

Text of Proposed Amendments to 19 TAC

Chapter 249. Disciplinary Proceedings, Sanctions, and Contested Cases

Subchapter A. General Provisions

§249.5. Purpose; Policy Governing Disciplinary Proceedings.

- (a) Purpose. The purpose of this chapter is:
 - (1) to protect the safety and welfare of Texas schoolchildren and school personnel;
 - (2) to ensure educators and applicants are morally fit and worthy to instruct or to supervise the youth of the state;
 - (3) to regulate and to enforce the standards of conduct of educators and applicants;
 - (4) to provide for disciplinary proceedings in conformity with the Texas Government Code, Chapter 2001, and the rules of practice and procedure of the State Office of Administrative Hearings;
 - (5) to enforce an educators' code of ethics;
 - (6) to fairly and efficiently resolve disciplinary proceedings at the least expense possible to the parties and the state;
 - (7) to promote the development of legal precedents through State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) decisions to the end that disciplinary proceedings may be justly resolved; and
 - (8) to provide for regulation and general administration pursuant to the SBEC's enabling statutes.
- (b) Policy governing disciplinary proceedings [~~Governing Disciplinary Proceedings~~].
 - (1) A certified educator holds a unique position of public trust with almost unparalleled access to the hearts and minds of impressionable students. The conduct of an educator must be held to the highest standard. Because SBEC sanctions are imposed for reasons of public policy, and are not penal in nature, criminal procedural and punishment standards are not appropriate to educator disciplinary proceedings.
 - (2) The following general principles shall apply.
 - (A) Because the SBEC's primary duty is to safeguard the interests of Texas students, educator certification must be considered a privilege and not a right.
 - (B) The SBEC may pursue disciplinary proceedings and sanctions based on convictions of felonies and misdemeanors as provided by the Texas Education Code (TEC), §21.060; the Texas Occupations Code, Chapter 53; and this chapter.
 - (C) The SBEC may also pursue disciplinary proceedings and sanctions based on educator conduct that is proved by a preponderance of the evidence, and such proceedings and sanctions do not require a criminal conviction, deferred adjudication, community supervision, an indictment, or an arrest.
 - (D) An educator's good moral character, as defined in §249.3 of this title (relating to Definitions), constitutes the essence of the role model that the educator represents to students both inside and outside the classroom. Chapter 247 of this title (relating to Educators' Code of Ethics) and this chapter provide for educator disciplinary proceedings and provide a minimum standard for educator conduct. Conduct or conditions that may demonstrate that an educator or applicant lacks good moral character, is a negative role model to students, and does not possess the moral fitness necessary to be a certified educator include, but are not limited to:
 - (i) active community supervision or criminal probation;
 - (ii) conduct that indicates dishonesty or untruthfulness;

- (iii) habitual impairment through drugs or alcohol;
 - (iv) abuse or neglect of students and minors, including the educator's own children; and
 - (v) reckless endangerment of the safety of others.
- (E) "Unworthy to instruct or to supervise the youth of this state," defined in §249.3 of this title, which serves as a basis for sanctions under §249.15(b)(2) of this title (relating to Disciplinary Action by State Board for Educator Certification), is a broad concept that is not limited to the specific criminal convictions that are described in the TEC, §21.058 and §21.060. The moral fitness of a person to instruct the youth of this state must be determined from an examination of all relevant conduct, is not limited to conduct that occurs while performing the duties of a professional educator, and is not limited to conduct that constitutes a criminal violation or results in a criminal conviction or to conduct that constitutes a violation of Chapter 247 of this title .
- (F) Educators have positions of authority, have extensive access to students when no other adults (or even other students, in some cases) are present, and have access to confidential information that could provide a unique opportunity to exploit student vulnerabilities. Educators must clearly understand the boundaries of the educator-student relationship that they are trusted not to cross. Any violation of that trust, such as soliciting or engaging in a romantic or sexual relationship with any student or minor, is considered conduct that may result in permanent revocation of an educator's certificate.
- (G) Administrators who hold Superintendent, Principal, or Mid-Management Administrator certificates issued by the SBEC have, as a result of their actual or potential positions of authority over both students and other educators, an even greater obligation to maintain good moral character than teachers and paraprofessionals. When an administrator's conduct demonstrates that the administrator lacks good moral character, is a negative role model to students, or does not possess the moral fitness necessary to be a certified educator as described in subparagraph (D) of this paragraph, the administrator may be subject to greater sanction than a teacher or paraprofessional would receive for the same conduct.
- (H) [~~(G)~~] Evidence of rehabilitation with regard to educator conduct that could result in sanction, denial of a certification application, or denial of an application for reinstatement of a certificate shall be recognized and considered. In addition, the following shall also be considered:
- (i) the nature and seriousness of prior conduct;
 - (ii) the potential danger the conduct poses to the health and welfare of students;
 - (iii) the effect of the prior conduct upon any victims of the conduct;
 - (iv) whether sufficient time has passed and sufficient evidence is presented to demonstrate that the educator or applicant has been rehabilitated from the prior conduct; and
 - (v) the effect of the conduct upon the educator's good moral character and ability to be a proper role model for students.