

1-17-2021

Pennsylvania State Board of Education



Public Comment on Certification of Professional Personnel
12-19-2020 Proposed Amendments to Chapter 49

Karen Molchanow:

I have not submitted comments to the State Board of Education (Board) before. As a result, I'm new to this process. I appreciate the opportunity to do so although I do not know whether or not these words will actually be read and considered.

I mention this as it appears many members of the Board may have no first hand experience as classroom teachers in the Pennsylvania public schools. They will be new to many of the issues educators face which compose "professional ethics". Despite this lack of familiarity with the day to day public school learning environment, Board members possess the power to regulate the certification of classroom educators.

My comments are divided into four sections: Pennsylvania Educators face Emergency, Definition of Professional Ethics, Approval of Program Providers and My Background.

1. Pennsylvania Educators face Emergency

The Board's proposed rulemaking accurately paints the dire straits of Pennsylvania Educators today. Fewer young people are taking education classes in college. School entities increasingly rely upon emergency certifications to place an adult in their classrooms. At the same time, the number of educator misconduct complaints filed with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has increased greatly in the past seven years.

Covid 19 makes this year a perfect storm with many teachers expected to quit or retire after this school year. Educators have serious health concerns for their students and themselves. In addition, the impersonal nature of virtual learning cuts against the very personal nature of teaching. Many public school educators

are rethinking their career choice while the Board ponders these proposed amendments. I hope the Board acts quickly on these proposed amendments.

2. Section 49.1 Definition of Professional Ethics

The Professional Standards & Practices Commission proposed the following definition to the Board on 1-6-2020.

“Professional ethics are the accepted and collectively agreed upon standards of behavior, values, and principles that, in conjunction with applicable laws and regulations, are meant to inform and guide professional decision-making. These standards of behavior, values and principles include those detailed in the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) and other ethical codes, guidelines, or standards unique to one’s professional discipline.”

I submit that the Professional Code of Practices & Conduct for Educators (Code of Practices), the Educators Discipline Act (EDA) and the Public School Code of 1949 (Public School Code) should be specifically named within the definition. It is the Code of Practices which is the ethical code of conduct that control a Pennsylvania educator’s teaching certification. The EDA and Public School Code control both an educator’s employment contract and teaching certification.

Educators familiar with the terms of all of these documents will be better able to negotiate the ethical pitfalls in their profession. I have found most educators are unaware of the details of all three.

3. Section 49.14(4)(i) Approval of institutions and alternative program providers

Educator preparation program providers will implement competencies, coursework and fieldwork in professional ethics. PDE will identify these competencies and develop the standards to be required of the educator preparation program providers.

I am an PDE Approved Act 48 Provider since July, 2020. My Course is entitled *Pennsylvania Educators: Your Ethical Codes and PDE Discipline Process*.

While presenting my course materials in live Zoom meeting with active educators, I have found specific content to be helpful. I submit PDE's eventual competencies and standards for these educator preparation programs providers should include:

Explanation of ethical vocabulary terms morals, ethics, values, Pennsylvania educators, school entity, fiduciary and educator misconduct complaint;
Comparison of the Pennsylvania State government agencies that police the professions of law, medicine and education and the statutes/codes of conduct which control each profession;
live interactive case studies discussing fact based discussion questions such as those found in *Professional Responsibilities-Module 5* in the Connecticut State Department of Education's Module 5; and
Components 4d, 4e and 4f of Charlotte Danielson's 2013 *The Framework of Teaching*, Domain 4 Professional Responsibility.

4. My Background

My background includes five years practicing law before entering Temple University's Intern Teaching Program in 1991. I taught high school social studies for 26 years, retiring from Hempfield Area High School in Westmoreland County in 2018. My first teaching position was at Girard College before switching to the Philadelphia School District for the following six years.

I have reinstated my Pennsylvania law license. I have presented live Zoom meetings on educator ethics in conjunction with the Allegheny County Bar Association's School & Municipal Law Committee and the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association.

Thank you for your time,

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