



The Ethical Music Educator

PAUL K. FOX // Teacher Training, Recruitment & Retention Council Chair

guid-ance (synonyms): advice, choice, counsel, direction, instruction, intelligence, leadership, management, navigation, supervision, teaching



DID YOU KNOW teachers make as many as 1,500 decisions every day, according to Edutopia (<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/battling-decision-fatigue-gravity-goldberg-renee-houser>) and other sources ([https://gadfyonthewallblog.com/2019/01/05/how-many-decisions-do-](https://gadfyonthewallblog.com/2019/01/05/how-many-decisions-do-teachers-make-every-day/)

[teachers-make-every-day/](https://www.edutopia.org/blog/battling-decision-fatigue-gravity-goldberg-renee-houser) and <https://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/teacher-makes-1500-decisions-a-day/>), which can lead to something the New York Times calls “decision fatigue” (<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/21/magazine/do-you-suffer-from-decision-fatigue.html>)?

► 1

What should be programmed - a "Christmas" or "holiday" or "winter" concert?

► 2

How do you balance the need to hold a student accountable for breaking a law or rule when doing so would jeopardize his/her continued participation and the outcome of a musical group's performance? What would you do if you discovered your soloist, lead, drum major, accompanist, etc. was AWOL or drinking on a school music trip? What if he or she was the one performer that you and the rest of the ensemble counted on for an excellent adjudication?

► 3

Is there ever a time when it is in the students' best interest to ignore the infraction of an existing policy or rule?

► 12

How do you resolve disagreements when you and your administrator do not see "eye-to-eye," or if you have a personality conflict with another staff member?



► 4

What guidelines are used to select student leadership positions (e.g. drum majors, section leaders, soloists, and leads in drama productions) or placements or "seats" in advanced ensembles or music festivals, etc.?

► 11

When considering transactions with vendors (instrumental rental or repair shops, sheet music dealers, festival companies, travel agents, etc.) and college representatives, what influences your decision to grant them access to your music students and program?

Often feeling like the "lone wolf" in their building with no other professional assigned to the same subject matter or courses, music educators are faced with a myriad of instant "judgment calls." Throughout a career of solo planning and presenting opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration and mastery of performing arts in the schools, PMEA members resolve numerous questions and/or conflicts guided by their own "ethical compass," examples such as these "dirty dozen!"

► 5

What determines the priorities of your grading criteria, scoring rubrics, audition rankings, selection of concert literature or lesson material, etc. and defines your "best practices" of "fairness," consistency, and "impartiality?"

► 10

When is it appropriate to model the philosophy "don't ask for permission, beg for forgiveness?"

► 6

How do you address the risks or harm of being "too close" to your students, especially the vulnerabilities of crossing professional boundaries in student/teacher relationships?

► 9

How do you respect a student's privacy rights while mitigating the dangers of meeting with him/her alone and unsupervised to resolve a problem?

► 8

How do you maintain a balance between the pursuit of a singular focus in (competitive) performance excellence vs. application of the principles of appropriate teaching practices (surveying, reading, and singing/playing a broader range of repertoire)? In other words, how many different selections are in your students' folders and rehearsed daily during festival or adjudication season?

► 7

How do you communicate an honest, unbiased appraisal of a poorly performing student's achievement or ability without demoralizing him or her?

STANDARDS, AND ETHICS, AND CODES... OH MY!

PMEA members are “ethical professionals.” Our moral aspirations, the “codes” to which we subscribe and our professionalism are important to us, our students, our programs, and our communities. Essentially, these are our beliefs for which we stand, the values and behavior we model in our day-to-day decision-making to “make a difference” in the lives of our students, and the overall integrity of the profession.

Any initial discussion about PA teacher ethics and professionalism should start with an understanding of and a commitment to the “Code of Professional Practices and Conduct” of the Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Practices Commission (PSPC): <https://www.pspc.education.pa.gov/Statutes-Regulations-Policies-Forms/Code-of-Professional-Practice-Conduct/Pages/default.aspx>.

“Professional conduct defines interactions between the individual educator and students, the employing agencies, and other professionals...” This chapter makes explicit the values of the education profession. When individuals become educators in this Commonwealth, they make a moral commitment to uphold these values”
– PA Code of Professional Practices and Conduct

Passed by the PA General Assembly, the Public School Code of 1949 and the Educator Discipline Act provide statutes (“the teeth”) to administer, regulate, and discipline educators for violations of the Code of Professional Practices and Conduct.

Thomas W. Bailey, a former Westmoreland County educator and currently an attorney, has collaborated in the presentation of Western PA professional development workshops on teacher ethics. He studied the Pennsylvania educator misconduct statutes, regulations, and case law. As a result of this work, he has shared these “five expected practices of educators.”

1. Hold yourselves to be of high moral character;
2. Maintain professional competence in your subject;
3. Temper what you do physically and watch what you say;
4. Show compassion to students and staff, not cruelty;
5. Act as a fiduciary to your students; perform your assigned duties. Avoid negligence.

IN A NUTSHELL ... WHAT IS THE MCEE AND WHO CREATED IT?

In 1997, the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) established an annual conference devoted to the topic of educator ethics, as well as the investigation and adjudication of educator misconduct. Known as the Professional Practices Institute (PPI), the conference is regularly attended by attorneys, investigators, state directors, education preparation providers and district officials. Attendee conversations in the meeting rooms and hallways of the PPI helped fuel the early discussions which eventually led to the development of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE).

Between 2012 and 2014, NASDTEC organized a series of purposeful initiatives – symposiums, surveys, webinars, presentations, meetings with professional organization partners – to affirm the need and assess the support for the development of a professional code of ethics.

To empower P-12 educators with a framework for the countless ethical decisions they make at school every day NASDTEC, in collaboration with practicing paraprofessionals, teachers, school administrators, district superintendents, state department of education officials, and representatives from other accredited educational associations from around the country, wrote the MCEE. This is the first document of its kind with the purpose of examining, understanding, and informing best practices in educator decision-making – “a professional code, developed by practitioners for practitioners, in which to hold themselves accountable...”

Most professions have a strong set of principles to guide decision-making around these principles; in fact, all other fiduciary professions have articulated clear guidelines for professional ethics. The education profession, however, has not adopted a model code of conduct to assist educators with making ethical decisions and to assist educator preparation program providers (EPPs) in preparing their candidates to make ethical decisions. The time has come for the education profession to adopt a common set of professional principles that inform state policy and practice with regard to supporting practitioners and preparing candidates in ethical understanding and to guide behaviors and decision making. – Rationale for MCEE, the National As-

Brief descriptions do not do justice to the full potential of the Code as a tool for educators and the profession.

sociation for State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC)

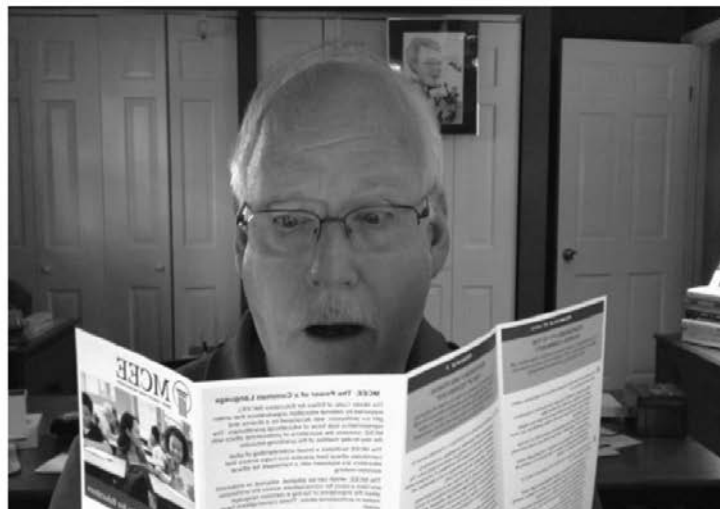
After numerous face-to-face and virtual meetings, the MCEE Task Force disseminated a draft edition of the code for public comment in February 2015. Based on the feedback it received, the final draft of MCEE was unveiled at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. on June 25, 2015.

Like the spokes in a wheel, MCEE encompasses five core principles with equal emphasis. Within these, 86 standards are presented in 18 sections.

- I. Responsibility to the Profession
- II. Responsibility for Professional Competence
- III. Responsibility to Students
- IV. Responsibility to the School Community
- V. Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology

The beauty of the Code – and something that I certainly didn't anticipate – is that its utility to the education profession does not seem to have limitations. The more I work with practitioners as they engage with the MCEE, the more I realize that it cannot easily be summed up with a quick and easy phrase like “professional norms,” “guide to ethical behavior,” or “statement of values.” Those brief descriptions do not do justice to the full potential of the Code as a tool for educators and the profession.

Consider the middle school English teacher whose choice of literature upset some parents: “Using the MCEE, in conjunction with guidelines from the National Council of Teachers of English, I was able to explain the value of the literary selection to the parents and my principal. But just as importantly, I was able to shift the narrative from what ‘I believe is best’ to ‘as teachers, we believe.’”



Or the high school principal who shared with me that the MCEE now gives him permission to have honest, caring discussions with teachers when they may be approaching a compromising situation: “School administrators don’t always feel comfortable discussing those things with a teacher if a line hasn’t been crossed,” he said.

And when an entire elementary school implemented the MCEE into their daily practice, the changes were unmistakable. “Now we are meeting about the micro-steps prior to an issue occurring,” said one teacher, “and its [sic] far deeper than discussing ethical dilemmas – we are discussing the steps that lead to an ethical dilemma.” Another shared that “perhaps the greatest gift of the Code is setting educators on that journey of discussions.” An early childhood teacher proclaimed that “we now feel empowered as professionals.”

Of course, this makes sense.

The interpretability of The Model Code of Ethics for Educators allows for robust professional discussions and targeted applications that are unique to every schooling community. – Troy Hutchings, Senior Policy Advisor, NASDTEC

To view a copy of MCEE, pull-out the brochure in the center-fold of this journal or visit this website: https://www.nasdtc.net/page/MCEE_Doc

This five-minute summary of MCEE is from NASDTEC:
<https://vimeo.com/223323342>

“**A code of ethics sets a higher threshold than regulatory codes of conduct.**”

WHY PMEA ADOPTED MCEE

“Motion from the Council TTRR that the PMEA State Board officially adopt the **Model Code of Ethics for Educators** (MCEE) as published by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, and furthermore, provide professional development on MCEE in future workshops and conference sessions.” *Passed unanimously at the Virtual Meeting of the PMEA Board on July 20, 2020*

A code of ethics sets a higher threshold than regulatory codes of conduct or even a nonprofit organization's bylaws and compliance rules enforced by the government. A code of conduct, such as the Pennsylvania “Code of Professional Practices and Conduct” of the PSPC, provides absolutes for employment, licensure, and/or civil/criminal sanctions. The MCEE document serves more as a general compass to help steer professionals towards sound judgment in their daily decision-making. What is unique about a true code of ethics vs. a code of conduct is that the principles are not defined in exact terms of law or policies, nor do they necessarily model family morals or values on which we as individual educators have been raised. The proposed standards are not about definite issues of right/wrong or black/white, but shades of grey. They are more open-ended, offering opportunities to discuss recommendations for consideration from a set of possible choices based on the circumstances of each ethical dilemma or resolution.

The PMEA Council for Teacher Training, Recruitment, and Retention voted to endorse MCEE during its members' online meeting on October 27, 2019. The motion was carried to the PMEA State Board for MCEE's adoption because this would demonstrate a greater commitment of support and collective

encouragement to exceed the benchmarks of its simple acceptance. Organizations which have chosen to adopt (as opposed to endorse) usually have in place a strategic plan for its communication, implementation, and ongoing education of its stakeholders.

ETHICS TRAINING ON THE HORIZON... PMEA IS “AHEAD OF THE CURVE!”

On January 6, 2020, the PSPC submitted recommendations regarding Chapter 49 for the State Board of Education's consideration, proposing a mandate for future inclusion and expansion of “professional ethics” in educator preparation programs, inductions, and Act 48 continuing education. During its July 8, 2020 meeting, the Board approved these amendments to Chapter 49 – Certification of Professional Personnel, and as of September 2020, members on the PDE Bureau of School Leadership and Teacher Quality are drafting competencies for all college students taking education courses in Pennsylvania to study professional ethics.

However, as far back as 2017 PMEA had already begun presenting local workshops, professional development videos, journal articles, and state conference sessions on “codes, concepts, case studies, and conundrums” and “empaneling ethics juries” for the study of professional decision-making:

PMEA State Conferences

Summer 2018, 2019

NafME Academy Professional Development Videos

January/February 2019

PMEA Webinar (2-part series)

February 2018

Articles in state journal PMEA News

Fall 2018 & Winter 2018

Sample local workshops

- PCMEA Grove City College – October 2020
- Slippery Rock University Freshmen Music Education Majors – October 2018, 2019, September 2020
- PMEA District 5 – February 2019
- PMEA District 7 – October 2017

For PMEA's application of MCEE, here is a video from the Chair of PMEA Council TTRR: <https://youtu.be/olhej7qUGQE>

Plans are underway to produce another PMEA webinar on "teacher ethics" scheduled for early 2021. Please stay tuned for future information about future PMEA-sponsored sessions on "teacher codes of conduct" and the MCEE. ▀

Paul K. Fox is a retired music teacher and administrator from the Upper St. Clair School District. Paul is currently the PMEA State Retired Members Coordinator and Chair of the PMEA State Council for Teacher Training, Recruitment and Retention.



**You are invited to follow-up
by attending the series of two
75-minute PMEA webinar
presentations:**

January 12, 2021

Teacher Ethics, Part 1 – The Basics

Definitions, Scenarios, and the PA Code of Professional Practices and Conduct
co-presented by Paul Fox and Thomas Bailey

February 9, 2021

Teacher Ethics, Part II – Going Beyond

Model Code of Ethics for Educators presented by Paul Fox

REFERENCES

National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) Model Code of Ethics for Educators: http://www.nasdtc.net/?page=MCEE_Doc

Pennsylvania's Educator Ethics and Conduct Toolkit by Dr. Oliver Dreon, Sandi Sheppard, and the Professional Standards and Practices Commission: <http://www.pspc.education.pa.gov/Promoting-Ethical-Practices-Resources/Ethics-Toolkit/Pages/default.aspx>

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education webinar presentation Beyond the Obvious: The Intersection of Educator Dispositions, Ethics, and Law by Troy Hutchings and David P. Thompson <https://smackslide.com/slide/ethical-equilibrium-aacte-2evrqb>

Protecting the Profession – Professional Ethics in the Classroom by Troy Hutchings <https://www.ets.org/s/proethica/pdf/real-clear-articles.pdf>

Education Week/Education Testing Service webinar presentation Professional Ethics – It's Rarely About Right or Wrong by Troy Hutchings <https://secure.edweek.org/media/190402presentation.pdf>

NASDTEC Educator Ethics blog-site <https://www.nasdtc.net/blogpost/1757877/Ethics-and-Educators>

Nebraska Professional Practices Commission: <https://nppc.nebraska.gov/>

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

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