



Teacher Professionalism

A Public Trust





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.

Over time, the members of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation have developed a Code of Professional Ethics, Standards of Practice and Code of Collective Interests that are statements of shared principles about this professional identity and what it means to be a teacher in this province.

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 STF Code of Professional Ethics, Standards of Practice and Code of Collective Interests speak directly to several closely related dimensions of professional practice. They 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 and the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation expect from its members in these regards.

Professional Relationships

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

In our province, individual teachers also have relationships with their professional organization, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, as well as their employing school board and the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board.

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 an employee. The Regulatory Board is responsible for teacher certification and registration, and may discipline registered teachers in accordance with its own codes and standards.

It is important to note that there are distinctive sets of expectations, policies and procedures for teachers as employees and as members of the teaching profession or Federation, and that one should not be used in place of another. Concerns about an individual teacher's conduct or competence may be addressed at the school level, with the employing school board, or elevated to the Regulatory Board and/or Federation.

Teachers are strongly encouraged to become knowledgeable about the Regulatory Board's standards of competence and the Federation's codes, standards and procedures, as well as their employers' policies and procedures to ensure they are aware of the expectations in all regards.

A Proactive Approach to Professionalism

Saskatchewan is unique in that the public, via legislation adopted by the provincial government, has granted the teaching profession the autonomy to regulate the conduct and competence of its members. The responsibility for teacher regulation lies with both the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board and the two professional organizations with members who hold teacher's certificates—the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents.

The Regulatory Board serves the public interest by ensuring registered teachers meet professional standards for certification, conduct and competence. The Federation and LEADS also have the legislated responsibility to serve the public interest by ensuring their respective members meet the standards of conduct and competence expected and established by their teacher colleagues. By proactively developing codes, standards and disciplinary processes, Saskatchewan teachers have demonstrated accountability and reinforced public confidence in, and support of, the profession.

Experienced teachers developed the STF codes and standards, so all members of the Federation should be able to recognize at least some aspects of themselves and their work in these

statements. At the same time, however, individual teachers will see their situation as somewhat unique. As teachers reflect on what the codes and standards mean for their own practice, it is essential to keep exploring the complexities of teachers' professional identity, practice, contexts and relationships.

The Federation's codes and standards can be viewed as a starting point for members to think about their own conduct and competence as teachers, 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. Members should also be aware of the codes, standards and legal definitions of misconduct and incompetence that govern the policies and procedures of the Regulatory Board as those are applicable to all registered teachers in Saskatchewan.

The Federation works to ensure all procedures to adjudicate complaints about the alleged misconduct or incompetence of a teacher in Saskatchewan are based on the principles of due process and natural justice. They should be designed to focus on professional conduct and practice, not personalities, and to protect individual teachers from frivolous or malicious complaints.



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.

Members of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation have an ethical responsibility to take their concerns first to the colleague in question. As noted STF Bylaw 6 (Professional Ethics and Practice) Section 6.2, teachers must "... inform an associate before making valid criticism and inform the associate of the nature of the criticism before referring the criticism to appropriate officials."

- Before approaching a colleague with their concerns, teachers are encouraged to contact STF senior 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.

It is important to note that the legal duty in Saskatchewan to report criminal acts, child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities supersedes the policies established by school divisions and the professional codes or standards established for members by the Federation. If a teacher suspects that a colleague has engaged in any conduct of this nature, it is their personal duty to call the police and/or social services agencies.

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 employing school board, Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board and/or the Federation.

In these situations, the Federation member involved either as complainant or as the subject of a complaint should seek advice and assistance from STF senior administrative staff.





STF Programs and Services

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

- 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 growth opportunities regarding teacher professionalism (e.g., pre-service workshops, Code of Professional Ethics/ethical decision-making workshops, sessions at teacher conventions, etc.).
- Promotes the activities of STF professional growth networks.
- Maintains an extensive professional resource collection and reference service (Stewart Resources Centre).

In addition, the Federation:

- 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, ethics and collective interests.
- Advocates strengthening teacher professionalism in various ways, including promoting better understanding 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 website, www.stf.sk.ca, or contact the STF office in Saskatoon for more information on programs and services for Saskatchewan teachers.

STF Code of Professional Ethics

These are the ethical ideals for Saskatchewan teachers, expressed as commitments made by assuming the duties of a professional teacher within Saskatchewan's publicly funded public education system:

Commitments to the Profession

1. To act at all times in a way that maintains the honour and dignity of the individual teacher and the teaching profession.
2. To strive to make the teaching profession attractive and respected in ideals and practices.
3. To act in a manner that respects the collective interests of the profession.
4. To perform teaching duties competently in accordance with the profession's standards of practice and taking into consideration the given context and circumstances for teaching.

Commitments to Teaching and Learning

5. To provide professional service to the best of one's ability.
6. To treat each student justly, considerately and appropriately in accordance with the beliefs of the profession.
7. To respect the right of students to form their own judgments based upon knowledge.
8. To support each student in reaching their highest levels of individual growth across intellectual, social-emotional, spiritual and physical domains.
9. To respond generously and appropriately to colleagues seeking professional assistance.

10. To evaluate the work of another teacher only at the request of the other teacher or when required by role as a supervisor.
11. To protect the educational program from exploitation.

Commitments to the Community

12. To model the fulfilment of social and political responsibilities associated with membership in the community.
13. To respect the various roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in the educational community.
14. To keep the trust under which confidential information is exchanged.
15. To keep parents and the school community informed of and appropriately involved in decisions about educational programs.
16. To inform an associate before making valid criticism and to inform the associate of the nature of the criticism before referring the criticism to appropriate officials.
17. To strive for the appropriate implementation and enforcement of legislation, regulations, bylaws and policies enacted by the Ministry responsible for PreK-12 education, school divisions and schools.
18. To maintain awareness of the need for changes in the public education system and advocate appropriately for such changes through individual or collective action.

STF Standards of Practice

These are the core principles of competent teaching practice for Saskatchewan teachers, expressed as commitments to standards of practice, each of which teachers may demonstrate in various ways throughout their careers:

Commitments to Standards of Practice

1. To create and maintain a learning environment that encourages and supports the growth of the whole student.
2. To strive to meet the diverse needs of students by designing the most appropriate learning experiences for them.
3. To demonstrate and support a repertoire of instructional strategies and methods that are applied in teaching activities.
4. To develop teaching practices that recognize and accommodate diversity within the classroom, the school and the community.
5. To carry out professional responsibilities for student assessment and evaluation.
6. To demonstrate a professional level of knowledge about the curriculum and the skills and judgment required to apply this knowledge effectively.
7. 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.
8. To reflect upon the goals and experience of professional practice and adapt one's teaching accordingly.
9. To work with colleagues in mutually supportive ways and develop effective professional relationships with members of the educational community.
10. To conduct all professional relationships in ways that are consistent with principles of equity, fairness and respect for others in accordance with the beliefs of the profession.

STF Code of Collective Interests

A member of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation shall:

1. Apply for an available position on the basis of the member's highest professional qualifications.
2. Neither apply for nor accept a position with an employer during a period in which the Federation has declared that a dispute exists between the Federation and the employer.
3. Undertake to perform as a condition of employment only those duties required by statute.
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, and work toward necessary or appropriate changes in STF policy and bylaw.
6. Respect those decisions made by elected representatives of the profession in the fulfilment of their duties and responsibilities.
7. Respect the collective bargaining process as the appropriate means to determine all conditions of employment.
8. Participate in legal sanctions requested by the bargaining unit following a vote of the membership.
9. Adhere to all terms of applicable collective agreements.





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