

CODE OF ETHICS FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Policy Code:

1320

The Watauga County Board of Education (the “board”) recognizes that, collectively and individually, all members of the board must adhere to a code of ethics as required by G.S. 160A-86 and G.S. 115C-47(57).

A. BOARD MEMBER ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS

Members of the board shall strive to improve public education and to that end the following standards will guide each board member in the performance of his or her official duties:

1. the need to obey all applicable state and federal laws regarding official actions taken as a board member;
2. the need to uphold the integrity and independence of the board member’s office;
3. the need to avoid impropriety in the exercise of the board’s and board member’s official duties;
4. the need to perform faithfully the duties of the office; and
5. the need to conduct the affairs of the board in an open and public manner, complying with all applicable laws governing open meetings and public records.

B. SPECIFIC BOARD MEMBER COMMITMENTS

In order to implement the above standards, each member of the board commits to do the following:

1. attend all regularly scheduled board meetings insofar as possible and become informed concerning the issues to be considered at those meetings;
2. endeavor to make policy decisions while always keeping in mind the objective of providing students the opportunity to receive a sound basic education and only after full discussion at publicly held board meetings;
3. attempt to make decisions only after full discussion of available facts at a public meeting, and in terms of the best interests or the educational welfare of children;
4. render all decisions based on the available facts and independent judgment and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups;
5. recognize that authority rests with the whole board and that individual board members have no legal status to act for the board outside a meeting;

6. model civility and integrity to students, employees and all elements of the community by encouraging the free expression of opinion by all board members; engaging in respectful dialogue with fellow board members on matters being considered by the board; and complying with all board policies that set expectations for conduct, regardless of whether the policies expressly require compliance by board members;
7. respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under applicable law and refrain from unauthorized disclosure of matters discussed in closed session;
8. work with other board members to establish effective board policies and to delegate authority for the administration of the schools to the superintendent;
9. communicate to other board members and the superintendent expressions of public reaction to board policies and school programs;
10. learn about current educational issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed information, such as those sponsored by the state and national school boards associations;
11. comply with North Carolina General Statute 115C-50 by earning the required 12 hours of training every two years;
12. comply with G.S. 160A-87 by earning two hours of ethics education within 12 months of election or appointment to the board;
13. support the employment of those persons best qualified to serve as school employees and avoid allowing personal relationships and biases to influence decision making;
14. support the regular and impartial evaluation of all personnel;
15. support school personnel in the performance of duties;
16. refrain from investigating or attempting to resolve complaints received personally, but instead direct the complainant to follow the board's complaint or grievance process to resolve concerns;
17. avoid being placed in a position of conflict of interest and refrain from using the board member's position on the board for personal or partisan gain;
18. as stated in board policy 1321, Board Member Conflict of Interest, refrain from participating in, deliberating on, voting on, or attempting to influence any person with respect to any matter pertaining to the employment with the board of the board member's spouse, including but not limited to hiring, transfer, promotion, demotion, suspension, discipline, performance evaluation, or review or

investigation of a complaint of any kind;

19. refuse to represent special interest or partisan politics or to use the schools for personal gain;
20. take no private action that will compromise the board or administration;
21. seek systematic communication between the board and the school community; and
22. remember always that a board member's first and greatest concern must be the educational welfare of the students attending the public schools.

All newly elected board members are expected to sign a code of ethics statement that includes these provisions at the organizational meeting of the board.

Legal References: G.S. 115C-36, -47(1), -47(57), -50; 160A-86, -87; *Leandro v. State*, 346 N.C. 336 (1997)

Cross References: Board Member Conflict of Interest (policy 1321), Board Member Opportunities for Development (policy 1323)

Adopted: October 12, 2015

Replaces: Board policy 1.01.10, Code of Ethics for Board of Education Members

Revised: January 28, 2016; March 8, 2021; May 8, 2023