



Connecticut's Teacher Education And Mentoring Program

Ethical and Professional Dilemmas
for Educators

Facilitator's Guide

Understanding the Code
of Professional Responsibility for Educators

January 2012

Module 5– Phase I Pilot





Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Organization and Format of the Ethical Scenarios	4
Using the Scenarios (Sample Process)	5
<i>I. Situations Involving Students</i>	
Scenario 1 – <i>Electronic Communications with Students</i>	6-9
Scenario 2 - <i>Transporting Students</i>	10-13
Scenario 3 - <i>Contact with Students</i>	13-15
<i>II. Situations Involving Professional Ethics</i>	
Scenario 1 – <i>Use of Social Network</i>	16-18
Scenario 2 - <i>DUI Convictions</i>	19-21
Scenario 3 - <i>Teacher Documentation</i>	22-24
<i>III. Situations Involving Community and Family</i>	
Scenario 1 – <i>Teacher Public Behavior</i>	25-27
Scenario 2 – <i>Student Confidentiality</i>	28-30
Scenario 3 – <i>Teacher Using Position for Personal Gain</i>	31-33
<i>IV. Situations Involving Bullying</i>	
<i>Introduction to Situations Involving Bullying</i>	34
<i>Scenario 1 – Emotional Bullying</i>	35-37
<i>Scenario 2 – Cyberbullying</i>	38-40
<i>Scenario 3 – Physical Bullying</i>	41-43
The Connecticut Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators	44-46
Program Contacts	47



Introduction

The education profession is vested by the public with a trust and responsibility requiring the highest ideals of professionalism. Therefore, the educator accepts both the public trust and the responsibilities to practice the profession according to the highest possible degree of ethical conduct and standards. Such responsibilities include commitment to the students, the profession, the community and the family.

Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators 2010 Preamble- Connecticut State Department of Education (2009)

Public school educators are held to high standards of behavior because they are entrusted with the well-being of their students. The public expects that their behavior exemplifies ethical and moral integrity. Teachers serve as role models who should recognize that their conduct, both on and off the job, can profoundly impact their professional image. Lapses in judgment can adversely impact students, damage teachers' credibility and erode public trust in schools and the profession. Additionally, with advances in technology and greater access to social media, the challenges educators are likely to encounter have increased in recent years. Consequently, educators must develop a keen awareness and sensitivity to a variety of dilemmas and circumstances they may encounter in their daily contact with students, families and the community. It is vital that educators make conscious ethical decisions to ensure that their professional practice meets the highest possible ethical standards of conduct and responsibility.

The purpose of this publication is to provide a collection of scenarios to help educators become more aware of the ethical dimensions of their profession. These brief scenarios provide educators the opportunity to engage in collegial discussions about situations that could result in career threatening consequences. Although the descriptions provided are fictional, they are based on actual situations and cases that have led to negative consequences ranging from personal and public embarrassment to license revocation, termination, criminal and civil liability.

Please note, this activity has not been designed to unduly raise fears or to prescribe a specific moral/ethical code. It is intended to be a resource for educators to help discuss, recognize and analyze situations that could result in public and professional harm. For the purpose of these discussions, "educator" includes superintendents, administrators, teachers, special services professionals, coaches, substitute teachers and paraprofessionals. Like most ethical challenges, some issues may have simple solutions while others will require educators to employ their best professional judgment.

ORGANIZATION AND FORMAT OF THE ETHICAL SCENARIOS

Educators rarely have the opportunity to openly discuss many of the issues raised in the following scenarios. Consequently, facilitators may observe various levels of discomfort ranging from a heightened concern about having any student interaction that could be misinterpreted to personal disagreements about whether or not the examples provided truly represent ethical dilemmas.

All reactions are legitimate. It is the fundamental nature of conversations like these to not only produce some discomfort, but also to offer opportunities for discussion, self reflection and learning.

Facilitated conversations are meant to raise teachers' level of awareness about responsible, professional behavior. Bringing beginning teachers, their mentors, as well as other staff members together to share perspectives will enhance the conversations and likely result in richer dialogue. Facilitators should establish an understanding with the group that the purpose of these discussions is to recognize that there are professional boundaries. The discussions are **not** meant to suggest that teachers should refrain from building and maintaining meaningful relationships with their students, colleagues and community to promote school success.

The following scenarios are provided as a way for educators to carefully examine and discuss possible strategies for dealing with ethical dilemmas. Many have been taken from the media here in Connecticut and across the nation. These scenarios present an opportunity for teachers to outline specific issues raised in the scenarios, recognize possible consequences and generate alternative considerations that would result in a more positive outcome.

The scenarios are organized in the following categories:

- I. Situations involving students
- II. Professional ethical situations
- III. Community and family situations
- IV. Bullying situations

The scenarios are based on the structure of the [*Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators*](#) which should help guide the discussion and analysis of each scenario.

Facilitating the Conversations

Districts have the opportunity to select the facilitator for the discussion of the scenarios. It is recommended that the facilitator be knowledgeable about district policies and procedures as well as the [*Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators*](#) within the *Common Core of Teaching*. For example, facilitators could be

- District Facilitators,
- Human Resource Directors,
- Building Administrators,
- Central Office Administrators or
- Teacher Leaders.

USING THE SCENARIOS

There are numerous ways for districts to use these scenarios. You may organize the **Facilitated Conversations** to best meet the needs of your district. Below is one process that *may* be used to facilitate the conversations within a two hour timeframe. Each scenario discussion should take approximately 20 – 30 minutes.

Sample Facilitated Conversation Process:

1. Prior to conducting the facilitated conversations, instruct participants to review the [Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators](#). *Be sure participants have a copy of the Code.*
2. Plan in advance which scenarios you will discuss. **Legislation mandates that at least one of the scenarios include a situation involving bullying (Category IV).** Select at least two to three additional scenarios which are most relevant to your district. **Provide each participant with copies of the selected scenarios and corresponding questions from the Participant’s Workbook. Create a sign-in sheet to keep for your records.**
3. Use the PowerPoint provided to set the purpose for the facilitated conversations. You may want to ask participants to review the PowerPoint prior to the scheduled meeting or use it to frame the conversation at the start of the meeting.
4. Review the first selected scenario using the guiding questions. Instruct participants to respond to the questions in the order listed as the discussion will build from one question to the next. Participants may work in small groups to develop responses and then share several of their responses with the entire group.
 - *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
 - *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school/district policies?*
 - *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?*
 - *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*
5. Use the provided section of the [Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators](#) which relates to the specific scenario to develop a deeper understanding of the educators’ responsibility to students, community and the profession.
6. Close the discussion by summarizing the key points and strategies to effectively handle a similar situation. Use the discussion points provided in the guide to assist you in both small and large group discussions.
7. Repeat the process with the remaining scenarios.
8. **Final Reflection:** on page 28 of the Participant’s Workbook, there are six questions provided that can be used as a final reflection. You may select to have participants respond to one or more of the questions and collect their response as an exit ticket at the end of the session.
9. **Next Steps:** Direct beginning teachers to login to TEAM and complete the online questions. Once they have completed the online questions, they will have completed the Module 5 requirements for this year.

Please note: The discussion points provided in the guide are by no means exhaustive and it is not mandatory that all points are discussed. Your participants may raise issues, discuss potential negative consequences and consider alternative actions beyond what is included in the guide.

Suggestions for Use of Participant's Workbook

The **Participant's Workbook** contains 12 scenarios available for use in the facilitated discussions. Also included behind each scenario is a page for participants to collect their thoughts in response to the questions asked.

As you plan your facilitated conversation, you may wish to reproduce only some of the available scenarios to customize the workbook as you like. For example, you may reproduce one scenario from each of the categories listed below along with the final reflection page. Teachers can keep the completed workbook for reference during completion of the online survey but you may wish to collect the final reflection page as feedback and documentation of attendance.

Situations Involving Students

Scenario 1- *Electronic Communications with Students*

Scenario 2- *Transporting Students*

Scenario 3- *Contact with Students*

Situations Involving Professional Ethics

Scenario 1- *Use of Social Networks*

Scenario 2- *DUI Convictions*

Scenario 3- *Teacher Documentation*

Situations Involving Community and Family

Scenario 1- *Teacher Public Behavior*

Scenario 2- *Student Confidentiality*

Scenario 3- *Teacher Using Position for Personal Gain*

Situations Involving Bullying

Scenario 1- *Emotional Bullying*

Scenario 2- *Cyberbullying*

Scenario 3- *Physical Bullying*

I. Situations Involving Students

Scenario 1

Electronic Communications with Students

Ms. K is a veteran teacher who is very popular with her students. She frequently offers students extra help after school, so it's not uncommon to see students visiting her classroom after school. She has tutored one of her students, "Melissa," in a variety of subjects over a two year period. During that time, Ms. K has emailed and texted "Melissa's" cell phone using her personal email address. At first, the exchanges were very general; sometimes unrelated to school work (e.g., asking Melissa about a sick family member, or how she was getting along with friends). Recently, the student began to text her teacher about more personal feelings.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT:

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:

(J) Create an emotionally and physically safe and healthy learning environment for all students

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:

(A) Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her actions reflect directly upon the status and substance of the profession; district policies, or laws.

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

(f) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:

(C) Sexually or physically harass or abuse students;

(g) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall not:

(F) Engage in any misconduct which would impair his or her ability to serve effectively in the profession.

I. Situations Involving Students

Scenario 1

Electronic Communications with Students

Context for communication with students through personal email and texting: Across the country, school officials are grappling with the growth of social media and the implications for their schools. Technological communication between students and teachers outside of school is often at the heart of the problem. More and more, school officials are making ethical and policy decisions balancing the ease of communication with student safety and decorum. Scores of teachers have e-mailed or texted their way into the headlines, crossing the bounds of appropriate relationships with students by engaging in inappropriate emailing and/or texting. Often, the problem with this form of communication is that it can obscure the boundaries between teacher and student. It is important for educators to understand the benefits as well as the dangers of using electronic communication with students.

Discussion Questions:

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

- Although Ms. K has made an attempt to make a personal connection with her student, Melissa, she is using her personal email and sending text messages that are non school related that may be viewed as too personal and could lead to serious issues. Ms. K's conversations may be considered inappropriate. A teacher-student relationship can begin very innocently but then progressively become more personal in ways that are inappropriate. It is obvious that Melissa feels comfortable enough with Ms. K to engage in more personal issues and it is a challenge for teachers to find an appropriate balance.
- Teachers should be approachable but they are professionals and should maintain a professional distance. The way Ms. K responds to the more personal issues can put her at risk of crossing the bounds of an appropriate relationship with a student.
- Ms. K is in a vulnerable position. If Ms. K continues to communicate with the student in this way, Melissa's family may accuse her of behaving inappropriately.
- Texts and emails are not private. They can be seen by others, forwarded and/or copied and printed. Out of context, they may appear to be inappropriate and lead to a violation of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators. Depending on how personal they are, a teacher may also be subject to investigation and possibly lose her certification.

2. *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school/district policies?*

- It is the teacher’s professional responsibility to create an emotionally and physically safe and healthy learning environment. The personal nature of the email/texting conversations may produce an emotionally unsafe environment. Melissa, may begin to feel uncomfortable being in Ms. K’s class after revealing information that is too personal.
- Ms. K has an obligation to report anything that may put a student at risk. If Melissa reveals personal information that may put her in danger, Ms. K. has an obligation to report it to the appropriate authorities.
- The community has an expectation that a teacher will behave in a professional manner. Ms. K’s behavior may be viewed as unprofessional and leave her open to possible claims of misconduct with a student.
- Many districts are developing policies regarding electronic communication with students. District policies around electronic communication must be shared with all staff. Ms. K may be in violation of her district’s policy.

Discuss your district’s policy regarding electronic communication.

3. *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?*

- Although the communication with Melissa may be well intended, how the messages may be translated by others who may be privy to them (friends, parents, siblings etc.) can greatly vary. Depending on the nature of the personal information shared by both Melissa and Ms. K, even perception of an inappropriate relationship can impact Ms. K’s reputation and continued employment if complaints are filed against her.

Share existing policies or brainstorm a list of possible rules governing the use of email and texting . Some ideas include the following, but allow your teachers to add their own ideas to the list:

- *be careful if talking with students remotely– a good rule of thumb: “If it is inappropriate to say in person, it is inappropriate to text*
- *use common sense*
- *be sure your communication is transparent, and accessible*
- *keep it professional*

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- Texts and emails are not private. Ms. K should stop emailing and texting Melissa any kind of personal messages. However, she should make every attempt to maintain a relationship with the student and enlist assistance from colleagues to provide guidance.
- Ms. K is obligated to report anything shared by Melissa to district administrators if there is fear of harm. Teachers and other school personnel are considered “mandated reporters.” A mandated reporter who has “reasonable cause to suspect or believe” that a child is being abused, neglected or placed in imminent risk of serious harm must follow DCF reporting procedures. Conn. Gen. Statute 17a-101a.
- Ms. K may need to examine her own intentions. Is she attempting to fulfill a personal need or void in her own life? The teacher must recognize the boundaries in the professional teacher/student relationship.
- Use the school based email to send messages to students and their families rather than personal emails or text messages.
- Issues pertaining to personal matters should not be discussed through text messaging. Face to face conversations, in school, with an open door, are most appropriate while still maintaining a level of student confidentiality.
- Consult another teacher/administrator and invite them to join the conversation with the student, if agreeable.

I. Situations Involving Students

Scenario 2 ***Transporting Students***

Ms. Z is a veteran teacher and a popular coach for several sports. She is well known for her concern for the welfare of her students. Since the high school has limited resources to accommodate practices and games for some of its teams, students are responsible for their own transportation to other sports venues. Consequently, it is not uncommon for Ms. Z to provide personal transportation for one or more students to athletic events and back home after events.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT:

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:

(J) Create an emotionally and physically safe and healthy learning environment for all students

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:

(A) Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her actions reflect directly upon the status and substance of the profession

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

(f) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:

(C) Sexually or physically harass or abuse students

I. Situations Involving Students

Scenario 2 *Transporting Students*

Context for transporting students: Most district policies prohibit the use of personal vehicles to transport students. Transportation of students is limited to board authorized events and teachers are expected to act in accordance with school board policy. In school districts where transportation of students may be allowed under clearly defined circumstances, such transportation must usually be approved in advance and in writing with proof of licensure and necessary insurance provided by the driver.

Discussion Questions:

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

- Has Ms. Z consulted board policy and procedures in place for the district? If Ms. Z is not otherwise employed by the district as a teacher, administrator etc., how does the district inform her of district policies and procedures?
- Other students/families that are providing their own transportation could view the coach's actions as a demonstration of favoritism.
- An accident or break down of the coach's vehicle could jeopardize the safety of the student(s) and the driver which would limit possible care and supervision of the students.

2. How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school/district policies?

- If the coach's decision to transport students violates district policy, the coach's actions could result in a reprimand. Most district policies do not allow students to travel in a teacher's personal vehicle. Districts need to clearly communicate policies to all staff.
- Educators and coaches have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for all students. What may start out as a well intended gesture, transporting students without adhering to district policies, without parental permission or in an unsafe vehicle could lead to potential physical and emotional harm for the student.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- In the event of a false claim by the student and/or public perception about misconduct, the coach's professional reputation could be at stake.
- An accident could result in injuries to the passengers in the vehicle creating physical and/or emotional trauma for all involved. If the coach did not follow district policies, the coach may be personally liable for insurance claims. Claims against the district may also be filed.
- Students may feel obligated to ride in the coach's/teacher's vehicle despite a level of discomfort, feeling that agreement is necessary for continued participation in the sport.
- Beyond harm to the driver and passengers in a vehicle, violating district policies in the unfortunate event of an accident could result in suspension of a driver's license, loss of employment and/or legal claims.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- District policies surrounding transportation of students should be clearly communicated to staff. All staff should be aware of the policy prior to transporting students in a teacher's/coach's vehicle.
- Should there be circumstances where student travel in a teacher's /coach's vehicle is acceptable, all permissions/protocols should be closely adhered to for the protection of both students and staff. Having two teachers accompany students in a personal vehicle would be good practice.
- Informed consent from parents should be included in any policy where transporting students in a personal vehicle is acceptable.

I. Situations Involving Students

Scenario 3 ***Contact with Students***

Mr. J is very popular with the students. He often converses and jokes with the students in the halls between classes. It is common for him to greet female students and staff with a hug and male students and staff with a pat on the back. One student has complained to the administration that Mr. J's hugs or physical contact makes him uncomfortable. Mr. J has been advised by the principal to stop all physical contact with students and staff. He agrees to try, but he can't promise anything because that is the way he is and he isn't doing anything wrong.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT:

- (1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:*
 - (J) *Create an emotionally and physically safe and healthy learning environment for all students.*

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

- (1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:*
 - (A) *Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her actions reflect directly upon the status and substance of the profession.*
 - (D) *Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.*

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

- (f) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:*
 - (C) *Sexually or physically harass or abuse students; or*

I. Situations Involving Students

Scenario 3 *Contact with Students*

Context for Contact with Students: Recognizing the unique and privileged relationships that exist between teachers and the students entrusted to their care, teachers must develop and maintain these relationships in a way that is professional, respectful and appropriate. Appropriateness can look different in pre-school contexts as opposed to middle and high school contexts. Teachers need to exercise “common sense” with any physical contact or touching to eliminate possible misunderstandings.

Discussion Questions:

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

- As an outgrowth of Mr. J’s popularity and ease of conversation with students, Mr. J. has used physical touching to convey his friendship towards his students and to make them feel at ease with him. However, this kind of touching can be construed as inappropriate by some students who may feel that their personal space has been invaded or even worse, that the touching is sexual in nature.
- Although all teachers want to maintain positive rapport with students, teachers are not friends; they are professionals and should maintain professional interactions.
- In cases of obvious sexual or physical abuse, educators can lose their jobs and licenses if proven true. However, in some cases, the abuse could be misrepresented and it is the accusation of one student that may put a teacher in a position of needing to defend him or herself regarding the accusation. This is the delicate balance of a very serious issue.

2. How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school/district policies?

- The Code indicates that the professional educator must “create an emotionally and physically safe and healthy learning environment for all students.” If students are uncomfortable with being touched, they do not feel safe and this will impact their learning environment.
- The community has an expectation that a teacher will behave in a professional manner. The Code specifically reminds educators that their actions reflect directly upon the status and substance of the profession. Mr. J’s behavior may be viewed as unprofessional if he leaving him vulnerable to possible claims of misconduct with a student.
- The Code specifically states that the professional educator shall not “sexually or physically harass or abuse students.” Although the physical touching of students may not be intended as a sexual gesture, it may be perceived as such by the student.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- The consequences may vary depending upon whom and how many have expressed concern and the nature of their concern. In the most severe cases, a teacher could lose her/his job and/or teaching license or face criminal charges.
- Some districts have or are developing policies regarding physical contact between teachers and students and between students. Mr. J may be in violation of his district's policy.
- Although unintended, Mr. J may jeopardize his professional and personal reputation with students, families and colleagues.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- A conversation with the principal should advise Mr. J to stop all physical contact with students and staff. The conversation and request should be documented in writing. The principal needs to continue monitoring Mr. J's interactions and report Mr. J's actions to district administrators should his behavior continue.
- In this kind of case, the students' perception of the nature of the touching must be taken seriously. However, it must also be balanced by the observations of others and the response of the teacher in question. Students must feel that they have been listened to and that efforts will be made to secure their environment.
- Generate alternative ways for Mr. J to demonstrate support and acceptance toward his students while respecting their personal space and avoiding physical contact.

II. *Situations Involving Professional Ethics*

Scenario 1 *Use of Social Networks*

Mr. Y is a new teacher in his first 90 days of employment in his district. He has made friends with many staff members and invited them to visit his social network page. On his website, Mr. Y has listed quite a bit of personal information. One of his colleagues visited the site and became very concerned because the site included a statement that Mr. Y was attracted to young girls, stating “the younger the better.”

The colleague notified the principal of this information.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT:

- (1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:*
 - (J) *Create an emotionally and physically safe and healthy learning environment for all students*

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

- (1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:*
 - (A) *Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her actions reflect directly upon the status and substance of the profession; district policies, or laws.*

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT*

- (f) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:*
 - (C) *Sexually or physically harass or abuse students;*
- (g) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall not:*
 - (F) *Engage in any misconduct which would impair his or her ability to serve effectively in the profession*

II. Situations Involving Professional Ethics

Scenario 1

Use of Social Networks

Context for use of social networks: The prevalence of the use of social media has greatly impacted the educational community – including teachers, administrators, students and their families. A new generation is growing up with social networks as an integral part of life. Personal information that was once considered private is increasingly being shared online. The public sharing of information obscures the normal boundaries between teacher and student and teacher and colleagues. Young teachers are especially vulnerable to the consequences of putting out personal information and pictures that may implicate them morally and professionally. In the same way that email and texting communications between educators and students may result in the crossing of the bounds of appropriate relationships, educators must also understand the dangers of social network sites in contributing to this as well.

Discussion Questions:

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

- As the use of social networking has become embedded in everyday life, the line between personal and professional has become blurred. Not only has Mr. Y shared a good deal about his personal life with colleagues, he has expressed an inappropriate interest in young girls. This is highly alarming considering that as a teacher he has daily contact with young girls.
- Mr. Y can be perceived as a possible risk to students.
- Personal rights vs. role of a public figure may be raised. Teachers are held to a higher standard of conduct than an average citizen. Online “posts” and communications can reach beyond an intended audience and impact the level of confidence held by students and community.

2. How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school/district policies?

- The Code states that the professional educator shall “conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her actions reflect directly upon the status and substance of the profession.” Mr. Y’s posted information on the web has clearly overstepped the boundaries of professionalism in making his personal and social life open to not only his colleagues, and possibly his students.
- The Code specifically states that the professional educator shall not “sexually or physically harass or abuse students.” Although there may be no current evidence that this has occurred, Mr. Y’s comment about being sexually attracted to young girls, “the younger the better,” is a serious concern that needs to be addressed immediately. Inappropriate conduct that would put students at risk is implied.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- Mr. Y has put himself in a vulnerable position that could result in loss of his job and teacher certification. Expressing his interest in young girls, using a public forum, has exposed a potential threat to young female students that will be taken seriously by the school community.
- Colleagues, students and families who are aware of the posted comment or have viewed it themselves may seek suspension of Mr. Y due to inappropriate conduct.
- Mr. Y's reputation in the school community may be permanently tainted, having far reaching impact on future employment.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- Engage teachers in the development of a district policy regarding the use of social networking sites if one does not already exist.
- Create professional development activities to explore the risks and the benefits of social networking sites for personal and professional use.
- Provide an orientation for all teachers to inform them about the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators.
- Specifically outline the process for reporting inappropriate behavior or abuse of a student by any adult.

II. *Situations Involving Professional Ethics*

Scenario 2 *DUI Convictions*

Ms. B is an educator with 20 years of service in the Connecticut public schools with seven years of service within her current district. Recently, Ms. B, along with several other colleagues from her school, attended a wedding reception for another staff member. During the evening, she consumed several alcoholic beverages and, on her way home, was arrested and charged with driving under the influence (DUI). On two prior occasions within the past three years, Ms. B had been convicted of DUI offenses. This most recent event was reported by the local news.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

- (1) *the professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:*
- (A) *Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her action reflects directly upon the status and substance of the profession;*
 - (D) *Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.*

(d) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE COMMUNITY

- (1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall:*
- (A) *Be cognizant of the influence of educators upon the community-at-large; obey local, state and national laws.*

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT*

- (g) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall not:*
- (F) *Engage in any misconduct which would impair his or her ability to serve effectively in the profession; or*
- (h) *The professional educator, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall not:*
- (B) *Be convicted in a court of law of a crime involving moral turpitude or of any crime of such nature that violates such public trust;.*

II. *Situations Involving Professional Ethics*

Scenario 2

DUI Convictions

Context for Convictions: School districts in Connecticut must require that each applicant for employment state whether he or she has ever been convicted of a crime and whether criminal charges are pending at the time of application. (Connecticut General Statute 10-221d). The statute also specifies that an employer may not discriminate against any applicant or employee on the basis of arrest/conviction records that have been erased. In this scenario, it does not appear that any records have been erased, although the teacher has been employed for the past seven years. Connecticut state statutes also outline several reasons for contract termination. For example, moral misconduct (10-151 (d) (3) may be cited after documentation. District policies and procedures will need to be reviewed regarding the pattern of behavior that has emerged.

Discussion Questions:

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

-
- Ms. B's current arrest combined with two prior convictions, demonstrates a pattern of inappropriate conduct. She may face serious criminal consequences and loss of employment.
- Relationships with students and families may be compromised.
- Colleagues, students and families may develop a lack of trust in the teacher who they perceived to be a role model. Judgment may be questioned regarding personal and professional decision making.
- If other issues have occurred with the DUI (other vehicles involved, injuries or moving violations) then, it might impact district decision making regarding future employment.
- Ms. B may have problem with alcohol which may impact her ability to be an effective teacher.

2. How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school/district policies?

- The teacher's behavior could negatively reflect upon the "status and substance of the profession" as stated in the Code of Professional Responsibility and commonly stated in most district policies.
- In the realm of misconduct as outlined in the CCT, the teacher may be found to be "impaired in his or her ability to serve effectively in the profession."
- Should the teacher be convicted "in a court of law involving moral turpitude or of any crime of such nature that violates public trust" further employment in her current or any other public school district may be in jeopardy.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- Legal issues leading to incarceration.
- Legal issues that could lead to frequent absenteeism due to attendance at court proceedings and/or rehabilitation creating consistent instructional interruptions.
- District consequences including possible suspension or loss of employment.
- Possible revocation of teaching certificate.
- Reduced confidence in Ms. B's ability to teach effectively by colleagues, students and school community.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- Ms. B's two previous DUI offenses may have triggered the district to offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at an earlier date. Ideally, if Ms. B received the support and treatment necessary prior to this incident, this third arrest may have been avoided.
- Additional counseling treatment and evaluation may be recommended, if Ms. B has been suspended, with conditions attached prior to her return to work.

II. *Situations Involving Professional Ethics*

Scenario 3 Teacher Documentation

Mr. S was given the opportunity to coach the boys' track team, provided he receives a coaching permit prior to the first day of the season. A former track star himself, Mr. S assumed that he was fully qualified but failed to apply for the permit in a timely manner. Two weeks prior to the start of the season, after being questioned by the school's athletic director, Mr. S submitted his application for a coaching permit. During the application process he noticed that his CPR card had expired, so he immediately registered for the next available workshop. However, in order to "expedite" the application process, he changed the dates on his old card to make it appear valid, figuring that he would eventually meet this requirement.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*

Consider the following sections of the *Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators*:

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

- (1) the professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:*
- (A) Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her action reflects directly upon the status and substance of the profession;*
 - (D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.*

(d) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE COMMUNITY

- (1) The professional educator, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall:*
- (A) Be cognizant of the influence of educators upon the community-at-large; obey local, state and national laws.*

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT*

- (g) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall not:***
- (A) Obtain a certificate, authorization, permit or other credential issued by the state board of education or obtain employment by misrepresentation, forgery or fraud; or*
 - (C) Misrepresent his, her or another's professional qualifications or competencies.*
- (h) The professional educator, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall not:*
- (C) Knowingly misrepresent facts or make false statements.*

II. *Situations Involving Professional Ethics*

Scenario 3 Teacher Documentation

Context for forging a document in an attempt to obtain a coaching permit: The public trusts that coaches have the qualifications, knowledge, skills and judgment to instruct students participating in team sports. Coaches have the responsibility of conducting themselves in a manner that is worthy of this trust and consistent with the profession's expectation. Falsifying information in an attempt to obtain a coaching permit violates this trust.

"We are on the field and in the locker room to teach our players how to win. Not just on the gridiron, but in any profession they choose. We want to impart habits that will lead them to excellence throughout their lives. Most of all, we want to teach them the value of loyalty, integrity, and teamwork. Once you know how to work with people, you can accomplish anything" (Winning Every Day: The Game Plan for Success, Holtz, 1998, p. 52).

Discussion Questions:

1. *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*

- Mr. S misrepresented his qualifications when he changed the expiration date on his CPR card to indicate that his card was valid in an attempt to obtain a coaching permit.
- Mr. S attempted to obtain a permit using a false credential and if detected, this could result in the denial of his application for a coaching permit.

2. *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school/district policies?*

- It is a violation of the "Code" to obtain a certificate, authorization or permit issued by the State Board of Education using false credentials.
- It is the expectation of the community that an educator or coach will conduct himself or herself in a professional manner and use the highest level of professional judgment. Falsifying information to obtain a coaching permit breaches the public's trust and displays a lack of professional judgment.
- An educator or coach has an obligation to create a physically safe and healthy environment for students. Employment as a coach without CPR certification creates an unsafe environment for students.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- Submission of an application for a certificate, authorization or coaching permit, requires that an applicant sign an attestation confirming that the information contained in the application and accompanying documentation does not contain any misrepresentations, falsifications or omissions. Misrepresentation of information may result in the denial or revocation of a certificate, permit or authorization and possibly result in criminal charges.
- If Mr. S obtained a coaching permit under false pretenses and without the required medical certification and a student he was coaching had a serious injury, Mr. S. and the school district may assume legal liability for the accident.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- Mr. S could have contacted the school district to inform them of the oversight and they may have worked with him to resolve the problem.
- If needed, Mr. S could have withdrawn his application for a coaching position rather than falsify a document to obtain a permit.
- Mr. S should have researched the requirements for a coaching permit to ensure he was eligible for the permit and submitted his application in a timely manner.
- Mr. S should have obtained a coaching permit prior to applying for coaching position.

III. Situations Involving Community and Family

Scenario 1

Teacher Public Behavior

Mr. R, a single male teacher, plays baseball on a local sports team. One Saturday evening, he was with team-mates socializing and having a few drinks at a post-game barbecue at a local park. Later in the evening, several male and female students from his 12th grade science class arrived at the barbecue by car. They had all been drinking and continued to drink at the barbecue. As the evening progressed, a very friendly rapport developed between the teacher and the students.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

- (1) the professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:*
- (A) Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her action reflects directly upon the status and substance of the profession; or*
 - (D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.*

(d) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE COMMUNITY

- (1) The professional educator, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall:*
- (A) Be cognizant of the influence of educators upon the community-at-large; obey local, state and national laws.*

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

- (f) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:**
- (C) Sexually or physically harass or abuse students;*
 - (D) Emotionally abuse students; or*
 - (E) Engage in any misconduct which would put students at risk.*

III. Situations Involving Community and Family

Scenario 1

Teacher Public Behavior

Context for teacher public behavior: Teachers are at the center of the educational process and uniquely in a position of trust and influence. Although there is much debate across the country about whether or not a teacher's behavior in a public place, away from school property or school activities, should be considered under the Code of Professional Responsibility, teachers can find themselves in a situation where public perception and opinion can lead to a disruption in the educational process.

Discussion Questions:

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

- Should Mr. R be drinking in a public venue or in the district where he is employed?
- Are there adults directly responsible for the students also attending the barbeque?
- Did Mr. R or his teammates provide any alcoholic beverages to the students?
- The boundaries between teacher and student may be blurred in a social, adult situation outside of the school day and/or calendar.
- Mr. R may be placing himself in a position where students/parents/community might misinterpret, even well intended, actions. The potential for charges of inappropriate conduct are significantly increased.

2. How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school/district policies?

- Is there a town ordinance prohibiting drinking in public parks that the teacher may be violating? The teacher must be "cognizant of the influence of educators upon the community at large, obey local, state and national laws" (Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators).
- The students are under the legal age to be drinking alcoholic beverages. The teacher, as well as any other responsible adult, should attempt to prevent the students from drinking and contact law enforcement to report illegal behavior.
- The teacher and the students may be subject to arrest for illegal consumption of alcoholic beverages in a local park.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- The teacher's rapport with the students could imply approval of behavior, sending a mixed message.
- The teacher's behavior at the barbeque could be embellished and/or exaggerated through photos, videos, text messages etc. creating a negative image of the teacher in the wider community. The teacher's reputation may be permanently scarred.
- Should the students' drive away from the barbeque intoxicated and get into a car accident, the teacher could be held responsible for injuries or loss of life for failing to report. The teacher is putting students at risk of harm.
- Under the worst of circumstances, the teacher could be arrested, lose his job, his driver's license and his teaching certificate for violating the law, the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators and the public's trust.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- Although Mr. R may not have invited the students to the barbeque, it is his responsibility to put an end to the situation and ensure that the students arrive home safely.
- The teacher should avoid drinking in public places to avoid the possibility of violating the law and meeting up with students and/or their families. In the given situation, the teacher should have left the park immediately and called law enforcement to report the underage drinking by the students observed.
- The teacher could report the incident to district administrators. Follow-up phone calls to parents/families and possible face to face meetings could be organized according to district policies.

III. Situations Involving Community and Family

Scenario 2 *Student Confidentiality*

Ms. D, a third year 7th grade math teacher, complains to her next door neighbor about a difficult student in her class, identifying the child by name and providing specific details about the student's academic record. Ms. D says that the neighbor doesn't know the student personally, so there should be no problem discussing the student and the situation.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT:

- (1) the professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:*
- (I) Maintain the confidentiality of information concerning students obtained in the proper course of the educational process, and dispense such information only when prescribed or directed by federal or state law or professional practice.*

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

- (1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:*
- (A) Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her actions reflect directly upon the status and substance of the profession; and*
 - (D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.*

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

- (f) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:*
- (E) Engage in any misconduct which would put students at risk.*

III. Situations Involving Community and Family

Scenario 2

Student Confidentiality

Context for student confidentiality: Federal law requires educational agencies to guarantee each student basic privacy rights. To maintain these rights, schools are required to have guidelines for collecting, maintaining, disseminating, and verifying the accuracy of information that they collect. As a general rule, discussions about pupils should concern only their educational goals and appropriate instructional strategies and those conversations should be exclusive to the school personnel directly related to the student’s educational program.

Discussion Questions:

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

- Ms. D is not exercising professional judgment by discussing a student outside of school with someone who is not directly related to the student’s educational program.
- Ms. D may be revealing confidential information, which in itself, may violate public trust and privacy laws. Also, Ms. D may not recognize that the person she is sharing the information with may have a relationship with the child which may now be compromised.

2. How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school/district policies?

- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), also known as the Buckley Amendment, requires that any personally identifiable information contained in educational records be kept confidential, unless consent for disclosure is given by a parent/guardian. School districts are obligated to maintain the confidentiality of personally identifiable student information. Ms. D may be in violation of this law.
- The “Code” supports FERPA by stating that the professional educator must “maintain the confidentiality of information concerning students obtained in the proper course of the educational process, and dispense such information only when prescribed or directed by federal or state law or professional practice.” School and district policies are written to comply with the law and the “Code” and would have policies in place to comply with federal and state statutes.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- In addition to legal violations, Ms. D may be sharing information about a student that will now be distributed to the wider community. The student's privacy will be violated and the student could be subject to unwanted concern, curiosity or ridicule.
- The student's learning environment could be compromised due to continued harassment by classmates. The student may no longer feel emotionally or physically safe which may affect attendance and academic progress.
- Colleagues, students and families may develop a lack of trust in Ms. D leading to a break in collaborative efforts. Colleagues may be less interested in working together, students may become increasingly mistrustful and families may lose confidence in Ms. D's capabilities to be an effective teacher.
- Continued complaints about Ms. D to administration regarding breaches in student confidentiality could lead to written reprimands and possible dismissal proceedings.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- Sharing the FERPA law, reviewing the Code of Professional Responsibility and supporting district policies and procedures at the start of every school year would serve as a reminder for all staff to refrain from discussing students outside of the educational community directly involved with educational programming.
- Using personally identifiable information, whether in writing or conversation should be avoided unless specific to the student's educational program.

III. Situations Involving Community and Family

Scenario 3

Teacher Using Position for Personal Gain

Ms. W, a fourth-grade music teacher, emails parents using the school's email, notifying them that she is available on weekends and after school to teach violin to students at a reasonable hourly rate. Several of her violin students have been struggling with their lessons. Ms. W feels that the extra time out of school will benefit the students.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(e) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT'S FAMILY

- (1) The professional educator in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall:*
- (B) Promote, respond, and maintain appropriate communications with the family, staff and administration.*

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT*

- (f) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:***
- (A) Abuse his or her position as a professional with students for private advantage.*
- (h) The professional educator, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall not:***
- (A) Exploit the educational institution for personal gain.*

III. Situations Involving Community and Family

Scenario 3

Teacher Using Position for Personal Gain

Context for teacher using school position for personal gain: There are many things that we use in both our personal and our professional lives. For educators, these could include teaching supplies e.g. paper, calculators, manipulatives or models as well as technological resources e.g. computers, DVD players, Internet, email, course-related equipment, video production equipment, kitchen appliances, microscopes, lab or shop equipment and even time during the school day. Educators need to be conscious about using resources available to them as an educator for the purposes of teaching and learning and not using resources provided by their school or district for personal use or personal gain.

Discussion Questions:

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

- While Ms. W may have her students' interests in mind, she is using the Internet access provided on a school computer to solicit business from which she will profit financially.
- She is using email addresses that parents have provided to the school for school related communication, not for private solicitation.
- Ms. W may also be setting herself up for a possible conflict of interest situation by receiving money for assisting struggling students for whom she will need to provide a course grade.

2. How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school/district policies?

- Ms. W would be violating the part of the "Code" that states that the professional educator shall not abuse his or her position as a professional with students for private advantage.
- Many districts have, or are developing, acceptable use policies for use of computers, networks and the Internet. Ms. W may be in violation of her district's acceptable use policy.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- The consequences may vary depending on the district's acceptable use policy. Examples of possible ways to address the situation could include: discussion with administrator to enhance Ms. W's awareness of the district's acceptable use policy, and/or providing Ms. W the opportunity to participate in training about acceptable use of school computers, networks and the Internet.
- If Ms. W continued the practice of contacting parents through the school's email to elicit private tutoring or otherwise using her position as a teacher for personal gain, consequences could include: a written reprimand in her personnel file, suspension or termination of access to the Internet at school, or disciplinary actions according to school or district policy.
- Encourage staff to ask a colleague to proofread communications that go out to parents. This could be for the purposes of ensuring clearly communicated messages, avoiding spelling and grammatical errors, as well as sending appropriate messages to parents.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- Engage teachers in a discussion about district policies regarding emails sent to school district employees, parents/guardians and students.
- Engage teachers in a discussion about appropriate and inappropriate use of sending emails to current, former and future students.
- Discuss proper procedures to follow in the event you are the recipient of an inappropriate email.
- Discuss district policies for using other technological and/or electronic devices, including, but not limited to: Cell phones and Smart phones, iPhones, iPods and iPads, Kindles or Nooks, etc.
- Discuss possible implications for use of technology at home (or outside of school), for example, content shared on social networking sites, viewing inappropriate and/or illegal websites, content of electronic messages/blogs that originate with you.
- This situation could have been avoided by providing an annual training/professional development for all staff regarding the district's acceptable use policy.



*INTRODUCTION TO SITUATIONS INVOLVING BULLYING**

**Bullying*

Legislation effective in July 2011 Section 1. Section 10-222d of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2011*)

<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2011/TOB/S/2011SB-01138-R00-SB.htm>

- (1) "Bullying" means the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic communication or a physical act or gesture directed at another student that: (A) Causes physical or emotional harm to another student or damage to another student's property, (B) places another student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property, (C) creates a hostile environment at school for another student, (D) infringes on the rights of another student at school, or (E) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school, and includes cyber bullying;
- Such policies must include provisions addressing bullying outside the school setting if it has a direct and negative impact on a student's academic performance or safety in school.
 - However, since every district has adopted its own policy and could have changed the definition slightly, it is important to review the definition of bullying included in your own school district's policy.

JoAnn Freiberg Ph.D., an Educational Consultant with the Connecticut State Department of Education who manages the wide arena of Bullying, Improving School Climate and Character Education, recommends focusing on **meanness** instead of using the word bully.

"Not only is the word (bully) itself alienating, but also, focusing on "bullying" is fundamentally not at all helpful in managing the epidemic of meanness that is at the heart of the problem addressed today. No one knows exactly what to look for, and since "bullying" implies some kind of repeated-over-time pattern of hurtful behavior, we adults tend not to stop things until we are sure they are really verified acts of bullying. This is far too late in the escalating cycle. And many schools shun claiming they host any bullying most likely for fear of being labeled a "persistently dangerous school" by community members.

If we stop using the words "bully" or "bullying" and use "mean" or "cruel" instead, we will have a much easier time in practice. No child wants to be told he or she is a bully or is engaged in bullying, and the same is true for parents and guardians about their children. Everyone understands "mean" and are much more likely to admit they are mean from time to time than that they are a bully.

Keynote for the School Safety Conference
3-27-08, CCSU

IV. Situations Involving Bullying

Scenario 1 ***Emotional Bullying***

Ms. H teaches ninth grade English. She gives the class directions for a writing assignment that is to be completed by the end of the period. Josh isn't paying attention and missed the directions. He frequently bothers his classmates by humming, tapping his pen, reminding them of the rules or speaking out of turn. He asks for the directions to be repeated. The other students in the class begin to make fun of Josh and ridicule him for not paying attention once again. Ms. H, feeling frustrated because she is asked to repeat the instructions once again, continues passing out materials and ignores Josh and the other students.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*
- *What are some classroom management strategies a teacher could employ to address a situation such as this?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT:

(1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:*

- (A) Recognize, respect and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;
- (C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientation;
- (J) Create an emotionally and physically safe and healthy learning environment for all students;

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

(1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:*

- (D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.

IV. Situations Involving Bullying

Scenario 1 *Emotional Bullying*

Context for emotional bullying: The harmful effects of bullying can include experiencing physical symptoms and illnesses, poor school performance, and lowered self-esteem. In extreme cases, bullying has been linked to violence and suicide. There are ways to help those who inflict cruelty learn better ways of interacting; to help those who are bullied learn strategies for coping ; and to help witnesses learn to stand up to being bullied and deprive them of an audience. If left unchecked, mean spirited students get the message that cruel behavior is acceptable to adults. Creating open lines of communication and support networks at home and at school, teachers, parents, and students can work together to create a safer school community.

Discussion Questions:

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

- Ms. H has the responsibility to maintain a classroom culture and climate that is respectful and tolerant of all people.
- Ms. H’s allowance of the ridicule may imply approval.
- Behavioral expectations may not be clearly communicated.
- Ms. H’s own frustration may be causing her to ignore the needs of her students.
- Ms. H may be neglecting accommodations for Josh.
- If Josh is repeatedly being “made fun of” during this class period, Ms. H may be contributing to an environment of bullying.

2. How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school/district policies?

- Legislation speaks specifically to “the repeated use by one or more students of a written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying, directed at or referring to another student attending school in the same school district.” If Ms. H consistently allows other students to be disrespectful in this manner, she can be cited to be in violation of the Connecticut statute.
- The “Code” clearly describes the professional educator’s obligation to students. Specifically, teachers must “recognize, respect and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings.” Teachers are obligated to deal justly and considerately with all students.
- School districts develop policies to comply with legislation and the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators. Teachers who are found to be out of compliance can be subject to written reprimand or dismissal.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- Tacit approval by the teacher could encourage continued cruelty toward the student outside of the classroom where there is greater opportunity for escalation.
- The student may feel physically and emotionally unsafe in the classroom or school building which may negatively impact academic performance.
- Some students may be mistrustful of the teacher, thinking that they could be a future target of ridicule and cruelty if the teacher refuses to address the behavior.
- Parents and families may lose confidence in the effectiveness of Ms. H. as their children's teacher. Josh's family could choose to pursue legal action against the school district which may jeopardize the teacher's continued employment.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- If Ms. H is experiencing continued frustration with one or more students' behavior, it is the responsibility of the teacher to request support from a colleague, school counselor, social worker and/or building administrator.
- Should a building administrator observe tacit approval of unacceptable behavior by a teacher, the administrator would be obligated to provide immediate assistance to the victimized student, counseling for the students engaging in the ridiculing and further direction for the teacher.
- Ms. H might want to contact Josh's family and the families of the offending students to maintain an open line of communication.
- Develop/adopt district training for all teachers around creating a positive classroom climate that encourages respectful and tolerant behavior. Current legislation requires districts to engage teachers in these conversations to be in compliance.

5. What are some classroom management strategies a teacher could employ to address a

- Facilitate discussions to learn what students are thinking, feeling and doing about teasing and bullying. Involve students in developing a code of conduct for acceptable behavior in and out of the classroom.
- Ms. H should determine why Josh is having difficulty following directions in her class. She could discuss his current behavior with previous teachers, as well as other subject area teachers, to gather additional information that might initiate some change in management strategies.
- Ms. H, together with support colleagues, might discuss, model, and role play conflict resolution strategies to allow all students to experience the role of bully, victim and witness.
- Establish a trusting relationship with students to encourage the sharing of experiences within the bullying arena. Use a concerned and supportive approach and carefully document the conversation.

IV. Situations Involving Bullying

Scenario 2 Cyberbullying

Mr. S, a sixth grade teacher, discovers that there is a Facebook group called “I hate Jesse,” a student in his fourth period art class. Some students at school have been joining this group and posting negative comments about Jesse. Recently, cell phone pictures have been taken and posted of Jesse’s buttocks while she was walking in the hall. Three weeks later, he notices other pictures appearing online in which Jesse’s face has been Photoshopped® onto other inappropriate images.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the “Code” or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*
- *What are some classroom management strategies a teacher could employ to address a situation such as this?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT:

- (1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:*
- (A) *Recognize, respect and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;*
 - (C) *Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientation;*
and
 - (J) *Create an emotionally and physically safe and healthy learning environment for all students.*

c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

- (1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:*
- (D) *Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.*

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT*

- (f) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:*
- (D) *Emotionally abuse students;*
 - (E) *Engage in any misconduct which would put students at risk.*

IV. Situations Involving Bullying

Scenario 2 Cyberbullying

Context: "Cyberbullying" is defined as any act of bullying through the use of the Internet, interactive and digital technologies, cellular mobile telephones or other mobile electronic devices or any electronic communications according to Connecticut State Statute, Section 10-222d. Cyberbullying is different from traditional bullying in terms of form and technique. First, victims may not often know who the bully is or why they are being targeted. Second, the hurtful actions of a cyberbully can go viral resulting in a cyber attack by many. Third, cyberbullying can be done from a physically distant location and finally, many adults lack the technological know-how to monitor online activity. (Cyberbullying Research Center www.cyberbullying.us)

Discussion Questions:

1. *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*

- The challenge for educators who are faced with an incident of cyberbullying is to recognize its potential to escalate and its impact on the victim, the bully and the educational community.
- Mr. S has a professional responsibility to report knowledge of the Facebook group to his building principal.
- Legislation states that school districts must appoint a safe school environment specialist/team in the building to develop policies and procedures around cyberbullying while building and maintaining a positive school culture. Mr. S may be able to access additional support from team members to determine appropriate actions.
- Mr. S has not intervened and the situation has escalated. Mr. S has a responsibility to protect Jesse from emotional attacks.

2. *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school/district policies?*

- Current legislation states that any type of bullying that creates a hostile environment, infringes on the rights of students and substantially disrupts the educational process is against the law.
- The "Code" also addresses bullying in several sections specific to the professional educator's responsibility to students. The code asks teachers to nurture a lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion or sexual orientation.
- Districts should have a safe school environment plan in place that outlines the policies and procedures for dealing with bullying situations.
- A possible lawsuit could be brought against the cyberbully for defamation of character or libel.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- If the situation continues unreported, the consequences for Jesse can be significant. Being constantly “e-connected” can leave some students susceptible to victimization as well as act on mean intentions toward others.
- According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, targets of cyberbullying report feeling depressed, sad, angry and frustrated. Feeling hurt both physically and mentally has also been reported and has, at times, led to suicide.
- Students report being afraid or embarrassed to come to school. Research also reports a link between cyber bullying and low self esteem, family problems, academic difficulties, school violence and delinquent behavior.
- Teachers who may be aware of cyberbullying and fail to act upon the knowledge could be perceived as complicit and/or liable for acts resulting in student harm.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive

- Mr. S should talk with Jesse to discuss her personal reactions and develop a plan for ongoing school support.
- Mr. S has an obligation to do whatever it takes to legally, safely, and ethically prevent bullying in his classroom.
- Mr. S could teach his students how to respond to cyberbullying and discuss effective strategies for dealing with situations. He could have ongoing talks with students about the devastating effects of cyberbullying.
- Mr. S should be well informed about his school’s bullying policy. If there isn’t a plan for the school, he should ask how he can participate in developing one.
- Victims of bullying are often fearful or embarrassed to come forward. By building a trusting relationship with his students, Mr. S will encourage students to feel comfortable bringing forward instances of bullying.
- Contacting the parents of the student being bullied and letting them know exactly what is happening and how Mr. S is handling it will assure them that he is watching out for his students.

5. What are some classroom management strategies a teacher could employ to address a situation such as this?

- One of the keys to effective classroom management is to build trusting rapport with students. Developing a climate of acceptance leads to students feeling connected.
- Mr. S should have a classroom management plan that addresses bullying and he should send a copy of it to parents along with the district policy which is likely to be included in the student and family handbook.
- Post clear computer use policies in the computer lab or at each computer work station to remind students of the rules of acceptable use.
- Mr. S can participate on the school’s bullying intervention committee recognizing that it is critical to maintain a school climate of respect and integrity for all within the school community and where violations result in clear consequences.
- Research supports that the most preventative step that schools can take is to educate the school community about responsible internet use. Mr. S needs to engage his students in conversations to continually remind them that all forms of bullying are wrong and that anyone who engages in threatening or harassing behaviors will be subject to disciplinary actions that are clearly outlined.

IV. Situations Involving Bullying

Scenario 3 **Physical Bullying**

Mr. L would frequently catch his students high-fiving each other as they made up names to describe a female student in their class who they thought was unattractive. He would give students a disapproving look, but their behavior didn't stop. On more than one occasion, he witnessed them kick her in the back of the knees or trip her. When the female student complained to Mr. L, he explained to the student that this type of behavior will stop if she simply ignores it.

Discussion Questions:

- *What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?*
- *How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school /district policies?*
- *In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for the students and the school community?*
- *What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?*
- *What are some classroom management strategies a teacher could employ to address a situation such as this?*

Consider the following sections of the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators:

(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT:

- (1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:*
- (A) *Recognize, respect and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;*
 - (C) *Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientation; and*
 - (J) *Create an emotionally and physically safe and healthy learning environment for all students.*

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

- (1) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall:*
- (D) *Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment.*

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT*

- (f) *The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:*
- (D) *Emotionally abuse students; or*
 - (E) *Engage in any misconduct which would put students at risk.*

IV. Situations Involving Bullying

Scenario 3

Physical Bullying

Context for physical bullying: The myth that schoolyard bullying is a rite of passage is, fortunately, past. However, bullying continues to be pervasive in our society. Bullying can take many forms and has been categorized in many ways to include physical aggression, social alienation, verbal aggression, intimidation and cyber bullying. Bullying can be direct or indirect, overt or subtle and range in degree of severity. Those who witness bullying can be traumatized as well and can be afraid to report an incident and even participate in the bullying for fear of being the next victim. Adults who witness bullying must take on a responsible role to stop its occurrence. School personnel must take an active role in engaging the community in developing intervention programs to help reduce bullying and eventually eliminate it altogether.

Discussion Questions:

1. What possible issues/concerns might this scenario raise?

- Mr. L's lack of attention to the students' taunts could be perceived as supportive of the behavior.
- Since the female student has complained to Mr. L. about the students' behavior, Mr. L may be held responsible should she be harmed in any way.
- Mr. L may not be following district policy regarding the reporting and documentation of cruelty witnessed toward students.
- Are there clear procedures in place for students to report incidents of cruelty toward and from their peers?

2. How could this situation become a violation of the law, the "Code" or other school/district policies?

- Current legislation states that any type of bullying that creates a hostile environment, infringes on the rights of students and substantially disrupts the educational process is against the law.
- The "Code" also addresses bullying in several sections specific to the professional educator's responsibility to students. The code asks teachers to nurture a lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion or sexual orientation.
- Districts should have a safe school environment plan in place that outlines the policies and procedures for dealing with bullying situations.
- In a severe case, should the female student report physical harm, assault charges could be brought against the boys and possibly a report to supervisors, law officers and/or DCF about the teacher's neglect to intervene.

3. In this situation, what are some potential negative consequences for the teacher, for students and the school community?

- Legal action could be taken against the boys, their families and school personnel for failing to document and report.
- Mr. L's failure to take the female student's complaint seriously may send the message that a reported concern from a female student does not warrant a reaction. Other female students could begin to view this as discriminatory.
- Should this female student be continuously victimized, she runs the risk of experiencing long term effects which may include but not be limited to low self esteem, depression, poor academic performance, exclusion from social circles, fearfulness and self injurious behavior.

4. What responses/actions will result in a more positive outcome and/or what proactive measures might be considered?

- Mr. L needs to share his concerns with the school climate specialist, school administrator, social worker, guidance counselor and/or other school personnel. He must seek assistance to deal with the situation immediately.
- Mr. L and all staff need to engage in district provided training around creating a positive classroom climate that encourages respectful and tolerant behavior. Current legislation requires districts to engage teachers in these conversations through the development of a safe school environment plan that outlines the policies and procedures for dealing with bullying situations.
- Create a bullying intervention plan that implements immediate disciplinary consequences for intimidation and aggressive behavior. The plan should include training for students, families and school personnel to learn how to prevent, detect and react to bullying. The plan should be created by staff, students and families.

5. What are some classroom management strategies a teacher could employ to address a situation such as this?

- Involve students in establishing classroom rules of behavior. Students are more likely to promote and follow the rules they helped to create.
- Establish consequences for failing to abide by the established rules of behavior.
- Hold regular classroom meetings so that students can clarify or change rules as necessary.
- Develop and/or use a curriculum that promotes positive assertiveness, communication, respect for others, camaraderie and friendship within the classroom.
- Talk regularly with parents to inform them of how their child is behaving as well as their performance in school. Inform parents of any bullying occurring to or from their child, and discuss how actions taken to help their child are or are not working.



Connecticut Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators

Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies

Section 10-145d-400a

(a) PREAMBLE

The Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators is a set of principles which the education profession expects its members to honor and follow. These principles set forth, on behalf of the education profession and the public it serves, standards to guide conduct and the judicious appraisal of conduct in situations that have professional and ethical implications. The Code adheres to the fundamental belief that the student is the foremost reason for the existence of the profession.

The education profession is vested by the public with a trust and responsibility requiring the highest ideals of professionalism. Therefore, the educator accepts both the public trust and the responsibilities to practice the profession according to the highest possible degree of ethical conduct and standards. Such responsibilities include the commitment to the students, the profession, the community and the family. Consistent with applicable law, the Code of Professional Responsibility for Educators shall serve as a basis for decisions on issues pertaining to certification and employment. The Code shall apply to all educators holding, applying or completing preparation for a certificate, authorization or permit or other credential from the State Board of Education. For the purposes of this section, "educator" includes superintendents, administrators, teachers, special services professionals, coaches, substitute teachers and paraprofessionals.

(b) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT:

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall:

- (A) Recognize, respect and uphold the dignity and worth of students as individual human beings, and, therefore, deal justly and considerately with students;
- (B) Engage students in the pursuit of truth, knowledge and wisdom and provide access to all points of view without deliberate distortion of content area matter;
- (C) Nurture in students lifelong respect and compassion for themselves and other human beings regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, social class, disability, religion, or sexual orientation;
- (D) Foster in students the full understanding, application and preservation of democratic principles and processes;
- (E) Guide students to acquire the requisite skills and understanding for participatory citizenship and to realize their obligation to be worthy and contributing members of society;

- (F) Assist students in the formulation of worthy, positive goals;
 - (G) Promote the right and freedom of students to learn, explore ideas, develop critical thinking, problem solving, and necessary learning skills to acquire the knowledge needed to achieve their full potential;
 - H) Remain steadfast in guaranteeing equal opportunity for quality education for all students;
 - (I) Maintain the confidentiality of information concerning students obtained in the proper course of the educational process, and dispense such information only when prescribed or directed by federal or state law or professional practice;
 - (J) Create an emotionally and physically safe and healthy learning environment for all students; and
 - (K) Apply discipline promptly, impartially, appropriately and with compassion.

(c) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION:

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession , shall:

- (A) Conduct himself or herself as a professional realizing that his or her actions reflect directly upon the status and substance of the profession;
- (B) Uphold the professional educator’s right to serve effectively;
- (C) Uphold the principle of academic freedom;
- (D) Strive to exercise the highest level of professional judgment;
- (E) Engage in professional learning to promote and implement research-based best educational practices;
- (F) Assume responsibility for his or her professional development;
- (G) Encourage the participation of educators in the process of educational decision-making;
- (H) Promote the employment of only qualified and fully certificated, authorized or permitted educators;
- (I) Encourage promising, qualified and competent individuals to enter the profession;
- (J) Maintain the confidentiality of information concerning colleagues and dispense such information only when prescribed or directed by federal or state law or professional practice;
- (K) Honor professional contracts until fulfillment, release, or dissolution mutually agreed upon by all parties to contract;
- (L) Create a culture that encourages purposeful collaboration and dialogue among all stakeholders;
- (M) Promote and maintain ongoing communication among all stakeholders; and
- (N) Provide effective leadership to ensure continuous focus on student achievement.

d) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE COMMUNITY

(1) The professional educator, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall:

- (A) Be cognizant of the influence of educators upon the community-at-large; obey local, state and national laws;
- (B) Encourage the community to exercise its responsibility to be involved in the formulation of educational policy;
- (C) Promote the principles and ideals of democratic citizenship; and
- (D) Endeavor to secure equal educational opportunities for all students.

(e) RESPONSIBILITY TO THE STUDENT’S FAMILY

(1) The professional educator in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall:

- (A) Respect the dignity of each family, its culture, customs, and beliefs;
- (B) Promote, respond, and maintain appropriate communications with the family, staff and administration;
- (C) Consider the family’s concerns and perspectives on issues involving its children; and
- (D) Encourage participation of the family in the educational process.

UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT*

(f) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall not:

- (A) Abuse his or her position as a professional with students for private advantage;
- (B) Discriminate against students;
- (C) Sexually or physically harass or abuse students;
- (D) Emotionally abuse students; or
- (E) Engage in any misconduct which would put students at risk; and

(g) The professional educator, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the profession, shall not:

- (A) Obtain a certificate, authorization, permit or other credential issued by the state board of education or obtain employment by misrepresentation, forgery or fraud;
- (B) Accept any gratuity, gift or favor that would impair or influence professional decisions or actions;
- (C) Misrepresent his, her or another's professional qualifications or competencies;
- (D) Sexually, physically or emotionally harass or abuse district employees;
- (E) Misuse district funds and/or district property; or
- (F) Engage in any misconduct which would impair his or her ability to serve effectively in the profession; and

(h) The professional educator, in full recognition of the public trust vested in the profession, shall not:

- (A) Exploit the educational institution for personal gain;
- (B) Be convicted in a court of law of a crime involving moral turpitude or of any crime of such nature that violates such public trust; or
- (C) Knowingly misrepresent facts or make false statements.

Unprofessional conduct is not limited to the descriptors listed above. When in doubt regarding whether a specific course of action constitutes professional or unprofessional conduct, please seek advice from your school district or preparation institution.

(i) Code revision

This Code shall be reviewed for potential revision concurrently with the revision of the Regulations Concerning State Educator Certificates, Permits and Authorizations, by the Connecticut Advisory Council for Teacher Professional Standards. As a part of such reviews, a process shall be established to receive input and comment from all interested parties.

Stefan Pryor
Commissioner of Education
Division of Teaching, Learning and Instructional Leadership

Marion H. Martinez Ed.D
Associate Commissioner
Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification

Nancy L. Pugliese, Chief

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Web: <http://www.ct.gov/sde/cert>

E-mail: teacher.cert@ct.gov

Phone: 860-713-6969

(Noon-4 p.m., Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday)

Mail: Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification

P.O. Box 150471, Room 243

Hartford, CT 06115-0471

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TEAM Program Contacts

CSDE TEAM Program Contacts

Unit Telephone Number: 860-713-6820

Sharon Fuller, Program Consultant	860-713-6814	sharon.fuller@ct.gov
Jane Gionfrido, Program Consultant	860-713-6812	jane.gionfrido@ct.gov
Beverly Hartstone, Program Manager	860-713-6811	beverly.hartstone@ct.gov
Claudine Primack, Program Consultant	860-713-6826	claudine.primack@ct.gov
Kim Wachtelhausen, Program Consultant	860-713-6841	kim.wachtelhausen@ct.gov
Gady Weiner, Data Manager	860-713-6836	gady.weiner@ct.gov
<i>Nancy Pugliese, Bureau Chief</i>	860-713-6709	nancy.pugliese@ct.gov

RESC TEAM Program Contacts

Patricia Hart-Cole, ACES	203-407-4454	phart@aces.org
Lyn Nevins, CES	203-365-8858	nevinsl@ces.k12.ct.us
Marta Diez, CREC	860-509-3613	mdiez@crec.org
Nancy Celentano, EASTCONN	860-455-1507	ncelentano@eastconn.org
Grace Levin, EASTCONN	860-455-1531	glevin@eastconn.org
Laura Patterson, EDUCATION CONNECTION	203-791-1904 Ext. 103	patterson@educationconnection.org
Ellen Dalton, LEARN	860-434-4800 Ext. 344	edalton@learn.k12.ct.us