



## **Common Missteps of the [Georgia Code of Ethics for Educators \(COE\)](#)**

*The purpose of this document is to provide areas of common violations, or missteps, of each standard within the Georgia Code of Ethics for Educators (COE), as well as specific takeaways. For the full definition of each COE standard, please refer directly to the COE available at [505-6-.01.pdf](#).*

### **Standard 1: Legal Compliance**

The first standard in Georgia's Code of Ethics focuses on Legal Compliance. Educators must abide by federal, state, and local laws and statutes. Please consult the employing district for local policies and guidance.

Educators are expected to uphold all federal, state, and local laws and statutes. Failure to do so is a violation of Standard 1 of the Code of Ethics and may result in disciplinary action by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

#### **Common Violations**

- All educators must answer Personal Affirmation Questions (PAQs) when applying for or renewing a certificate. Not answering PAQs accurately and honestly, including not disclosing minor convictions, including shoplifting, misdemeanor marijuana, etc., are common violations.
- It is important all educators carefully read and respond to PAQs. There are helpful PAQ videos available in It is also important to respond to GaPSC inquiries regarding questions that may emerge regarding submitted PAQ responses. Helpful PAQ videos are available in [GaPSC's Video Series](#) that further explain how to respond to PAQs.
- Educators must report any felony, misdemeanor involving moral turpitude, or drug-related charges to the GaPSC within 90 days. Drug-related convictions must be reported to the PSC within 10 days. More information regarding reporting requirements is in COE Standard 8: Required Reports.

#### **Takeaways**

- Follow the law
- Read all applications carefully and adhere to the application requirements.
- Anyone who holds an educator certification must disclose a controlled substance conviction within 10 days to the GaPSC. The 10 day reporting requirement also includes any felony conviction and any misdemeanor convictions involving moral turpitude.
- No matter how old an offense, attest to it when completing Personal Affirmation Questions (PAQs), applications, etc. It is critical to answer YES appropriately as to if there has been a

conviction. YES answers are investigated under Standard 1: Legal Compliance. Not answering PAQs accurately and honestly also violates Standard 4: Honesty.

- Conduct or ethics sanctions in another state must be self-reported to the GaPSC and/or disclosed on PAQs where appropriate.
- Failure to respond to GaPSC's requests for more information results in a revocation.

## ***Standard 2: Conduct with Students***

The second standard in Georgia's Code of Ethics focuses on Conduct with Students. Educators must maintain a professional relationship with all students, both in and outside the classroom.

Appropriate use of public funds and property is paramount. Know your local school district's policy and seek guidance when needed.

### **Common Violations**

- Physical altercations with students
- Inappropriate restraint or not following approved restraint measures;
- Verbal abuse depending on the degree – such cases may be handled locally;
- Becoming too friendly with a student or group of students, such as treating students as peers;
- Having inappropriate conversations with students via social media.

### **Takeaways**

- Be friendly, but not a friend.
- Respect physical boundaries of students.
- Choose appropriate settings and times for communication, and avoid direct electronic communications where possible.
- Do not furnish or allow the use of alcohol and drugs by students.
- Avoid social media pitfalls with students.
- Any sexual contact with a student will result in a revocation.

## ***Standard 3: Alcohol or Drugs***

The third standard in Georgia's Code of Ethics focuses on Alcohol or Drugs. An educator shall refrain from the use of alcohol or illegal or unauthorized drugs during the course of professional practice.

The use of alcohol and/or drugs has no place on school or school district premises or at a school-related activity.

### **Common Violations**

- Gifting wine to other co-workers while on school premises.
- Consuming or using alcohol or drugs prior to going on campus, on campus, on school field trips at any time, or any other school-sponsored event or activity.
- Allowing students access to alcohol at any time, including in your own home.

### **Takeaways**

- Do not use drugs or consume alcohol at school, on school grounds, or prior to any school or school-sponsored activity.
- Ensure there are no drugs or alcohol in your possession, including in your automobile while on school premises.
- Know and understand your local policy about disclosing drug and alcohol arrests.

## ***Standard 4: Honesty***

The fourth standard in Georgia's Code of Ethics focuses on Honesty. An educator shall exemplify honesty and integrity in the course of professional practice.

Educators are held to a high standard in their important role of educating students and ensuring their safety. As always, honesty is always the best policy.

### **Common Violations**

- Answering Personal Affirmation Questions dishonestly.
- Falsifying Individualized Education Plan, IEP, documents, such as documenting a meeting that was not held, falsifying signatures, and backdating meetings.
- Submitting inaccurate leave absences, such as taking sick leave when on vacation.

### **Takeaways**

- Do not submit false or forged transcripts, degrees, or other documentation in the course of professional practice.
- Answer Personal Affirmation Questions, PAQs honestly and accurately. Do not hide prior offenses.
- Do not falsify or omit information related to student evaluations, reasons for leave, or IEP documentation.

## ***Standard 5: Public Funds and Property***

The fifth standard in Georgia's Code of Ethics focuses on Public Funds and Property. An educator entrusted with public funds and property shall honor that trust with a high level of honesty, accuracy and responsibility.

### **Common Violations**

- Improper use of school system property (E.g. watching a movie while at work).
- Stealing weight room equipment.
- Pawning musical instruments.
- Co-mingling of funds.
- Inappropriate handling of fundraiser fees, student activity funds, and athletic fees.
- Collecting funds but not using receipt books.
- Using personal cash apps.

- Inappropriate use of school email to sell for personal benefit, promote political candidates, or political issues.

#### **Takeaways**

- When handling money, make sure to receipt it according to your school's financial guidelines.
- Do not mix funds. Reimbursing school-related funds deposited earlier into personal accounts is not allowable. You cannot reimburse money taken and deposited.
- Use of personal peer-to-peer payment applications is not permitted. Use of school-approved payment applications is allowable depending on the local school district's policies.
- Understand and follow local school district policy regarding use of a school/organization item, equipment, vehicles, kitchens, athletic facilities, etc.

### ***Standard 6: Remunerative Conduct***

The sixth standard in Georgia's Code of Ethics focuses on Remunerative Conduct. An educator shall maintain integrity with students, colleagues, parents, patrons, or businesses when accepting gifts, gratuities, favors, and additional compensation.

Keep personal and public business separate. Educators should ensure appropriate approval prior to providing additional services that financially benefit the educator.

#### **Common Violations**

- Getting paid for two or more jobs during school time.
- Conducting personal business for profit during school hours.
- Not getting permission to provide additional services, such as coaching or tutoring, to students for payment.

#### **Takeaways**

- When handling money, make sure to receipt it according to your school's financial guidelines.
- Do not mix funds. Reimbursing school-related funds deposited earlier into personal accounts is not allowable. You cannot reimburse money taken and deposited.
- Use of personal peer-to-peer payment applications is not permitted. Use of school-approved payment applications is allowable depending on the local school district's policies.
- Understand and follow local school district policy regarding use of a school/organization item, equipment, vehicles, kitchens, athletic facilities, etc.

### ***Standard 7: Confidential Information***

The seventh standard in Georgia's Code of Ethics focuses on Confidential Information. An educator shall comply with state and federal laws and state school board policies relating to the confidentiality of student and personnel records, standardized test material and other information.

Educators should be very intentional in complying with state and federal laws and state school board policies relating to the confidentiality of student and personnel records, standardized test material and other information.

### **Common Violations**

- Sharing confidential information on social media platforms.
- Sharing information outside appropriate settings and with appropriate personnel.
- Sharing confidential information with appropriate personnel but within the hearing of others.
- Using personal email to send/receive a student's education record(s).

### **Takeaways**

- Keep confidential information within secure, school platforms.
- Ensure school records and school files are protected.
- Respect the information and data of your students.
- Avoid social media posts of students and the classroom.
- Be aware of others who may be able to overhear confidential information.
- Student information, including and especially IEP information, is to be protected and only discussed with appropriate individuals when needed and in a private setting.
- Any information located in a student's school file should be protected and never disclosed to anyone in public.

## ***Standard 8: Required Reports***

An educator shall file with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission reports of a breach of one or more of the standards in the Code of Ethics for Educators, child abuse (O.C.G.A. §19-7-5), or any other required report.

Educators should know and abide by specified reporting timelines.

### **Common Violations**

- Not reporting abuse or suspected abuse to appropriate personnel and within specified timelines.
- Not reporting new criminal charges and/or suspected violations of the Georgia Code of Ethics and within specified timelines.
- Not disclosing past and current convictions within specified timelines.

### **Takeaways: Mandated Reporting**

- The Mandated Reporter Law requires reporting of actual or suspected student abuse within 24 hours to the Local Education Agency (LEA), Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS), and/or the District Attorney's Office.
- Teachers, Administrators, School Counselors, Visiting Teachers, School Social Workers, or School Psychologists must report actual or suspected abuse (physical or sexual) to the appropriate person at the school within 24 hours.

### **Takeaways: Georgia Controlled Substances Act**

- Certified individuals must report any conviction of any criminal offense involving the manufacture, distribution, trafficking, sale, or possession of a controlled substance or marijuana.
- Must report to the Georgia Professional Standards within 10 days following the conviction.
- Certification is subject to revocation if the individual fails to report the conviction.

### **Takeaways: Reporting Code of Ethics Violations**

- An educator must report to the GaPSC any alleged or proven violation of one or more standards of the Code of Ethics for educators of which they have personal knowledge.
- The report must be made as soon as possible but no later than ninety (90) days from the date the educator became aware of an alleged breach unless the law or local procedures require reporting sooner.

### **Takeaways: Reporting Past and Current Convictions**

- It is important to disclose past and current convictions within specified timelines.

## ***Standard 9: Professional Conduct***

An educator shall demonstrate conduct that follows generally recognized professional standards and preserves the dignity and integrity of the education profession.

Historically, Standard 9: Professional Conduct is the most violated standard of the Code of Ethics for Educators. Making ethical decisions, especially regarding professional conduct, is an important responsibility of educators.

### **Common Violations**

- Contract breaches and leaving without notice.
- Disrespecting students.
- Any conduct that is detrimental to the health, welfare, discipline, or morals of the student.
- Failure to supervise students.

### **Takeaways**

- Be a professional. Observe personal and professional boundaries.
- Supervise students appropriately and obtain supervisory approval when needed.
- Be aware of those following you on social media and those you follow. Be aware others can post comments on your page that can speak to how others perceive you.
- Show respect for colleagues and students.
- Use social media appropriately, including showing respect for colleagues and students.
- Honor your contractual obligations.

### **Takeaways: Breach of Contract**

- On or before June 1<sup>st</sup>, the GaPSC will not sanction an educator who breaches his/her contract for the upcoming school year.
- After June 1<sup>st</sup>, the educator must show an approved GaPSC Guideline(s) has been met:
  - Spousal Transfer – Unreasonable Commute
  - Documented Illness of the Educator or Immediate Family Member
  - Promotion in the Education Field, which includes the following:
    - Increased Job Responsibility
    - Increased Prestige
    - Appropriate and Reasonable Increase in Pay
- Breach of contracts typically result in a 90-contract day suspension.

### ***Standard 10: Testing***

An educator shall administer state-mandated assessments fairly and ethically. It is critically important to know and follow all testing policy, reporting any irregularities.

#### **Common Violations**

- Intentional errors in the testing process.
- Blatant cheating to influence the outcome.
- Paraphrasing or prompting students' responses.

#### **Takeaways**

- Know testing procedures and policies; follow protocols.
- Acknowledge any mistakes; do not hide them.
- Establish an environment conducive to student learning and test score improvement.
- Report testing irregularities or suspicion of testing irregularities.
- Know that test security is paramount.

Please refer to other resources regarding the Code of Ethics for Educators on the Georgia Professional Standards Commission's website at [www.gapsc.com](http://www.gapsc.com).