OVERVIEW

Model Code of Ethics for Educators

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.

WELCOME

There is a movement growing within the greater P-12 and educator preparation educational communities to ensure educators and prospective educators understand how professional decision-making can impact the safety and well-being of children, as well as the culture and mission of the school. This increased focus on examining, understanding, and informing best practice in educator decision-making is a critical part of the mission of the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC).

Most other professions have a very strong set of principles to guide decision-making around these principles; in fact, all other fiduciary professions have professional ethics. NASDTEC, working closely with its partners, convened a diverse and representative panel of practicing teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals to collaboratively...
and transparently draft a Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE). After a public comment period, the final draft of the MCEE was adopted by the NASDTEC Board of Directors for jurisdictions to adopt or adapt as an ethical guide designed to assist educators in constructing the best course of action when faced with the complexities of P-12 education; establish principles that define ethical behavior and ethical best practice; and to clarify to current and future educators, and to those they serve, the nature of the ethical responsibilities held in common by all educators.

The MCEE principles listed in this publication define ethical behavior, ethical best practice, and ethical responsibilities held in common by P-12 educators. Each principle is undergirded by performance indicators that more specifically define aspects within each principle, which are accessible at the provided links.

By establishing the MCEE, a model of best practice for the profession of education is now available to help ensure that states, educator preparation providers (EPPs), individual schools and districts are effectively equipping educators in ethical understanding and decision making. This critical work will lead to a more intentional emphasis, at national, state, and local levels, being placed on ethics and ethical preparation. Ultimately, not only will ethical violations in education be reduced, children will be safer in classrooms.

Founded in 1928, NASDTEC represents 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 that are responsible for the preparation, licensure, and discipline of educational personnel. Associate members include other Canadian provinces, institutions of higher education, and representatives of other constituent groups with an interest in the preparation, continuing development, and certification of educational personnel.

More information on NASDTEC may be found at www.nasdtec.net. More details on the task force’s work may be found at: Insert new link.

The National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) is an organization of teachers leading in policy, practice, and advocacy. Since the organization’s revitalization in 2012, NNSTOY has been researching professional codes of practice in other professions. As a partner in the development of the MCEE, one of the visions outlined in NNSTOY’s white paper on professionalizing teaching has been realized by the development of a code of professional practice, by practitioners for practitioners. This code is one the five structures present in almost every profession, but missing in teaching as detailed in that paper. NNSTOY is most grateful to NASDTEC for this opportunity to work together to strengthen the profession.

More information about NNSTOY may be found at www.nnstoy.org.

CODE OF ETHICS CONCEPT

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). Understanding all three frameworks is imperative to guide educators as they navigate the complexities of the profession.
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 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.

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.
OUR HISTORY

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.

With an annual conference held since 1928, NASDTEC has taken the lead in fostering communication regarding professional practices across jurisdictional lines as part of its core mission.

In the 1960’s, 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. Among the recommendations was the critical need to develop “model” or national standards for ethics in teaching. NASDTEC—as 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 and 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 were secured, invitations sent and accepted, and on September 26-28, 2014, the MCEE task force convened for its first meeting with NASDTEC partnering with ETS, University of Phoenix, and National Network of State Teachers of the Year to lead the development of the Code. During 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.