particular needs.

Equally important, the MCEE gives permission to the profession and individual educators to have conversations about ethics in a transparent manner, ensure that educators act in the best interests of students, and help protect themselves and colleagues from ethical violations or missteps that diminish the reputation of and respect for the education profession.

Acknowledgements

During the course of this project, the ethical codes of numerous organizations both inside and outside the education profession were examined for their structure, content, and wording of commonly held principles with the education profession. NASDTEC wishes to acknowledge the following organizations as being particularly instrumental in helping the MCEE Task Force develop the Code:

American Bar Association (2013) *Model Rules of Professional Conduct*

(http://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications/model_rules_of_professional_conduct/model_rules_of_professional_conduct_table_of_contents.html)

American Counseling Association (2014) *Code of Ethics*

(<http://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>)

American Educational Research Association (2011) *Code of Ethics*

(<http://www.aera.net/AboutAERA/AERARulesPolicies/ProfessionalEthics/tabid/10200/Default.aspx>)

American Medical Association (2014) *Principles of Medical Ethics*

(<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/medical-ethics/code-medical-ethics/principles-medical-ethics.page>)

American Psychological Association, 2010, *Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of Conduct*

(<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Resource%20Center/Legal%20and%20Ethical%20Issues/Sample%20Documents/EthicalStandards2010.pdf>)

American School Counselor Association (2010) *Ethical standards for School Counselors*

(<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Resource%20Center/Legal%20and%20Ethical%20Issues/Sample%20Documents/EthicalStandards2010.pdf>)

American Society of Plumbing Engineers (nd) *ASPE Voluntary Code of Ethics*

(<https://www.aspe.org/codeofethics>)

The Teaching Council of Ireland (2012) *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*

(<http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/professional-standards/code-of-professional-conduct-for-teachers.1425.html>)

Glossary

The following is a glossary of terms used in the MCEE.

Boundaries:

Boundaries are the verbal, physical, emotional and social distances that an educator must maintain in order to ensure structure, security, and predictability in an educational environment. Most often, the boundaries that are transgressed relate to role, time and place. By respecting contracted roles, appropriate working hours, and the location of the learning environment, secure boundaries are in place for all members of the schooling community and provide structure, security, and predictability.

District/school district:

Often referred to as a “local education agency” or a “local unit of administration,” a “district” in this document is defined as a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state, or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a state as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools. This can include charter schools, magnet schools, virtual magnet schools, regional educational school districts, or other entities falling under the definition above.

Culture:

Culture refers to the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group, including the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time⁴.

Educator:

Educators are the target audience for the MCEE and are defined as licensed educators. These include paraprofessionals, teachers, teacher leaders, student support personnel and administrators. However, others who interact with students who are not under the auspices of an education-related licensing organization such as coaches, school secretaries, custodians or other school staff are encouraged to adopt or adapt this *Model Code of Ethics for Educators*. See a separate definition for “professional educator.”

Emerging Educators:

Emerging educators include individuals in an educator preparation program or newly employed in the education profession, including paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators, and student support personnel.

Ethic of care:

An ethic of care refers to responding with compassion to the needs of students.

Ethical Decision-Making Model:

⁴ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>

An ethical decision-making model is a framework utilized by educators to guide decision-making which includes professional dispositions; applicable laws, statutes, and policies; the *Model Code of Ethics for Educators*; and other guidelines that have been adopted and endorsed by educational organizations.

Fiduciary relationship:

A fiduciary relationship is one in which a person justifiably places confidence in another whose aid, advice, or protection is assumed. Inherent in such fiduciary relationships is an imbalance of power. Examples of fiduciary relationships include attorneys/clients, physicians/patients, counselors/clients, clergy/parishioners and educators/students.

Implicit or Explicit Demands of an Organization:

Implicit demands are often subjective or implied and reflect the culture of the schooling environment. Explicit demands are clearly articulated through mandates, policies, or statutes.

Harm:

Harm is defined as the impairment of learning or any potential action which may lead to physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, or intellectual damage to a student or a member of the school community.

Learning Community:

A group of educators who work with one another to achieve the shared goals of their school and engage in collaborative professional learning to strengthen practice and increase student results.⁵

Multiple Relationships:

Multiple relationships occur when the educator is in a professional role with one or more members of the school community and also has a personal relationship with that person or a member of that person's family. Multiple relationships have the potential to impair objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing his or her functions as an educator.

Professional educator:

A professional educator is a licensed educator who demonstrates the highest standards of ethical and professionally competent practice and is committed to advancing the interests, achievement and well-being of students. The professional educator is also committed to supporting the school community and the education profession.

Proprietary materials:

Proprietary materials are those that are protected from unauthorized use by copyright or other forms of intellectual property rights.

Safe environments/Safety and well-being:

Safe environments refer to a school settings which promote the safety and well-being of all members of the school community and is characterized by the absence of physical, psychological, sexual or emotional harm.

⁵ <http://learningforward.org/standards/learning-communities#.VTVerkv7Q3Y>

School Community:

A school community usually refers to those stakeholders invested in the welfare of a school and its community. It includes school administrators, teachers, school staff members, students, their parents and families, school board members and other community members.⁶

Sensitive Information:

Sensitive information includes but is not limited to student information and educational records, including medical or counseling records.

Student:

A student is a learner attending a P-12 school.

Technology:

Technology refers to tools, systems, applications and processes that can include, but are not limited to, electronic communications networks such as the internet and electronic devices such as computers, laptops, phones and other hardware/software that deliver text, audio, images, animation, and streaming video.

Transparency:

Transparency means openness and accountability with respect to one's behaviors, actions and communications as an educator.

⁶ <http://edglossary.org/school-community/>