



**Board Policy BH: Board Code of Ethics**

**Status:** ADOPTED

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## **Board Code of Ethics**

The DeKalb County Board of Education, desiring to carry out its responsibilities in the most ethical and conscientious manner possible, adopts this Code of Ethics and each member of the Board agrees that he or she will:

### **Domain I: Governance Structure**

1. Recognize that the authority of the Board rests only with the Board as a whole and not with individual Board members and act accordingly.
2. Support the delegation of authority for the day-to-day administration of the School District to the Superintendent and act accordingly.
3. Honor the chain of command and refer problems or complaints consistent with the chain of command.
4. Recognize that the Superintendent should serve as secretary, ex-officio to the Board and should be present at all meetings of the board except when his or her contract, salary or performance is under consideration.
5. Not undermine the authority of the Superintendent or intrude into responsibilities that properly belong to the Superintendent or school administration, including such functions as hiring, transferring or dismissing employees.
6. Use reasonable efforts to keep the Superintendent informed of concerns or specific recommendations that any Board member may bring to the Board.

### **Domain II: Strategic Planning**

1. Reflect through their actions that the educational welfare and academic achievement of the School District's students is the top priority.
2. Participate in all planning activities to develop the vision and goals of the Board and the School District.
3. Work with the Board and the Superintendent to ensure prudent and accountable uses of the resources of the School District.
4. Render all decisions based on available facts and data and his or her independent judgment and refuse to surrender his or her judgment to individuals or special interest groups.
5. Uphold and enforce all applicable laws, all rules and regulations of the State Board of Education, the Board policies and all court orders pertaining to the School District.

### **Domain III: Board and Community Relations**

1. Seek regular and systemic communications among the Board and students, staff and the community.
2. Communicate to the Board and the Superintendent expressions of public reaction to board policies and school programs.
3. Bring community complaints to the attention of the Superintendent or his/her designee so that proper administrative channels may be followed to resolve the matter.

### **Domain IV: Policy Development**

1. Be familiar with the board policies in effect during their tenure in office.

2. Work with other Board members to establish effective policies for the governance of the School District.
3. Make decisions on policy matters only after full discussion at publicly held Board meetings.
4. Periodically review and evaluate the effectiveness of policies on School District programs and performance.

#### **Domain V: Board Meetings**

1. Attend and participate in all regularly scheduled and called Board meetings to the extent possible.
2. Review the Board packet provided by the Administration, and shall endeavor to be well informed and prepared to discuss issues to be considered on the Board agenda before voting on an issue.
3. Work with other Board members in a spirit of harmony and cooperation in spite of differences of opinion that may arise during the discussion and resolution of issues at Board meetings.
4. Handle disagreements among Board members in a respectful, professional and non-confrontational manner.
5. Interact with School District employees in a respectful, non-confrontational and professional manner even if a Board member disagrees with a staff recommendation.
6. Vote for a closed executive session only when applicable law or board policy requires consideration of a matter in executive session.
7. Maintain the confidentiality of all discussions and other matters pertaining to the Board and the School District, during executive session of the Board.
8. Make decisions in accordance with the best interest of the entire School District and not a particular segment of the School District.
9. Execute Board member duties in a fair and impartial manner, unswayed by partisan bias or special interest groups of any kind.
10. Not adopt or follow any code of ethics which prevents Board members from discussing freely the policies and actions of the Board outside of a Board meeting. This shall not apply to any matter or matters discussed in executive session or which are exempt from disclosure under Code Section 50-18-72.
11. Abide by all decisions of the Board and shall not undermine or diminish the Board's decisions.
12. Comply with the State Open Meetings and Open Records laws.

#### **Domain VI: Personnel**

1. Consider the employment of personnel only after receiving and considering the recommendation of the Superintendent.
2. Support the employment of persons best qualified to serve as employees of the School District and insist on regular and impartial evaluations of School District staff.
3. Abstain from voting or participating in discussions, deliberations or decisions in any student appeal, Fair Dismissal proceeding, employee discipline matter, or employee grievance involving a relative.
4. Comply with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and all board policies regarding employment of family members.

#### **Domain VII: Financial Governance**

1. Refrain from using the position of Board member for personal or partisan gain or to benefit any person or entity over the interest of the School District.

### **Conduct as Board Member**

1. Devote sufficient time, thought and study to the performance of the duties and responsibilities of a member of the Board.
2. Become informed about current educational issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed education and training.
3. Communicate in a respectful professional manner with and about fellow Board members.
4. Share pertinent information about any item of Board business with all Board members so that all Board members are equally informed and prepared at Board meetings.
5. Take no private action that will compromise the Board or School District Administration.
6. Not use their position as an attorney to represent clients in any action or proceeding against the School District or its employees.
7. Refrain from providing intentionally misleading information to other Board members, the Administration, or the public.
8. Refrain from knowingly soliciting financial or any other support from School District employees or vendors when seeking reelection.
9. Refrain from using School District resources for personal interests and using School District resources for community programs without Board approval.
10. Not use or lead others to believe they will use their influence to help anyone obtain employment, promotion, or business opportunities within the School District.
11. Direct all requests for the assistance of School District personnel to the Superintendent.
12. Participate in all training programs for board members required by state law or State Board of Education rule developed for Board members by the Board or the State Board of Education.
13. File annually with the Superintendent and with the State Board of Education a written statement certifying that he or she is in compliance with this Code of Ethics.

### **Abstentions**

1. Abstain from voting when required by this policy and fully disclose the reason for not voting to the other Board members and to the public.
2. Abstain from voting, participating in discussions, deliberations or decisions on any contract expenditure involving a business in which the Board member or a relative of the Board member has a financial interest.
3. Abstain from voting or otherwise participation in discussions, deliberations, or decisions on any matter in which a reasonable person would consider the Board member to have a conflict of interest.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

1. Announce potential conflicts of interest and fully disclose the reason for not voting before Board action is taken.
2. Comply with the Board Policy BHA: Board Member Conflict of Interest and all applicable laws.
3. Upon a motion supported by a (2/3) two-thirds vote, the Board may choose to conduct a hearing concerning a possible violation of this Code of Ethics by a member of the Board pursuant to the section below entitled Enforcement of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policies.

**Ethics Oath**

At the first meeting of each calendar year (or as soon thereafter as possible), all Board members shall publicly swear or affirm their commitment to comply with the Board Member Ethics Policy, as set forth in Board Policy BH, and the Board Member Conflict of Interest Policy, as set forth in Board Policy BHA. The Ethics Oath, which shall be in addition to the Board member’s oath of office, shall read as follows.

As a member of the DeKalb County Board of Education, I hereby swear or affirm my commitment to comply with the Board Member Ethics Policy, as set forth in Board Policy BH, and the Board Member Conflict of Interest Policy, as set forth in Board Policy BHA.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Definition of Relative**

As used in this policy, the term “relative” shall include the spouse, child, grandchild, sibling, and parent of a Board member; the child, grandchild, sibling, and parent of a Board member’s spouse; and the spouse of a Board member’s child, grandchild, sibling, or parent.

**Board Training**

Upon being elected, reelected, or appointed to the Board, Board members shall be required to attend a training program on the Board Member Ethics Policy and the Board Member Conflict of Interest Policy. Such training shall be completed within 90 days of taking office and shall be repeated every two years while the Board member is in office.

The training program shall last at least two hours and shall address appropriate Board member behavior, an explanation of the conduct prohibited by the Board Member Ethics Policy and the Board Member Conflict of Interest Policy, and a review of the procedures for enforcement of the Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policies.

The Board may contract with an institution of the University System of Georgia, the Georgia School Boards Association, or some other qualified agency, organization or individual qualified to perform such training. The cost of the training shall be paid by the School District.

**Enforcement of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policies**

A Board member who believes in good faith that another Board member has violated the Board Member Ethics Policy or the Board Member Conflict of Interest Policy shall ask the Board Chair to convene an Executive Session of the Board. Upon such a request, the Board Chair shall convene an Executive Session to discuss or deliberate upon the possible disciplinary action of a Board member. At least ten calendar days’ notice of the Executive Session shall be provided to all Board members, unless subject of complaint agrees to a shorter time. If no charges are to be brought and no hearing is to be held, the matter shall proceed no further.

Any vote to charge a Board member with a violation of the Board Member Ethics Policy or the Board Member Conflict of Interest Policy shall be taken in an open meeting and shall require a (2/3) vote of the Board members present, provided a quorum is present. The Board member or members suspected of the violation shall not be permitted to vote on the matter.

If charges are brought against a Board member, the Board shall conduct a hearing on the charges. At least thirty calendar days’ notice of the date, time, and place of the hearing shall be provided to all Board members. The accused Board member’s notice shall be sent by certified mail to the address listed with the School District and by electronic means. The accused Board member shall be entitled to be represented by counsel at his/her own expense.

The parties by agreement may stipulate that some disinterested member of the State Bar of Georgia shall decide all questions of evidence and other legal issues arising in the hearing. At the hearing, both the Board and the accused may call and cross-examine witnesses. The burden of proof shall be on the Board to establish the alleged violation

by a preponderance of the evidence. The hearing shall be open to the public while the Board is receiving evidence or hearing argument.

A two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Board members conducting the hearing shall be required to find that the accused Board member committed the alleged violation and to impose sanctions. The Board member or members charged with a violation shall not be permitted to vote on the matter. Any vote on the matter shall be taken in public.

If the accused Board member is found to have committed the alleged violation, the Board shall be authorized to take any or all of the following actions:

1. Censure or reprimand the Board member;
2. Disavow the improper acts or statements of the Board member;
3. Ask for a public apology by the Board member;
4. Report the Board member to AdvancED (SACS) or the appropriate accrediting agency;
5. Initiate a civil action to recover the value of anything received by the Board member in violation of the Board Member Ethics Policy or the Board Member Conflict of Interest Policy;
6. If warranted by the evidence and findings, report the matter to law enforcement authorities for possible consideration of criminal charges against the Board member.

A Board member subject to sanction may, within thirty (30) days of such sanction vote, appeal such decision to the State Board of Education in accordance with the rules and regulations of the State Board of Education. A record of the decision of the Board to sanction a Board member for a violation of this Code of Ethics shall be placed in the permanent minutes of the Board.

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