

Using Professional Ethics to Protect Yourself and Your Students from Discrimination

Created by the Supportive Schools team at the [Campaign for Southern Equality](#). Thank you to the volunteer researchers and writers who contributed to this piece.

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Many school professionals across the United States are concerned that, under recent [Executive Orders](#), they will be called upon to actively participate in discrimination against their students.

The Trump administration is using the limited powers of the executive office to create an illusion of unbridled control. The strategy is designed to be overwhelming and exhausting, hoping that many people will respond by overcompliance or 'obeying in advance' in order to avoid conflict. However, many of the orders have been successfully challenged or limited by public outcry and action by the courts. The policies that make it through legal scrutiny will take time to implement, especially if they are funding-related.

In the South, many of these attacks on teachers and public schools have already been implemented as various state laws, such as the notorious ['Don't Say LGBTQ' laws](#) in Florida, North Carolina, Alabama, Arkansas, and Louisiana. While school districts have been required to pass district policies that comply with these laws, non-compliance by staff and faculty has been widespread. Teachers are refusing to misgender their students, media specialists are refusing to ban books, faculty are refusing to be the 'bathroom police,' and social workers are refusing to 'out' students against their wishes. For more on these strategies and tactics, as well as general principles of resistance, check out this recent release from our Supportive Schools team, [Resisting Discriminatory Education Policies: Lessons from the South](#).

One of the most important protections for educational professionals is their code of ethics, which they can cite as justification for refusing to comply with laws or policies that they find unethical. Legally, the situation is complicated: professional ethics do not take precedence over state and federal laws, but most states have laws requiring school staff and faculty to abide by their professional code of ethics. In practical terms,

most school districts do not want to find themselves in the public spotlight for requiring their employees to violate their professional ethics.

Below, we provide information on several professional codes of ethics that school employees and other professionals may use to resist unethical policies and practices. We also provide information about how to file a complaint for unethical conduct, for parents and students and colleagues who experience professionals who are violating their code of ethics.

While our research is focused on schools and protecting LGBTQ+ students, many of the provisions apply to other targeted groups, such as students of color, immigrants, and students with disabilities. Professionals in other fields, such as health care, may also find this strategy to be a useful form of self-protection.

Social Workers

The Social Work Code of Ethics

The field of social work has a robust code of ethics that articulates non-discrimination and a duty to promote social justice. The National Association of Social Workers shares the primary ethical guidance, while the [Supplemental Ethical Standards for School Social Work Practice](#) were created to specifically address issues critical to school social work practice but not addressed in the NASW Code of Ethics.

NASW Code of Ethics

- [Preamble](#): “Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice.”
- [Ethical Principles: Social Justice](#). “Social workers challenge social injustice. Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers’ social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.”
- [Ethical Principles: Dignity and Worth of the Person](#): “Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person. Social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity...They seek to resolve conflicts between clients’ interests and the broader society’s interests in a socially responsible manner consistent with the values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of the profession.”

- [Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Clients: 1.05\(d\)](#). "Cultural Competence. Social workers should obtain education about and demonstrate understanding of the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical ability."
- [Privacy and Confidentiality: 1.07](#). "Social workers should respect clients' right to privacy. Once private information is shared, standards of confidentiality apply." (1.07a). "Social workers should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service, except for compelling professional reasons." (1.07b) "Social workers should protect the confidentiality of clients during legal proceedings to the extent permitted by law. When a court of law or other legally authorized body orders social workers to disclose confidential or privileged information without a client's consent and such disclosure could cause harm to the client, social workers should request that the court withdraw the order or limit the order as narrowly as possible or maintain the records under seal, unavailable for public inspection." (1.07j)
- [Commitments to Employers: 3.09\(c\) and \(d\)](#). "Social workers should take reasonable steps to ensure that employers are aware of social workers' ethical obligations as set forth in the NASW Code of Ethics and of the implications of those obligations for social work practice. Social workers should not allow an employing organization's policies, procedures, regulations, or administrative orders to interfere with their ethical practice of social work. Social workers should take reasonable steps to ensure that their employing organizations' practices are consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics."
- [Social Workers Ethical Responsibilities as Professionals: Discrimination. 4.02](#). "Social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical ability."
- [Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Broader Society: 6.04\(d\)](#). "Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical ability."

[Supplemental Ethical Standards for School Social Work Practice](#)

- [Beliefs: 5](#). "School district employees and officials have a responsibility to act in the best interests of students (both individually and collectively) while they are entrusted into their care."

- [Beliefs: 6.](#) “A fundamental responsibility of schools and other educational programs is to help prepare children and youth for their adult lives following graduation. Schools are structured and protected environments in which students gradually develop more autonomy as they move through preschool, elementary, middle, and high school. A student’s developing autonomy is supported and enhanced in the social worker-client relationship when the NASW Ethical Standards of Self-Determination (1.02), Informed Consent (1.03), and Privacy and Confidentiality (1.07) are honored by the school social worker.”
- [Ethical Responsibilities: 1.](#) “School social workers have a primary ethical responsibility to students and secondary ethical responsibilities to other stakeholders.”
- [Ethical Responsibilities: 3.](#) “School social workers support the developing autonomy of students as they mature from childhood to adolescence to adulthood and utilize a collaborative decision-making process, consistent with students’ age, development and mental health.”
- [Advocacy: 8.](#) “School social workers advocate for the rights of students and families in school and community settings.”

How to file a complaint

If you experience a social worker who is violating their professional code of ethics, you can [file a complaint with the National Association of Social Workers](#). NASW can investigate complaints that occurred within the past year.

Educators

The Code of Ethics for Educators

The Code of Ethics for Educators provides a commitment to consistent education that serves the needs of all students. This code includes teachers, assistant teachers, and other education support professionals. Some relevant provisions include:

- [Preamble:](#) “The educator, believing in the worth and dignity of each human being, recognizes the supreme importance of the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, and the nurture of the democratic principles. Essential to these goals is the protection of freedom to learn and to teach and the guarantee of equal educational opportunity for all. The educator accepts the responsibility to adhere to the highest ethical standards.”
- [Principle I - Commitment To The Student \(2\):](#) “Shall not unreasonably deny the student’s access to varying points of view.”
- [Principle I - Commitment To The Student \(3\):](#) “Shall not deliberately suppress or distort subject matter relevant to the student’s progress.”

- [Principle I - Commitment To The Student \(4\)](#): “Shall make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions harmful to learning or to health and safety.”
- [Principle I - Commitment To The Student \(6\)](#): “Shall not on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, marital status, political or religious beliefs, family, social or cultural background, or sexual orientation, unfairly--
 1. Exclude any student from participation in any program
 2. Deny benefits to any student
 3. Grant any advantage to any student.”

How to file a complaint

If you experience an educator who is violating their professional code of ethics, you can [file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights](#) through the U.S. Department of Education website. OCR offers guidance on how to file a complaint, the evaluation procedure, and resolution process. You may also file a complaint with your local school district; check district policies for information on how to file.

School Nurses

The School Nurse Code of Ethics

The National Association of School Nurses acknowledges the moral and ethical commitment held within the nursing profession despite the diversity of current laws and conditions. The Code of Ethics recognizes that school nurses “straddle two statutory and regulatory frameworks: health and education.” Some relevant provisions include:

- [Provision 1](#): “School nurses deliver care in a manner that promotes and preserves student autonomy, dignity, and rights, delivering care in an inclusive, collaborative manner to embrace diversity in the school community. School nurses promote equitable treatment of all students, regardless of health, race, gender, socio-economic status, culture, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, or religion. The school nurse supports and promotes each student’s unique abilities to achieve the highest quality of life.”
- [Provision 3](#): “School nurses are student advocates and support student rights in navigating the educational environment. Regardless of the setting or the situation, the school nurse endorses and understands that the primary commitment is to the student.”
- [Provision 5](#): “Personal and professional integrity are maintained via careful attention to verbal, non-verbal, and written communication that is culturally informed, unbiased, truthful, accurate, and well planned.”
- [Provision 5](#): “The potential tension between administrators and school nurses can result in ethical dilemmas resulting in moral distress for the nurse. It is

incumbent upon the school nurse to advocate for evidence-based practice decisions that are based on respect of self and others.”

How to file a complaint

If you experience a school nurse who is violating their professional code of ethics, you can file a complaint with the State Board of Nursing. The complaint filing process may vary by state. Search online for “Board of Nursing,” “complaint” and your state.

Example: [North Carolina](#)

If you experience a school nurse who is violating their professional code of ethics, you can file a complaint with the North Carolina Board of Nursing. This process involves accessing the [complaint portal](#) and providing incident and contact information in order to then be notified of the complaint outcome following the investigation.

Counselors/Licensed Mental Health Therapists

[The Counselors Code of Ethics](#)

The [American Counseling Association Code of Ethics](#) promotes respect for human dignity and diversity, strengthened by the [Core Values and Beliefs](#) from the National Board of Certified Counselors. Some relevant provisions include:

- [Preamble](#): Core values of the counseling profession include “honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts” and “promoting social justice.”
- [Section A \(Introduction\)](#): “Counselors actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients they serve. Counselors also explore their own cultural identities and how these affect their values and beliefs about the counseling process.”
- [Section A.1.a.](#): “The primary responsibility of counselors is to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of clients.”
- [Section A.4.b.](#): “Counselors are aware of—and avoid imposing—their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Counselors respect the diversity of clients, trainees, and research participants and seek training in areas in which they are at risk of imposing their values onto clients, especially when the counselor’s values are inconsistent with the client’s goals or are discriminatory in nature.”
- [Section A.7.a.](#): “When appropriate, counselors advocate at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels to address potential barriers and obstacles that inhibit access and/or the growth and development of clients.”

- [Section A.7.b.](#): “Counselors obtain client consent prior to engaging in advocacy efforts on behalf of an identifiable client to improve the provision of services and to work toward removal of systemic barriers or obstacles that inhibit client access, growth, and development.”
- [Section B.1.a.](#): “Counselors maintain awareness and sensitivity regarding cultural meanings of confidentiality and privacy. Counselors respect differing views toward disclosure of information. Counselors hold ongoing discussions with clients as to how, when, and with whom information is to be shared.”
- [Section C.5.](#): “Counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination against prospective or current clients, students, employees, supervisees, or research participants based on age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race, religion/spirituality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital/ partnership status, language preference, socioeconomic status, immigration status, or any basis proscribed by law.”
- [Section C.6.a.](#): “Counselors do not engage in or condone sexual harassment. Sexual harassment can consist of a single intense or severe act, or multiple persistent or pervasive acts.”
- [Section C.7.c.](#): “Counselors do not use techniques/procedures/modalities when substantial evidence suggests harm, even if such services are requested.”
- [Section F.2.b.](#): “Counseling supervisors are aware of and address the role of multiculturalism/ diversity in the supervisory relationship.”

How to file a complaint

If you experience a counselor who is violating their professional code of ethics, you can file a complaint with your state’s Board of Licensed Mental Health Counselors. The complaint filing process may vary by state. More information and a state database available from the [National Board for Certified Counselors](#).

Example: [North Carolina](#)

If you experience a counselor who is violating their professional code of ethics, you can file a complaint with the North Carolina Board of Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselors (NCBLCMHC). Complaints must be submitted in writing with citations of the ethical codes you believe they have violated and a completed [NCBLCMHC Complaint Form](#) which is then submitted to the board. The counselor involved in the complaint will be notified and allowed to respond to allegations before an investigation begins.

School Counselors

In addition to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) provides a specific set of [Ethical Standards for School Counselors](#), which articulate the understanding that school counselors are leaders, advocates, collaborators, and consultants who create systemic change to ensure equitable educational outcomes for all students. Some relevant provisions include:

[Ethical Standards for School Counselors](#)

- [Preamble](#): “All students have the right to: Be respected and treated with dignity.
- [Preamble](#): “All students have the right to: Equitable access to school counselors who support students from all backgrounds and circumstances and who advocate for and affirm all students regardless of but not limited to ethnic/racial identity; nationality; age; social class; economic status; abilities/disabilities; language; immigration status; sexual orientation; gender identity; gender expression; family type; religious/spiritual identity; and living situations, including emancipated minor status, wards of the state, homelessness or incarceration.”
- [Section A.1.a.](#): “School counselors: Have a primary obligation to the students, who are to be treated with dignity and respect as unique individuals.”
- [Section A.1.b.](#): “School counselors: Foster and affirm all students and their identity and psychosocial development.”
- [Section A.1.c.](#): “School counselors: Support all students and their development by actively working to eliminate systemic barriers or bias impeding student development.”
- [Section A.1.d.](#): “School counselors: Provide culturally responsive instruction and appraisal and advisement to students.”
- [Section A.1.f.](#): “School counselors: Do not diagnose but recognize how a student’s diagnosis and environment can potentially affect the student’s access, participation and ability to achieve academic, postsecondary and social/emotional success.”
- [Section A.1.h.](#): “School counselors: Respect students’ and families’ values, beliefs and cultural background, as well as students’ sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, and exercise great care to avoid imposing personal biases, beliefs or values rooted in one’s religion, culture or ethnicity.”
- [Section A.1.i.](#): “School counselors: Are knowledgeable of local, state and federal laws, as well as school and district policies and procedures affecting students and families and strive to protect and inform students and families regarding their rights.”
- [Section A.1.j.](#): “School counselors: Advocate for equitable, anti-oppressive and anti-bias policies and procedures, systems and practices, and provide effective,

evidence-based and culturally sustaining interventions to address student needs.”

- [Section A.2.g.](#): “School counselors: Recognize their primary ethical obligation for confidentiality is to the students but balance that obligation with an understanding of parents’/guardians’ legal and inherent rights to be the guiding voice in their children’s lives. School counselors understand the need to balance students’ ethical rights to make choices, their capacity to give consent or assent, and parental or familial legal rights and responsibilities to make decisions on their child’s behalf.”
- [Section A.2.g.](#): “School counselors: Collaborate with and involve students to the extent possible and use the most appropriate and least intrusive method to breach confidentiality if such action is warranted. The child’s developmental age and the circumstances requiring the breach are considered and, as appropriate, students are engaged in a discussion about the method and timing of the breach. Consultation with professional peers and/or supervision is recommended.”
- [Section A.3.d.](#): “School counselors: Review and use school and student data to assess and address needs, including but not limited to data on strengths and disparities that may exist related to gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability and/or other relevant classifications.”
- [Section A.10.a.](#): “School counselors: Advocate with and on behalf of students to ensure they remain safe at home, in their communities and at school. A high standard of care includes determining what information is shared with parents/guardians and when information creates an unsafe environment for students.”
- [Section A.10.b.](#): “School counselors: Actively work to establish a safe, equitable, affirming school environment in which all members of the school community demonstrate respect, inclusion and acceptance.”
- [Section A.10.f.](#): “School counselors: Advocate for the equitable right and access to free, appropriate public education for all youth in which students are not stigmatized or isolated based on race, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, language, immigration status, juvenile justice/court involvement, housing, socioeconomic status, ability, foster care, transportation, special education, mental health and/or any other exceptionality or special need.”
- [Section A.10.h.](#): “School counselors: Actively advocate for systemic and other changes needed for equitable participation and outcomes in educational programs when disproportionality exists regarding enrollment in such programs by race, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, language, immigration status, juvenile justice/court involvement, housing, socioeconomic status, ability, foster care, transportation, special education, mental health and/or any other exceptionality or special need.”

- [Section A.11.a.](#): “School counselors: Recognize that bullying, discrimination, bias and hate incidents rooted in race, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity are violations of federal law and many state and local laws and district policies.”
- [Section A.11.d.](#): “School counselors: Report all incidents of bullying, dating violence or harassment to the administration, recognizing these behaviors may fall under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 or other federal and state laws as illegal and require administrator intervention.”
- [Section A.11.e.](#): “School counselors: Recognize that bias incidents are not only potentially traumatizing for students but can lead to significant damage and disruption of the school environment. Facilitate and monitor schoolwide prevention of bullying, harassment, discrimination, hate and bias through active practices that support a positive school climate, culture and belonging.”
- [Section B.2.d.](#): “School counselors: Exercise leadership to create systemic change to create a safe and supportive environment and equitable outcomes for all students.”
- [Section B.3.g.](#): “School counselors: Develop knowledge and understanding of historic and systemic oppression, social justice and cultural models (e.g., multicultural counseling, anti-racism, culturally sustaining practices) to further develop skills for systemic change and equitable outcomes for all students.
- [Section C.i.](#): “School counselors: Provide staff with opportunities and support to develop knowledge and understanding of historic and systemic oppression, social justice and cultural models (e.g., multicultural counseling, anti-racism, culturally sustaining practices) to further develop skills for systemic change and equitable outcomes for all students.

How to file a complaint

If you experience a school counselor who is violating their professional code of ethics, reach out to school leadership. If needed, contact the [American School Counselor Association](#) for further guidance. Formal documentation of the steps taken and the response of the complainant and respondent should be submitted in hard copy to the appropriate state organization and/or the ASCA Ethics Committee.

Example: [North Carolina](#)

If you experience a school counselor who is violating their professional code of ethics, you may file a complaint or report in writing to the [NCSCA's](#) President. The complaint may be made on a confidential or anonymous basis and should describe in detail the specific facts demonstrating the bases for the complaints, reports or inquiries. The Association will conduct a prompt, discreet, and objective review or investigation.

Librarians and Media Specialists

The American Library Association has a [Code of Ethics](#) for librarians and media specialists, and a [Bill of Rights](#) for library users, which all libraries should follow. The American Association of School Librarians references these documents in their set of [Common Beliefs](#). The relevant portions of these documents are included below:

American Library Association Code of Ethics

- [Preamble](#): “In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.”
- [Principle 1](#): “We provide the highest level of service to all library users through... equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.”
- [Principle 2](#): “We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.”
- [Principle 3](#): “We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.”
- [Principle 5](#): “We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.”
- [Principle 7](#): “We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.”
- [Principle 9](#): “We affirm the inherent dignity and rights of every person. We work to recognize and dismantle systemic and individual biases; to confront inequity and oppression; to enhance diversity and inclusion; and to advance racial and social justice in our libraries, communities, profession, and associations through awareness, advocacy, education, collaboration, services, and allocation of resources and spaces.”

American Library Association Library Bill of Rights

- [Principle I](#): “Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.”
- [Principle II](#): “Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.”
- [Principle III](#): “Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.”

- [Principle IV](#): “Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.”
- [Principle VII](#): “All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for, educate about, and protect people’s privacy, safeguarding all library use data, including personally identifiable information.”

How to file a complaint

Though the Code of Ethics, Bill of Rights, and Common Beliefs are not legally binding, they provide a basic framework to guide librarians’ activity. If you have experienced conduct that violates these frameworks, you can [file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights](#) through the U.S. Department of Education website. OCR offers guidance on how to file a complaint, the evaluation procedure, and resolution process. You may also file a complaint with your local school district; check district policies for information on how to file.

Administrators

School administrators are governed by two similar codes of ethics, overseen by the School Superintendents Association (AASA) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).

[School Superintendents Association Code of Ethics](#)

- [Preamble](#): “An educational leader’s professional conduct must conform to an ethical code of behavior, and the code must set high standards for all educational leaders.”
- [Preamble](#): “The educational leader acknowledges that he or she serves the schools and community by providing equal educational opportunities to each and every child.”
- [\(1\)](#) “The educational leader makes the education and well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision making.”
- [\(3\)](#) “The educational leader supports the principle of due process and protects the civil and human rights of all individuals.”
- [\(6\)](#) “The educational leader pursues appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies, and regulations that are not consistent with sound educational goals or that are not in the best interest of children.”

[Statement of Ethics for School Administrators](#)

- [Preamble](#): “This professional leadership responsibility requires the administrator to lead with interpersonal and communication skills, social-emotional insight, and understanding of all students’ and staff members’ backgrounds and cultures.”

- (1) “The educational administrator makes the well-being of students the fundamental value in all decision making and actions.”
- (3) “The educational administrator supports the principle of due process and protects the civil and human rights of all individuals as well as safeguards and promotes the values of democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, equity, social justice, community, and diversity.”
- (4) “The educational administrator obeys local, state, and national laws and does not knowingly join or support organizations that advocate, directly or indirectly, the overthrow of the government.”
- (6) “The educational administrator pursues appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies and regulations that are not consistent with sound educational goals or that are not in the best interest of children.”

How to file a complaint

If you experience a school administrator who is violating their professional code of ethics, you can [file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights](#) through the U.S. Department of Education website. OCR offers guidance on how to file a complaint, the evaluation procedure, and resolution process. You may also file a complaint with your local school district; check district policies for information on how to file.

School Board Members

The Code of Ethics for School Board Members varies from state to state. Search online for “School Board Code of Ethics” and the name of your state. To report violations, search for “school board ethics complaint” and the name of your state.

School board ethics focus on representing the best interests of the entire school community, making well-informed decisions, listening to constituents, and refusing to serve special interests or political agendas. Below are some examples from various states.

- “The Code is about more than just following the law. It’s about setting a higher standard—a standard that helps you ensure your decisions and actions reflect the interests of your district as a whole.” ([Texas](#))
- “Remember always that my first and greatest concern must be the educational welfare of the students attending the public schools.” ([Colorado](#))
- “I will make decisions in terms of the educational welfare of children and will seek to develop and maintain public schools that meet the individual needs of all children regardless of their ability, race, creed, sex, or social standing.” ([New Jersey](#))

- “I will confine my board action to policy making, planning, and appraisal, and I will help to frame policies and plans only after the board has consulted those who will be affected by them.” ([New Jersey](#))
- “Make all decisions based on the available facts and my independent judgment, and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups.” ([Idaho](#))
- “I will be sufficiently informed about and prepared to act on the specific issues before the board, and remain reasonably knowledgeable about local, state, national, and global education issues.” ([Illinois](#))
- “Be open, fair and honest – no hidden agendas, and respect the right of other board members to have opinions and ideas which differ from mine.” ([Idaho](#))
- “I will abide by majority decisions of the board, while retaining the right to seek changes in such decisions through ethical and constructive channels.” ([Illinois](#))
- “Student-Centered Focus: I will be continuously guided by what is best for all students of the District.” ([Texas](#))

How to file a complaint

To report violations, search for “school board ethics complaint” and the name of your state. School Board members are also subject to Title IX and other civil rights laws. You can [file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights](#) through the U.S. Department of Education website. OCR offers guidance on how to file a complaint, the evaluation procedure, and resolution process.

Additional Resources

- [Frequently Asked Privacy-Related Questions about Filing a Civil Rights Complaint](#): US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights
- [LGBTQ+ Issues Letter Template](#): National Education Association
- [School Systems Across US Refuse to Comply With Anti-Trans Executive Order](#): Truthout

Sample Letters of Non-Compliance

Included below are three examples of letters that school staff and faculty might send to their supervisor or Board of Education, expressing their commitment to their professional codes of ethics.

Sample Letter 1 for Educators:

Principal John Miller, Flower Elementary School
Honeycombe County School District
1234 Flower Road
Blueville, NC, 12345

Subject: Letter of Non-Compliance with Directive Issued 2/21/25

Dear Principal Miller,

I am writing to inform you that the recent Directive 22.1, prohibiting teachers from using students' affirmed names and pronouns, violates both the Educator Code of Ethics and Title IX. As such, I am morally and legally obligated to refuse to comply with this directive.

The National Education Association's Educator [Code of Ethics](#) states that an educator "shall not on the basis of ... sex, ... political or religious beliefs, ... social or cultural background, or sexual orientation, unfairly – deny benefits to any student," (Principle I - 6). Directive 22.1, in asking teachers to discriminate against students based on their gender and sex and denying them the benefit of being called their preferred name, violates this code of ethics. Therefore, I am ethically unable to comply with this policy.

Furthermore, Title IX states that, "no person shall, on the basis of sex... be subjected to discrimination under any . . . education program or activity operated by a recipient that receives Federal financial assistance," ([Title IX, 65 F.R. 52870](#)). More specifically, under Title IX, "a recipient shall not, on the basis of sex: subject any person to separate or different rules of behavior, sanctions, or other treatment," ([Title IX, 65 F.R. 52870](#)). Directive 22.1, in mandating teachers discriminate against transgender and gender non-conforming students, violates Title IX. Therefore, I am legally unable to comply with Directive 22.1.

I urge you, as Principal, to ask School Board to rescind Directive 22.1. In requiring educators to choose between district policy or their Code of Ethics and federal law, the School Board is threatening the educational welfare of students, going against the very principles they are elected to uphold.

Please add a copy of this letter to my personnel file. Any response should be made in writing and also added to my file.

Sincerely,
Robert Teacher

Sample Letter 2 for Administrators:

To: Clay County School Board
2233 Pots Road
Ambertown, NC, 54321

Subject: Discriminatory School Board Policy

To the members of the Clay County Schools Board of Education:

I am writing to inform you that the recent Clay County School Board Policy entitled, "Ending Radical Indoctrination," violates both the Administrators Code of Ethics and Title IX. As such, I am respectfully requesting that the Board rescind this policy, as I and my staff are unable to comply with any policy that violates the law and our codes of ethics.

This recent school board policy prohibiting school officials from using students' affirmed names and pronouns violates Title IX. Title IX, a federal law governing any educational program or activity receiving federal funding (which includes every school in Clay County) states that, "no person shall, on the basis of sex... be subjected to discrimination under any . . . education program or activity operated by a recipient that receives Federal financial assistance," ([Title IX, 65 F.R. 52870](#)). More specifically, under Title IX, "a recipient shall not, on the basis of sex: subject any person to separate or different rules of behavior, sanctions, or other treatment," ([Title IX, 65 F.R. 52870](#)). The new school board policy, in mandating discrimination against transgender and gender non-conforming students, violates Title IX. Therefore, this new district policy is illegal and I am unable to enact or comply with it.

The school board policy also violates the National Education Association's [Statement of Ethics for School Administrators](#). This document, created as an ethical guide for the conduct of all school administrators in the United States, stipulates that "the educational administrator makes the well-being of students the fundamental value in all decision making and actions," (Standard 1). The recently enacted school board policy, in requiring school officials to discriminate against students based on their gender and sex, causes unnecessary harm to students and thus violates this code of ethics. Therefore, based on both legal and moral standards, I am unable to enact the new school board policy at East High School.

The NEA's Statement of Ethics goes on to read, "The educational administrator pursues appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies and regulations that are not consistent with sound educational goals or that are not in the best interest of children." Discriminating against certain students based on their sex and gender is not consistent with sound educational goals, nor is it in the best interest of these children.

Guided by my profession's code of ethics, I urge you to rescind the new policy. Discriminating against students is illegal and unethical, and harms the students we are pledged to protect. In requiring administrators to violate federal law and their code of ethics, the School Board is

threatening the educational welfare of students, going against the very principles you were elected to uphold.

Please add a copy of this letter to my personnel file. Any response should be made in writing and also added to my file.

Sincerely,
Gabrielle Johnson
Principal, East High School
Clay County School District

Sample Letter 3 for Counselors:

To: Taylor Edwards,
Principal, Orville Middle School
Richardson County School Board
7798 Sunny Road
Jacobson, NC, 17776

Subject: Letter of Non-Compliance with Discriminatory Edict

Dear Principal Edwards and Richardson County School Board,

I am writing to inform you that the recent Richardson County School District Edict, "Combatting Gender Ideology" violates Title IX, the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, and the American School Counselor Association Ethical Standards for School Counselors. As such, it is both illegal and unethical for Richardson School District Counselors (and other educators) to comply with this policy. This letter serves as a notice that I will not be able to comply with this policy. Furthermore, I advise you to rescind this policy, due to its illegal and discriminatory nature.

This recent school board policy prohibiting District employees from using students' affirmed names and pronouns violates Title IX, the federal law prohibiting discrimination "on the basis of sex." In mandating that District employees single out and refuse to use the preferred names and pronouns only of transgender and gender non-conforming students, the Edict is clearly violating Title IX, and I am unable to comply with it.

Furthermore, the Edict violates both the [Counselors Code of Ethics](#) and the [Ethical Standards for School Counselors](#), the two ethics codes that govern school counselors' professional behavior in Richardson County and North Carolina:

1. The Counselor Code of Ethics states that "'Counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination against... students... based on... gender, gender identity, sexual orientation... or any basis proscribed by law," ([Section C.5](#)).

2. The Ethical Standards for School Counselors states counselors must, “Foster and affirm all students and their identity” and “respect... students’ sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression,” ([Section A.1.b](#), [Section A.1.h](#)).

Asking counselors and educators to refuse to use students’ names and proper pronouns based on those students’ sex and gender amounts to discrimination. Discrimination in any form is contrary to the morals of the counseling profession, and harms children. Furthermore, the District does not have the right or the authority to require counselors to take actions that may result in the loss of our professional licenses.

Both the Ethical Standards for School Counselors and the Counselors’ Code of Ethics require counselors to advocate against policies that are harmful towards students (Code of Ethics, [Section A.7.a](#); Ethical Standards, [Section A.10.f](#)). Guided by my profession’s code of ethics, I urge you to rescind the new policy. Discriminating against students is illegal and unethical, and harms the students we are meant to protect. In requiring counselors, and educators, to violate federal law and their code of ethics, the School Board is threatening the educational welfare of students, going against the very principles you have been elected to uphold.

Please add a copy of this letter to my personnel file. Any response should be made in writing and also added to my file.

Sincerely,
Jackson Smith
School Counselor, Orville Middle School
Richardson County School District