

Association of Texas Professional Educators

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Supporting Your Freedom to TeachSM

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SBEC to vote on Educators' Code of Ethics

AUSTIN – Major changes to rules governing the ethics of Texas teachers are up for a vote Friday by the State Board for Educator Certification, and the changes still have significant issues, according to the state's largest educators' group.

The proposed updates to the Educators' Code of Ethics rely heavily on vague and subjective language and lack any direct input from the members of the profession the code governs.

“When it comes to the rules addressing how educators are required to conduct themselves both in and out of the classroom, the language used must be clear and easily understood with little need for interpretation,” said Monty Exter, a lobbyist with the 115,000-member Association of Texas Professional Educators. “But as it stands, the changes to the Code of Ethics include entirely too many instances that will allow subjective judgment calls to be made by the agency prosecutors tasked with enforcing the code.”

In its seven-page brief to SBEC members, ATPE cited numerous examples where the changes to the Code of Ethics lacked specificity. For example, SBEC proposes the new term “worthy to instruct,” defined as the “presence of those moral, mental, and psychological qualities that are required to enable an educator to render the service essential to the accomplishment of the goals and mission” of SBEC policy and rules. If certain moral, mental and psychological qualities are to be required, as the changes to the Code of Ethics suggest, then those qualities must be defined rather than left open to agency interpretation.

As first adopted by the Legislature in 1969, the laws governing the Educators' Code of Ethics also require a referendum vote through which all actively certified professionals in Texas public schools can vote on changes to the code. Despite this long-standing tradition, both SBEC and the Texas Education Agency have declined to undertake a proper referendum.

“A referendum is a powerful means in which a classroom teacher can participate in the ethics process,” said Exter. “We fully intend to urge the board to delay this vote until the educators who will be governed by these proposed changes to the code have been given an opportunity to either ratify or reject them.”

If the board approves the updated Educators' Code of Ethics, the State Board of Education will have 90 days after receiving a copy of the changes to decide whether to veto the update.

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The 115,000-member Association of Texas Professional Educators is the largest educators' group in Texas and the largest nonunion educators' group nationwide. Its membership consists of classroom teachers, para-educators, administrators, college students and retired educators. ATPE is committed to advocating for better benefits for all educators, promoting a collaborative work environment and the right of educators to choose the association they feel represents their interests, and providing the best education possible for all Texas school children.