

Teacher Professionalism:
A Public Trust



*Who
teachers
are*



Professional Identity

Although all teachers are individuals who have their own unique ways of teaching, they are also members of a profession bound by a social contract in which the public gives the profession independence and responsibility for the conduct of its affairs in return for the profession's commitment to high professional standards of conduct and competence.

This social contract carries the implication that teachers share with their colleagues an identity based on certain kinds of specialized knowledge, skills and other characteristics.

Many factors shape this professional identity including pre-service preparation, the professional contexts of teachers' work, continuing professional growth, and the other common experiences of most teaching careers. In turn, this identity, or *who teachers are*, is central to teachers' professional practice and relationships.

The three codes of Professional Competence, Professional Ethics and Collective Interests, developed in Saskatchewan *by teachers for teachers*, are statements of shared principles about this professional identity and what it means to be a teacher in this province.



*What teachers do
and
how they do it*

Professional Practice and Contexts

Teachers teach. The public trusts professional teachers because they have the qualifications, including specialized knowledge, skills and judgment, to serve students' educational needs. In turn, teachers have a responsibility to act at all times in a manner that is worthy of this public trust and consistent with the teaching profession's expectations.

Many factors affect teachers' daily activities, and their conduct and competence as they carry out this work. A few examples include the diversity of students' needs, the teaching assignment, class size, the condition of the school facilities, as well as access to preparation time, quality learning resources and parental support.

The three codes of Professional Competence, Professional Ethics and Collective Interests, speak directly to several closely related dimensions of professional practice. These codes and the processes used to implement them also recognize that teachers' work lives involve very complex contexts that must be carefully considered whenever there are questions about an individual teacher's professional conduct or competence.

Ultimately, the codes outline what ethical conduct, competent professional practice and collective interests mean, and what the teaching profession expects from its members in these regards.



*Who teachers
work with*

Professional Relationships

Teachers work with many individuals including students, colleagues, administrators, education assistants, support staff, social workers, healthcare professionals, parents, volunteers and other community members. Effective professional relationships are essential to teaching practice and teachers share the responsibility for the quality of these relationships.

In Saskatchewan, individual teachers also have professional relationships with both the teaching profession and the employer. The STF has the legislated authority to develop and implement the three codes of Professional Competence, Professional Ethics and Collective Interests that express what it means to be a member of the teaching profession. Boards of education or other employers have the authority to establish their own policies and procedures regarding what it means for a teacher to be a staff member or employee.

It is important to note that these are two distinctive sets of expectations, policies and procedures, and that one should not be used in place of another. Concerns or complaints about an individual teacher's conduct or competence may be addressed through the teaching profession, the employer or both, either at the same time or at different points in time.

Teachers are strongly encouraged to become knowledgeable about the Federation's codes and procedures **and** their employers' policies and procedures to ensure they are aware of the expectations in both regards.



*How the profession
demonstrates responsibility*

A Proactive Approach to Professionalism

Saskatchewan is unique in that the public, via legislation, grants teachers and their professional organization the autonomy to regulate the professional competence, professional ethics and collective interests of its members. By proactively developing codes and disciplinary processes, Saskatchewan teachers demonstrate accountability and reinforce public confidence in, and support of, the profession.

Some teachers may feel uneasy about the idea of having professional codes. They may worry that “these codes will be used against me.” It is important to keep two key points in mind, however. First, procedures are in place to adjudicate complaints about the alleged misconduct or incompetence of a teacher. These procedures are based on the principles of due process. They are designed to focus on professional conduct and practice, not personalities, and to protect individual teachers from frivolous or malicious complaints.

Second, experienced teachers developed the three codes governing the professionalism of Saskatchewan teachers. All members of the teaching profession should be able to recognize at least some aspects of themselves and their work in the codes. At the same time, however, individual teachers will see their situation as somewhat unique. As teachers reflect on what the codes mean for their own practice, it is essential to keep exploring the complexities of teachers’ professional identity, practice, contexts and relationships.

The codes can be viewed as a starting point for teachers to think about these kinds of issues and to discuss with colleagues what is important to them as professionals, what teaching practice should involve, and what, if anything, they should change in their practice to meet students’ learning needs.



When Questions or Concerns Arise

Questions or concerns about an individual's teaching practice or professional competence should always be raised first with the teacher. In most cases, taking this step will address the issues that an administrator, teacher colleague, parent or other individual may have.

Teachers have an ethical responsibility to take their concerns first to the colleague in question. As noted in Article Six of the STF Code of Professional Ethics, teachers must "...inform an associate before making valid criticism, and inform the associate of the nature of the criticism before referring the criticism of the associate to appropriate officials."

Before approaching a colleague with their concerns, teachers are encouraged to contact STF Administrative Staff for advice and assistance. It is not a violation of the Code of Professional Ethics for a member to make this request. The role of the Federation's staff in these kinds of situations is to help clarify issues and procedures, *not* to judge or penalize STF members.

If questions or concerns about an individual's teaching practice or competence continue after a discussion with the teacher has occurred, then a formal complaint about a teacher's professional conduct and/or competence may be made to the board of education and/or the STF. Two routes may be followed:

1. The board of education may implement teacher supervision and evaluation processes in accordance with its policies.
2. A complainant, including a board of education, may forward the allegation to the Federation.

In either situation, the teacher involved should seek advice and assistance from STF Administrative Staff.



STF Programs and Services

Teachers may wish to explore the implications of their professional codes with colleagues in their school, local association or other settings. As they do so, they may want to access the STF programs and services regarding teacher professionalism. For example, the STF:

- Encourages and supports teachers at the provincial, local association, school staff and individual levels to create and carry out professional development plans.
- Offers various professional development opportunities regarding teacher professionalism (for example, pre-service workshops, Code of Professional Ethics/ethical decision-making workshops, summer short courses, beginning teacher conferences, “Big Questions, Worthy Dreams” symposium, sessions at teacher conventions, etc.).
- Promotes the professional development activities of STF special subject councils.
- Maintains an extensive professional resource collection and reference service (Stewart Resources Centre).

In addition, the STF:

- Provides information and advice to members regarding professional matters.
- Promotes teachers’ understanding and practice of teacher professionalism, including the principles and ideals of professional competence, professional ethics and collective interests.
- Advocates strengthening teacher professionalism in various ways, including promoting better understandings of teachers’ professional needs by educational partners and stakeholders.
- Supports and works with various affiliates and partner organizations with a focus on teacher professionalism initiatives.

Visit the Federation’s website at www.stf.sk.ca or contact one of the STF offices in Saskatoon or Regina for more information on programs and services for Saskatchewan teachers.



Code of Professional Competence

The Code includes the following core principles of competent teaching practice, each of which teachers may demonstrate in various ways.

1. To create and maintain a learning environment that encourages and supports the growth of the whole student.
2. To demonstrate a professional level of knowledge about the curriculum and the skills and judgment required to apply this knowledge effectively.
3. To demonstrate and support a repertoire of instructional strategies and methods that are applied in teaching activities.
4. To carry out professional responsibilities for student assessment and evaluation.
5. To reflect upon the goals and experience of professional practice, and adapt one's teaching accordingly.
6. To work with colleagues in mutually supportive ways and develop effective professional relationships with members of the educational community.
7. To conduct all professional relationships in ways that are consistent with principles of equity, fairness and respect for others.

This Code, set by Council, guides:

- the teaching practices of Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation members,
- the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Executive in decision-making regarding the disposition of complaints, and
- the deliberations and judgments of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Professional Competency Committee.

These are the ethical ideals for Saskatchewan teachers:

1. To act at all times in a manner that brings no dishonour to the individual and the teaching profession.
2. To act in a manner that respects the collective interests of the profession.
3. To make the teaching profession attractive in ideals and practices so that people will desire to enter it.
4. To respond unselfishly to colleagues seeking professional assistance.
5. To respect the various roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in the educational community.
6. To inform an associate before making valid criticism, and inform the associate of the nature of the criticism before referring the criticism of the associate to appropriate officials.
7. To support objectively the work of other teachers and evaluate the work of other teachers only at the request of the other teacher or when required by role as a supervisor.
8. To strive to be competent in the performance of any teaching services that are undertaken on behalf of students, taking into consideration the context and circumstances for teaching.
9. To deal justly, considerately and appropriately with each student.
10. To develop teaching practices that recognize and accommodate diversity within the classroom, the school and the community.
11. To respect the right of students to form their own judgments based upon knowledge.
12. To encourage each student to reach the highest level of individual development.

13. To seek to meet the needs of students by designing the most appropriate learning experiences for them.
14. To implement the provincial curriculum conscientiously and diligently, taking into account the context for teaching and learning provided by students, the school and the community.
15. To be consistent in the implementation and enforcement of school, school system and Department of Learning policies, regulations and rules.
16. To render professional service to the best of the individual's ability.
17. To keep the trust under which confidential information is exchanged.
18. To keep parents and the school community informed of, and appropriately involved in, decisions about educational programs.
19. To model the fulfillment of social and political responsibilities associated with membership in the community.
20. To protect the educational program from exploitation.
21. To seek to be aware of the need for changes in local association, Federation, school, school division and Department of Learning policies and regulations and actively pursue such changes.

These ideals, set by Council, guide:

- the ethical behaviour of Saskatchewan teachers,
- the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Executive in decision-making regarding the disposition of complaints, and
- the deliberations and judgments of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Ethics Committee.

A member shall:

1. Apply for an available position on the basis of the member's highest professional qualifications.
2. Undertake to perform as a condition of employment only those duties required by statute.
3. Neither apply for nor accept a position with an employer during a period in which the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation has declared that a dispute exists between the Federation and the employer.
4. Adhere to all terms of a contract of employment until it is legally terminated.
5. Participate actively in Federation affairs at both the provincial and local levels, working for needed changes in Federation policy and respect those decisions made by elected representatives of the profession.
6. Respect the collective bargaining process as the appropriate means to determine all conditions of employment.
7. Adhere to all terms of applicable collective agreements.
8. Participate in legal sanctions requested by the bargaining unit following a vote of the membership.

This Code, set by Council, guides:

- the conduct of members of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation,
- the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Executive in decision-making regarding the disposition of complaints, and
- the deliberations and judgments of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Collective Interests Committee.

For further information contact the STF:

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