

A Code of Ethics for Educators

The Regents established the Professional Standards and Practices Board in 1998, in part to address issues that would ensure “an adequate supply” of highly qualified professionals for all of New York’s classrooms. The Professional Standards and Practices Board (the Board) advises the Regents and Commissioner of Education on issues relating to the quality of teaching and teacher education, and it was charged by the Regents to develop a Code of Ethics. The Board consists of twenty-eight members, including twenty-one K-12 (only nine of whom are practicing classroom teachers) and higher education practitioners, six public representatives consisting of parents, school board members, and community and business representatives; and one non-voting teacher education student.

The Regents charged the Board with developing a Code of Ethics for teachers. A teacher pledge, although not part of the charge, was also developed. The Professional Standards and Practices Board, following a period of public comment, completed work on the Code. The final draft included an important change: the term “teacher” was changed to “educator” to reflect that the Code applied not only to classroom teachers and personnel service providers, but to school administrators as well. The Board also decided to separate the teacher pledge from the Code, but to plan to revisit the issue of a need for a teacher pledge at a later date. The Code of Ethics was approved by the Board of Regents in September 2002.

The six core values or principles articulated in the Code of Ethics to guide practice and inspire professional excellence are:

- Educators nurture the intellectual, physical, emotional, social and civic potential of each student;
- Educators create, support and maintain challenging learning environments for all;
- Educators commit to their own learning in order to develop their practice;
- Educators collaborate with colleagues and other professionals in the interest of student learning;
- Educators collaborate with parents and community, building trust and respecting confidentiality; and
- Educators advance the intellectual and ethical foundation of the learning community.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is NYSUT's position on a Code of Ethics?

NYSUT, from its inception, has always been a strong proponent of high standards for students and teachers. The Code adopted by the Board of Regents is a comprehensive statement of principles, and while not perfect, does a reasonable job of summing up the professional responsibilities that all teachers should aspire to uphold. This draft Code is modeled after the core propositions developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which represents the highest standards of the teaching profession. This language, including the guarantee that the Code not be used for disciplinary purposes, provides a reasonable framework for a Code of Ethics in this state.

Will the Code of Ethics govern teacher discipline?

No. The Professional Standards and Practices Board, at the urging of NYSUT, included language in the Code that clearly indicates the Code is not to be used for local discipline or at the state level for removal of a certificate. Teacher behavior and professionalism are currently addressed in New York State laws, rules and regulations. Education law (Section 3020-a) and Commissioner's Regulations (Part 83) already define issues of unprofessional behavior or conduct, good moral character and local disciplinary actions.

What's NYSUT's position on the teacher pledge or oath?

While NYSUT supports the concept of a Code of Ethics that lays out a commonly held set of principles for all teachers, it does not support a recommendation that teachers be required to take a pledge or oath swearing to uphold those principles. A pledge is not a state requirement for licensure or certification for any of the other professions and, therefore, should not be a requirement for teachers.

How will the Code of Ethics be disseminated?

The Board developed a strategy to make the educational community aware of the Code of Ethics. The Code will be printed on the back of the teaching certificates and made into posters and mailed to all K-12 schools and colleges in New York State. Professional organizations will be asked to help publicize the Code by printing it in their official publications and newsletters. Colleges will be asked to make future educators aware of the Code by including it, when appropriate, in course content and discussions and during ceremonies or events hosted by teacher preparation programs.