

PTPC ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

MAY 2018

Slippery Slopes, aka Boundary Issues

Teaching is a “helping profession.” As educators, we want to help students succeed, both academically and as members of society. We will go to great lengths to help students, giving almost endlessly of our time, talents, and personal resources (i.e. buying materials and supplies for the classroom). Although it will most likely look different for different ages, it is happening across the grade spectrum.

At the same time we need to be vigilant and not let our commitment to students and our desire to always be there for students lead us down the wrong path. That is, beware of “slippery slopes.” Events can start out very innocently and with all good intentions, but before we know it, can go south.

The following are actual responses received from 3 educators whose cases have come before the Commission. Their responses have been edited slightly to preserve their anonymity. These are real examples of “slippery slopes.” These situations all started out innocently enough, ostensibly to “help” the student. However, these educators started down a slippery slope and could not climb back up the hill, even when they recognized that they had “crossed the line.”

“Giving him [a male student] advice about women was done before any relationship between he and I [female teacher] started. . . . Advice was given after school hours, as a friend [emphasis added] not as a teacher.”

“My athletes know if they are in a situation they need someone to talk to, they can contact me [male teacher/coach]. I do not provide my cell phone to my students, but I do provide my cell phone to my athletes. . . . I received a text message from a female student that said she needed someone to talk to and it was important. . . . at this time at night there were not any coffee shops or public areas to meet.”

“There’s nothing to worry about. You’re 18. You’re not my student. We’re friends.”

Take-a-ways for all educators:

- You can be friendly to your students, but students are not your friends.
- Any time you are around students, you are wearing your teacher hat. Even if you have known the student for many years because the student is a family friend.
- Be careful making promises that will be hard to keep. (Call me any time you need someone to talk to.)
- You are always the adult in the situation, even if the student makes advances towards you.
- Be very careful with private conversations (in-person or electronically) with students.

Certification Reminders

Mandatory trainings required began **June 30, 2017**. You need to demonstrate all **4 trainings** have been completed within five years prior to the date of your application. <https://education.alaska.gov/TeacherCertification/mandatorytraining.html>

Know the expiration date of your certificate! Five-year certificates expire on your birthday. All others expire on June 30 or December 31. You may renew your certificate up to one year before it expires. <https://education.alaska.gov/TeacherCertification/OnlineRenewal>

Do not let your certificate lapse! You are then non-compliant. At that time you are no longer contributing to TRS. In addition your district might impose other measures such as reduction in pay (being paid as a substitute) and loss of benefits.

Notify Teacher Certification of any changes to your contact information.

<https://education.alaska.gov/TeacherCertification/ContactChange/>

State of Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission

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James A. Seitz

COMMISSION ACTION



During its January 2017 meeting:

- the Commission issued an order for an **eighteen (18) month suspension** of the Alaska Professional Teaching Certificate of **John W. Hutchinson** effective January 1, 2017.
- the Commission issued a **warning** to an educator.
- the Commission issued an order of **reprimand** to **Lesley A. Wallace** who holds both an Alaska Pro-fessional Teacher Certificate and an Alaska Special Services Certificate.

During its April 2017 meeting:

- the Commission issued an order for a **one-year suspension** of the Alaska Initial Teaching Certificate of **Audrey Leary** effective January 13, 2017.
- the Commission issued an order for a **one-year suspension** of the Alaska Initial Teaching Certificate of **Michelle A. Medlin** effective January 10, 2017.
- the Commission issued an order for a **30-day suspension (with conditions)** of the Alaska Professional Teaching Certificate of **Troy M. Zimmerman** effective May 27, 2017.
- the Commission issued an order of **reprimand** to **Rodney Wayne Boggs** who holds an Alaska Provisional Administrative Certificate.

During its October 2017 meeting:

- the Commission issued a **warning** to three educators.
- the Commission ordered a **one-year suspension** of the Alaska Provisional Special Services Certificate of **Laura Weston** effective August 7, 2017.
- the Commission issued an order of **reprimand** to **John M. Hammonds** who holds an Alaska Initial Teacher Certificate.
- the Commission issued an order of **reprimand** to **Deborah A. Hagedorn** who holds both an Alaska Professional Teacher Certificate and an Alaska Administrative Certificate.
- the Commission issued an order **denying** certification of **Sonny L. Shields** for one year effective August 7, 2017. [Note: That order was modified during the February 2018 meeting reducing the length of denial so that the end date is now May 1, 2018.]

“The commission will report on all discipline taken since last publication in the commission’s periodic publication of commission activity. The commission will not identify name of the respondent in cases where only a warning was given.” [20 AAC 10.300 (d)]

You can also find Commission Action on the PTPC website (<https://education.alaska.gov/ptpc>) approximately one week after each Commission meeting. Look under “Recent Commission Action.”

Number and Type of Sanctions Imposed by the Commission for the Last 8 Years

	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	Total
Warning	0	2	1	3	5	3	5	3	22
Reprimand	3	4	1	1	2	3	2	6	22
Suspension	5	6	7	4	8	9	6	6	51
Revocation	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	6
Surrender	3	5	3	3	0	5	0	2	21
Total	14	18	13	12	15	20	13	17	122

The Professional Teaching Practices Commission will meet in general session **October 1-2, 2018, January 31-February 1, 2019** and **April 25-26, 2019**. Meetings are held in the 12th floor conference room (Suite 1270) at 550 West 7th Avenue in downtown Anchorage. Meetings are open to the public.

NEW COMMISSIONERS

Diane Kardash is the new Higher-Education Representative on the Commission having been appointed to complete the term of retired commissioner Dr. Martin Laster. She is currently a term assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks working in elementary education. She has taught elementary school in California and in Fairbanks. Ms. Kardash received her undergraduate degree from the University of Southern California and Master's degree from California State University, Fresno.

Tony Graham is the new principal representative on the Commission. He is currently the principal of Soldotna High School. Mr. Graham has twenty years of experience as an educator having both taught and been an administrator in Montana and Alaska. He received his bachelor's degree (Education—social studies) and master's degree (Educational Leadership) from Montana State University.

- When vacancies arise, the appropriate constituent group (NEA-AK, AAESP & AASSP, ASA, DEED, UA) submits nominations to the Governor who then makes appointments, which are then subject to legislative confirmation. Terms are for 3 years. Commissioners may serve 2 terms. They receive no compensation for their service but do receive per diem (according to law) and are granted administrative leave with pay for performance of official duties.

Code of Ethics Quiz – Yes or No

1. A teacher gives 30-day's notice to the district of his intention to resign (quit) before the school year is over and then he quits on day 31. Is this a violation of the Code of Ethics?
2. A principal physically gives a student a pat on the back ("good job"). Is this a violation of the Code of Ethics?
3. An educator fails to divulge a criminal conviction (a misdemeanor) on both the application for certification as well as the district employment application. The conviction was over 20 years ago. Is this a violation of the Code of Ethics?
4. A teacher purposely and repeatedly doesn't call on a student in class because the student is transgender. Is this a violation of the Code of Ethics?
5. An intern (student teacher) sends a flirtatious text message to a high school student. Is this a violation of the Code of Ethics?



1. Probably yes. Unless the district agrees to release him from his contract, this is considered a breach of contract and may result in district sanctions (often financial) as well as a PTPC sanction (generally a one-year suspension of the teaching certificate). [Code of Ethics (d)(15)]

2. Probably no. However, educators must be mindful when physically touching students even when the touch is well intended. Some students do not like to be touched and any physical contact could be misinterpreted. [Code of Ethics (b)(4)]

3. Yes! All criminal convictions, regardless of the severity or how far in the past they are, need to be divulged on both certification applications and employment applications. Always divulge (and then provide an explanation), even if you have divulged the last time your renewed your certificate. [Code of Ethics (d)(9)]

4. Yes! With recent revisions to the Code of Ethics, gender identification was added to the list of protected classes of students. As certified educators, we are to educate all students in our schools and classrooms. [Code of Ethics (b)(6)]

5. Yes! With recent revisions to the Code of Ethics, student teachers (interns) now are required to abide by the Code of Ethics in the same manner that any certified educator is to abide by the Code of Ethics. In addition, the definition of sexual conduct has been expanded. Flirtatious comments, as well as comments with double entendre, are specifically prohibited. [Code of Ethics (a), (b)(4); Definitions (1)(B)]

**In the
Spotlight!**

ALASKA TEACHER OF THE YEAR:

The Alaska Department of Education & Early Development named **Ben Walker**, a science teacher at Romig Middle School, the Alaska Teacher of the Year 2018. The announcement was made by Alaska Education Commissioner Dr. Michael Johnson at a surprise ceremony at the school in Anchorage on October 12, 2017.



Mr. Walker has taught for 11 years, all at Romig Middle School in the Anchorage School District. He holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Whitman College and an MAT from UAA. He says, "My goal is to help students learn to learn on their own as in our current world, this skill is as important as information. Students today must be able to learn, unlearn, and relearn to remain competitive in the workplace."

Eric Rush, a third grade teacher at Ticasuk Brown Elementary in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, was named alternate for the Alaska Teacher of the Year 2018. Mr. Rush has taught for 8 years. He says, "Personalized instruction is the foundation of my teaching philosophy. It drives all of my decisions on how to best approach and interact with each student because I don't teach to a class, I teach to the individual." He received his bachelor's degree from UAA and M.Ed. from the University of Alaska Southeast.

Contact the Program Coordinator, Cecilia Miller, for more information. <https://education.alaska.gov/RecognitionPrograms/TOY/>

ALASKA PRINCIPALS OF THE YEAR:

The Alaska Association of Elementary School Principals (AAESP) announced that **Lisa Vrvilo**, principal of Cottonwood Creek Elementary School in Wasilla, has been selected by her peers as the Alaska National Distinguished Principal for 2017.

The Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP) selected **Dr. Kersten Johnson-Struempler**, of South Anchorage High School, and **Petra Timmons** of Ryan Middle School in Fairbanks as Alaska Secondary School Principal and Assistant Principal of the Year, respectively. Ms. Johnson-Struempler has served as South High School principal for seven years. Ms. Timmons has been AP at Ryan Middle School for the last four years.

ALASKA SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR:

The Alaska Superintendents Association (ASA) announced that Unalaska City School District Superintendent, **John Conwell**, has been selected by his peers as Alaska's 2018 Superintendent of the Year. Mr. Conwell became UCSD superintendent in 2007. Prior to that he was Assistant Principal and Principal for Unalaska High School for ten years. The Unalaska City School District is one of the highest performing in our state, with a graduation rate of 96.6%. Unalaska High School was a Blue Ribbon award winning school in 2011 and Eagle's View Elementary was a Blue Ribbon Finalist in 2013.

Breach of contract continues to be the single-most prevalent complaint that the PTPC sees. When you sign a contract, you are making a commitment to not only the school district, but to your students, to remain for the entire school year. Leaving before the school year is over causes difficulties for the school district as well as disruption for your students. If extenuating circumstances come up that necessitate you leaving employment mid-year, please talk with the district office early on. However, districts are under no obligation to release you from your contract. Typical sanction imposed by the Commission for a breach of contract violation is a one-year suspension of your certificate. In addition, some district impose their own penalties (generally financial) for breach of contract.

Commission staff is available to provide presentations on the Code of Ethics of the Education Profession and the role of the Commission. The presentation includes discussions regarding professionalism and professional responsibilities.

Contact the State of Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission to arrange presentations in your district.

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