THOMAS COUNTY SCHOOLS

EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT



Dear Colleagues,

We have an exceptional workforce in Thomas County Public Schools (TCPS) that is strongly committed to the highest standards of ethical conduct and professionalism. Our employees work tirelessly every day to ensure that we deliver the highest quality education for our students to prepare them for success beyond graduation. Nevertheless, as an organization committed to continuous improvement, we can always improve our operational processes.

The creation of this Employee Code of Conduct is an effort to make clearer the expectations of employees in how we all work together to ensure the safety and well-being of all of our students, fellow employees, and the broader community. This Code of Conduct seeks to bring together, in one document, a summary of the legitimate standards of conduct that TCPS and the broader community expect employees to follow in carrying out their important roles in the school system's mission. In addition, the Code of Conduct summarizes the disciplinary procedures that we use to address situations where employees fall short of our expectations.

I deeply appreciate the collaboration and input from the broad range of stakeholders who contributed to the development of this Employee Code of Conduct. During this school year, we will monitor the implementation of the Code of Conduct and continue to gather feedback so we can identify any clarifications or revisions that should be incorporated going forward.

We hope you find the Employee Code of Conduct informative. Thank you for your dedicated service to TCPS students and families.

Respectfully,
Lisa Williams, Ed.D.
Superintendent

1.0 Introduction

Thomas County Public Schools (TCPS) is committed to an organizational culture that furthers our core values. All employees must make every effort to create and maintain safe and healthy learning environments and shall serve as positive role models for students and set good examples in conduct, manners, dress and grooming.

All employees are expected to interact with all students, parents/guardians, colleagues at all levels, and the community with the utmost integrity and professionalism. This Employee Code of Conduct provides a general overview of the legitimate expectations and standards of conduct that TCPS and the broader community expect employees, including student teachers and other interns, to follow in carrying out their important part of the district's mission.

The Thomas County Board of Education expects each employee to maintain the highest standards of conduct and act in a mature and responsible manner at all times. Employees shall not engage in activities which violate federal, state or local laws or which, in any way, diminish the integrity, efficiency or discipline of the district.

In addition, this Employee Code of Conduct summarizes the disciplinary procedures that TCPS uses to address situations where employees fall short of our expectations and standards of conduct. The Employee Code of Conduct applies to all TCPS employees, both certificated and non-certificated, full-time and part-time, as well as substitutes and others employed in a temporary or seasonal capacity.

Many aspects of this Code of Conduct are based on applicable Thomas County Board of Education policies, TCPS regulations, as well as state and federal laws. This Code of Conduct is not intended to replace these resources, but rather to provide a one-document summary and reference point of appropriate items that would be useful to all employees. This Code of Conduct is intended as a guide and a help to all school staff. It sets out standards of conduct which staff are expected to follow when within, or representing TCPS, any school, or any program associated with TCPS. This code is not exhaustive but is written to assist staff, and it is important that staff should seek and take advice and guidance if necessary. If you do not understand the expectations explained in this Code of Conduct, you should ask a supervisor or administrator.

Please note that this Code of Conduct is not a contract, and the policy and legal requirements that it references are subject to change and supersede the statements contained in this publication.

1.1 Expectations for Employee Conduct

TCPS expects all employees to perform their work with requisite skill and knowledge; maintain the highest standards of responsible and ethical conduct; and obey all applicable laws, policies, and regulations. Under no circumstances may any employee engage in any of the following activities or behavior: immorality, misconduct in office (which includes knowing failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect), insubordination, incompetence, or willful neglect of duty. Whenever an employee faces a matter that requires an ethical decision concerning his or her behavior, TCPS expects the individual to consider whether it might violate a law, policy, regulation, or professional standard of responsible and ethical conduct.

Equally important, the employee should refrain from any action or conduct that - -

• threatens the safety of students, fellow employees, or the broader community;

• undermines the employee's professional integrity; and/or

• makes the employee unfit to perform his or her assigned duties.

An employee's failure to perform expected behaviors, as well as an employee's performance of inappropriate behaviors (including, but not limited to, the "Do nots" listed on the following pages), may subject the employee to disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or termination. Employees should understand that not all inappropriate, improper, or unethical conduct may be expressly referenced in this publication. Rather, the examples on the following pages are illustrative and non-exhaustive. Conduct that is not expressly listed nonetheless may warrant disciplinary action. For example, this code of conduct does not attempt to list every standard of employee behavior grounded in common sense or commonly understood sound practices.

2.0 Conduct in the Work Environment

Employees are expected to behave honestly; diligently fulfill their job responsibilities; adhere to all laws, regulations, and ethical standards governing their work; and comply with laws and regulations outside of work where failure to do so affects their fitness to perform their job.

2.1 Selected examples of expected conduct:

1. Staff must treat all students fairly, equitably, and with respect, regardless of their race, color, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, age, marital status, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, physical characteristics, disability, or any other characteristic protected by applicable law.
2. Staff must maintain high expectations for all students that are reasonable, clear, and age-appropriate.
3. Staff must use behavior intervention strategies to guide student behavior and appropriate responsive strategies to maintain a safe and secure environment.
4. Staff must respect students' personal space.
5. Staff must immediately report abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults when observed or suspected and not interfere with the making of reports of abuse or neglect.
6. Staff should avoid words and deeds that might bring TCPS or any school or program in the district into disrepute or might undermine colleagues in the perception of others (staff/pupils/parents/community).
7. Staff should retain professional independent objectivity and not promote dogma or political bias to others in their working activities.
8. Staff should be aware of and should follow school district policies, systems, and procedures.
9. In order to ensure safeguards both for staff and pupils, staff must obtain permission from the principal before taking pupils off the school premises or before arranging for any visiting speakers.

10. Before incurring any expenditure on behalf of the school or school district, staff must obtain approval from their principal or supervisor.

11. Staff must complete work assignments in an appropriate, satisfactory, and timely manner and follow TCPS, department, and school procedures and guidelines, as well as the instructions, directions, and orders of supervisors and administrators.

12. Staff must report to work on time as scheduled, work as long as expected, follow leave procedures, and use work time for performance of TCPS responsibilities.

13. Staff must dress for work in a professionally appropriate manner.

14. Staff must follow legal requirements and TCPS standards on ethical behavior and avoid conflicts of interest to include obeying copyright laws on computer software, audio-visual and printed material.

15. Staff must maintain the confidentiality of information that they obtain through work, including employee and student records.

16. Staff must exercise due care and prudence when incurring expenses on behalf of TCPS and comply with all requirements for submitting any requests for reimbursement of travel and related expenses directly related to official TCPS business.

17. Staff must complete all required reports on a timely basis and follow program and financial reporting guidelines.

18. Staff must attend and participate fully in all required TCPS professional learning opportunities and complete all coursework and training to maintain valid certification/ licensure required to hold the TCPS position to which they are assigned including safety training and annual updates.

19. Staff must report known or suspected instances of fraud, false claims, false statements, bribery, theft, or embezzlement of TCPS funds or property.

20. Staff must exercise fiscal responsibility with and properly account for TCPS funds, safeguard TCPS property, and respect other people's property.

21. Staff must follow legal requirements and TCPS rules prohibiting use of tobacco, drugs, and other controlled substances on TCPS property and in TCPS vehicles and at all school related events. Tobacco use is prohibited on all Thomas County School System property, in all Thomas County School vehicles, and at all school-related events on or off campus and whenever in the presence of students. Use of alternative nicotine delivery devices such as E-cigs, vape pens, nicotine vaporizers, etc. is prohibited in the same manner as all other tobacco-related devices.

22. Staff must follow legal requirements and TCPS rules concerning school safety and security. Staff must not climb on chairs, tables, stools or other items that are not designed for that purpose. Injuries sustained while climbing improperly may result in disciplinary action. Staff must use recommended safety equipment when working and must wear seat belts when driving school system vehicles or when driving a private vehicle on school business.

23. Staff must follow legal requirements and TCPS rules regarding appropriate use of TCPS websites, e-mail, and other communications technology, as well as test security and data reporting requirements.

24. Staff must self-report criminal arrests, charges, or convictions.

25. Staff must respond honestly to a work-related inquiry by TCPS, law enforcement, or other authorized investigative officials.

26. Staff must conduct private life activities (including social media activities) in a manner that is not prejudicial to their effectiveness as a TCPS employee and recognize that criminal, dishonest, and other inappropriate activities may have an adverse impact on employment with TCPS.

2.2 Selected examples of inappropriate conduct:

("Do nots") Note: The following list of unacceptable activities does not include all types of conduct that can result in disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. Nothing in this list alters the at-will nature of employment for some employees of the district.

1. Do not engage in conduct that endangers the safety of students, employees, yourself, parents/guardians, or the public.
2. Do not abandon your job or misuse leave.
3. Do not provide false information or make a material omission on a résumé or job application.
4. Do not submit incorrect or fraudulent requests for reimbursement, expenses, or pay.
5. Do not participate in decision making during the course of your work for TCPS in areas where you have a personal interest. Do not use your position as a TCPS employee or information gained through your employment for personal gain.
6. Do not provide tutoring, before-school, after-school, or during summer activities for compensation, except as allowed by TCPS policy or regulation.
7. Do not possess firearms or other weapons on TCPS property or at a TCPS-sponsored activity.
8. Do not use any type of tobacco product or alternative nicotine delivery device on any TCPS property, in any TCPS vehicle, at any school-related event, or in the presence of students on or off campus.
9. Do not consume alcohol or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs on TCPS property, at any school-related event, or in the presence of students, on or off campus.
10. Do not discriminate against students based on race, color, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, age, marital status, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, physical characteristics, disability, or any other characteristic protected by applicable law.
11. Do not bully, harass, or intimidate students, parents/guardians, or peers.

12. Do not engage in abuse or neglect of any child or vulnerable adult, including grooming behaviors through which an adult or a person in a position of authority builds an emotional connection with a child to gain his or her trust for the purposes of exploitation or other abuse.

13. Do not meet with a student one-on-one in a room with the door locked or the lights off.

14. Do not show pornography to TCPS students or involve children in or with pornography. Do not introduce or view pornography on TCPS property or at TCPS activities or anywhere on a TCPS owned device or by way of a TCPS Internet connection.

15. Do not engage in inappropriate physical interactions with students, such as— hitting, tickling, or kissing; fondling any part of a student's body; any type of massage given by or to a child; and sending offensive or sexually explicit pictures, notes, cartoons, or jokes. NOTE: Certain touches may be appropriate in particular circumstances, such as a pat on the back or shoulder, handshakes, high fives, or holding the hand of younger children to guide or escort them. Sexual contact, including consensual sexual relationships between any employee or volunteer and students, including students who have reached the age of consent, is prohibited and will result in immediate dismissal and referral to law enforcement and the Professional Standards Commission. Do not engage in inappropriate verbal interactions with students, such as name-calling or using profanity; discussing intimate details of one's personal life; encouraging students to keep secrets from other adults; sexual or offensive humor; shaming, belittling, or derogatory remarks about a student, including negative comments about the student's physique, body development, dress, or family; and harsh language that may threaten, degrade, or humiliate children.

16. Do not have one-on-one interactions with TCPS students through social media, e-mail, or other electronic communication about subjects not directly related to instruction or your TCPS work responsibilities. Do not use personal e-mail accounts, social media networking sites, or other electronic communications to communicate or become "friends" with students.

17. Do not transport a student in a personal vehicle without permission from a parent/guardian and a school administrator,

and, if possible, arrange for a second adult to accompany the driver and the student.

18. Corporal punishment, which is defined as any disciplinary action taken by school personnel with the intention of producing physical pain, shall not be used in TCPS. Do not utilize corporal punishment, or other inappropriate student disciplinary practices, such as shaking, slapping, shoving, pinching, ostracizing, requiring excessive physical exertion, or withholding food, water, light, medical care or the opportunity to use the restroom.

19. Do not engage in any form of physical/verbal violence towards pupils.

20. Do not utilize inappropriate physical restraints or seclusion of students.

21. Do not engage in conduct that is rude or disrespectful to others.

22. Do not retaliate against an employee or another person for taking any action or for reporting any facts or information related to real or perceived improper acts.

23. Do not steal school monies or property nor monies or property of colleagues or visitors to the school.

24. Do not remove from school premises property, including documents, which is not normally taken away without the express authority of the principal or supervisor or of the owner of the property.

25. Do not use district equipment, vehicles, or other property for personal reasons without approval from a supervisor with appropriate authority to grant such permission.

26. Do not deliberately falsify documents such as time sheets, stipend sheets, subsistence and expense claims.

27. Do not refuse to comply with reasonable instructions given by staff with a supervisory responsibility.

28. Do not violate any federal, state and local law or regulation, any Board of Education policy or administrative procedural directive, or any security or safety rules. Employees must

observe safety rules and district safety practices and wear required safety equipment.

29. Do not threaten, intimidate or coerce fellow employees on or off district property at any time, for any purpose.

30. Do not spread malicious gossip and/or rumors or engage in behavior which creates discord and lack of harmony or that interferes with another employee.

31. Do not gamble on school district property.

32. Do not use obscene or abusive language toward any supervisor, employee, parent, family or student on or off school district premises.

33. Do not speed or drive carelessly in district-owned vehicles or in personal vehicles while on school business. Do not drive any vehicle on school business while under the influence of alcohol or without using seatbelts.

34. Do not fail to immediately report damage to, or accident involving, district-owned vehicles or equipment.

35. Do not solicit fellow employees, students, families or other members of the school community during working hours and/or in working areas. Soliciting may include selling merchandise or collecting funds of any kind for charities, businesses or others without authorization from the supervisor of the employees being solicited during business hours, or at a time or place that may make others feel uncomfortable or interfere with the work of another employee.

WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK!

If any employee is in any doubt with regard to the guidelines of this Code, and how they apply in any particular situation, the employee should consult with the principal or supervisor.

2.3 Ethical Conduct with Students

It is expected that all employees will build positive relationships with students to support learning while adhering to standards of professional practice.

2.4 Dress Code and Personal Appearance

Employees shall be suitably attired and groomed during working hours, when attending district-sponsored activities and when representing any school, school program, or school activity. To maintain a professional appearance, facial piercings, ear gauges, tongue piercings and visible tattoos must be covered. Dress shall be professional and modest so that cleavage, midriffs, buttocks, and undergarments are covered.

If a supervisor determines that an employee's attire and/or grooming is out of place, the employee may be asked to leave the workplace until he/she is properly attired and/or groomed. In no case shall dress code and personal appearance standards for employees be less than those prescribed for students in the student handbook. Supervisors shall counsel staff assigned to their location on appearance and conduct. Employees who violate the dress code standard may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

2.5 Funds

Any money collected at any school, at any school function, from students anywhere, or as part of a fundraiser to benefit students, student organizations, or a charity, must be deposited into a school managed account at the school or into the account of one of the two authorized booster organizations - - the athletic boosters or the band boosters. No organization or informal group of parents, other than the band boosters or athletic boosters, is authorized to open a bank account on behalf of a school, school group, or student organization. Any organization that is authorized to open a bank account must use its own federal identification number and is prohibited from using the school district's federal identification number. School-related functions may not be operated on a cash basis. School personnel must provide a receipt to the student or parent for all funds collected (except in the case where it is not practical such as at a concession stand or at the entrance to a school play or dance). Any money collected from students or on behalf of students or as part of any fundraiser must be deposited into the appropriate school account and expenses must be paid from that account by the school bookkeeper, principal, or principal designee. Sufficient

documentation should be maintained by employees collecting money. Employees must not comingle (mix) their personal money with school system money nor should they make cash purchases from the proceeds of a fundraiser or concession stand. School funds should be left in a secure location at school and should never be taken home or left in an unattended vehicle. Any loss or theft of funds must be reported immediately to the appropriate administrator and to law enforcement. Every effort should be made by employees to submit funds within three days of receipt to the school bookkeeper who will issue a receipt to the employee for the submitted funds. Employees may not direct parents to manage funds in a manner that is inconsistent with these guidelines. Any employee who has knowledge of improper fund management of an organization should notify the school district administration. Employees who fail to follow the financial expectations of the school system will be subject to disciplinary action which may include termination. Certificated employees who fail to follow the proper financial guidance of the school district may be referred to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission if a violation of the Georgia Educator Code of Ethics has occurred.

3.0 EXCLUSIVITY OF SERVICE

Staff's off-duty hours are their personal concern, but they should avoid a position where duty and private interests conflict with each other. This includes the following:

- Staff members making online associations/friendships with current pupils via social networking.

- Staff members using texting/email facilities on either their mobile phone or computer device to communicate with current pupils.

The school district does not seek to preclude staff unreasonably from undertaking additional employment but staff are required to devote their time, attention and abilities to TCPS duties during working hours and to act in the best interests of the school at all times. Accordingly, staff must not undertake any employment or engagement which might interfere with the performance of their TCPS duties or conflict with the interests of the school district without permission from the superintendent. It follows

that, regardless of whether you are employed on a full-time or fractional contract, you are required to notify the Director of Administrative Services of any employment or engagement which you intend to undertake whilst in the employment of the school system (including any such employment or engagement which commenced before your employment began with the school system or prior to the adoption of this Code of Conduct).

Staff must not accept employment with another school district during their contract period without first requesting and receiving release from their contract with TCPS. Certificated employees who fail to fulfill their contracts will be charged liquidated damages as provided in their contracts **and** reported to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission for breach of contract.

4.0 Weapon-free and Violence-free School Safety Zones
(§ 16-11-127.1)

Any employee who violates the weapon-free and violence-free section of this code will be reported to law enforcement and shall be subject to additional disciplinary action which may include termination.

(a) As used in this Code section, the term:

(1) "School safety zone" means in or on any real property owned by or leased to any public or private elementary school, secondary school, or school board and used for elementary or secondary education and in or on the campus of any public or private technical school, vocational school, college, university, or institution of postsecondary education.

(2) "Weapon" means and includes any pistol, revolver, or any weapon designed or intended to propel a missile of any kind, or any dirk, bowie knife, switchblade knife, ballistic knife, any other knife having a blade of two or more inches, straight-edge razor, razor blade, spring stick, knuckles, whether made from metal, thermoplastic, wood, or other similar material, blackjack, any bat, club, or other bludgeon-type weapon, or any flailing instrument consisting of two or more rigid parts connected in such a manner as to allow them to swing freely, which may be known as a nun chahka, nun chuck, nunchaku, shuriken, or fighting chain, or any disc, of whatever configuration, having at least two points or pointed blades

which is designed to be thrown or propelled and which may be known as a throwing star or oriental dart, or any weapon of like kind, and any stun gun or Taser as defined in subsection (a) of Code Section 16-11-106. This paragraph excludes any of these instruments used for classroom work authorized by the teacher.

(b)

(1) Except as otherwise provided in subsection (c) of this Code section, it shall be unlawful for any person to carry to or to possess or have under such person's control while within a school safety zone or at a school building, school function, or school property or on a bus or other transportation furnished by the school any weapon or explosive compound, other than fireworks the possession of which is regulated by Chapter 10 of Title 25.

(2) Any license holder who violates this subsection shall be guilty of a misdemeanor. Any person who is not a license holder who violates this subsection shall be guilty of a felony and, upon conviction thereof, be punished by a fine of not more than $10,000.00, by imprisonment for not less than two nor more than ten years, or both.

(3) Any person convicted of a violation of this subsection involving a dangerous weapon or machine gun, as such terms are defined in Code Section 16-11-121, shall be punished by a fine of not more than $10,000.00 or by imprisonment for a period of not less than five nor more than ten years, or both.

(4) A child who violates this subsection may be subject to the provisions of Code Section 15-11-63.

(c) The provisions of this Code section shall not apply to:

(1) Baseball bats, hockey sticks, or other sports equipment possessed by competitors for legitimate athletic purposes;

(2) Participants in organized sport shooting events or firearm training courses;

(3) Persons participating in military training programs conducted by or on behalf of the armed forces of the United States or the Georgia Department of Defense;

(4) Persons participating in law enforcement training conducted by a police academy certified by the Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council or by

a law enforcement agency of the state or the United States or any political subdivision thereof;

(5) The following persons, when acting in the performance of their official duties or when en route to or from their official duties:

(A) A peace officer as defined by Code Section 35-8-2;

(B) A law enforcement officer of the United States government;

(C) A prosecuting attorney of this state or of the United States;

(D) An employee of the Georgia Department of Corrections or a correctional facility operated by a political subdivision of this state or the United States who is authorized by the head of such correctional agency or facility to carry a firearm;

(E) A person employed as a campus police officer or school security officer who is authorized to carry a weapon in accordance with Chapter 8 of Title 20; and

(F) Medical examiners, coroners, and their investigators who are employed by the state or any political subdivision thereof;

(6) A person who has been authorized in writing by a duly authorized official of the school to have in such person's possession or use as part of any activity being conducted at a school building, school property, or school function a weapon which would otherwise be prohibited by this Code section. Such authorization shall specify the weapon or weapons which have been authorized and the time period during which the authorization is valid;

(7) A person who is licensed in accordance with Code Section 16-11-129 or issued a permit pursuant to Code Section 43-38-10, when such person carries or picks up a student at a school building, school function, or school property or on a bus or other transportation furnished by the school or a person who is licensed in accordance with Code Section 16-11-129 or issued a permit pursuant to Code Section 43-38-10 when he has any weapon legally kept within a vehicle when such vehicle is parked at such school property or is in transit through a designated school zone;

(8) A weapon possessed by a license holder which is under the possessor's control in a motor vehicle or which is in a locked compartment of a motor vehicle or one which is in a locked container in or a locked firearms rack which is on a motor vehicle which is being used by an adult over 21 years of age to bring to or pick up a studeat a school building, school function, or school property or on a bus or other transportation furnished by the school, or when such vehicle is used to transport someone to an activity being conducted on school property which has been authorized by a duly authorized official of the school; provided, however, that this exception shall not apply to a student attending such school;

(9) Persons employed in fulfilling defense contracts with the government of the United States or agencies thereof when possession of the weapon is necessary for manufacture, transport, installation, and testing under the requirements of such contract;

(10) Those employees of the State Board of Pardons and Paroles when specifically designated and authorized in writing by the members of the State Board of Pardons and Paroles to carry a weapon;

(11) The Attorney General and those members of his or her staff whom he or she specifically authorizes in writing to carry a weapon;

(12) Probation supervisors employed by and under the authority of the Department of Corrections pursuant to Article 2 of Chapter 8 of Title 42, known as the "State-wide Probation Act," when specifically designated and authorized in writing by the director of the Division of Probation;

(13) Public safety directors of municipal corporations;

(14) State and federal trial and appellate judges;

(15) United States attorneys and assistant United States attorneys;

(16) Clerks of the superior courts;

(17) Teachers and other school personnel who are otherwise authorized to possess or carry weapons, provided that any such weapon is in a locked compartment of a motor vehicle or one which is in a locked container in or a locked firearms rack which is on a motor vehicle; or

(18) Constables of any county of this state.

(d)

(1) This Code section shall not prohibit any person who resides or works in a business or is in the ordinary course transacting lawful business or any person who is a visitor of such resident located within a school safety zone from carrying, possessing, or having under such person's control a weapon within a school safety zone; provided, however, it shall be unlawful for any such person to carry, possess, or have under such person's control while at a school building or school function or on school property, a school bus, or other transportation furnished by the school any weapon or explosive compound, other than fireworks the possession of which is regulated by Chapter 10 of Title 25.

(2) Any person who violates this subsection shall be subject to the penalties specified in subsection (b) of this Code section.

(3) This subsection shall not be construed to waive or alter any legal requirement for possession of weapons or firearms otherwise required by law.

(e) It shall be no defense to a prosecution for a violation of this Code section that:

(1) School was or was not in session at the time of the offense;

(2) The real property was being used for other purposes besides school purposes at the time of the offense; or

(3) The offense took place on a school vehicle.

5.0 Ethical Conduct with Colleagues, Parents/Guardians, and the Community

Employees are expected to treat parents/guardians, other employees, and members of the community professionally and respectfully and comply with all nondiscrimination laws and policies in their relationships with other adults.

6.0 Application and Enforcement of the Employee Code of Conduct

While this Code of Conduct focuses on actions that may subject an employee to discipline, there are many instances that may, or should, be handled appropriately through a professional growth process.

6.1 Corrective and Progressive Discipline

TCPS is committed to fair and consistent treatment of employees in a disciplinary process that is both corrective and progressive.

6.2 Non-disciplinary Corrective Actions

In some circumstances, a supervisor or manager may determine that an employee's conduct does not warrant formal disciplinary action but does warrant a clarification as to expectations regarding future conduct. In such cases, the supervisor or manager may provide written guidance as to expectations regarding future conduct. Such a document is not considered disciplinary in nature, but a confidential record will be maintained because it may provide context for future disciplinary action if the employee's conduct does not conform to the communicated expectations.

6.3 Disciplinary actions

Typical disciplinary actions include the following:

1. Oral or written warning
2. Letter of Direction
3. Written reprimand from the superintendent
4. Suspension without pay
5. Demotion
6. Removal from position
7. Termination

TCPS is not obligated to use any specific level of progressive discipline or to utilize the actions in the order listed above. Rather, the specific facts of each situation will determine which of the listed disciplinary actions will be appropriate. In making a determination as to the appropriate level of disciplinary action in each case, consideration of mitigating factors (such as an employee's history of service with a clean record or an indication of less culpability on the part of the employee) or aggravating factors (such as placing others at risk of serious injury, demonstrating intentional wrongdoing, or indifference to the effect of an action or the outcome on others) may be considered.

Lack of awareness or knowledge of this Code of Conduct, or applicable policies or regulations, is not a defense to a charge of misconduct. Except for serious infractions, including but not limited to the prohibited criminal conduct discussed on the following pages, the lowest appropriate level of disciplinary action should be

applied initially to focus on ensuring that an employee understands expectations and does not repeat the inappropriate conduct. In general, discipline should progress to a more severe level after a lesser disciplinary action has been implemented and proven to be ineffective.

Nevertheless, a more serious infraction may warrant suspension or termination, even for a first-time offense, or repeated offenses, depending on the circumstances. This may be the case even when the infraction violates a standard of conduct that is not specifically enumerated in writing but involves common-sense application of governing principles or criminal law.

7.0 Media

Other than on matters of publicity, only the principal or superintendent is authorized to speak or send any communication on behalf of the school to members of the press or broadcast media. This decision is to avoid any embarrassment or unfair pressure on staff. This authorization may be extended by the superintendent or principal to other staff members.

8.0 Georgia Educator Code of Ethics

All TCPS employees are expected to abide by the Georgia Educator Code of Ethics. Certificated employees who violate one or more standards of the Georgia Educator Code of Ethics will be referred to Ethics Division of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

(1) Introduction. The Code of Ethics for Educators defines the professional behavior of educators in Georgia and serves as a guide to ethical conduct. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission has adopted standards that represent the conduct generally accepted by the education profession. The code defines unethical conduct justifying disciplinary sanction and provides guidance for protecting the health, safety and general welfare of students and educators, and assuring the citizens of Georgia a degree of accountability within the education profession.

(2) Definitions

(a) "Breach of contract" occurs when an educator fails to honor a signed contract for employment with a school/school system by resigning in a manner that does not meet the

guidelines established by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

(b) "Certificate" refers to any teaching, service, or leadership certificate, license, or permit issued by authority of the Professional Standards Commission.

(c) "Child endangerment" occurs when an educator disregards a substantial and/or unjustifiable risk of bodily harm to the student.

(d) "Educator" is a teacher, school or school system administrator, or other education personnel who holds a certificate issued by the Professional Standards Commission and persons who have applied for but have not yet received a certificate. For the purposes of the Code of Ethics for Educators, "educator" also refers to paraprofessionals, aides, and substitute teachers.

(e) "Student" is any individual enrolled in the state's public or private schools from preschool through grade 12 or any individual under the age of 18. For the purposes of the Code of Ethics for Educators, the enrollment period for a graduating student ends on August 31 of the year of graduation.

(f) "Complaint" is any written and signed statement from a local board, the state board, or one or more individual residents of this state filed with the Professional Standards Commission alleging that an educator has breached one or more of the standards in the Code of Ethics for Educators. A "complaint" will be deemed a request to investigate.

(g) "Revocation" is the invalidation of any certificate held by the educator.

(h) "Denial" is the refusal to grant initial certification to an applicant for a certificate.

(i) "Suspension" is the temporary invalidation of any certificate for a period of time specified by the Professional Standards Commission.

(j) "Reprimand" admonishes the certificate holder for his or her conduct. The reprimand cautions that further unethical conduct will lead to a more severe action.

(k) "Warning" warns the certificate holder that his or her conduct is unethical. The warning cautions that further unethical conduct will lead to a more severe action.

(l) "Monitoring" is the quarterly appraisal of the educator's conduct by the Professional Standards Commission through contact with the educator and his or her employer. As a condition of monitoring, an educator may be required to submit a criminal background check (GCIC). The Commission specifies the length of the monitoring period.

(m) "No Probable Cause" is a determination by the Professional Standards Commission that, after a preliminary investigation, either no further action need be taken or no cause exists to recommend disciplinary action.

(3) Standards

(a) Standard 1: Legal Compliance - An educator shall abide by federal, state, and local laws and statutes. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to the commission or conviction of a felony or of any crime involving moral turpitude; of any other criminal offense involving the manufacture, distribution, trafficking, sale, or possession of a controlled substance or marijuana as provided for in Chapter 13 of Title 16; or of any other sexual offense as provided for in Code Section 16-6-1 through 16-6-17, 16-6-20, 16-6-22.2, or 16-12-100; or any other laws applicable to the profession. As used herein, conviction includes a finding or verdict of guilty, or a plea of nolo contendere, regardless of whether an appeal of the conviction has been sought; a situation where first offender treatment without adjudication of guilt pursuant to the charge was granted; and a situation where an adjudication of guilt or sentence was otherwise withheld or not entered on the charge or the charge was otherwise disposed of in a similar manner in any jurisdiction.

(b) Standard 2: Conduct with Students - An educator shall always maintain a professional relationship with all students, both in and outside the classroom. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to: 1. committing any act of child abuse, including physical and verbal abuse; 2. committing any act of cruelty to children or any act of child endangerment; 3.

committing any sexual act with a student or soliciting such from a student; 4. engaging in or permitting harassment of or misconduct toward a student that would violate a state or federal law; 5. soliciting, encouraging, or consummating an inappropriate written, verbal, electronic, or physical relationship with a student; 6. furnishing tobacco, alcohol, or illegal/ unauthorized drugs to any student; or 7. failing to prevent the use of alcohol or illegal or unauthorized drugs by students under the educator's supervision (including but not limited to at the educator's residence or any other private setting).

(c) Standard 3: Alcohol or Drugs - An educator shall refrain from the use of alcohol or illegal or unauthorized drugs during the course of professional practice. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to: 1. being on school or Local Unit of Administration (LUA)/school district premises or at a school or a LUA/school district-related activity while under the influence of, possessing, using, or consuming illegal or unauthorized drugs; and 2. being on school or LUA/school district premises or at a school-related activity involving students while under the influence of, possessing, or consuming alcohol. A school-related activity includes, but is not limited to, any activity sponsored by the school or school system (booster clubs, parent-teacher organizations, or any activity designed to enhance the school curriculum i.e. Foreign Language trips, etc.).

(d) Standard 4: Honesty - An educator shall exemplify honesty and integrity in the course of professional practice. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to, falsifying, misrepresenting, or omitting: 1. professional qualifications, criminal history, college or staff development credit and/ or degrees, academic award, and employment history; 2. information submitted to federal, state, local school districts and other governmental agencies; 3. information regarding the evaluation of students and/or personnel; 4. reasons for absences or leaves; 5. information submitted in the course of an official inquiry/investigation; and 6. information submitted in the course of professional practice.

(e) Standard 5: Public Funds and Property - An educator entrusted with public funds and property shall honor that

trust with a high level of honesty, accuracy, and responsibility. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to: 1. misusing public or school-related funds; 2. failing to account for funds collected from students or parents; 3. submitting fraudulent requests or documentation for reimbursement of expenses or for pay (including fraudulent or purchased degrees, documents, or coursework); 4. co-mingling public or school-related funds with personal funds or checking accounts; and 5. using school or school district property without the approval of the local board of education/governing board or authorized designee.

(f) Standard 6: Remunerative Conduct - An educator shall maintain integrity with students, colleagues, parents, patrons, or businesses when accepting gifts, gratuities, favors, and additional compensation. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to: 1. soliciting students or parents of students, or school or LUA/school district personnel, to purchase equipment, supplies, or services from the educator or to participate in activities that financially benefit the educator unless approved by the local board of education/governing board or authorized designee; 2. accepting gifts from vendors or potential vendors for personal use or gain where there may be the appearance of a conflict of interest; 3. tutoring students assigned to the educator for remuneration unless approved by the local board of education/governing board or authorized designee; and 4. coaching, instructing, promoting athletic camps, summer leagues, etc. that involves students in an educator's school system and from whom the educator receives remuneration unless approved by the local board of education/governing board or authorized designee. These types of activities must be in compliance with all rules and regulations of the Georgia High School Association.

(g) Standard 7: Confidential Information - An educator shall comply with state and federal laws and state school board policies relating to the confidentiality of student and personnel records, standardized test material and other information. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to: 1. sharing of confidential information concerning student academic and disciplinary records, health and medical information, family status and/or income, and assessment/testing results

unless disclosure is required or permitted by law; 2. sharing of confidential information restricted by state or federal law; 3. violation of confidentiality agreements related to standardized testing including copying or teaching identified test items, publishing or distributing test items or answers, discussing test items, violating local school system or state directions for the use of tests or test items, etc.; and 4. violation of other confidentiality agreements required by state or local policy.

(h) Standard 8: Required Reports - An educator shall file reports of a breach of one or more of the standards in the Code of Ethics for Educators, child abuse (O.C.G.A. §19-7-5), or any other required report. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to: 1. failure to report all requested information on documents required by the Commission when applying for or renewing any certificate with the Commission; 2. failure to make a required report of a violation of one or more standards of the Code of Ethics for educators of which they have personal knowledge as soon as possible but no later than ninety (90) days from the date the educator became aware of an alleged breach unless the law or local procedures require reporting sooner; and 3. failure to make a required report of any violation of state or federal law soon as possible but no later than ninety (90) days from the date the educator became aware of an alleged breach unless the law or local procedures require reporting sooner. These reports include but are not limited to: murder, voluntary manslaughter, aggravated assault, aggravated battery, kidnapping, any sexual offense, any sexual exploitation of a minor, any offense involving a controlled substance and any abuse of a child if an educator has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused.

(i) Standard 9: Professional Conduct - An educator shall demonstrate conduct that follows generally recognized professional standards and preserves the dignity and integrity of the education profession. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to a resignation that would equate to a breach of contract; any conduct that impairs and/or diminishes the certificate holder's ability to function professionally in his or her employment position; or behavior or conduct that is detrimental to the health, welfare, discipline, or morals of students.

(j) Standard 10: Testing - An educator shall administer state-mandated assessments fairly and ethically. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to: 1. committing any act that breaches Test Security; and 2. compromising the integrity of the assessment.

(4) Reporting

(a) Educators are required to report a breach of one or more of the Standards in the Code of Ethics for Educators as soon as possible but no later than ninety (90) days from the date the educator became aware of an alleged breach unless the law or local procedures require reporting sooner. Educators should be aware of legal requirements and local policies and procedures for reporting unethical conduct. Complaints filed with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission must be in writing and must be signed by the complainant (parent, educator, or other LUA/school district employee, etc.).

(b) The Commission notifies local and state officials of all disciplinary actions. In addition, suspensions and revocations are reported to national officials, including the NASDTEC Clearinghouse.

(5) Disciplinary Action

(a) The Georgia Professional Standards Commission is authorized to suspend, revoke, or deny certificates, to issue a reprimand or warning, or to monitor the educator's conduct and performance after an investigation is held and notice and opportunity for a hearing are provided to the certificate holder. Any of the following grounds shall be considered cause for disciplinary action against the holder of a certificate: 1. unethical conduct as outlined in The Code of Ethics for Educators, Standards 1-11 -10 (GaPSC Rule 505-6-.01); 2. disciplinary action against a certificate in another state on grounds consistent with those specified in the Code of Ethics for Educators, Standards 1-11 -10 (GaPSC Rule 505-6-.01); 3. order from a court of competent jurisdiction or a request from the Department of Human Resources that the certificate should be suspended or the application for certification should be denied for non-payment of child support (O.C.G.A. §19-6-28.1 and §19-11-9.3); 4. notification from the Georgia Higher

Education Assistance Corporation that the educator is in default and not in satisfactory repayment status on a student loan guaranteed by the Georgia Higher Education Assistance Corporation (O.C.G.A. §20-3-295); 5. suspension or revocation of any professional license or certificate 6. violation of any other laws and rules applicable to the profession (O.C.G.A. §16-13-111); and 7. any other good and sufficient cause that renders an educator unfit for employment as an educator.

(b) An individual whose certificate has been revoked, denied, or suspended may not serve as a volunteer or be employed as an educator, paraprofessional, aide, substitute teacher or, in any other position during the period of his or her revocation, suspension or denial for a violation of The Code of Ethics. The superintendent and the educator designated by the superintendent/Local Board of Education shall be responsible for assuring that an individual whose certificate has been revoked, denied, or suspended is not employed or serving in any capacity in their district. Both the superintendent and the superintendent's designee must hold GaPSC certification. Should the superintendent's certificate be revoked, suspended, or denied, the Board of Education shall be responsible for assuring that the superintendent whose certificate has been revoked, suspended, or denied is not employed or serving in any capacity in their district. Authority O.C.G.A. § 20-2-200; 20-2-981 through 20-2-984.5

This document was compiled with input from a variety of individuals and sources including codes of conduct from other school districts. No right of authorship or ownership is asserted, claimed, or sought.

THOMAS COUNTY SCHOOLS

Hand-In-Hand Primary School
Pre-K & Kindergarten
229-225-3908

Garrison-Pilcher Elementary School
Grades 1 & 2
229-225-4387

Cross Creek Elementary School
Grades 3 & 4
229-225-3900

Thomas County Middle School
Grades 5 - 8
229-225-4394

Thomas County Central High School
Grades 9 - 12
229-225-5050

Thomas County Academy
Grades 8 - 12
229-227-1397



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