

CODE OF ETHICS

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to support the State Ethics Regulation by articulating the importance of ethical conduct by Board members and employees of Talbot County Public Schools in governance and operation of the school system, to establish standards of conduct, and to publicize those standards to the school community.

II. POLICY STATEMENT

- A. The Board of Education of Talbot County Public Schools (TCPS) recognizes that the success of a public school system is dependent in part upon citizens having the highest trust in their public officials and employees. Citizens have a right to be assured that the Board, the Superintendent, and Talbot County Public Schools employees maintain impartiality and independence of judgement in their performance of duties and responsibilities.
- B. This policy applies to members of the Board of Education, candidates to be members of the Board of Education, members of the Ethics Panel, and the following school officials or employees of TCPS: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, Chief Financial Officer, Directors, Supervisors, Assistant Supervisors, Curriculum Specialists, Managers, Assistant Managers, Accountants, Principals, Associate Principals, Assistant Principals, and the Executive Assistant to the Superintendent. It is evident that this confidence and trust is eroded when the conduct of public business is subject to improper influence and even the appearance of improper influence.
- C. For the purpose of guarding against improper influence, the Talbot County Board of Education adopts these Ethics Regulations to require school officials and employees to disclose their financial affairs and to set minimum standards for their conduction of school system business.
- D. It is the intention of the Board that this chapter be liberally construed to accomplish this purpose.

Ethics and ethical standards are regulated by this policy and by the regulations of the policy. The Board's Ethics Regulations establish expected behavior for all instructional and non-instructional personnel, administrative and supervisory personnel, Board of Education members, employees and consultants (henceforth referred to as Board members and employees). These Ethics Regulations have been issued in accordance with Maryland law, which requires all Boards of Education to adopt the Ethics Regulations. Board members and employees will be subject to Ethics Regulations, which address the school system's commitment to leading and teaching by example, and to serving as role models for students. Through these Ethics Regulations, the Board sets minimum ethical standards of conduct for itself and for school system employees.

III. POLICY ELEMENTS

- A. All Board members and employees of TCPS will conduct their duties and responsibilities in a responsible and ethical manner that reflects and exemplifies their position of public trust.
- B. All Board members and employees will maintain impartiality and independent judgment in carrying out their duties.
- C. All Board members and employees will report any violation of the Ethics Policy or the Ethics Regulations to the Ethics Panel.
- D. It is the responsibility of all Board members and employees to be alert for any indications of fraud and/or abuse involving TCPS funds or property.
- E. The Board requires certain school officials (Board members and candidates, the Superintendent, and those listed in the Ethics Regulations), to disclose certain financial interests to guard against improper influence.
- F. A Board member providing testimony to another entity represents only the individual views of that Board member and does not speak on behalf of the entire Board unless the Board member has been previously designated by the Board to be its representative.
- G. All Board members and employees have the right to participate in political and governmental affairs in the manner afforded all other citizens: the right to vote; the right to be an active member of a political party; the right to campaign for election to public office; and the right to seek and serve in public office.
 - 1. The following activities are specifically prohibited on TCPS property, except by guidelines established by the Board, the Superintendent, Board of Elections, bargaining units, and Student Representation governing the Student Members of the Board and candidates for Student Member of the Board:
 - a. Posting of political circulars or petitions.
 - b. The use of any school or office help, telephones, supplies, or equipment.
 - 2. All Board members and employees, excluding the Student Members of the Board or students running for the Student Member of the Board, who are seeking or holding public office or campaigning for a political candidacy:
 - a. Must not conduct campaign activities within the staff workplace or while staff is engaged in TCPS business.
 - b. May not associate their TCPS position with the endorsement of any candidate.

- c. May not require any TCPS student to participate in political campaigns for the employee or for any specific political party, candidate, or political issue which the employee is promoting.
3. If a conflict arises between a provision in this ethics policy and the terms of the Ethics Regulations, the provisions of the Ethics Regulations will supersede and will be applied.
4. Detailed and/or specific information regarding any of the standards can be obtained from the Ethics Regulations.
5. All opinions, findings, and recommendations by the Ethics Panel will be provided to the Board.
6. An annual report on the activities of the Ethics Panel will be provided for the Board.
7. In the event of receipt of a complaint of any ethics violation, the Ethics Panel will consider the complaint in accordance with this policy and with the Ethics Regulations.
8. If a situation arises in which any individual is concerned that his/her actions may be a violation, they should contact legal services, who will provide the employee with an advisory opinion. If the question is clearly allowed by the Ethics Policy or the Ethics Regulations, or according to prior rulings by the Ethics Panel, legal services may share those standards and rulings with the individual.
9. All Board members and employees may seek an advisory opinion from the Ethics Panel by making a request in writing.
10. Ethics violations will result in consequences in accordance with this policy and with the Ethics Regulations.
11. Violations of this policy or the Ethics Regulations can include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Tutoring of a current student by an employee for private compensation.
 - b. Soliciting gifts of any value.
 - c. Accepting a gift in violation of Section IV of the Ethics Regulations. An unsolicited gift of \$20.00 or less in cost is not a violation, unless the gift would tend to impair the impartiality and independence of judgment of the person receiving the gift.
 - d. Holding outside employment in an area of responsibility that could impair an employee's impartiality or independence of judgment.

- e. Intentionally disclosing confidential information in an area of responsibility that could impair another's impartiality or independence of judgment.
 - f. Intentionally disclosing confidential information to an unauthorized recipient or using confidential information for one's own benefit or that of another.
 - g. Participating in a matter which would have a financial impact on the employee or on a member of their immediate family.
 - h. Intentionally using one's prestige of office or position for one's own private gain or the gain of another.
12. All bidders and potential vendors doing business with TCPS will be notified in writing, as per Section VII of the Ethics Regulations, and will be advised that giving or offering a gift or series of gifts to a Board official or employee who is subject to these regulations is improper and may result in disqualification from future work on the grounds that the donor/offeror is no longer a responsible bidder or vendor.

13. Responsibilities

- a. A legal counsel will serve as liaison to the TCPS Ethics Panel and will ensure that the appropriate reports, opinions, findings and recommendations are provided to the Board in a timely manner.
- b. Members of the Ethics Panel will abide by the duties, responsibilities, and rules of the Ethics Regulations.
- c. The Office of Human Resources will ensure that all new Board members and employees receive a copy of this ethics policy and the Ethics Regulations.

14. Ethics Panel

The TCPS Ethics Panel consists of three (3) members appointed by the Board.
Members of the panel will:

- a. Serve a staggered three (3) year term or, a panel member may serve until a successor is appointed and qualifies.
- b. Be assisted by the Executive Assistant to the Board; who shall be the custodian of all forms, which are public record, submitted by any person under this policy and the associated regulation.
- c. Be assisted by the Board Attorney in carrying out its duties.
- d. Conduct an information session regarding the purposes and application of this policy and associated regulations.

- e. Be the advisory board responsible for interpreting and advising those subject to this policy and its associated regulation.
- f. Provide advisory opinions, upon request from individuals subject to this policy, and associated regulation regarding the application of the policy or regulation.
- g. Respond promptly to a request for an advisory opinion and shall provide interpretations of this policy within 20 days of the request, based on the facts provided or reasonably available to the Ethics Panel.
- h. In accordance with applicable State laws regarding public records, the Ethics Panel shall publish, or otherwise make available to the public, copies of the advisory opinions with the identities of the individuals who are the subjects of the opinions deleted.
- i. Process and make determinations regarding complaints alleging violations of this policy and associated regulation.
- j. Be suspended or removed from the Ethics Panel if just cause is determined by the Board.
- k. Be removed and/or replaced by the Board in the event of
 - i. Death; or
 - ii. Resignation; or
 - iii. Just cause as determined by the Board.
- l. In the event of a vacancy on the Ethics Panel, the replacement member will finish out the term of the removed member.

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