

# Essential Ethics for the new Educator

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PCMEA/Collegiate/Pre-Service Workshops

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## A. Summary

What does it mean to be a “fiduciary” or a “moral exemplar?” Do you understand the difference between codes of conduct and codes of ethics? Have you read your Pennsylvania “Code of Professional Practice & Conduct?”

Why is this important? It is essential... not so much to serve as a reminder of the penalties for ethical infractions or spotlighting the occurrences you read or hear about in the news... but, because ETHICS are what we stand for, the values we exhibit in our day-to-day decision-making, the integrity of our profession, and our “making a difference” in the lives of our students. **Besides, most educators have never had full-blown formal ethics training!**

We will examine a few “conundrums” or issues whose solutions may not be clearly discernable or “black and white.” Then, we’ll empanel an *Ethics Jury* of your peers to judge several hypothetical incidents relating to music teacher decision-making.

## B. Targets

Attendees will appraise, critique, differentiate, justify, and internalize knowledge and understanding of:

1. Definitions, philosophy, and practices of teacher ethics, morality, professional standards, responsibilities, and codes of conduct
2. Professional nature of teachers’ relationships with students, parents, other professionals, school institutions, and maintenance of appropriate student-teacher boundaries
3. Values set forth in the Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Practices Commission “Code of Professional Practice and Conduct” and introduction to the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification “Model Code of Ethics for Educators”
4. Ethical dilemmas and recommendations for the avoidance of unacceptable appearances and/or actions

## C. Clinician

Paul K. Fox is State Retired Member Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA), Chair of the PMEA State Council for Teacher Training, Recruitment, and Retention, Artistic Director of the South Hills Junior Orchestra, Steering Committee/School District Representative of the **UPPER ST. CLAIR TODAY** magazine, Admin and Staff Announcer for the Upper St. Clair High School Marching Band, Communications Director and Arts Committee Chair for the Community Foundation of Upper St. Clair, and Volunteer Escort for the St. Clair Hospital.

He retired in June 2013 from 35 years of public-school music teaching and administration. His final job assignment was Performing Arts Curriculum Leader and orchestra/string teacher (grades 5-12) employed by the Upper St. Clair School District (Allegheny County in Western Pennsylvania). As a music educator, he also taught choral music (grades 7-12), vocal/general music (grades K-8), elementary band (grade 4), plays/musicals (grades 4-12), and music theory (grades 10-12).

Since 2012, he has presented 40+ professional development workshops and has written more than 150 articles about care/health/wellness of educators, creativity in education, interview techniques, marketing professionalism, pre-service training, and retirement resources for a variety of websites and publications, most of which are archived at <https://paulfox.blog/>.

Mr. Fox graduated with University Honors from Carnegie-Mellon University, earning degrees in Bachelor of Fine Arts in Music/Viola (1977) and Master of Fine Arts in Music Education (1979).

## D. Primary References

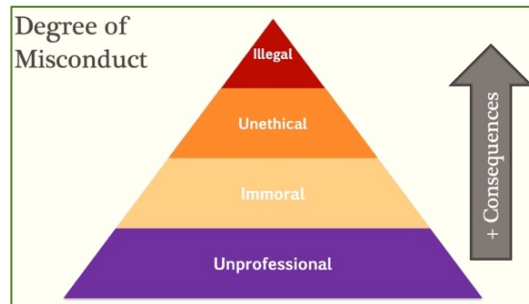
1. Article series and blogsite: <https://paulfox.blog/category/ethics/>
2. Pennsylvania’s *Code of Professional Practice and Conduct for Educators*: <http://www.pspc.education.pa.gov/Statutes-Regulations-Policies-Forms/Code-of-Professional-Practice-Conduct/Pages/default.aspx>
3. Pennsylvania’s *Educator Ethics and Conduct Toolkit* by Dr. Oliver Dreon, Sandi Sheppeard, PA State System of Higher Education, and the PA Professional Standards and Practices Commission: <http://www.pspc.education.pa.gov/Promoting-Ethical-Practices-Resources/Ethics-Toolkit/Pages/default.aspx>
4. Model Code of Ethics for Educators [http://www.nasdtdec.net/?page=MCEE\\_Doc](http://www.nasdtdec.net/?page=MCEE_Doc)
5. Nebraska Professional Practices Commission: <https://nppc.nebraska.gov/>
6. Lien, Joelle L. (2012). Ethical Dilemmas of In-Service Music Educators. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*. Online: [http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Lien11\\_1.pdf](http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Lien11_1.pdf)
7. American Board: “Social Media Rules for Educators” <https://www.americanboard.org/blog/10-social-media-rules-for-teachers/>

### E. "Common Sense" Recommendations

1. Never put anything in email, text, writing, or anywhere on the Internet that can come back to haunt you.
2. Do not engage in gossip about other students or professionals.
3. Avoid unofficial/unsupervised meetings or off-campus personal fraternization with students.
4. Do not transport individual students.
5. Do not share photos or personal information on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.).
6. Avoid physical contact with a student (never touch, hug, hold, push, etc.).
7. In your presence, allow no harassment or language that is of a sexual nature or can be misinterpreted.
8. Do not provide closed-door counseling.
9. Do not give gifts to your students.
10. Report serious medical issues to the authorities (bulimia, abuse, alcohol-use).
11. Report any suspected professional ethics violations of colleagues to administration.

### F. Additional Scenarios for Discussion

1. Mr. S is a high school music teacher who has been tutoring Melissa on AP Music Theory after school for several months. Although Melissa's academic performance has been improving, Melissa's parents meet with the principal about concerns they have regarding Mr. S's relationship with Melissa. During their tutoring sessions, Mr. S has given Melissa gift cards as rewards for her academic progress, driven Melissa home after tutoring sessions, and even begun to communicate with Melissa via text messaging during the evenings. While they have no proof of any impropriety, Melissa's parents are concerned. When the principal meets with the teacher, Mr. S argues that his behavior is not inappropriate and that he is simply offering assistance to a student in need.
2. During lunch, Steven R. often walks around the faculty room giving his female colleagues back massages to help them "relax." Some of the teachers look visibly uncomfortable with the contact and attempt to avoid his massages.
3. Robert M. was a middle school general music teacher who uses the Internet for instruction when students begin working on their composition projects. Due to the small number of computers in his classroom, Mr. M. allowed one of the students to use his desk computer to complete her work. While using Mr. M's computer, the student encountered several sexually explicit websites that Mr. M. had bookmarked in his Favorites.
4. Melissa S. is a third-grade general music teacher in a rural school. Near the end of the year, Rodrigo enrolls in her class, even though he cannot speak English. Ms. S. is frustrated because she feels she does not have the training to work with a student like Rodrigo and complains in class that "people shouldn't come here if they can't even speak our language." One of the students complains to her parents about what Ms. S said.
5. In the hallway one day, students from one of your classes stop and ask you what you think of Mr. T. When you ask why this would be important to them, they explain that Mr. T. had gone on a tirade in their class and complained about your ability as a teacher. One of them says that Mr. T. says that you were the worst teacher in the school.
6. An itinerant instrumental music instructor travels from school to school. After leaving Elm elementary school, the teacher travels to Central elementary. A Central teacher has a biological child who attends Elm elementary. Because of recent discipline issues with some of the special education students, the teacher at Central begins to ask the itinerant instructor about the behavior of some of the children at Elm elementary. The itinerant begins to share some of the concerns and specifics about the IEPs of those children who were involved in a recent behavioral incident.
7. Elizabeth L. taught general music at Webster Hills Middle School. In her free time, Ms. L. was also a cheerleader for a local sports team. As a reward for their performance on a recent exam, Ms. L. performed one of her cheerleading routines for her eighth graders in her classroom. Unbeknown to Ms. L, one of the students in the class used his cell phone to videotape the cheerleading routine. The student posted the video online and the video drew the attention of district personnel and community members. Several parents were outraged and complained about the suggestive nature of the cheerleading routine.



### G. Links for additional follow-up

1. **The Good Teacher: A Story of Sexual Misconduct**  
[www.leadershipcredit.info/docBase/The%20Good%20Teacher%20Storyboard5.pptx](http://www.leadershipcredit.info/docBase/The%20Good%20Teacher%20Storyboard5.pptx)
2. **Crossing Boundaries: Inappropriate Relationships**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwQyoXy0kns>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL02yPaO81qEd7LWJd1yPw0PPHVBmVvPx&v=kgI2OZdzO6Q>
3. **Confidentiality of Student Information**  
<http://www.marion.kyschools.us/docs/Confidentiality%20of%20Student%20Information-%20handout1.pdf>
4. **Educator Ethics**  
[www.sai-iowa.org/Educator%20Ethics%20ppt%20NEW%202017.pptx](http://www.sai-iowa.org/Educator%20Ethics%20ppt%20NEW%202017.pptx)
5. **Teachers' Ethical Dilemmas – What Would You Do?**  
[https://www.redorbit.com/news/education/1141680/teachers\\_ethical\\_dilemmas\\_what\\_would\\_you\\_do/](https://www.redorbit.com/news/education/1141680/teachers_ethical_dilemmas_what_would_you_do/)