

# **TOWSON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION PROGRAM PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR POLICY**

## **INTRODUCTION and RATIONALE**

The Teacher Education Executive Board (TEEB) has a responsibility to the education community to ensure that individuals whom Towson University recommends to the State of Maryland for certification are highly qualified to join the education profession. Those entering the teaching profession are required to have strong academic preparation, demonstrable pedagogical knowledge and skills, and other professional competencies. The profession also requires non-academic professional behaviors, such as interpersonal skills, which are as critical to success as those in the academic domain. The goal of this *Professional Behavior Policy* is to help candidates know and demonstrate professional behaviors in a school environment. This document sets forth the essential professional behaviors for all Educator Preparation Programs and applies to candidates from the time of acceptance into the professional education program through completion of the program. Please note that the expectations apply throughout a candidate's time in the program, even when not formally enrolled in coursework.

A professional behavior policy serves several important functions, including, but not limited to: (a) providing clear expectations regarding professional and ethical behaviors for those pursuing careers in education; (b) serving as the basis for feedback provided to candidates throughout their preparation program regarding their progress toward mastery of all program objectives; and (c) outlining fair and impartial procedures for managing and addressing candidate professional behavior issues.

All candidates in education programs are expected to demonstrate that they are prepared to work with students and adults in educational settings. This preparation results from the combination of successful completion of Towson University coursework, practicum experiences, and the demonstration of professional and ethical behaviors that all educators should possess. The professional behaviors and conduct deemed compatible with Towson University and/or partner schools are outlined below. These professional behaviors are aligned with the expectations of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) published by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) and required by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The MCEE is intended to support future and current educators in understanding the impact of their actions and decision making on the safety and well-being of students as well as on colleagues and school culture. All TU Educator Preparation programs require candidates to learn about the MCEE and candidates are expected to adhere to these ethical standards in their program and throughout their professional career.

## **EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR STATEMENT**

The Teacher Education Executive Board (TEEB) reserves the right for each department/program to refuse, deny, or revoke the application for admission to professional education programs or continuation in professional education programs of any candidate whose observed behavior is deemed incongruent with established guidelines of professional behavior.

All teacher education candidates agree to accept “the responsibility to adhere to the highest ethical standards of professional behavior.” Placing the importance of professional behavior and duties above one's own convenience is the cornerstone of professionalism.

All teacher education candidates are responsible for understanding department- and program-specific professional expectations. Fulfilling all academic requirements and successful completion of all practicum experiences require professional behavior including, but not limited to, punctuality, attendance, professional attire, discretion, respect for confidentiality, effective and appropriate communication with University and school-based students and personnel, and support of diversity.

All teacher education candidates must exhibit behaviors consistent with the [Towson University Code of Student Accountability](#) and established professional practice in educational and clinical settings. Successful completion of all practicum and academic experiences is a requirement for continuation in the education program.

### **Educator Preparation Program Expectations of Behavior**

The Expectations of Professional Behavior for all candidates enrolled in Educator Preparation programs are grouped into five categories: Communication/Interpersonal Skills, Emotional and Physical Abilities, Personal and Professional Behavior, Respect for Self and Others, and Social Media Policy.

**Candidates enrolled in an education program must exhibit effective:**

#### **1. Communication/Interpersonal Skills**

- **Candidates express themselves effectively in written and oral communication regarding concepts, assignments, evaluations, and expectations with members of the learning community such as University faculty, students, parents/guardians/families, administrators, and other staff. Candidates will:**
  - communicate with colleagues, faculty, staff, students, parents/guardians/families, and other professionals in a timely, respectful, and culturally sensitive manner. Candidates express ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrate a willingness and an ability to listen to others.
  - communicate any concerns about their practicum experience with the university supervisor in a proactive, timely, and professional manner.
  - write clearly and use correct grammar and spelling. Candidates demonstrate sufficient skills to adequately complete all written assignments, as specified by faculty.
  - demonstrate sufficient oral skills to adequately complete all oral assignments and to meet the objectives of practicum experiences, as specified by faculty.
- **Candidates have communication skills that are responsive to a variety of perspectives represented in diverse classrooms and/or other professional environments. Candidates will:**
  - demonstrate written and oral communication skills that are responsive to a variety of perspectives represented in diverse classrooms and/or other professional environments.
  - leverage the value of diversity and look beyond self in interactions with others. Candidates must not impose personal, political, religious, sexual, and/or cultural values on others.
- **Candidates possess the necessary interpersonal competencies to work effectively with colleagues, faculty, staff, students, parents/guardians/families, and other professionals and to function collaboratively as part of a professional team. Candidates will:**
  - demonstrate positive social skills in professional and social interactions with colleagues, faculty, staff, students, parents/guardians/families, and other professionals.
  - express their viewpoints and negotiate difficulties appropriately and professionally with colleagues, faculty, staff, students, parents/guardians/families, and other professionals.
  - respect the dignity, worth and uniqueness of each individual including, but not limited to, actual and perceived gender, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, civil status, family status, religion, age, disability, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic context and culture.

#### **2. Emotional and Physical Abilities**

- **Candidates will be able to work appropriately with time constraints and deadlines, to concentrate in distracting situations, to make subjective judgments to best serve the needs of students, and to ensure safety in the classroom and in emergency situations. Candidates will:**
  - work with frequent interruptions, respond appropriately to unexpected situations, and cope with variations in workload and stress levels.
  - multi-task and adapt to and display flexibility in changing situations.
  - make and execute quick, appropriate, and accurate decisions in complex, stressful environments.
  - maintain composure and continue to function professionally in a myriad of situations.

- **Candidates will demonstrate the physical and mental stamina to work a contractual day and perform extended and additional duties of a school professional such as parent/guardian/family conferences, after-school events, and other assigned duties. Candidates will:**
  - monitor and maintain sound mental, physical, and emotional health necessary to perform assigned duties and take appropriate measures when personal or health-related issues may interfere with work-related duties.
  - manage demanding workloads and function effectively under stress.

### 3. **Personal and Professional Behavior**

- **Candidates will meet program deadlines and requirements. Candidates will:**
  - arrive on time and stay for the duration of the planned experience for professional commitments, including classes and practicum experiences.
  - meet deadlines for course assignments, practicum, and program requirements.
- **Candidates will seek assistance and follow supervision in a timely manner; modify and respond appropriately to constructive reviews of their work from supervisors. Candidates will:**
  - reflect upon and assess their professional skills, knowledge, and competency on an ongoing basis.
  - reflect on their practice and accept constructive feedback in a professional manner.
  - demonstrate the ability to act upon appropriate suggestions and reasonable criticism.
  - be flexible, open to new ideas and modify their classroom practices to best serve the needs of the students.
  - commit to ongoing professional learning.
- **Candidates will demonstrate attitudes of integrity, responsibility, and tolerance. Candidates will:**
  - demonstrate honesty and integrity by being truthful about background, experiences, and qualifications; doing their own work; giving credit for the ideas of others; and providing proper citation of source materials.
  - interact courteously, fairly, and professionally with people from diverse racial, cultural, and social backgrounds and of different genders, gender identities, or sexual preferences.
  - refrain from making verbal or physical threats; engaging in sexual harassment; becoming involved in sexual relationships with their students, supervisors, or faculty; or abusing others in physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual ways.
  - understand the perspectives of others and demonstrate the ability to separate personal and professional issues.
  - advocate for equitable educational opportunities for all students.
  - create, maintain, disseminate, store, retain and dispose of records and data relating to one's research and practice, in accordance with, but not limited to, official guidance, policy and laws.
  - use data, data sources, or findings accurately, reliably, and ethically.
  - respect the privacy of students and the need to hold in confidence certain forms of student communication, documents or information obtained in the course of professional practice.
  - uphold parents'/guardians'/family's legal rights, as well as any legal requirements, to reveal information related to legitimate concerns for the well-being of a student.
  - protect the confidentiality of student records and releasing personal data in accordance with prescribed state and federal laws and district policies.

### 4. **Respect for Self and Others**

- Candidates will exhibit respect for all colleagues, faculty, staff, students, parents/guardians/families, and other professionals.
- Candidates will respect the rule that cell phone for personal use is prohibited during class hours; possible exceptions for emergencies may be approved in advance.
- Candidates will remain free of the influence of illegal drugs and/or the abuse of legal drugs and/or alcoholic beverages on University premises and school-based settings. Candidates are expected to abide by the [Towson University Code of Student Accountability](#) and the [Student Academic Integrity Policy](#).

- Candidates will demonstrate the ability to manage personal and professional stressors through the use of appropriate coping mechanisms, self-care, and supports.
- Candidates will seek and effectively use help for medical and emotional problems that may interfere with academic and/or professional performance. They will utilize resources such as the [Towson University Health Center](#), [Accessibility and Disability Services](#), [Student Outreach and Support Services](#), and the [Towson University Counseling Center](#).
- Candidates will take into account how their appearance and dress can affect one's interactions and relationships with colleagues, faculty, staff, students, parents/guardians/families, and other professionals.

##### 5. Social Media Policy

- **The same principles and guidelines that apply to candidates' activities in general also apply to their activities online. This includes all forms of online publishing and discussion, including blogs, user-generated video and audio, social networks and other social media applications. The Internet is neither anonymous nor forgetful, and there is no clear line between one's professional life and personal life on a social media site. Candidates will:**
  - use social media transparently and primarily for purposes of teaching and learning per school and district policy. They will consider the ramifications of using social media and direct communication via technology with one's interactions with students, colleagues and the general public.
  - recognize that some electronic communications are records under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and state public access laws.
  - consider the implications of sharing legally protected or other sensitive information electronically either via professional or personal devices/accounts.
  - exercise vigilance in maintaining separate and professional virtual profiles and keeping personal and professional lives distinct.
  - shall refrain from engaging with classroom students or parents/guardians/family members on any social media site or device.
  - shall abide by TU and school district media policies when taking videos and/or photos of students and student work.

##### Implementation and Review Procedures

Each program in the Education Preparation Program will introduce this policy, candidates will receive a copy of the *Professional Behavior Policy* and sign a *Professional Behavior Policy Acknowledgement Form* upon admission into the program and/or prior to entry into any practicum experience.

At various points in their program, candidates will be notified of professional and/or academic behavior inadequacies that may prevent them from progressing through their program. Documentation and consensus regarding the student's performance will be sought before any action is taken. Candidates who experience deficiencies in any areas will be encouraged to seek appropriate professional support from Towson University or other sources. If the problem seems to be beyond remediation, the candidate's continuation in professional programs, graduation, or recommendation for certification may be denied.

##### Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities

Requirements of the *Professional Behavior Policy* may be met with or without accommodations. The University complies with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Therefore, Towson University will endeavor to make reasonable accommodations with respect to its professional behavior standards for an applicant with a disability who is otherwise qualified. "Disability" shall mean, with respect to an individual, (1) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life functions of such individual; (2) a record of such an impairment; or (3) being regarded as having such an impairment. The University reserves the right to reject any requests for accommodations that are unreasonable, including those that would involve the use of an intermediary that would require a student to rely on someone else's power of selection and observation, fundamentally alter the nature of the University's educational program, lower academic standards, cause an undue hardship on the University, or endanger the safety of students or others.

For all requests for accommodations, students should contact Towson University's Accessibility & Disability Services (ADS) Office and follow established university policy and procedures. **Candidates must inform ADS if they are requesting accommodations for a practicum experience, even if they already receive class-based accommodations, as practicum accommodations are subject to different criteria based on the essential job functions of teaching.** Accommodations for practicum may more closely resemble job accommodations rather than academic accommodations. Candidates should be aware that practicum accommodations must also be approved by the hosting school district and require additional time due to the significant amount of interaction between the school system, the academic program, ADS, and the student. **It is recommended that candidates submit requests for practicum accommodations to ADS at least two months prior to the start date of the practicum.**

Unless a student has expressly waived his or her privilege to confidentiality of records provided to substantiate either a disability or a recommendation for an accommodation, program administrators to which such information has been communicated shall maintain such information in a manner that preserves its confidentiality. Under no circumstances shall such information become part of a student's academic records.

### **CONTINUANCE or REMOVAL FROM PRACTICUM and/or PROGRAM**

Practicum experiences are intended to be an opportunity for candidates to practice and demonstrate the pedagogical skills required for their program. In addition to academic preparation and teaching knowledge and skills, the teaching profession requires non-academic professional behaviors such as interpersonal skills, which are as critical to teaching success as those in the academic domain. The *Education Program Professional Behavior Policy* describes the professional behaviors expected of teacher candidates in all school placements. Candidates who fail to demonstrate appropriate professional behaviors, pedagogical skills, and/or mastery of content are subject to the procedures noted below.

#### **School Requested Dismissal**

If a school leader and/or mentor teacher requests the removal of a candidate from a school placement, the placement at that school **ends immediately**. The teacher candidate will meet with the TU Department Chair/Program Director and supervisor to determine next steps. This may include the implementation of an assistance plan, a failing practicum grade, and/or dismissal from the program depending on the severity of the behaviors and previously implemented interventions. If the candidate's actions consist of illegal activities, the candidate will be dismissed from the program immediately.

#### **Dismissal Based on Safety Concern**

If the behavior of a candidate presents a safety concern as identified by university faculty and/or school-based personnel, the placement **ends immediately**. The teacher candidate will meet with the TU Department Chair/Program Director and supervisor to determine next steps. University faculty will contact the Office of Student Affairs directly or submit an SOS form and encourage the candidate to contact the Counseling Center.

#### **Procedures for Performance Concerns**

- **Professionalism Issues:** If the difficulties are limited to professionalism, TU Department Chair/Program Director will send a Warning Letter to the candidate to identify the specific unprofessional behavior(s) and violation(s) of the *Professional Behavior Policy*. Candidates will be required to acknowledge the violations and will be expected to remediate the behaviors. A copy of the Warning Letter will be documented in Watermark. In the event of a repeat of similar behavior(s) or if the candidate refuses to acknowledge the violations, the candidate will be removed from the school placement and receive a failing grade for the practicum.
- **Academic Performance Issues:** If a candidate encounters performance issues in the school placement, the university supervisor will inform the candidate, in writing, that they are not meeting expectations and will specify the teaching behaviors, knowledge, and/or skills that need remediation. Once informed of the area(s) requiring improvement, the candidate, university supervisor, and mentor teacher will develop an assistance plan addressing the areas of concern. The assistance plan must include the area(s) that need improvement and the steps the

candidate must follow to remediate those area(s) of need. The assistance plan will also include a timeline that specifies how and when the candidate will be expected to address the identified area(s) of need, supports and feedback that will be provided by the supervisor and mentor teacher, and the steps that will follow if the area(s) are not remediated within the identified time frame. Each time the university supervisor and the mentor teacher observe the candidate, observations will be written with specific references to the identified area(s) for improvement in the assistance plan and any progress being made in these areas noted. The university supervisor will share a copy of the assistance plan with the TU Department Chair/Program Director so they are aware of the area(s) in which the candidate is experiencing difficulty. A copy of the assistance plan should also be uploaded into Watermark. Should the candidate refuse to accept and/or complete the assistance plan, the candidate will be removed from the school placement and receive a failing grade for the practicum.

- **Successful Completion of the Assistance Plan:** At the end of the time frame set forth in the assistance plan, if the candidate has successfully completed all parts of the assistance plan to the satisfaction of the university supervisor and mentor teacher and is able to maintain all of the responsibilities expected in the school placement, the candidate will continue in the practicum. Successful completion of the Assistance Plan does not indicate successful completion of the course, only the ability to continue in the practicum.
- **Unsuccessful Completion of the Assistance Plan:** At the end of the time frame set forth in the assistance plan, if adequate progress in the area(s) of need identified on the assistance plan is not achieved, the candidate will be removed from the school placement and receive a failing grade for the practicum. This decision will be made by the university supervisor in consultation with the mentor teacher and the TU Department Chair/Program Director. The school principal, TU Partnership Facilitator, and Center for Professional Practice will also be notified by email of the decision. Within two business days of the decision to remove a candidate from a school placement, a letter written by the university supervisor and signed by both the university supervisor and TU Department Chair/Program Director outlining the reasons for the removal from the placement will be given to the candidate.

### **Appeal Process**

Candidates have the right to appeal their removal from a school placement and/or dismissal from a professional education program.

- **Removal from School Placement:** A written appeal must be received by the College of Education Dean's Office within two business days of the program's decision to remove the candidate from a placement. The appeal letter should be no more than two typed pages and must include a statement as to why the student believes they should have another placement. In addition to the appeal letter, the candidate must include, as attachments, any previous warning letters and/or signed assistance plans.
- **Dismissal from Professional Education Program:** A written appeal must be submitted to the TU Department Chairperson/Program Director within five business days to appeal a dismissal from a teacher education program. The appeal letter should be no more than two typed pages and must include a statement as to why the student believes they should have the opportunity to continue in the program. In addition to the appeal letter, the candidate must include, as attachments, any previous warning letters and/or signed assistance plans.

Should the candidate wish to appeal the TU Department Chairperson/Program Director's decision, they may appeal to the College of Education. A written appeal must be submitted to the College of Education Dean's Office within five business days of the TU Department Chairperson/Program Director's decision. The appeal letter should be no more than two typed pages and must include a statement as to why the student believes they should have the opportunity to continue in the program. In addition to the appeal letter, the candidate must include, as attachments, any previous warning letters and/or signed assistance plans as well as the appeal decision letter written by the TU Department Chairperson/Program Director.

