

Chalkboard

By

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I have heard it said that you cannot legislate morality. I will not debate that statement any more than I would the statement that says character is what you do in the dark when no one is looking. Nonetheless, within Act 846 of 2007, this paragraph proposed, with these words, something akin to legislating morality, “Establish a code of ethics for administrators and teachers in educational environments for students in prekindergarten through grade twelve. I am not sure who actually drafted the proposed ethics rules but you may read them at http://www.arkansased.org/rules/pdf/pending/educator_ethics021408_pending.pdf if you so desire.

The eight standards named within the rules follow: **Standard 1:** An educator maintains a professional relationship with each student, both in and outside the classroom. **Standard 2:** An educator maintains competence regarding skills, knowledge, and dispositions concomitant to his/her organizational position, subject matter, and/or pedagogical practice. **Standard 3:** An educator honestly fulfills reporting and contractual obligations associated with professional practices. **Standard 4:** An educator entrusted with public funds and property honors that trust with honest, responsible stewardship. **Standard 5:** An educator maintains integrity with students, colleagues, parents, patrons and businesses regarding gifts, gratuities, favors and additional compensation. **Standard 6:** An educator keeps in confidence student records, personnel records, standardized test material and other information covered by confidentiality agreements. **Standard 7:** An educator factually and appropriately presents the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and unauthorized /illegal drug use during the course of professional practice and in accordance with current state law. **Standard 8:** An educator abides by local, state and federal laws. Within the standards are examples or descriptors but space does not permit their listing, the rules are 13 pages long.

All of the above are certainly worthwhile but they remind me somewhat of the story of the cat and the mice. The story goes roughly that apparently a local den of mice were having problems with a certain cat sneaking into their domain and taking out one of their fellows one at a time for lunch, like the poor Oysters in Lewis Carroll’s *The Walrus and the Carpenter*. In a mice legislative session, a bill was passed that the Cat should be made to wear a bell on her collar so that they would be warned of her appearance. Joy reigned supreme and mice were dancing and scampering in the hallways squeaking in triumph of the wisdom of the new law. Finally one old mouse with grey whiskers and reading glasses was overheard to muse, “That is all very well, but who is to bell the Cat?”

Forgive my liberties with Aesop’s fable, but I call your attention to two, at

least in my opinion, glaring problems with the rules. First, who will bell the cat?

The rules state that the following people may file a claim that an educator has violated some part of the four standards. “A request for investigation may be a written and validated signed statement of allegations from a citizen of Arkansas filed with the Arkansas Department of Education, local school board, the Arkansas State Board of Education, or public school superintendent of this state....” That means anyone. So what is wrong with that? Everyone has a right to an opinion, right?

What I believe is wrong is that everyone does have a right to an opinion but having an opinion is just that, having an opinion. Let’s look at one of the descriptors under **Standard 2**: An educator maintains competence regarding skills, knowledge, and dispositions concomitant to his/her organizational position, subject matter, and/or pedagogical practice. The example given of unethical behavior that could be reported, and if substantiated, cause an educator to forfeit his or her license is “*Unreasonably denying students access to varying points of view, suppressing or distorting subject matter to promote personal bias or to proselytize.*” I read that and I know what it means to me. Would my concept of it match yours? What will be the measuring stick for “unreasonably denying”? Better yet, whose measuring stick will we use?

I will stop here and go on record as saying I am not opposed to ethical behavior; who would be? Nor am I opposed to rules addressing ethical behavior; we have at Gentry a board policy entitled *Certified/Classified Professional Standards of Conduct* that is similar in nature to the proposed rules. Neither am I opposed to parents or patrons raising a question about some particular issue. It happens frequently at Gentry Public Schools and I suspect every other public school in the state. Someone has a problem with someone or something. The complaining party talks with a teacher, or principal, or superintendent, or school board, or a court of law until the issue is resolved. That is what is supposed to happen and it does.

What I am opposed to is an unrealistic mechanism that takes a local problem, real or imagined, and gives it to a state board to investigate and resolve.

If you have an opinion in this matter and want to express it, then accept the ADE’s invitation from Commissioner’s Memo LIC-08-038 which offers, “Public comments may be submitted in written form and may be delivered by hand or orally at a public comment hearing; by mail to Beverly Williams, Assistant Commissioner for Human Resources/Licensure, #4 Capitol Mall, Room 204B, Little Rock, AR 72201; or by fax to (501) 682-1193. Public comments will be accepted in the Human Resources/Licensure Office until April 21, 2008.”

Maybe the old mouse said it best, “It is easy to propose impossible remedies.”