



Understanding Educator Ethics

Competency

Educator will leverage research and resources to differentiate between codes of conduct and codes of ethics, supporting the identification and application of best ethical practices when addressing diverse dilemmas.

Key Method

Educators will explore the distinctions between the NEA Code of Ethics, the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE), and state or local codes of conduct. Sharing these insights with colleagues will help elevate the profession and promote ethical awareness. To apply their understanding, educators will analyze an educational ethical dilemma and propose a thoughtful, actionable solution grounded in ethical principles.

Method Components

Professional Codes of Ethics

A growing movement within PK–12 education and educator preparation communities emphasizes the critical importance of understanding how professional decision-making impacts the safety and well-being of children, as well as the culture and mission of schools. While most professions have well-established principles guiding ethical decision-making, the education profession has historically lacked a universally adopted model code of conduct. In its absence, judicial decisions and legislative actions have often governed educators' conduct. This void underscores the need for a professional framework to guide educators in making ethical decisions and preparing future educators for the complexities of their roles.

Code of Ethics vs. Code of Conduct

A professional code of ethics represents a higher standard than regulatory codes of conduct. While codes of conduct outline absolutes tied to employment, licensure, or legal consequences, a code of ethics, such as the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE), provides a proactive framework for mitigating risks inherent in the profession. It supports educators in navigating ethical dilemmas through learning, reflection, and self-accountability. By fostering a deeper understanding of ethical practices, the MCEE offers a foundation for educators to make sound, principled decisions.

The Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE)

The MCEE is a vital resource for current and future educators, addressing the complexities of ethical decision-making in PK–12 education. Developed by educators for educators, it honors public trust and upholds the dignity of the profession. The MCEE:

- Bridges professional aspirations with the daily realities of education practice.
- Enhances understanding of best ethical practices.
- Provides a structured framework for ethical decision-making.
- Facilitates conversations across the profession about shared ethical standards.

The MCEE encompasses five core principles:

1. Responsibility to the Profession
2. Responsibility for Professional Competence
3. Responsibility to Students
4. Responsibility to the School Community
5. Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology

For more information about the MCEE, its principles, and performance indicators, visit www.nasdtc.net.

Distinguishing Codes of Conduct vs. Codes of Ethics

Understanding and differentiating between codes of conduct and ethics equips educators to address ethical dilemmas effectively. Unfortunately,

educators may rely on subjective or inconsistent resolutions without guidance, often lacking transparency.

To prepare for completing this micro-credential, it is highly recommended that you do the following:

- **Watch:** [It's Time and It's Here: Why We Have MCEE](#) by NASDTEC (see Resources).
- **Read and Analyze:** [The National Education Association's Code of Ethics](#), the [National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education's Model Code of Ethics for Educators](#), and your state or local codes of conduct and ethics.
- **Reflect** on the contradictions between these codes. How would you navigate them? Which code would take precedence, and why?

Ethics in Education and Ethical Decision-Making Models: What are they and why are they needed?

Effective, ethical decision-making requires educators to navigate professional boundaries thoughtfully and confidently. A culture of silence often exists among educators, stemming from fears of consequences when addressing ethical dilemmas. This micro-credential aims to break that silence and elevate the profession by empowering educators to share resources and guide peers through ethical decision-making processes.

Historically, education has lacked a unified code of ethics, leaving educators to operate under policies and regulations they may not fully understand. In 1915, Ontario's Minister of Education observed, "No profession can really exist without having a code of ethics to guide the conduct of its members. Doctors, lawyers, and clergymen have their codes, but teachers can scarcely be said to have such a code. Until they have developed a professional spirit which is characterized by loyalty to the recognized standards, they cannot rank with the learned professions" (Campbell, 2000).

As emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) become increasingly common in educational settings, ethical decision-making models can help educators assess their own use of these tools—particularly in terms of responsible and equitable implementation. For example, when using AI to support instruction or manage administrative tasks, educators should consider potential impacts on student privacy, bias, and fairness.

Further Reading

Explore the following resources to deepen your understanding of ethics and ethical decision-making models:

1. [A Framework for Ethical Decision Making](#) by the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University (see Resources).
 - Clarify misconceptions about ethics and review five approaches to guide decision-making.
 - Study the five sources of ethical standards.
2. [Ethical Decision Making](#) by the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics (see Resources).
3. [Five Steps to Better Ethical Decision Making](#) by Arthur Dorbrin in *Psychology Today* (2012) (see Resources).
4. [Ethics Checklist: Ten Tests of Ethicality](#) by Dr. Doverspike.

Supporting Rationale and Research

Harrison, L. K. (2019). Educator misconduct in Idaho: A quantitative analysis (Order No. 13426867). Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2175705732). Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/openview/c1bee69a25f9d5a904182583c3f54f74/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

Cliffe, J., & Solvason, C. (2021). The Messiness of Ethics in Education. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 20(1), 101–117. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-021-09402-8>

afi, Z., Motallebzadeh, K., & Ashraf, H. (2018). Developing, localizing & validating code of professional ethics through PLS-SEM: EFL university instructors' perspectives. *Cogent Education*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2018.1492340>

Kemman, H. R. (2019). Ethical school leadership: The conceptions and practices secondary principals use to maintain ethical context and relationships in their schools (Order No. 13810380). Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2201789195). Retrieved from <https://scholarspace.library.gwu.edu/etd/mg74qm740>

Maxwell, B., Tremblay-Laprise, A.-A., Fillion, M., Boon, H., Daly, C., Hoven, M., Heilbronn, R., Lenselink, M., & Walters, S. (2016). A five-country survey on ethics education in preservice teaching programs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 67(2), 135–151.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294105993_A_Five-Country_Survey_on_Ethics_Education_in_Preservice_Teaching_Programs

Özkan, S., & Güngör, C. (2021). Ethics of the teaching profession from the perspective of students according to the gender variable. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 11(4), 265-277. Retrieved [PDF] from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1309655.pdf>

Resources

Ethics and Codes of Ethics in Education – What are they?

Video: [It's Time and It's Here](#)

[Model Code of Ethics for Educators \(MCEE\)](#)

[Code of Ethics for Educators | NEA](#)

[Code of Ethics for Early Childhood Educators | NAEYC](#)

Video: [Exploring the Model Code of Ethics for Educators](#)

Ethics in Education and Ethical Decision-Making Models: What are they and why are they needed?

[Ethical Decision Making](#)

[Five Steps to Better Ethical Decision Making](#)

[Ethics Checklist: Ten Tests of Ethicality](#)

Additional Resources

[Professional ethics in teaching: Toward the development of a code of practice.](#)

[Code of Ethics with Troy Hutchings and Phil Rogers \(Part 1 of 2\)](#)

[Code of Ethics with Troy Hutchings and Phil Rogers \(Part 2 of 2\)](#)

[Overview of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators \(MCEE\)](#)

[Beyond the Classroom: The Importance of Ethics in Education](#)

[The Model Code of Ethics for Educators](#)

[Rationale for the MCEE](#)

[National Council for the Advancement of Educator Ethics \(NCAEE\)](#)

[Focusing on Ethics: Smartphones in the Classroom](#)

[Blurred Lines: Protecting educators from social media mishaps](#)

[ESP Professional Growth Continuum | NEA](#)

[Great Teaching and Learning: Creating the Culture to Support Professional Excellence](#)

[Code of Ethics for Educators | NEA](#)

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3 and be proficient for all components in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

300-500 words

Please use the suggested word count as a guide to answer the following contextual questions. This will help our assessors understand your current context for working on this micro-credential.

Please answer the following contextual questions to help our reviewers understand your current situation. Do not include any information that will make you or others identifiable to our reviewers.

1. List your NEA career/membership category, specific position and title, number of years working in education and a basic description of your worksite (grades, student population), community information (urban/rural/suburban), and other relevant information.
2. Describe your current knowledge of ethics in education.
 - Have you had any training in educational ethics?
 - How do you know if something is ethical? Be sure to fully explain your response with examples and details.

Passing: Responses completely answer each question and include specific examples that clearly illustrate understanding. Writing is organized and easy to understand.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following **three artifacts**. *Please do not include any information that will make you or your students identifiable to your reviewers.*

Artifact 1: Create a resource for colleagues: Codes of Ethics and Highlights Explained

Create and submit a visually engaging resource designed to share with your colleagues. The resource should highlight key points from the NEA Code of Ethics, the Model Code of Ethics for Educators, and your state or local codes of conduct and ethics. Choose a format that is easily shareable and accessible to a broad audience, such as a poster, newsletter, or slideshow presentation. Ensure your resource includes **at least three specific examples**, situations, or scenarios that demonstrate the importance of these codes in your area of the profession, helping colleagues understand their practical relevance.

Reminder: *To protect the privacy of others, please use pseudonyms when discussing ethical dilemmas from your personal experiences, and to protect the privacy of minors, please follow your district's policies regarding photographing students.*

Artifact 2: Description of Implementation (250-500 words)

Describe how you shared your Artifact 1 resource with colleagues. Include:

- A discussion of feedback you received from colleagues;

- How you considered the needs of diverse populations;
- What changes you would make to the resource to use again in the future

Artifact 3: Ethical Dilemma Case Study is a culminating final project. (500-800 words)

Identify an ethical dilemma you have personally encountered in your professional practice as an educator. The dilemma should be drawn from your own lived experience, not a hypothetical or second-hand example. Use the codes of conduct and codes of ethics explored in this micro-credential, along with other relevant resources, to guide your analysis of the dilemma. Provide recommended solutions supported by solid evidence and sound reasoning. If selecting an AI-related scenario, be sure to consider how the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) and local policies apply.

Using pseudonyms, identify all stakeholders involved, reflect on the perspectives of each key player, and **outline two possible alternatives** for addressing the dilemma. For each alternative, analyze the potential consequences and recommend the most appropriate course of action. Support your recommendation with clear reasoning and reference guiding principles, the Codes of Ethics and Conduct examined in this micro-credential, and any applicable federal, state, or district laws and policies.

Reminder: To protect the privacy of others, please use pseudonyms when discussing ethical dilemmas from your personal experiences and, to protect the privacy of minors, please follow your district's policies regarding photographing students.

Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	Basic	Developing
Artifact 1: Create a Resource	<p>The resource clearly highlights key points from the NEA Code of Ethics, the Model Code of Ethics for Educators, and state or local codes of conduct and ethics.</p> <p>The chosen format is accessible and well-suited for sharing with a broad audience.</p> <p>Includes three or more specific examples, situations, or scenarios that effectively demonstrate the importance of these codes in the educator's professional context.</p> <p>The resource connects the codes to professional practice, providing clarity and relevance for colleagues.</p>	<p>The resource includes basic information on the NEA Code of Ethics, the Model Code of Ethics for Educators, and state or local codes of conduct and ethics.</p> <p>The chosen format is somewhat accessible but may not be ideal for wide sharing.</p> <p>Includes at least two specific examples, situations, or scenarios, though the connections to professional practice may lack depth or clarity.</p> <p>The resource provides a general understanding of the codes but may not fully demonstrate their importance in the educator's professional context.</p>	<p>The resource includes limited or incomplete information on the NEA Code of Ethics, the Model Code of Ethics for Educators, or state or local codes of conduct and ethics.</p> <p>The chosen format is not well-suited for sharing with a broad audience.</p> <p>Includes fewer than two specific examples, situations, or scenarios, with minimal or unclear connections to professional practice.</p> <p>The resource does not adequately convey the relevance or importance of these codes for colleagues.</p>

<p>Artifact 2: Describe Implementation of Artifact 1</p>	<p>The description is complete and includes important details about how the resource was shared with peers.</p> <p>And Includes a summary of the feedback received from peers.</p> <p>And Includes information about revisions needed with an explanation as to why.</p>	<p>The description is incomplete, lacking important details about how the resource was shared with peers.</p> <p>And/or Does not include a summary of the feedback received from peers.</p> <p>And/or Does not include information about revisions needed with an explanation as to why.</p>	<p>The description missing.</p> <p>And/Or Does not include a summary of the feedback received from peers.</p> <p>And/Or Does not include information about revisions needed with an explanation as to why.</p>
<p>Artifact 3: Ethical Case Study</p>	<p>The case study clearly identifies an ethical dilemma the educator personally encountered in their professional practice and applies the codes of conduct and codes of ethics explored in this micro-credential, along with other relevant resources, to guide a thoughtful analysis.</p> <p>All stakeholders are identified using</p>	<p>The case study identifies an ethical dilemma the educator personally encountered in their professional practice and includes limited or surface-level references to the codes of conduct and codes of ethics explored in this micro-credential or other relevant resources.</p> <p>Stakeholders are identified using pseudonyms, though</p>	<p>The case study provides a vague, incomplete, or generalized description of an ethical dilemma that is not clearly grounded in the educator’s own professional practice and demonstrates limited or no use of the codes of conduct or codes of ethics explored in this micro-credential.</p> <p>Stakeholders may not be clearly identified or</p>

	<p>pseudonyms, with detailed reflections on their perspectives.</p> <p>Two viable alternatives are outlined, and the potential consequences of each are thoroughly analyzed.</p> <p>The recommended course of action is well-supported by clear reasoning and references to guiding principles, Codes of Ethics and Conduct, and relevant federal, state, or district laws and policies.</p> <p>The submission is well-organized and demonstrates depth of understanding.</p>	<p>reflections on their perspectives may lack detail.</p> <p>Two alternatives are presented, but the analysis of consequences may be underdeveloped.</p> <p>The recommended course of action is supported by reasoning, though references to guiding principles, Codes of Ethics and Conduct, or laws and policies may be limited.</p> <p>The submission is somewhat organized and demonstrates a basic understanding.</p>	<p>pseudonyms may be missing.</p> <p>Alternatives are not clearly outlined, and the analysis of consequences is minimal or absent.</p> <p>The recommended course of action is unsupported or lacks clear reasoning, with few or no references to guiding principles, Codes of Ethics and Conduct, or laws and policies.</p> <p>The submission lacks organization and demonstrates a limited understanding.</p>
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Part 3. Reflection

(300-500 words)

Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

Please answer the following reflective prompt. *Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.*

Reflect on how your new understanding of ethical principles and the level of risk, gained through this micro-credential, will influence your approach to navigating risky situations. Specifically, consider interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and the broader community.

In your response, be sure to include:

- Clear evidence of how this micro-credential has positively impacted your professional practices;
- Specific examples from your personal or work experiences that show how it has contributed to student success;
- Actionable steps you plan to take to integrate the knowledge and strategies into your daily practice;
- How you will apply this learning to make ethical decisions and foster a safe, equitable educational environment.

Passing:

- Reflection clearly demonstrates that this activity has positively impacted both educator practice and student success.
- Claims are supported by specific examples drawn directly from personal and/or work-related experiences.
- Reflection includes specific, actionable steps that outline how the new learning will be effectively integrated into future professional practices.