Professional Practices

For the 21st Century Leader

About the Author

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Do you recall the first day you entered your classroom as a new teacher? I do, and I vividly remember the enormous sense of responsibility I felt for the education of my first graders. They would learn to read with me, something that would impact their lives forever. I had to get it right. Do you remember when you accepted your first principalship? I do and this time the sense of responsibility was almost overwhelming. I didn't sleep for days before the first day of school. Not only was I responsible for the growth of every student in every subject, but of every teacher. I now recognize and appreciate those restless nights as checks along the way to confirm my beliefs and ethics. I learned long ago that the only real thing I owned was my character and that as I moved into positions with greater responsibility, my professionalism, morals, and character would be critiqued. Acting with fairness, integrity, and honesty became my daily credo, and still is.

The focus for this month's *Professional Practices* is Standard 2 of the **Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015: Ethics and Professional Norms**. My experiences as a teacher, principal, director, and mother have reinforced the belief that the vast majority of us in the field of educational leadership, are passionately interested in improving the lives of the students in our care. You wouldn't be reading professional literature and research, such as this, if you weren't interested in improving, increasing, and enhancing your own and others' attitudes, skills, and knowledge around the ideas of leadership. Over the past 25 years, when I found myself in situations that required tough decisions or difficult conversations, I would evaluate the outcome and reflect on the words spoken and actions taken to see if they revealed my goal to behave in an ethical and professional manner by speaking the truth and acting in ways that benefited children. I felt most productive, anchored, and effective when my moral compass was right. One year, I bought toy compasses for my staff to help us all refocus on doing the right things for the right reasons.

In this era of political posturing, racial tension, and social media, our modelling for students, teachers, and principals is paramount. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration validated this importance and identified in their **Professional Standards** a strong advocacy for creating positive working conditions for teachers and systems that engage all students. Acting ethically and professionally in personal conduct, relationships with others, decision-making, stewardship of district and school resources, and in all aspects of school leadership underpin Standard 2.

I hope you find this issue one to share with your colleagues!

Ethics and Professional Norms

Because we have a daily influence on the lives of children, school leaders and teachers are often held to high standards. In the midst of all of our responsibilities, we're required to serve as strong role models and demonstrate ethical behaviors as we interact with students, colleagues, parents and others. Developing and following a professional code of ethics helps make sure school leaders and teachers act in a professional and ethical manner at all times. Many states have put into statute a code for moral and ethical behaviors for educators and many districts offer professional training in these standards.

Public school educators are held to high standards of behavior because we are entrusted with the well-being of their students. The public expects that our behavior exemplifies ethical and moral integrity. Superintendents, principals, and teachers serve as role models who should recognize that our conduct, both on and off the job, can profoundly impact our professional image. Lapses in judgment can adversely impact students, damage credibility, and erode public trust in schools and the profession.

Additionally, with advances in technology and greater access to social media, the challenges we are likely to encounter have increased in recent years. A 2014 article by Suzanne E. Eckes titled "Strippers, Beer, and Bachelorette Parties: Regulating Teachers' Out-of-School Conduct" points us to the need for more conversations around ethics and professionalism not less. Each case described in this article involves some aspect of social media.

Consequently, educators must develop a keen awareness of and sensitivity to a variety of dilemmas and circumstances we may encounter in our daily contact with students, families, and the community. It is vital that educators make conscious ethical decisions to ensure that our professional practice meets the highest possible ethical standards of conduct and responsibility.

Ethics have always been important, but they rarely get much attention until someone behaves unethically. Business ethics make headline news when fund managers put their personal interests ahead of their clients' financial well-being. Sports ethics become public debate when an athlete is accused of steroid use, cheating, or gambling. Medical ethics surface with each new breakthrough in genetics or the high cost of life-saving drugs. We see examples of ethics every day. We are tested every day in small, and sometimes, big ways. Ethics are especially relevant in the public sector. Political leaders, courts, government employees, and schools are expected to conduct business in a manner that efficiently and effectively uses public resources, while at the same time safeguarding and protecting our rights as citizens.

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015

- **Mission, Vision, and Core Values**

- **Ethics and Professional Norms**
  Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

- **Equity and Cultural Responsiveness**
- **Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment**
- **Community of Care and Support for Students**
- **Professional Capacity of School Personnel**
- **Professional Community for Teachers and Staff**
- **Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community**
- **Operations and Management**
- **School Improvement**

In an educational organization ethics manifest in many ways. Principals are compelled to treat each child fairly; teachers are bound to create a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning; cafeteria workers are responsible for protecting the identity of children receiving free meals; board members are charged to help schools function in accordance with laws, standards, norms, and best practices in the field; administrators are obligated to ensure that school resources are used as intended without mismanagement, fraud, or abuse.

Sonia Nieto states in her book, **Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds:**

Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Practices in U.S. Classrooms, that teaching is a moral endeavor. She writes that although they certainly want their students to shine intellectually, teachers interviewed also recognize that to help students learn to lead consequential lives, they must teach them to understand others who are different from themselves. It is clear that we, all of us, need to recognize that teaching responsibility for others is an important human value to be nurtured. These ideals apply beyond the classroom to the principal's office, the director's office, the assistant superintendent's office, the superintendent's office, and the school board room.

Yesterday & Today

Part II:
Ethics & Professional Norms
Where We've Been & Where We're Going

Accomplish tasks in isolation	Act ethically and professionally in all aspects of school leadership
Determine areas for improvement and sets goals without input from others	Promote the norms of fairness, integrity, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning and continuous improvement
Operate school smoothly and without notice; Students' performance not seen responsibility of school, but result of family background	Place children at the center of education and accept responsibility for each student's academic success and well-being
Conform to implied or set standards of conduct without free expression	Safeguard the values of democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, equity, social justice, community, and diversity
Follow without public question or disagreement	Lead with interpersonal and communication skill, social-emotional insight, and understanding of cultural diversity
Run a safe environment without complaint	Provide moral direction for the school and promote professional behavior

Strategy Alert: Ethics and Professional Norms Conversation Starters
Take a Stand, Case Study, and Problems of Practice

To motivate staff members to share experiences and expertise, place them in situations that cause them to grapple with a reading or a video that requires them to consider the need for ethical decision-making and professional norms.

The active learning strategy of **Take a Stand** explained on page 107 of **Instruction for All Students** would help facilitate dialogue about ethics and norms. Its purpose is to motivate through controversy. To begin the process, identify the main points you want the audience to consider. Create five to ten statements related to those points. Use signal cards with "agree" on one side and "disagree" on the other. When a discussion point is read aloud, audience members hold up their selected agree or disagree card and then discuss their rationales and the pros and cons of their choices.

Another strategy to get people thinking and talking about ethics and professional norms is **Case Study**. There are ample stories available on the Internet and in your local news. One excellent source of twelve scenarios complete with discussion questions is the **Connecticut Teacher Education and Mentoring Program Facilitator's Guide for Ethical and Professional Dilemmas for Educators** available at www.ctteam.org/df/resources/Module5_Manual.pdf. Video clips can also be strong tools in helping teams grapple with ethics and norms. Be sure to share examples of how ethics and professionalism issues have been factors in your own leadership role. Explain the principles that underpinned your decisions in those dilemmas.

What do you do when? … Problems of Practice is another powerful way to engage colleagues in discussions about ethical and professionalism issues that they have faced or are facing right now. Have those working with you identify real-life **Problems of Practice**, write them on pieces of paper, and fold or wad the papers up. Gather the submissions, place them in a container and pull them out of that container in a random order. Read them aloud and have group members identify possibilities and discuss the pros and cons of various approaches to dealing with the anonymously submitted issues.

Possibilities to use as models are
- What do you do when team norms created by consensus are routinely not met and the group is avoiding dealing with that issue? Responses might include
  - Check with the group to see if the norm needs to be revised or eliminated.
  - If the group continues to ignore the norm, ask them to monitor it.
  - Test out any assumptions you're making with the group around the norm. For example, "I want to see if my assumption is correct or not. When the group discussed side bar conversations, I promised to give us all the time to process understanding through "talk time." I'm assuming that I am not giving you enough of that reflective time. Is that accurate?"
  - Have team members self monitor by rating how well they are meeting the norm
- What do you do when you hear a colleague making derogatory comments about another colleague in the lounge, in a public forum, or on social media?

relationships **Ethics** stewardship well-being **Norms** personal conduct integrety leadership democracy **Professionalism** moral direction transparency collaboration continuous improvement social-emotional insight

Making Meetings Matter
Setting Norms and Sticking to Them

Norms for professional behavior help groups move the work forward. Teams need to be granted decision-making authority so that they can create meeting protocols to guide their tasks. Once norms are established, all members of the team have made a commitment to honor the norms.

See pages 88-90 in **Creating a Culture for Learning: Your Guide to PLCs and More** for guidance in establishing norms, sample norms, norms of collaboration, and variables to consider in holding courageous and courteous discussions.

Some areas for consideration in norm development are:
- **Logistics**: frequency, location, length of meetings
- **Timeliness**: when to start and end, will we wait until all are present before beginning, what are expectations for attendance?
- **Courtesy**: how will we show respect for each other when we disagree?
- **Decision-making process:** how will we make decisions and come to agreement/consensus?
- **Workload assignment**: how can we ensure the workload is shared?
- **Setting priorities**: how can we make sure we are working on the right tasks?
- **Implementation of norms**: what do we do if norms are not being followed? Can we revise them? Can we add norms?

District and school leadership team meetings should reflect the values of integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning, and continuous improvement. In districts and schools with collaborative cultures, teams are the norm and everyone is expected to be on a team, Unfortunately, these teams may not always be as productive as they might be. The reasons that many teams are ineffective, or even dysfunctional, include the lack of a clear and agreed upon set of goals as well as a lack of communication and collaboration skills among team members.

Strategy Alert: Establishing Norms

This tool was developed by Brenda Kaylor, Just ASK Senior Consultant, and Stevie Quate, co-director of the Colorado Critical Friends Group.

Steps in Establishing Norms
- Each person in small groups of 4 to 6 write for 1 to 2 minutes in response to the first question.
- Then, each person shares his/her ideas (1 minute per person).
- Next, each person writes for 1 to 2 minutes in response to the next question.
- Each person shares his/her responses (1 minute per person).
- Continue through all the questions.
- All the groups come back together to discuss their proposed norms.
- Work for consensus on the final set of norms.

Questions
- When I think about groups that have worked exceptionally well, I realize that in those groups we…
- When I think about groups that have worked exceptionally poorly, I realize that in those groups we…
- Therefore, I think that for us to work together we need to…

The **Establishing Norms** template is available online at www.justaskpublications.com/ccltemplates (Tool-19).

Once norms are established, it's important to make sure they are adhered to. As mentioned in the **Problem of Practice** on page 4, making observations and checking assumptions can help team members stay true to the norms. The **Data Collection Tool: Use of Collaborative Norms template** (Tool-12) is also available at www.justaskpublications.com/ccltemplates.

Norms of Collaboration
Establishing Norms

Norms, ground rules, or agreements are important for a group that intends to work together on difficult issues or will be working together over time. The norms may be added to or condensed, as the group progresses. Starting with the basic norms builds trust, clarifies group expectations of one another, and establishes points of reflection to see how the group is doing regarding process.

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Data Collection Tool
Use of Collaborative Norms

Behaviors	Participants					
Contributes ideas and opinions (puts ideas on the table)						
Models						
Presumes positive intent						
Clarifies/probes						
Paraphrases						
Summarizes						
Links						
Refocuses						
Checks perceptions						

Resources and References

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Connecticut Teacher Education and Mentoring Program Facilitator's Guide for Ethical and Professional Dilemmas for Educators
Access at www.ctteam.org/df/resources/Module5_Manual.pdf

Teacher Leader Model Standards
• Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium
  Access at www.teacherleaderstandards.org (exemplars, articles, and video clips)
• National Network of State Teachers of the Year
  Access at www.nnstoy.org/download/standards/Teacher%20Leader%20Standards.pdf