The Code of Ethics on Standardized Testing

Clip this out. Save it. Refer back to it.

For more information on the Georgia Code of Ethics, visit www.gapsc.com
As a professional in education, you already know that you are required to follow the set of rules for ethical conduct, the Georgia Code of Ethics. Published, maintained, and enforced by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC), this code defines the professional behavior of educators in Georgia and serves as a guide to ethical conduct—on such topics as health and safety to general welfare of students and standardized testing.

You also know just how important maintaining ethical standards is when it comes to standardized testing. You, more than anyone, understand why collecting accurate, valid, and reliable information about the extent to which students are acquiring or having acquired knowledge and skills is vitally important to education in Georgia.

Still, knowing what is—and also what isn’t—ethical behavior when it comes to standardized testing can be complicated. Testing regulations can be tricky. There are a number of gray areas. While Georgia’s PSC sets certain standards in its Code of Ethics, the description is brief and broad. And trainings on the how-tos of standardized testing often vary from school district to school district.

That’s why, in 1999, the Georgia Association of Educators sought to clarify and better define what counts as ethical versus unethical behavior when it comes to standardized testing. By developing the Code of Ethics on Standardized Testing, the goal was to supplement and further clarify the standards set forth in the PSC’s original document. To that end, GAE developed an easy-to-follow set of testing dos and don’ts.

Please note: This code provides you with standards that demonstrate acceptable and praiseworthy conduct, as well as advance notice of specific, unacceptable conduct for which they will be held accountable. While not in and of itself a binding code of conduct, the Code of Ethics on Standardized Testing serves as a timely guide for ethical behavior.

The Code of Ethics on Standardized Testing applies to all certified educators in Georgia and educational employees with testing responsibilities.

Why do we have a Code of Ethics on Standardized Testing?
Good question. The main objective of these principals on standardized testing is to raise educators’ awareness, individually and collectively, maintain a high level of professional and ethical conduct on testing and testing issues. It’s important to know these rules and to follow them. After all, no matter how strongly motivated you are to do what is ethically right, you can do so only if you know what the rules are.

What are the “Ethics”? Ethics has to do with widely shared principles generally accepted by the education profession. For this reason, an unethical procedure or conduct in one area of the state cannot be ethical under the same circumstances in another area. For the same reason, the wide extent of an unethical practice does not make it ethical or ethically acceptable. In light of new levels of education accountability at the federal, state, and local levels, practices that were acceptable 10 or 20 years ago may no longer be acceptable today.

The teaching profession requires that its members adhere to an ethical code of professional behavior. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission has adopted a Code of Ethics for Educators that is binding upon all certified educators. Additionally, State Board of Education Rule 160-3-1-07 provides, in part, “Local school systems shall adhere to all written regulations and procedures relating to testing and test administration—including the distribution and collection of test materials, test security, use of test results, and department testing dates established in the Student Assessment Handbook, System Coordinator’s Manual, School Test Coordinator’s Manual, test administration manual(s), Examiner’s Manual, and assessment supplements and correspondence.” Thus, Georgia’s education community needs to cultivate and integrate ethical principals with high-stakes testing practices.

As a certified educator, what should you be doing? Although specific test items must not be taught, you should acquaint students with the format of tests so that students feel comfortable when taking them. In order to foster interest rather than anxiety, try using some of the following activities throughout the school year to prepare students for testing and to establish a more relaxed atmosphere.

- Be familiar with the curriculum to ensure that you teach mandated content standards as part of your instructional program.
- Be familiar with the most common skills that students must use to pass standardized tests.
- Familiarize your students about the format of standardized tests.
- Encourage your students to study daily.
• **Teach test-taking strategies** such as the process of elimination to your students.

• Incorporate timed and “wise use of time” activities for your students.

• Design practice classroom tests to parallel standardized tests to familiarize students with the format and to prepare them in completing their writing assignments.

• **Give students practice in following various types of directions**—including reading and listening to directions carefully; identifying key words and phrases (for example, “opposite” and “the same meaning as”) and base words spelled correctly and incorrectly; and encouraging students to ask their questions immediately for clarification. Repeat directions verbatim as they are written in the Examiners Manual or in the Directions for Administration.

• **Notify students and parent(s)/guardian(s) as early as possible** for the test dates and times, the purpose of the test, the usefulness of the test results to the child’s progress, and how the test is relevant to each child personally.

• Make sure all test questions, answers, and/or answer sheets are secured properly.

• **Enlist the enthusiastic support of each parent/guardian** for peak test performance by ensuring that their child gets plenty of rest, eats breakfast, gets to school on time, and feels their encouragement. The school should also be informed of any stressful family events such as death or illness prior to the test.

As a certified educator, what shouldn’t you be doing? Before administering a standardized test to students, you need to know what defines unethical conduct. If a testing violation occurs, you are required to report the breach of testing ethics as soon as possible according to local policies and procedures.

• **Never teach the test or coach students on a test item in any manner prior to the test.** This violation includes teaching or coaching during the school day or through homework assignments, relaying a memorized test item, making a list of most items used on a test, or copying manually or mechanically the actual test items.

• **Never use or give your students a test item from any part of the test in which only a word, phrase, or distractor has been changed.** Constructing or using any practice form that is similar to the actual test items to reflect the situations, options, or conditions of the original question can destroy item security and validity.

• **Don’t copy or distribute the test.** Standardized tests mandated by the Georgia Department of Education are secure. Copying test items by hand or by photocopying machine or by distributing items violate test security and render test results useless.

• **Old or used test forms from the mandated testing program cannot be used as practice materials,** unless the practice materials are authorized by the State Department of Education.

• **Don’t use or allow your students to use false records, identification papers, unauthorized identification cards, or computer access to official school documents.**

• **You should not accept any gratuity, gift, or favor** that might impair or appear to influence professional decisions or actions around student testing and scores.

• **Be careful not to grant any advantage to one student over another except as prescribed in his/her IEP or 504 accommodations.** Modifications may be granted per IEP or 504 plan. This is designed to “level the playing field” and does not constitute an advantage.

• **Never disclose information about your students** obtained in the course of testing unless disclosure serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law.

“The Georgia Association of Educators felt the need to align practices with current standards on standardized testing. We want educators to have user-friendly, easy to understand information that is as specific as possible on what is and isn’t appropriate conduct when it comes to standardized testing. That’s why we worked to develop this list of helpful dos and don’ts.”

—Michael McGonigle, Director of GAE Legal Services

**Terms you need to know:**

**EDUCATOR:** An educator is a teacher, school or school system administrator, or other education personnel who holds a certificate issued by the Professional Standards Commission including—paraprofessionals. For purposes of this Code, the term educator includes teacher aides and substitute teachers.

**STUDENT:** A student is any individual enrolled in the state’s public or private schools from preschool through grade 12 or any individual between and including the ages of 3 and 17.

**COLLEAGUE:** A colleague is any person with whom the educator has a professional relationship—including fellow workers and employees—regardless of their rank or status as educators.

**SUPERVISOR:** A supervisor is any person with authority to evaluate or direct the performance of a colleague.
Did you KNOW? Standard 4 and Standard 7 of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission’s Code of Ethics for Educators directly relate to testing and evaluation programs. (Effective September 15, 2004)

**Standard 4: Misrepresentation or Falsification**—An educator should exemplify honesty and integrity in the course of professional practice. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to:

1. falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting or erroneously reporting professional qualifications, criminal history, college or staff development credit and/or degrees, academic award, and employment history, when applying for employment and/or certification or when recommending an individual for employment, promotion, or certification;
2. falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting erroneously reporting information submitted to federal, state, and other governmental agencies;
3. falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting or erroneously reporting information regarding the evaluation of students and/or personnel;
4. falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting or erroneously reporting reasons for absences or leaves; and
5. falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting or erroneously reporting information submitted in the course of an official inquiry/investigation.

**Standard 7: Confidential Information**—An educator should comply with state and federal laws and local school board/governing board policies relating to the confidentiality of student and personnel records, standardized test material and other information covered by confidentiality agreements. Unethical conduct includes but is not limited to:

1. sharing of confidential information concerning student academic and disciplinary records, personal confidences, health and medical information, family status and/or income, and assessment/testing results unless disclosure is required or permitted by law;
2. sharing of confidential information restricted by state or federal law;
3. violation of confidentiality agreements related to standardized testing including copying or teaching identified test items, publishing or distributing test items or answers, discussing test items, violating local school system or state directions for the use of tests or test items, etc.;
4. violation of other confidentiality agreements required by state or local policy.

A Quick Guide to Standardized Testing “Dos.”

- Teach skills and concepts which are listed in the objectives or on test profiles.
- Teach the curriculum standards as part of your instructional program.
- Practice test-taking skills, such as the process of elimination.
- Acquaint your class with the format of standardized tests.
- Incorporate “wise use of time” for your students.
- Encourage students to study daily.
- Work on listening, reading, and following direction skills.
- Notify parents as early as possible of upcoming test dates.
- Properly secure all testing-related materials.
- Communicate with your administrator about any concerns you might have.


- Never teach the test or coach students on a test item or content to be known on the test.
- Don’t use or give to students a test item from any part of the test in which only a work, phrase, or distracter has been changed.
- Don’t copy or distribute the test.
- Don’t use old or formerly used test forms from the mandated testing program as practice material.
- Don’t use or allow students to use false records, identification papers, unauthorized identification cards, or computer access to official school documents.
- Don’t accept any gratuity, gift, or favor that might impair or appear to influence professional decisions or actions around student testing or test scores.

GAE offers trainings on the Code of Ethics on Standardized Testing.

We can bring a training directly to your school. For more information, contact your GAE UniServ Director (UD).

To find your UD, visit www.gae.org.