Principles and Ethics for High School Educators

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Abstract

The role of high school educators goes beyond sharing knowledge. They are responsible for modeling ethical behavior to aid students' personal and social development. This paper looks at the foundational principles of ethics in a high school environment and the professional conduct of high school educators. The values that educators must get right to help the educational experience for high school students include integrity, fairness, respect, and responsibility (Kouzes, 2023). Students have diverse needs; the student-teacher relationship is critical for students' personal and social development (Essex, 2016). Educators face challenges such as balancing disciplinary actions with compassion. Educators' legal and ethical responsibilities can be found in the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) and state codes of conduct for educators. These codes help educators adhere to legal standards and protect student safety (Model Code of Ethics for Educators, 2023). The educational leader must promote an ethical culture within schools (Rebore, 2014). These leaders are held to a higher standard. They must be able to support students, parents, and community partners. They must model the way for all stakeholders to follow (Kouzes, 2023). Applying principles and ethics is essential for educators because their influence extends beyond academic instruction. When educators uphold ethical standards, they help create a culture where students feel valued and the environment is inclusive.

Keywords: Educational Leader; Educators; Ethics; Foundational Principles; Professional Conduct; Student-teacher relationship

Principles and Ethics for High School Educators

Understanding principles and ethics are crucial for Educators because they are held to a high standard and influence every child they encounter. The role of an educator is multifaceted. Educators' primary focus should be imparting knowledge to students (Sumerfield, 2018). Instead, they must wear different hats to assist students in the learning environment. They must also model ethical behavior and create a respectful learning environment. In high school, they must help guide students through critical personal and social development stages. The educational landscape continues to evolve, and with it comes more responsibility for educators.

The purpose of this paper is to provide some principles and ethical beliefs that support the professional conduct of high school educators. The core values that drive educational practices include integrity, fairness, respect, and responsibility. These values shape the experiences of both teachers and students (Rebore, 2014). This paper will also highlight the importance of ethical decision-making in addressing the diverse needs of students. This paper will also discuss the framework educators can use to navigate their roles regarding professionalism and ethics.

Foundational Principles of Ethical Teaching

Ethical teaching is supported by several foundational principles that guide educators' professional conduct and student interactions. These principles help ensure that the educational environment is conducive to learning but also respectful, equitable, and fair. Integrity is one of the top values educators should have (Rebore, 2014). It involves an educator's commitment to honesty, transparency, and ethical conduct. Educators are entrusted with the responsibility of shaping the minds and futures of students (Schunk, 2018). This responsibility cannot be taken

lightly. It requires being consistent in actions and decisions. Educators must maintain clear boundaries between their professional and personal lives or risk being judged unfairly.

The student's independence must be considered a fundamental principle in education. It honors students' right to decide on their learning and personal development. Students have unique perspectives, experiences, and aspirations and should be empowered to take ownership of their educational journey. Research shows that educators who respect students' autonomy encourage critical thinking, support independent learning, and provide opportunities for students to express their views and make informed choices (Murphy & Jacobs, 2000). It supports self-confidence and motivation. It prepares students to become responsible, active, productive members of society.

Equity and fairness are fundamental principles that ensure all students have access to the same opportunities for success, regardless of their background, abilities, and socioeconomic status. Ethical educators are committed to treating all students with fairness (Schunk, 2018). Even though systemic inequalities and biases may exist within the educational system, educators must make a conscious effort to address these issues. This can be addressed by being proactive in creating an inclusive environment that encourages diversity and promotes the well-being of every student (Coley, 2009). By supporting equity and fairness, educators help to tear down barriers to learning and create a school culture that is fair and empowering.

The Role of Ethics in Student-Teacher Relationships

It takes an intentional effort to establish a student-teacher relationship. The relationship must be built on trust, respect, and a commitment to the well-being of students (Kouzes, 2023). Unfortunately, not all student-teacher relationships are positive or built on these values. Ethical considerations can help bridge that gap that may exist (Rebore, 2014). Those considerations will ensure positive and constructive interactions occur between students and teachers. When clear

boundaries are maintained, and educators adhere to professional conduct, relationships can be forged for the betterment of the school (Essex, 2016). The educator is in a position of authority and can easily influence students, good or bad. Care has to be exercised when interacting with students.

Ethical boundaries help ensure the relationship focuses on the student's educational and personal development. Educators must be aware of behavior perceived as favoritism. The learning process can occur when educators treat all students respectfully and fairly regardless of personal feelings or external pressures (Wilson, Smalley, & Yancey, 2012). Educators must be mindful of their language, behavior, and communication style, ensuring that these align with the professional standards expected in an educational setting (Schunk, 2018). Students want educators they can trust because they often share personal information with them. It can be challenging to distinguish between what is considered mandatory reporting and what is not. Maintaining confidentiality builds trust. Students require it before they open up and be honest when communicating with teachers or staff (Kouzes, 2023). Confidentiality cannot be absolute, especially when a student's safety is at risk or when there is a legal obligation to report. Handling these situations with care is a must. Students must be informed upfront about what information must be shared and with whom. The reason why the information will be shared should also be provided to the student (Essex, 2016). When done right, educators can maintain the trust needed for an effective student-teacher relationship.

Educators must promote a safe environment while establishing an inclusive learning environment. The educators' responsibilities do not stop addressing discrimination, harassment, or bullying. They must also provide a classroom that is a safe place for all students. When students feel safe, valued, respected, and supported, they are likelier to excel in the classroom. Promoting inclusivity is recognizing that every student does not learn the same. It is, at the least,

accommodating the diverse needs of students. Culture, language, learning abilities, and personal circumstances can be complex (Coley, 2009). These same things that are complex for educators to address are complex for students to overcome. Educators who successfully address these complex issues create opportunities for all students to participate fully in the educational experience. They are helping to ensure that no one is excluded or marginalized. Educators must advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves. This will help build a strong community where students can learn and grow without fear of bias or exclusion.

Ethical Decision-Making in the Classroom

The classroom is a space where students from diverse backgrounds and experiences come together. The teacher's role is to create an environment of trust, respect, and learning (Schunk, 2018). The decisions that are made in the classroom have to be made based on ethics. The right balance is difficult to find at times. The decision to enforce discipline or show compassion is tough. Classroom management calls for disciplinary measures to maintain order at times. Unfortunately, students may suffer from external issues such as family problems, mental health concerns, or learning disabilities out of their control (Schunk, 2018). Trying to determine if a student's behavior is a manifestation of issues stemming from outside influences or if the behavior is a deliberate act of defiance is tough to recognize. Even the most experienced educators have difficulty navigating the fine line between understanding and maintaining order. Educators must identify the effects of the consequences of disciplinary actions (Sumerfield, 2018). For example, if a student gets suspended from school for skipping classes, this may push the child to disengage from school more than just skipping a class they do not like. However, if the student is offered counseling and individualized support in an educational setting, it could get to the root of the problem.

Teacher biases and assumptions can impact ethical decision-making. Conscious and unconscious biases influence how educators interact with students. This leads to unequal treatment for some and favorable opportunities for others (Almager, 2018). For example, an educator may lower the expectations on assignments for students based on their socioeconomic status. This does not help the student long term. It is putting a band-aid on a wound that requires stitches. Assumptions about students' abilities and behaviors based on stereotypes lead to unfair treatment and disciplinary actions. For example, assuming a student is more likely to cause trouble based on past experiences with other students from similar backgrounds. Educators must continuously self-reflect and seek professional development to help them recognize and minimize their biases. Culturally responsive teaching practices are a great way to create an all-inclusive classroom (Sumerfield, 2018). The ethical decision-making process in the classroom can improve with the practice.

Educators often face ethical dilemmas that require them to make difficult decisions. Prayer and fasting can be a way to overcome the difficult choices that have to be made. Matthew 17:21, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting (King James Version Holy Bible, 1611/2020)." In this scripture, the disciples are being taught by Jesus that some challenges require prayer and fasting to get a spiritual breakthrough. This can be applied to ethical decision-making in the classroom when the challenges involve conflicting values, such as fairness versus individual needs. Individual needs will win every time. The decisions that educators make are not always black or white. What does the educator do when they are faced with the gray area? For example, a student takes additional food from the lunchroom without asking because they have not eaten and are hungry. In this case, is it in the student's best interest to discipline or provide the appropriate support they require? Would it matter if their

socioeconomic status is below the poverty line? Educators must rely on their values, administrators' guidance, and the professional codes of ethics.

Legal and Ethical Responsibilities of Educators

Regarding educators' legal and ethical responsibilities, the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) and the state Code of Ethics for Educators provide the framework for ethical conduct in education. The framework is designed to help educators with their legal and ethical responsibilities (Model Code of Ethics for Educators, 2023). The federal, state, and local laws that govern educational practice must be adhered to by educators. The MCEE helps to break down how educators should conduct themselves to avoid legal troubles. Educators are expected to have an understanding of the laws and be able to apply them to their profession (Model Code of Ethics for Educators, 2023). The most concerning laws include student privacy, special education, mandatory reporting, and nondiscrimination (Essex, 2016). A firm understanding of these laws can help educators make the right decisions regarding ethical responsibility.

Protecting the rights and welfare of students is a responsibility that comes with the profession (Essex, 2016). The Florida Department of Education has an entire section dedicated to the principles of professional conduct for the education profession in Florida. Rule 6A-10.081, Florida Administrative Code, Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida, provides the ethical principles educators must abide by (Florida Department of Education, 2021). Educators risk losing their professional license to educate if they violate the rule in any way. It is common to refer to both codes when dealing with complex issues.

Promoting Ethical Culture within the School

One of the keys to a strong school leader is upholding ethical standards. The leader cannot be afraid or be bullied into not doing what is ethically and morally correct. They must be actively involved with parents and community members and always stand up for what is right.

They must use collaboration to their advantage. This consists in creating an ethical culture that starts with the leader. The leader must have a spirit of partnership to assist in developing the desired culture (Blackaby, 2011). This can be done by establishing shared values and having open and honest feedback. It does not hurt when there is mutual respect among educators and staff. There should be constant communication about ethical dilemmas to share best practices without revealing the person affected. Supporting each other to maintain high ethical standards while holding everyone accountable can lead to a better working environment (Schunk, 2018). By working together, educators can ensure that their actions are aligned and that students receive consistent messages about the importance of ethical behavior.

School leadership sets the tone for the ethical culture of the school. They must lead by example, demonstrate integrity fairness, and be committed to the ethical principles of (MCEE) and the Code of Educational Standards provided by their state (Model Code of Ethics for Educators, 2023). Establishing and enforcing ethical standards falls on their shoulders even when they need a clear precedence. Leaders must provide professional development opportunities that deal with ethical dilemmas (Kouzes, 2023). The reporting of ethical issues has to be done without fear of retaliation.

The ethical education does not stop at the school gates; it extends into the community. It is best to involve parents and the community so they can reinforce what has been taught or practiced in school (Kouzes, 2023). Addressing parents can be done by hosting workshops, sharing information on ethical parenting, and involving them in discussions about the school's ethical values. Addressing community members can be done by creating partnerships where businesses can come and speak to students or provide job opportunities for students while sharing the same ethical messages the school shares with students. The student will hear the same consistent message from multiple sources in the hopes that they will internalize the values

of ethics. When all stakeholders are on the same page, it can lead to a more supportive environment for students, where ethical behavior is recognized and celebrated at home, school, and the community.

Biblical Worldview of Ethics in School

Integrity is the foundation of ethical behavior in schools. Honesty in academic work, fairness in dealing with students, and maintaining trustworthiness are values in the Bible (Blackaby, 2011). Proverbs 11:3 "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity (New International Version Bible, 2011)." Wisdom and understanding are essential in a school environment. They guide educators and students. It reflects on what is good and righteous in God's eyes (Youssef, 2013). A learning environment aligned with Godly principles creates a safe place for students to excel. Proverbs 4:7 reads, "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it costs all you have, get understanding (King James Version Holy Bible, 1611/2020)." Respect for educators and the educational process is rooted in Biblical principles. The Bible teaches that all people are made in the image of God. If this is the case, they should be respected and honored. The leader must be kind, supportive, and willing to help those in need. Proverbs 21:3 reads, "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice (New International Version Bible, 2011)." They must help to create a community where students and staff feel cared for and valued. Colossians 3:12 reads, "Therefore, as god's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (King James Version Holy Bible, 1611/2020)." Christian educators must realize their work is ultimately for the Lord. They must find ways to integrate Biblical principles into the ethical framework of a school.

Conclusion

Educators must understand and apply principles of ethics because they set a high standard for themselves and influence every student they encounter. The role of the educator is complicated because they have to wear many hats. They must provide knowledge, model ethical behavior, and guide students in high school through some of the most challenging development stages of their lives (Rebore, 2014). Ethical decision-making involving the diverse needs of students is challenging in the educational setting because everything is not equitable. Communities have varying socioeconomic statuses, translating into educators being subconsciously biased (Kouzes, 2023). Educators' legal and ethical responsibilities are supported by frameworks like the (MCEE) and the State's Department of Education Code of Professional Conduct for Educators (Model Code of Ethics for Educators, 2023). These are excellent resources to help adhere to laws and maintain ethical standards. Schools must continue to partner with parents and communities to improve ethical standards in and around schools. It cannot be normal to turn on the news and hear of unethical behavior at a school. The future of our country is in jeopardy when an educator acts unethically and takes advantage of a student, knowingly or unknowingly.

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