



PROFESSIONALISM IN TEACHING



Professionalism in teaching means a set of implied and explicit standards educators are expected to follow while working as a teacher. Professionalism in the field of education involves interacting with students, colleagues, administrators, parents and other members of the community in an appropriate and respectful way that encourages a successful learning environment. While teachers share some of the same standards for behavior in the workplace as other professionals such as appropriate dress and communication, specific traits in educators prove an instructor's ability to act with integrity in an educational institution.

Why is professionalism important for teachers?

Acting with integrity and showing courtesy to others is an important way to share and maintain your character and reputation at school. Teachers who show professionalism may have more opportunities to move into leadership positions. Professionalism also helps you gain the trust of parents, students, colleagues and school administrators. Showing you have the integrity to complete your job responsibilities with excellence gives others confidence in your ability to guide student learning and manage a classroom.

Professionalism is a consistent mode of behavior teachers observe within the practice of education. For classroom instructors, this includes maintaining subject knowledge and instructing students at age-appropriate levels while collaborating with other educators to plan teaching methods. Professionalism in education combines personal growth, collaboration, instruction

and communication, creating a complex set of traits unique to the profession.

How to develop professionalism in teaching

Learn to value collaboration...

Learning to collaborate effectively is an important aspect of a teacher's professional character. Opening your instructional planning to new ideas and input from colleagues often improves students' experiences in your classroom. Working with other educators to meet common goals shows your commitment to a successful learning community. Understanding how to effectively share and accept new ideas, delegate and complete parts of a project and receive critique are all ways teachers can work together to strengthen the educational process.



Consider your attire...

Choosing the right clothing helps you maintain a professional appearance and can boost your own confidence as an educator. Many schools adopt a business casual dress code for teachers including slacks, tailored shirts and dresses or skirts cut close to the knees. Patterns and colors are appropriate when combined with well-fitting garments. Jeans are also acceptable in some cases provided they are free from rips and holes and fit correctly.

Be punctual...

Unless events happen that are out of your control, be on time for the start of school, meetings or conferences. Model punctuality to students to encourage their sense of professional values. Setting a schedule for class time can also help you maintain an effective pace for lesson content and encourage students to follow and acknowledge time limits.

Maintain a positive attitude...

Professionalism involves self-control, including the attitude you show to others in the workplace. Complaining less and taking responsibility for your actions instead of blaming others for mistakes creates a more positive environment for students and colleagues. Striving to be positive in the way you speak to others can also improve your mood and outlook. Smiling is another way to show positivity to others as you communicate.

Acknowledge your strengths and weaknesses...

Self-knowledge of your own abilities and weaknesses proves a professional awareness of your potential growth areas. Acknowledging your strengths gives you the opportunity to help train and develop others using your strongest skills. This also contributes to a stronger collaborative culture when educators reflect on ways to provide better learning opportunities for students.



Seek professional improvement...

Listen and contemplate professional development concepts to find ways you can improve your educational practice. Explore new ideas from thought leaders in your discipline and those addressing general concepts in education. Although school administration may provide training and resources, seeking out content knowledge on your own sets a standard for personal growth that contributes to a professional attitude. Some ideas for professional growth resources include:

*Books on pedagogy... Podcasts about education...
Professional teaching magazines or journals...
Online learning modules... Educator blogs...
Websites for educational products and resources*



Give your best effort...

Complete work to the best of your abilities using resources to supplement your own skills and expertise. Turn in lesson plans and other professional documents as free from errors as you can make them. Set expectations for completing work such as grading within a certain amount of time. Hard work is an important component of professionalism, and fulfilling a set of job responsibilities that meet or exceed the expectations of administrators and community stakeholders is a pivotal part of demonstrating professional character as an educator.

Go beyond your job duties...

Be willing to help with things outside your classroom to improve your learning community. You can show professionalism when you take time to mentor students and develop genuine care for the well-being of everyone in your classroom, including those who cause disruptions. Showing that you are willing to cross-train and taking the initiative to learn about different disciplines within education can also develop your professional character.

Provide clear communication...

Responding in a timely way to any communication from peers, students, parents or administration is one way to communicate professionally. It's also important to choose your words carefully to convey your message in a respectful tone with a clear purpose for your audience. Another aspect of professional communication is speaking out when needed. This includes asking for help or clarification instead of waiting for someone else to ask you first. Pick the right time and mode of communication to share your ideas to communicate in the most professional manner.

Separate your personal and professional life...

Professionalism begins with acknowledging the difference between how to behave at work versus how to act during your personal time. Professional educators

teach without letting their personal lives affect the quality of their instruction and preparation in the classroom. While acting natural and showing personality in your mannerisms and way of speaking can help you connect with students and colleagues, it's important to balance this with neutral and unbiased language and actions when interacting with others in an educational environment.



Prepare and plan...

Another key trait that shows professionalism is how an educator prepares for instruction. This includes mastering the instructional content you present to students, planning the most effective resources, activities and assessments to teach course material and understanding the main concepts related to a particular area of knowledge. Teachers who show the most professionalism prepare to instruct students before they enter the classroom by planning the scope and sequence of course content.

Adapt to new circumstances...

Teachers can exhibit professionalism when they learn to overcome challenges and show their ability to change. Administrators and leading professionals often share the latest teaching methods and philosophies, guiding educators to adopt new ways of instruction. Professional educators adapt to changes encouraged or required by school authorities while assessing what traditional methods still apply in their classroom teaching. An intentional shift in teaching practices supported by research and peer review can show that you are intent on serving your learning community instead of your own comfort or interests.

Reflect on your process...

Teachers can benefit from strategic reflection and analysis of their instructional process. Using student data to determine the effectiveness of a lesson is one way to gauge the success of a specific unit of instruction. Thinking through the segments of a

particular lesson plan, including the direct instruction, activities and assessments and writing down what improvements you'd make in the future can result in stronger teaching methods. Stopping to consider how you can improve is an indication of professional dedication to your craft.

[Source: Indeed, March 2022]

CAREER ADVICE FOR TEACHERS

Signs of Professionalism in a Teacher

As a teacher, you play a critical role in helping young people achieve success in the classroom. A professional demeanor shows you take your responsibilities seriously. Failing to act professionally sets a bad example and may cause you to lose the trust and respect of students. Demonstrate professionalism in all aspects of your career to provide your pupils with the best education possible.

Neat Appearance...

A teacher's appearance plays a role in conveying professionalism. A male teacher should wear dress pants and a polo shirt or button-down shirt, adding a tie or jacket for special occasions. Female teachers should wear appropriate clothing for the classroom, avoiding short skirts and revealing tops. Many schools do not allow teachers to display facial piercings, tattoos and brightly colored hair at work. In addition, teachers should refrain from drinking alcohol or smoking in the presence of students, and avoid using foul language or acting inappropriately with colleagues in view or earshot of students.



Positive Interaction with Students...

When it comes to interacting with students, teachers must understand there is a fine line between being a caring adult and being a friend. Professional teachers do not let their desire to be liked by students get in the way of enforcing classroom and school rules. They do

not show favoritism or discriminate against students. A Dedicated teacher believes all students have the ability to learn and succeed. Lesson plans and materials are thoughtfully chosen to help make that happen.

Productive Interaction with Colleagues...

Professional teachers strive to interact effectively with one another. Teachers in the same department may collaborate to share teaching strategies, analyze data and discuss curriculum issues. Those who teach the same students meet regularly to discuss ways to improve student performance and make connections between subjects. Strategies are developed to resolve specific behavior problems. Teachers focused on professionalism are also concerned with the school community and how they can work with their colleagues to create an environment that maximizes learning and bolsters achievement. Professional educators do not gossip or inappropriately share confidential information.



Ongoing Professional Training...

Many states require teachers to participate in ongoing professional development programs to maintain their certification. Teachers committed to professionalism enthusiastically participate in training to stay abreast of advances in technology and emerging trends in education. They seek information on best practices and teaching strategies for all types of learners. Other interests include reading books, magazines and blogs about educational leadership. Some teachers conduct research to continually improve their teaching methods and support the performance of their students. Additionally, many attend education conferences and belong to professional organizations to connect with others in the field.

[Source: Stacy Zeiger, July 2018]

Professional Code of Ethics for Teachers

Because they have a daily influence on the lives of children, teachers are often held to high standards. In the midst of all of their responsibilities, they're required to serve as strong role models and demonstrate ethical behaviors as they interact with students, colleagues, parents and others. Developing and following a professional code of ethics helps make sure teachers act in a professional and ethical manner at all times.



Working with Students...

A teacher's job is to provide a quality education to all students. A professional code of ethics must address this fact, stating that teachers must not show favoritism or discriminate against students. Teachers also must interact with students appropriately, not taking advantage of students in any way, bullying students or putting them down. Contact with students outside of the classroom or school building must be kept to a minimum and must focus on school-related activities and events.

Student Safety...

In addition to a teacher's job to help all students learn, a professional code of ethics also addresses a teacher's responsibility to keep students safe. Teachers must abide by all school and classroom safety procedures to ensure student safety. It's also a teacher's responsibility to report instances of bullying and harassment. If a teacher suspects cases of abuse or neglect, or a student confides in a teacher in cases of abuse or neglect, the teacher is required to report it to the proper authorities, even if the student requests otherwise.

Professional Practice

Teachers must maintain ethical behavior in professional practice by accurately representing and maintaining certifications, licenses and other qualifications. Applying for a teaching certificate with false information or lying about meeting the requirements to renew the certificate can lead to a loss of teaching privileges. In addition to qualifications, teachers must practice ethical

behavior when it comes to reporting grades and handling assessments. Misrepresenting grades or altering student responses on assessments can lead to criminal charges and the loss of a job.

Working with Colleagues...

In a school, teachers must collaborate with administrators, fellow teachers and other employees in order to provide a safe and positive learning experience for students. A teacher must follow the direction of administrators, even if rules or expectations seems unreasonable, in order to avoid undermining an administrator's authority and to set a positive example for students. When disagreements arise between teachers, they must handle the disagreements in private and refrain from talking negatively about colleagues in front of students. In addition, teachers must engage in appropriate relationships with colleagues, keeping personal feelings and adult behaviors out of the school.

Interacting with Stakeholders...

Aside from colleagues, teachers have a responsibility to interact positively with parents and other stakeholders in a child's education. Contact with parents must be kept professional, free from arguments and physical contact. If a teacher has an issue with a parent, another teacher or administrator must be present during all meetings. Teachers also must avoid being unduly influenced by parents and other stakeholders when it comes to students' grades or other school-related matters.

[Source: Stacy Zeiger, July 2018]

CORE COMPETENCIES FOR EDUCATORS

Being a teacher at any level requires a significant amount of knowledge and skill. Paying attention to the core competencies for educators helps to ensure that all teachers and others who work in education are prepared to make school a positive experience for students and their families.

Interacting Well with Students...

Educators must be able to positively interact with all students. This includes difficult students, students who work below grade-level and students whose personalities just grate on a teacher. Teachers must put aside their prejudices and feelings in order to treat all students with respect, provide them with equal opportunities for learning and make them feel confident.

Creating a Learning Environment...

Creating a safe learning environment that is conducive to learning is essential. Educators must set high expectations for student performance and behavior. All rules must be enforced consistently and fairly. Students should not have to worry about being bullied in the classroom and should feel comfortable when speaking up.



Good at Lesson Plan Design...

All educators must be capable of designing lesson plans to meet student needs and cover the standards. This requires knowing how to choose and create instructional materials to accommodate students at different levels. It also requires creating a scope and sequence that provides students with enough time to master the standards.

Able to Use Varied Teaching Strategies...

Best practices and other appropriate teaching strategies allow competent educators to effectively teach the curriculum. Competent educators may lecture, but they also incorporate a variety of strategies, including non-traditional teaching strategies, to help students with multiple learning styles learn and stay engaged. Educators also attend regular professional development sessions to learn new strategies and the latest best practices.

Able to Assess...

Educators must design or select and administer effective assessments. An assessment must accurately measure what has been taught and what students have learned. Competent educators combine informal and formal assessment techniques to monitor student performance. They also incorporate technology, portfolios and other creative methods to assess students.

Able to Identify Student Needs...

Being able to identify and address student needs is a crucial component of an educator's job. This is done by partly using formal and informal assessments to help guide instruction. However, it also involves getting to know students beyond an instructional level, learning about their interests, recognizing changes in mood and making sure students are mentally and emotionally focused on learning.

Good at Communication...

Communicating effectively with parents and other stakeholders in a child's education is a key component of an educator's job. A quality educator provides regular updates on a child's progress and immediately addresses any concerns that may arise. The educator also knows how to calmly discuss issues with difficult parents and how to come to decisions that have the best interests of the child in mind.



Able to Collaborate...

Educators must be able to collaborate with other teachers and school staff. Teachers can learn from one another and grow into better teachers through collaboration. They can also collaborate to make the school a safe, effective learning environment for all students and to improve the overall image of the school and the instruction that takes place there.

Maintaining a Professional Appearance...

Being an educator requires maintaining a professional appearance at all times. This includes dressing appropriately and acting professionally. Educators often serve as role models for students. Actions such as using foul language, gossiping about teachers and students or dressing inappropriately can cause students to lose respect for an educator.

Demonstrating a Commitment to the Profession...

Educators must make a commitment to education and professional development. Subject matter knowledge fades, teaching strategies change and new research is always modifying the way students learn and teacher's teach. By furthering their education and taking part in

professional development sessions, educators can continue to improve the quality of the education they provide.

[Source: Stacy Zeiger, June 2018]

TIPS FOR INTERNS

Believe in the Children...

You may find yourself working with special education students and those with learning disabilities. They often do not have a lot of people who believe in them. Even if it seems like it will take a miracle for a student to be able to accomplish a task, it's your job to believe in the child and do all you can to help the child experience success. When children realize you believe in them, they are more willing to work for you.

Communicate Concerns...

If you have a concern or an issue, do not bottle it up inside you or try to handle it yourself. Talk to your cooperating teacher about your concerns or any issues you may have about expectations of your role. If you do not address negative feelings, it can affect your ability to help the students and may also damage the way the students see their teacher. Examples of goals for interns may include working on assertiveness and open lines of communication.

Don't Discriminate...

Do not discriminate against students for any reason. You will encounter students of different races, backgrounds and abilities, and you must treat all of them with dignity and respect. Students can tell if you do not like them, especially if you treat them differently from other students, and this may cause them to act out or refuse to let you help them.

Act With Integrity...

In everything you do, focus on integrity. Do not get caught up in gossip among teachers and other school staff. Do not help students cheat or get away with negative behavior. While you must follow instructions and do your job, if your cooperating teacher or another staff member asks you to engage in discriminatory or unethical behavior, do not agree to it.

Show Respect...

Even if you do not like the teachers you work with or other school staff, you must respect them and focus on the work you need to do. If you do not respect the other adults in a school, students may not respect them either. That can lead to problems with classroom management, discipline and the overall school environment.

Remain Professional...

Always act in a professional manner. Avoid raising your voice or using inappropriate language when dealing with difficult students, parents or teachers. Follow all of the school's rules and procedures and encourage students to do the same. Dress appropriately for the school environment, following the teacher dress code.



Give Students Some Independence...

A large portion of an intern's job involves helping students, but this does not mean you have to do everything for them. Give students the opportunity to work independently to help them build confidence in their skills. When students solve a problem incorrectly or ask a question, do not simply provide the correct answer. Ask questions to help the students arrive at the answer themselves.

Maintain Confidentiality...

During your work with students, you will often discuss confidential information in meetings or have access to confidential documents. Remember that the information needs to remain confidential. Only discuss information such as grades, health problems and personal information about a student with that student's parents.

Document Everything...

As an intern, you often have to work with students one-on-one. Interns can support student learning by documenting the activities they do with a student and keeping notes about the student's progress. If conflict arises with a student, make sure to document the conflict and report it to a teacher or administrator.

[Source: Stacy Zeiger, October 2022]

IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING PROFESSIONALISM IN SCHOOLS

Professionalism is a quality that every educator and school employee should possess. Administrators and teachers represent their school district and should do so at all times in a professional manner. This includes being mindful that you are still a school employee even outside of school hours.

Honesty and Integrity...

All school employees should also be aware that they are almost always being watched by students and other community members. When you are a role model and authority figure for children, how you carry yourself matters. Your actions can always be scrutinized. Therefore, teachers are expected to be honest and act with integrity.

As such, it is crucial to always be honest about and up to date with all your certifications and licensures. Also, any kind of manipulation with other people's information, whether it is physical paperwork or in a conversation, needs to be limited to the necessities. This kind of approach will help you maintain physical and emotional safety, which are also critical responsibilities of a teacher.

Relationships...

Building and maintaining respectful and positive relationships with the key stakeholders are main components of professionalism. This includes relationships with your students, their parents, other educators, administrators, and support personnel. Just like everything else, your relationships should be based on honesty and integrity. Failing to make deep, personal connections can create a disconnect that might impact the overall effectiveness of the school.

When dealing with students, it is important to be warm and friendly, while at the same time keeping a certain distance and not blurring the lines between your professional and personal lives. It is also key to treat everyone fairly and avoid bias or favoritism. This applies as much to your everyday interactions with your students as it does to your approach to their performance in class and their grades.

Similarly, your relationships with coworkers and administrators are crucial to your professionalism. A good rule of thumb is to always be polite and err on the side of caution. Taking on a learner's attitude, being openminded, and assuming best intentions go a long way.

Appearance...

For educators, professionalism also includes personal appearance and dressing appropriately. It includes how you talk and act both inside and outside of school. In many communities, it involves what you do outside of school and with whom you have relationships. As a school employee, you must keep in mind that you represent your school district in everything that you do.

The following example policy is designed to establish and promote a professional atmosphere among the faculty and staff.

Professionalism Policy...

All employees are expected to adhere to this policy and to at all times maintain professionalism such that an employee's behavior and action(s) are not harmful to the district or workplace and such that an employee's behavior and action(s) are not harmful to working relationships with teachers, staff members, supervisors, administrators, students, patrons, vendors, or others.

Staff members who take a sincere professional interest in students are to be commended. The teacher and administrator who inspires, guides, and helps students can have a lasting influence on students throughout

their lives. Students and staff members should interact with each other in a warm, open, and positive fashion. However, a certain distance must be maintained between students and staff in order to preserve the businesslike atmosphere necessary to achieve the educational mission of the school.

All boards of education consider it obvious and universally accepted that teachers and administrators are role models. The district has a duty to take steps to prevent activities which adversely intrude into the educational process and which could lead to undesirable consequences.

In order to maintain and preserve the appropriate environment necessary to achieve the educational mission of the school, any unprofessional, unethical, or immoral behavior or actions harmful to the district or workplace, or any such behavior or actions harmful to working relationships with co-workers, supervisors, administrators, students, patrons, vendors, or others may lead to disciplinary action under applicable disciplinary policies, up to, and including termination of employment.

[Source: Derrick Meador, October 2019]



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