

The Code of Ethics for Educators

According to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission

Every Georgia educator is governed by a code of conduct, or code of ethics.

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The Code of Ethics for

The Code of Ethics for Educators defines the professional behavior of educators in Georgia and serves as a guide to ethical conduct. The Professional Standards Commission (or PSC) has adopted standards that represent the conduct generally accepted by the education profession. The code protects the health, safety and general welfare of students and educators, ensures the citizens of Georgia a degree of accountability within the education profession, and defines unethical conduct justifying disciplinary sanction.

The Standards

Standard 1: Criminal Acts—An educator should abide by federal, state, and local laws and statutes. **Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to the commission or conviction of a felony or of any crime involving moral turpitude.** As used herein, conviction includes a finding or verdict of guilt, or a plea of *nolo contendere*, regardless of whether an appeal of the conviction has been sought; a situation where first offender treatment without adjudication of guilt pursuant to the charge was granted; and a situation where an adjudication of guilt or sentence was otherwise withheld or not entered on the charge or the charge was otherwise disposed of in a similar manner in any jurisdiction.

Standard 2: Abuse of Students—An educator should always maintain a professional relationship with all students, both in and outside the classroom. Unethical conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. committing any act of child abuse—including physical and verbal abuse;
2. committing any act of cruelty to children or any act of child endangerment;
3. committing or soliciting any unlawful sexual act;
4. engaging in harassing behavior on the basis of race, gender, sex, national origin, religion, or disability;
5. soliciting, encouraging, or consummating an inappropriate written, verbal, or physical relationship with a student; and
6. furnishing tobacco, alcohol, or illegal/unauthorized drugs to any student or allowing a student to consume alcohol or illegal/unauthorized drugs.

Standard 3: Alcohol or Drugs—An educator should refrain from the use of alcohol or illegal/unauthorized drugs during the course of professional practice. Unethical conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. being on school premises or at a school-related activity involving students while under the influence of, possessing, using, or consuming illegal/unauthorized drugs; and
2. being on school premises or at a school-related activity involving students while documented as being under the

influence of, possessing, or consuming alcoholic beverages.

Note: A school-related activity includes, but is not limited to, any activity sponsored by the school or school system (booster clubs, parent-teacher organizations, or any activity designed to enhance the school curriculum, i.e. Foreign Language trips, etc.)

Standard 4: Misrepresentation or Falsification—An educator should exemplify **honesty and integrity** in the course of professional practice. Unethical conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting or erroneously reporting professional qualifications, criminal history, college or staff development credit and/or degrees, academic awards, and employment history when applying for employment and/pr certification or when recommending an individual for employment, promotion, or certification.
2. falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting or erroneously reporting information submitted to federal, state, and other governmental agencies;
3. falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting or erroneously reporting information regarding the evaluation of students and/or personnel;
4. falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting or erroneously reporting reasons for absences or leaves; and
5. falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting or erroneously reporting information submitted in the course of an official inquiry or investigation.

Standard 5: Public Funds & Property—An educator entrusted with public funds and property should honor that trust with a **high level of honesty, accuracy, and responsibility.** Unethical conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. misusing public or school-related funds;
2. failing to account for funds collected from students or parents;
3. submitting fraudulent requests for reimbursement of expenses or for pay;
4. co-mingling public or school-related funds with personal funds or checking accounts; and
5. **using school property without the approval of the local board of education or governing board.**

Educators

In 2006, 1500 cases were opened for investigation by the PSC. Approximately 1/3 resulted in the recommendation for sanction.

Standard 6: Improper Remunerative Conduct—An educator should maintain integrity when accepting gifts, gratuities, favors, and additional compensation. Unethical conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. soliciting students or parents of students to purchase equipment, supplies, or services from the educator or to participate in activities that financially benefit the educator unless approved by the local board of education or governing board.
2. accepting gifts from vendors or potential vendors for personnel gain where there may be the appearance of a conflict of interest;
3. tutoring students assigned to the education for remuneration unless approved by the local board of education or governing board or superintendent; and
4. coaching, instructing, promoting athletic camps, summer leagues, etc. that involve students in an educator's school system and from whom the educator receives remuneration unless approved by the local board of education or governing board or superintendent.

Note: These types of activities must be in compliance with all rules and regulations of the Georgia High School Association.

Standard 7: Confidential Information—An educator should comply with state and federal laws and local school board or governing board policies relating to the confidentiality of student and personnel records, standardized test material, and other information covered by confidentiality agreements.

Unethical conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. sharing of confidential information concerning student academic and disciplinary records, personal confidences, health and medical information, family status and/or income, and assessment/testing results unless disclosure is required by law;
2. sharing of confidential information restricted by state or federal law;
3. violation of confidentiality agreements related to standardized testing including copying or teaching identified test items, publishing or distributing test items or answers, discussing test items, violating local school system or state directions for the use of tests or test items, etc;
4. violation of other confidentiality agreements required by state or local policy.

Standard 8: Abandonment of Contract—An educator should fulfill all of the terms and obligations detailed in the contract with the local board of education or education agency for the duration of the contract. Unethical conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. abandoning the contract for professional services without prior release from the contract by the employer; and
2. willfully refusing to perform the services required by a contract.

Terms you need to know:

CERTIFICATE: A certificate refers to any teaching, service, or leadership certificate, license, or permit issued by authority of the Professional Standards Commission.

EDUCATOR: An educator is a teacher, school or school system administrator, or other education personnel who holds a certificate issued by the Professional Standards Commission and person who have applied for but have not yet received a certificate. For the purposes of the Code of Ethics for Educators, “educator” also refers to paraprofessionals, aides, and substitute teachers.

STUDENT: A student is any individual enrolled in Georgia’s public or private schools from preschool through grade 12 or any individual between and including the ages of 3 and 17.

COMPLAINT: A complaint is any written and signed statement from a local board, the state board, or one of more individual residents of Georgia filed with the Professional Standards Commission alleging that an educator has breached one or more of the standards in the Code of Ethics for Educators. **A complaint will be deemed a request to investigate.**

REVOCATION: A revocation is the invalidation of any certificate held by the educator.

DENIAL: A denial is the refusal to grant initial certification to an applicant for a certificate.

SUSPENSION: A suspension is the **temporary** invalidation of any certificate for a period of time specified by the Professional Standards Commission.

REPRIMAND: A reprimand admonishes the certificate holder for his/her conduct. The reprimand cautions that further unethical conduct will lead to a more severe action.

WARNING: A warning warns the certificate holder that his/her conduct is unethical. The warning cautions that further unethical conduct will lead to a more serious action.

MONITORING: Monitoring is the **quarterly appraisal of the educator’s conduct** by the Professional Standards Commission through contact with the educator and his/her employer. As a condition of monitoring, an educator may be required to submit a criminal background check (GCIC). The PSC specifies the length of the monitoring period.

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Standard 9: Failure to Make a Required Report—An educator should file reports of a breach of one or more of the standards in the Code of Ethics for Educators, child abuse (O.C.G.A.19-7-5), or any other required report. Unethical conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. failure to report all requested information on documents required by the Commission when applying for or renewing any certificate with the Commission;
2. failure to make a required report of a violation of one or more standards of the Code of Ethics for educators of which they have personal knowledge as soon as possible no later than ninety (90) days from the date the educator became aware of an alleged breach unless the law or local procedures require reporting sooner;
3. failure to make a required report of any violation of state or federal law as soon as possible but no later than ninety (90) days from the date the educator became aware of an alleged breach unless the law or local procedures require reporting sooner. **These reports include but are not limited to: murder, voluntary manslaughter, aggravated assault, aggravated battery, kidnapping, any sexual offense, any sexual exploitation of a minor, any offense involving a controlled substance and any abuse of a child if an educator has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused.**

Standard 10: Professional Conduct—An educator should demonstrate conduct that follows generally **recognized professional standards**. Unethical conduct is any conduct that impairs the certificate holder's ability to function professionally in his/her employment position or a pattern of behavior or conduct that is detrimental to the health, welfare, discipline, or morals of students.

Reporting

Educators are required to report a breach of one or more of the Standards in the Code of Ethics as soon as possible, but no later than ninety (90) days from the date of the educator became aware of an alleged breach, unless the law or local procedures require reporting sooner. Educators should be aware of local policies and procedures and/or the chain of command for reporting unethical conduct.

Complaints filed with the Professional Standards Commission must be in writing and must be signed by the complainant (parent, educator, personnel director, superintendent, etc.).

Who serves on the PSC?

There are 18 members on the PSC—including 9 teachers, 2 administrators, 2 teacher education institution faculty members, 2 board of education members, and 3 business or private sector members.

The Commission notifies local and state officials of all disciplinary actions. In addition, suspensions and revocations are reported to national officials—including the NASDTEC Clearinghouse.

Disciplinary Action

The Professional Standards Commission is authorized to suspend, revoke, or deny certificates, to issue a reprimand or warning, or to monitor the educator's conduct and performance after an investigation is held and notice and opportunity for a hearing are provided to the certificate holder. Any of the following grounds shall be considered cause for disciplinary action against the holder of a certificate:

1. unethical conduct as outlined in The Code of Ethics for Educators, Standards 1-10 (PSC Rule 505-6-.01);
2. disciplinary action against a certificate in another state on grounds consistent with those specified in The Code of Ethics for Educators, 1-10 (PSC Rule 505-6-.01);
3. order from a court of competent jurisdiction or a request from the Department of Human Resources that the certificate should be suspended or the application for certification should be denied for non-payment of child support (O.C.G.A. 19-6-28.1 and 19-11-9.3);
4. notification from the Georgia Higher Education Assistance Corporation that the educator is in default and not in satisfactory repayment status on a student loan guaranteed by the Georgia Higher Education Assistance Corporation (O.C.G.A. 20-3-295);
5. suspension or revocation of any professional license or certificate;
6. violation of any other laws and rules applicable to the profession (O.C.G.A. 16-13-111); and
7. any other good and sufficient cause that renders an educator unfit for employment as an educator.

An individual whose certificate has been revoked, denied, or suspended may not serve as a volunteer or be employed as an educator, paraprofessional, aide, substitute teacher, or any other positing during the period of his or her revocation, suspension, or denial for a violation of The Code of Ethics.

Authority O.C.G.A. 20-2-200; 20-2-91 through 20-2-984.5

Ready to schedule a Code of Ethics Training at your school?

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To find your UD, visit www.gae.org.