

# ***Code of Professional Responsibilities in Educational Measurement***

***Prepared by the NCME Ad Hoc Committee on the Development of a Code of Ethics:***

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As an organization dedicated to the improvement of measurement and evaluation practice in education, the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) has adopted this Code to promote professionally responsible practice in educational measurement. Professionally responsible practice is conduct that arises from either the professional standards of the field, general ethical principles, or both.

The purpose of the Code of Professional Responsibilities in Educational Measurement, hereinafter referred to as the Code, is to guide the conduct of NCME members who are involved in any tinge of assessment activity in education. NCME is also providing this Code as a public service for all individuals who are engaged in educational assessment activities in the hope that these activities will be conducted in a professionally responsible manner. Persons who engage in these activities include local educators such as classroom teachers, principals, and superintendents; professionals such as school psychologists and counselors; state and national technical, legislative, and policy staff in education; staff of research, evaluation, and testing organizations; providers of test preparation services; college and university faculty and administrators; and professionals in business and industry who design and implement educational and training programs.

This Code applies to any type of assessment that occurs as part of the educational process, including formal and informal, traditional and alternative techniques for gathering information used in making educational decisions at all levels. These techniques include, but are not limited to, large-scale assessments at the school, district, state, national, and international levels; standardized tests; observational measures; teacher-conducted assessments; assessment support materials; and other achievement, aptitude, interest, and personality measures used in and for education.

Although NCME is promulgating this Code for its members, it strongly encourages other organizations and individuals who engage in educational assessment activities to endorse and abide by the responsibilities relevant to their professions. Because the Code pertains only to uses of assessment in education, it is recognized that uses of assessments outside of educational contexts, such as for employment, certification, or licensure, may involve additional professional responsibilities beyond those detailed in this Code.

The Code is intended to serve an educational function: to inform and remind those involved in educational assessment of their obligations to uphold the integrity of the manner in which assessments are developed, used, evaluated, and marketed. Moreover, it is expected that the Code will stimulate thoughtful discussion of what constitutes professionally responsible assessment practice at all levels in education.

The Code enumerates professional responsibilities in eight major areas of assessment activity. Specifically, the Code presents the professional responsibilities of those who:

- 1) Develop Assessments
- 2) Market and Sell Assessments
- 3) Select Assessments
- 4) Administer Assessments
- 5) Score Assessments
- 6) Interpret, Use, and Communicate Assessment Results
- 7) Educate About Assessment
- 8) Evaluate Programs and Conduct Research on Assessments

Although the organization of the Code is based on the differentiation of these activities, they are viewed as highly interrelated, and those who use this Code are urged to consider the Code in its entirety. The index following this Code provides a listing of some of the critical interest topics within educational measurement that focus on one or more of the assessment activities.

### ***General Responsibilities***

The professional responsibilities promulgated in this Code in eight major areas of assessment activity are based on expectations that NCME members involved in educational assessment will:

- 1) protect the health and safety of all examinees;
- 2) be knowledgeable about, and behave in compliance with, state and federal laws relevant to the conduct of professional activities;
- 3) maintain and improve their professional competence in educational assessment;
- 4) provide assessment services only in areas of their competence and experience, affording full disclosure of their professional qualifications;
- 5) promote the understanding of sound assessment practices in education;
- 6) adhere to the highest standards of conduct and promote professionally responsible conduct within educational institutions and agencies that provide educational services; and
- 7) perform all professional responsibilities with honesty, integrity, due care, and fairness.

Responsible professional practice includes being informed about and acting in accordance with the *Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education* (Joint Committee on Testing Practices, 1988), the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education, 1985), or subsequent revisions, as well as all applicable state and federal laws that may govern the development, administration, and use of assessments. Both the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* and the *Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education* are

intended to establish criteria for judging the technical adequacy of tests and the appropriate uses of tests and test results. The purpose of this Code is to describe the professional responsibilities of those individuals who are engaged in assessment activities. As would be expected, there is a strong relationship between professionally responsible practice and sound educational assessments, and this Code is intended to be consistent with the relevant parts of both of these documents.

It is not the intention of NCME to enforce the professional responsibilities stated in the Code or to investigate allegations of violations to the Code.

Since the Code provides a frame of reference for the evaluation of the appropriateness of behavior, NCME recognizes that the Code may be used in legal or other similar proceedings.

### ***Section 1: Responsibilities of Those Who Develop Assessment Products and Services***

Those who develop assessment products and services, such as classroom teachers and other assessment specialists, have a professional responsibility to strive to produce assessments that are of the highest quality. Persons who develop assessments have a professional responsibility to:

- 1.1 Ensure that assessment products and services are developed to meet applicable professional, technical, and legal standards.
- 1.2 Develop assessment products and services that are as free as possible from bias due to characteristics irrelevant to the construct being measured, such as gender, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, age, or national origin.
- 1.3 Plan accommodations for groups of test takers with disabilities and other special needs when developing assessments.
- 1.4 Disclose to appropriate parties any actual or potential conflicts of interest that might influence the developers' judgment or performance.
- 1.5 Use copyrighted materials in assessment products and services in accordance with state and federal law.
- 1.6 Make information available to appropriate persons about the steps taken to develop and score the assessment, including up-to-date information used to support the reliability, validity, scoring and reporting processes, and other relevant characteristics of the assessment.
- 1.7 Protect the rights to privacy of those who are assessed as part of the assessment development process.
- 1.8

- Caution users, in clear and prominent language, against the most likely misinterpretations and misuses of data that arise out of the assessment development process.
- 1.9 Avoid false or unsubstantiated claims in test preparation and program support materials and services about an assessment or its use and interpretation.
- 1.10 Correct any substantive inaccuracies in assessments or their support materials as soon as feasible.
- 1.11 Develop score reports and support materials that promote the understanding of assessment results.

***Section 2:***  
***Responsibilities of Those Who Market and Sell Assessment Products and Services***

The marketing of assessment products and services, such as tests and other instruments, scoring services, test preparation services, consulting, and test interpretive services, should be based on information that is accurate, complete, and relevant to those considering their use. Persons who market and sell assessment products and services have a professional responsibility to:

- 2.1 Provide accurate information to potential purchasers about assessment products and services and their recommended uses and limitations.
- 2.2 Not knowingly withhold relevant information about assessment products and services that might affect an appropriate selection decision.
- 2.3 Base all claims about assessment products and services on valid interpretations of publicly available information.
- 2.4 Allow qualified users equal opportunity to purchase assessment products and services.
- 2.5 Establish reasonable fees for assessment products and services.
- 2.6 Communicate to potential users, in advance of any purchase or use, all applicable fees associated with assessment products and services.
- 2.7 Strive to ensure that no individuals are denied access to opportunities because of their inability to pay the fees for assessment products and services.
- 2.8 Establish criteria for the sale of assessment products and services, such as limiting the sale of assessment products and services to those individuals who are qualified for recommended uses and from whom proper uses and interpretations are anticipated.
- 2.9 Inform potential users of known inappropriate uses of assessment products and services and provide recommendations about how to avoid such misuses.

- 2.10 Maintain a current understanding about assessment products and services and their appropriate uses in education.
- 2.11 Release information implying endorsement by users of assessment products and services only with the users' permission.
- 2.12 Avoid making claims that assessment products and services have been endorsed by another organization unless an official endorsement has been obtained.
- 2.13 Avoid marketing test preparation products and services that may cause individuals to receive scores that misrepresent their actual levels of attainment.

***Section 3:  
Responsibilities of Those Who Select Assessment Products and Services***

Those who select assessment products and services for use in educational settings, or help others do so, have important professional responsibilities to make sure that the assessments are appropriate for their intended use. Persons who select assessment products and services have a professional responsibility to:

- 3.1 Conduct a thorough review and evaluation of available assessment strategies and instruments that might be valid for the intended uses.
- 3.2 Recommend and/or select assessments based on publicly available documented evidence of their technical quality and utility rather than on unsubstantiated claims or statements.
- 3.3 Disclose any associations or affiliations that they have with the authors, test publishers, or others involved with the assessments under consideration for purchase and refrain from participation if such associations might affect the objectivity of the selection process.
- 3.4 Inform decision makers and prospective users of the appropriateness of the assessment for the intended uses, likely consequences of use, protection of examinee rights, relative costs, materials and services needed to conduct or use the assessment, and known limitations of the assessment, including potential misuses and misinterpretations of assessment information.
- 3.5 Recommend against the use of any prospective assessment that is likely to be administered, scored, and used in an invalid manner for members of various groups in our society for reasons of race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, language background, socioeconomic status, religion, or national origin.
- 3.6 Comply with all security precautions that may accompany assessments being reviewed.
- 3.7

- Immediately disclose any attempts by others to exert undue influence on the assessment selection process.
- 3.8 Avoid recommending, purchasing, or using test preparation products and services that may cause individuals to receive scores that misrepresent their actual levels of attainment.

#### ***Section 4: Responsibilities of Those Who Administer Assessments***

Those who prepare individuals to take assessments and those who are directly or indirectly involved in the administration of assessments as part of the educational process, including teachers, administrators, and assessment personnel, have an important role in making sure that the assessments are administered in a fair and accurate manner. Persons who prepare others for, and those who administer, assessments have a professional responsibility to:

- 4.1 Inform the examinees about the assessment prior to its administration, including its purposes, uses, and consequences; how the assessment information will be judged or scored; how the results will be kept on file; who will have access to the results; how the results will be distributed; and examinees' rights before, during, and after the assessment.
- 4.2 Administer only those assessments for which they are qualified by education, training, licensure, or certification.
- 4.3 Take appropriate security precautions before, during, and after the administration of the assessment.
- 4.4 Understand the procedures needed to administer the assessment prior to administration.
- 4.5 Administer standardized assessments according to prescribed procedures and conditions and notify appropriate persons if any nonstandard or delimiting conditions occur.
- 4.6 Not exclude any eligible student from the assessment.
- 4.7 Avoid any conditions in the conduct of the assessment that might invalidate the results.
- 4.8 Provide for and document all reasonable and allowable accommodations for the administration of the assessment to persons with disabilities or special needs.
- 4.9 Provide reasonable opportunities for individuals to ask questions about the assessment procedures or directions prior to and at prescribed times during the administration of the assessment.
- 4.10 Protect the rights to privacy and due process of those who are assessed.
- 4.11

Avoid actions or conditions that would permit or encourage individuals or groups to receive scores that misrepresent their actual levels of attainment.

***Section 5:  
Responsibilities of Those Who Score Assessments***

The scoring of educational assessments should be conducted properly and efficiently so that the results are reported accurately and in a timely manner. Persons who score and prepare reports of assessments have a professional responsibility to:

- 5.1 Provide complete and accurate information to users about how the assessment is scored, such as the reporting schedule, scoring process to be used, rationale for the scoring approach, technical characteristics, quality control procedures, reporting formats, and the fees, if any, for these services.
- 5.2 Ensure the accuracy of the assessment results by conducting reasonable quality control procedures before, during, and after scoring.
- 5.3 Minimize the effect on scoring of factors irrelevant to the purposes of the assessment.
- 5.4 Inform users promptly of any deviation in the planned scoring and reporting service or schedule and negotiate a solution with users.
- 5.5 Provide corrected score results to the examinee or the client as quickly as practicable should errors be found that may affect the inferences made on the basis of the scores.
- 5.6 Protect the confidentiality of information that identifies individuals as prescribed by state and federal laws.
- 5.7 Release summary results of the assessment only to those persons entitled to such information by state or federal law or those who are designated by the party contracting for the scoring services.
- 5.8 Establish, where feasible, a fair and reasonable process for appeal and rescoring the assessment.

***Section 6:  
Responsibilities of Those Who Interpret, Use, and Communicate Assessment  
Results***

The interpretation, use, and communication of assessment results should promote valid inferences and minimize invalid ones. Persons who interpret, use, and communicate assessment results have a professional responsibility to:

- 6.1

- Conduct these activities in an informed, objective, and fair manner within the context of the assessment's limitations and with an understanding of the potential consequences of use.
- 6.2 Provide to those who receive assessment results information about the assessment, its purposes, its limitations, and its uses necessary for the proper interpretation of the results.
- 6.3 Provide to those who receive score reports an understandable written description of all reported scores, including proper interpretations and likely misinterpretations.
- 6.4 Communicate to appropriate audiences the results of the assessment in an understandable and timely manner, including proper interpretations and likely misinterpretations.
- 6.5 Evaluate and communicate the adequacy and appropriateness of any norms or standards used in the interpretation of assessment results.
- 6.6 Inform parties involved in the assessment process how assessment results may affect them.
- 6.7 Use multiple sources and types of relevant information about persons or programs whenever possible in making educational decisions.
- 6.8 Avoid making, and actively discourage others from making, inaccurate reports, unsubstantiated claims, inappropriate interpretations, or otherwise false and misleading statements about assessment results.
- 6.9 Disclose to examinees and others whether and how long the results of the assessment will be kept on file, procedures for appeal and rescoring, rights examinees and others have to the assessment information, and how those rights may be exercised.
- 6.10 Report any apparent misuses of assessment information to those responsible for the assessment process.
- 6.11 Protect the rights to privacy of individuals and institutions involved in the assessment process.

### ***Section 7: Responsibilities of Those Who Educate Others About Assessment***

The process of educating others about educational assessment, whether as part of higher education, professional development, public policy discussions, or job training, should prepare individuals to understand and engage in sound measurement practice and to become discerning users of tests and test results. Persons who educate or inform others about assessment have a professional responsibility to:

7.1

- Remain competent and current in the areas in which they teach and reflect that in their instruction.
- 7.2 Provide fair and balanced perspectives when teaching about assessment.
- 7.3 Differentiate clearly between expressions of opinion and substantiated knowledge when educating others about any specific assessment method, product, or service.
- 7.4 Disclose any financial interests that might be perceived to influence the evaluation of a particular assessment product or service that is the subject of instruction.
- 7.5 Avoid administering any assessment that is not part of the evaluation of student performance in a course if the administration of that assessment is likely to harm any student.
- 7.6 Avoid using or reporting the results of any assessment that is not part of the evaluation of student performance in a course if the use or reporting of results is likely to harm any student.
- 7.7 Protect all secure assessments and materials used in the instructional process.
- 7.8 Model responsible assessment practice and help those receiving instruction to learn about their professional responsibilities in educational measurement.
- 7.9 Provide fair and balanced perspectives on assessment issues being discussed by policymakers, parents, and other citizens.

***Section 8:  
Responsibilities of Those Who Evaluate Educational Programs and Conduct  
Research on Assessments***

Conducting research on or about assessments or educational programs is a key activity in helping to improve the understanding and use of assessments and educational programs. Persons who engage in the evaluation of educational programs or conduct research on assessments have a professional responsibility to:

- 8.1 Conduct evaluation and research activities in an informed, objective, and fair manner.
- 8.2 Disclose any associations that they have with authors, test publishers, or others involved with the assessment and refrain from participation if such associations might affect the objectivity of the research or evaluation.
- 8.3 Preserve the security of all assessments throughout the research process as appropriate.
- 8.4

- Take appropriate steps to minimize potential sources of invalidity in the research and disclose known factors that may bias the results of the study.
- 8.5 Present the results of research, both intended and unintended, in a fair, complete, and objective manner.
- 8.6 Attribute completely and appropriately the work and ideas of others.
- 8.7 Qualify the conclusions of the research within the limitations of the study.
- 8.8 Use multiple sources of relevant information in conducting evaluation and research activities whenever possible.
- 8.9 Comply with applicable standards for protecting the rights of participants in an evaluation or research study, including the rights to privacy and informed consent.

### *Afterword*

As stated at the outset, the purpose of the *Code of Professional Responsibilities in Educational Measurement* is to serve as a guide to the conduct of NCME members who are engaged in any type of assessment activity in education. Given the broad scope of the field of educational assessment as well as the variety of activities in which professionals may engage, it is unlikely that any code will cover the professional responsibilities involved in every situation or activity in which assessment is used in education. Ultimately, it is hoped that this Code will serve as the basis for ongoing discussions about what constitutes professionally responsible practice. Moreover, these discussions will undoubtedly identify areas of practice that need further analysis and clarification in subsequent editions of the Code. To the extent that these discussions occur, the Code will have served its purpose.

To assist in the ongoing refinement of the Code, comments on this document are most welcome. Please send your comments and inquiries to:

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### *Supplementary Resources*

The following list of resources is provided for those who want to seek additional information about codes of professional responsibility that have been developed and adopted by organizations having an interest in various aspects of educational assessment.

American Association for Counseling and Development (now American Counseling Association). (1988). *Ethical standards of the American Counseling Association*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

American Association for Counseling and Development (now American Counseling Association) & Association for Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development (now Association for Assessment in Counseling). (1989). *Responsibilities of users of standardized tests: RUST statement revised*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education. (1985). *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. Washington, DC: Author.

American Educational Research Association. (1992). Ethical standards of the American Educational Research Association. *Educational Researcher*, 21(7), 23-26.

American Federation of Teachers, National Council on Measurement in Education, & National Education Association. (1990). *Standards for teacher competence in educational assessment of students*. Washington, DC: Author.

American Psychological Association. (1992). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct*. Washington, DC: Author.

American Psychological Association President's Task Force on Psychology in Education. (in press). *Learner-centered psychological principles: Guidelines for school redesign and reform*. Washington, DC: Author.

Joint Advisory Committee. (1993). *Principles for fair assessment practices for education in Canada*. Edmonton, Alberta: Author.

Joint Committee on Testing Practices. (1988). *Code of fair testing practices in education*. Washington, DC: Author.

Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. (1988). *The personnel evaluation standards: How to assess systems for evaluating educators*. Newberry Park, CA: Sage.

Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. (1994). *The program evaluation standards: How to assess evaluations of educational programs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

National Association of College Admission Counselors. (1988). *Statement of principles of good practice*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

## *Index to the Code of Professional Responsibilities in Educational Measurement*

This index provides a list of major topics and issues addressed by the responsibilities in each of the eight sections of the Code. Although this list is not intended to be exhaustive, it is intended to serve as a reference source for those who use this code.

Advertising: 1.9, 1.10, 2.3, 2.11, 2.12  
Bias: 1.2, 3.5, 4.5, 4.7, 5.3, 8.4  
Cheating: 4.5, 4.6, 4.11  
Coaching and Test Preparation: 2.13, 3.8, 4.11  
Competence: 2.10, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 5.2, 5.5, 7.1, 7.8, 7.9, 8.1, 8.7  
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Consequences of Test Use: 3.4, 6.1, 6.6, 7.5, 7.6  
Copyrighted Materials, Use of: 1.5, 8.6  
Disabled Examinees, Rights of: 1.3, 4.8  
Disclosure: 1.6, 2.1, 2.2, 2.6, 3.3, 3.7, 4.1, 5.1, 5.4, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.6, 6.9, 8.2, 8.4, 8.5  
Due Process: 4.10, 5.8, 6.9  
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Fees: 2.5, 2.6, 2.7  
Inappropriate Test Use: 1.8, 2.8, 2.9, 3.4, 6.8, 6.10  
Objectivity: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 6.1, 6.5, 7.2, 7.3, 7.9, 8.1, 8.2, 8.5, 8.7  
Rights to Privacy: 1.7, 3.4, 4.10, 5.6, 5.7, 6.11, 8.9  
Security: 3.6, 4.3, 7.7, 8.3  
Truthfulness: 1.10, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.11, 2.12, 3.2, 4.6, 7.3  
Undue Influence: 3.7  
Unsubstantiated Claims: 1.9, 3.2, 6.8

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