

# Professional Ethics

## All Aboard the *E<sup>3</sup>-Train!*

### Essential Educator Ethics — and Introducing the Model Code of Ethics for Educators

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#### A. Session Description

Teachers make thousands of decisions every day resolving conflicts in pedagogy, enforcement, resource allocation, relationships, and diversity. Many of these are “snap judgments” relying on gut feelings, intuition, past experiences, and a personal moral compass. And, although Johnny Cash may have sung “I walk the line...” in his love song, in education it is often a perilous “fine line” to maintain the standards and appearances of professionalism, integrity, and ethical codes both in and outside the school community.

This workshop will foster interactive facilitated discussions on risk assessment and resolution of ethical disputes and “conundrums” both in and outside the workplace. We will introduce the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) and empanel a mock jury of volunteer attendees to analyze and judge sample (real or hypothetical – “what would you do?”) scenarios for new perspectives in managing day-to-day decision-making in music education.

#### 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/ethics.
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 National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification “Model Code of Ethics for Educators” (MCEE).
4. Methods for evaluating ethical decision-making including the Connecticut State Department of Education's TEAM discussion questions.
5. 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), member and Past State Chair (2016-2024) of the PMEA 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, Staff Announcer for the Upper St. Clair High School Marching Band (40 years), Director of Communications, Arts Committee Chair, and Trustee for the Community Foundation of Upper St. Clair, and Volunteer Escort for the St. Clair Hospital.



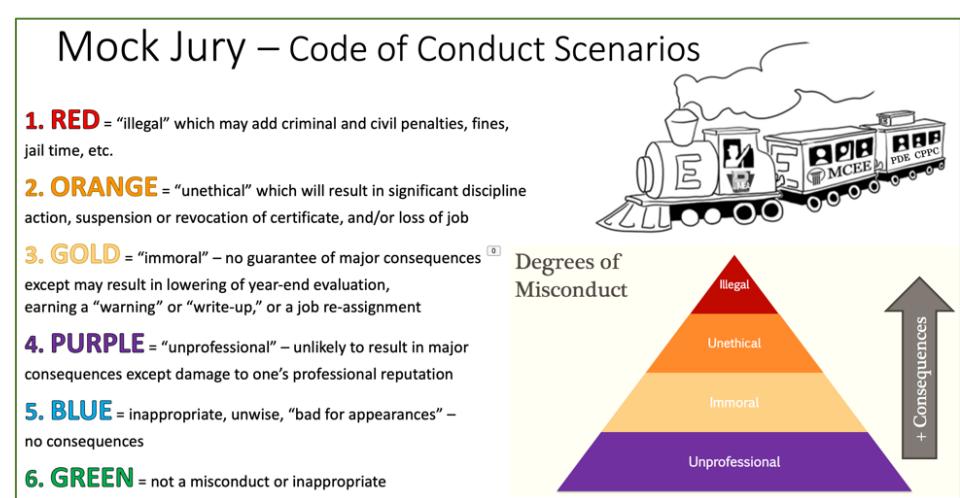
He retired in June 2013 from 35 years of public-school music teaching and administration. His final job assignment was Performing Arts Curriculum Leader and orchestra/string teacher (grades 5-12) employed by the Upper St. Clair School District (Allegheny County in Western Pennsylvania). As a music educator, 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 (all grades).

Since 2012, he has presented 80+ professional development workshops and has written more than 200 articles about care/health/wellness of educators, creativity in education, interview techniques, marketing professionalism, pre-service training, educator ethics, and retirement resources for a variety of websites and publications, most of which are archived at his website: <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. Additional Scenarios for Interactive Discussion of Educator Risk & Decision-Making

1. Mr. S is a high school teacher who has been tutoring Melissa on an Advanced Placement course 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.



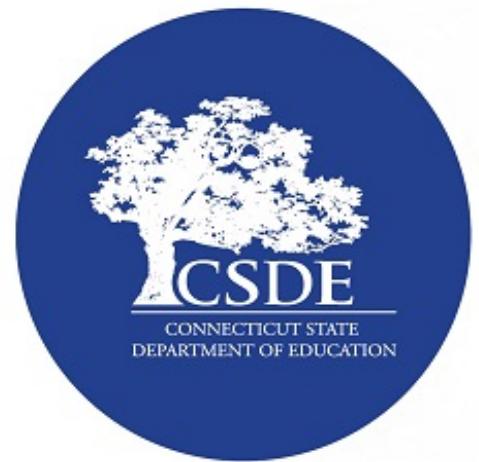
2. Rich W. is a high school band director who gives pet names to the female students in his ensembles. He calls them "darling" and "sweetheart" but always refers to the male students by their first name. Some of the female students are upset with this and arrange to meet with the principal to discuss their concerns.

3. Melissa S. is a third-grade 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.
4. 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.

5. An itinerant special needs teacher 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.
6. Elizabeth L. taught 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.

## E. Additional References and Updated Session Slide Summary

- Articles: <https://paulfox.blog/category/ethics/>
- Slides: <https://paulfox.blog/becoming-a-music-educator/>



### In Depth Discussion Questions (adapted from the CSDE)

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?
2. How could this situation become a violation of your school entity policy, state regulations, statutes, MCEE, or caselaw?
3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the students, fellow educators, and the school community?
4. At this point, what responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?