“Is it possible for staff development leaders or providers to do harm?,” I ask educators. Their immediate response is strong and affirmative. And that quickly leads to an airing of views and perspectives regarding the exact nature of those harmful actions.

A draft of the National Staff Development Council’s Staff Development Code of Ethics is provided here for your review. The Code’s purpose is to improve the quality of staff development by drawing attention to harmful practices and by creating a sense of personal responsibility for ethical conduct among staff development leaders and providers.

About a year ago, the Board of Trustees received an initial draft of the Code and approved a process for its continuing development. To date, the Code of Ethics has gone through five subsequent drafts as a result of reviews by the Board of Trustees, the Council staff, NSDC affiliate and network leaders, and a number of leaders in the field of staff development.

NSDC now needs your help in reviewing and strengthening the Code. Please take a few minutes to read this proposed Code of Ethics, to consider its implications for your work, and to note any gaps in its content.

– Dennis Sparks, Executive Director, National Staff Development Council

PLEASE WRITE ME

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your comments and suggestions by April 15. I look forward to hearing from you.
Rationale

Human behavior is shaped by many forces. Because an individual’s sense of ethical conduct influences his or her professional conduct as well as personal actions, one of the most powerful but invisible of these forces is a person’s sense of right and wrong, of what is ethical or unethical in a particular situation.

Recognizing the importance of ethical conduct, many professions and education organizations have adopted codes of ethics for practitioners. Among those organizations are the National Education Association, the National School Boards Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the American Society for Training and Development.

With the goal of improving practice, the National Staff Development Council developed and disseminated during the mid-1990s standards for staff development. These standards describe the most powerful staff development content, learning processes, and organizational structures to support the application of that learning on the job. These standards did not, however, specifically address ethical conduct on the part of staff development leaders and providers. The purpose of NSDC’s Staff Development Code of Ethics is to increase awareness of ethical issues in staff development and to improve the quality of decision making regarding these issues so that staff development can more fully make its essential contribution to improved student learning.

Ethical Conduct

Ethics have been described as “obedience to the unenforceable.” A code of ethics articulates and affirms the highest values, beliefs, and purposes of an organization or profession.

Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines “ethics” as “the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation” and “the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group.” “Ethical” is defined as “conforming to accepted professional standards of conduct.” “Moral” is defined by Webster’s Ninth as “of or related to principles of right and wrong in behavior;” “expressing or teaching a conception of right behavior,” “conforming to a standard of right behavior,” and “capable of right and wrong action.”

Lists of widely-held values in Western culture typically include honesty, fairness, and respect for the worth and dignity of every human being. Behavior that is regarded as ethical is described as beneficial to everyone involved, truthful and accurate, and based on a commitment to do one’s duty, keep promises, and not cause harm. The Staff Development Code of Ethics represents the concrete expression of these values in the daily work of individuals who are responsible for staff development within their schools or school districts.

Staff Development Leaders and Staff Development Providers

Many individuals who make important decisions about staff development have not traditionally viewed themselves as “staff developers.” To help clarify the various staff development responsibilities assumed by school board members, teachers, administrators, and other school employees, this Code of Ethics divides these responsibilities into two categories: staff development leader and staff development provider.

Staff development leaders are individuals within a school, school district, university, state education agency, or other educational organization who plan, implement, coordinate, and/or evaluate staff development efforts. They include but are not limited to directors of staff development, superintendents, school board members, principals, curriculum coordinators, and teacher leaders.

Staff development providers use their knowledge and skills to promote adult learning or to help groups and organizations perform more effectively. They include trainers, facilitators, consultants, mentors, and instructional and leadership coaches.
STAFF DEVELOPMENT LEADERS

PRINCIPLE I: Staff development leaders are committed to achieving school and district goals, particularly those addressing high levels of learning and performance for all students and staff members.

Staff development leaders make decisions based on high academic standards for all students. They ensure that staff development activities make a significant contribution to the accomplishment of school system and school goals for student learning.

PRINCIPLE II: Staff development leaders select staff development content and processes that are research-based and proven in practice after examining various types of information about student and educator learning needs.

Staff development leaders are informed consumers of educational research. They are familiar with and use research findings and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the research and its applicability to their settings. Consequently, staff development leaders only recommend professional practices that support high-quality teaching and learning. Staff development leaders use data to plan, assess, and evaluate the effectiveness of staff development efforts. Data may be drawn from various valid and reliable sources such as norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests, portfolios of student work, teacher grades, student attendance, and graduation rates. These data are disaggregated to determine the effectiveness of the school program and staff development on various sub-groups of students. In addition, other sources of information, such as data on student, parent, staff, and community satisfaction with schools, are used to guide decision making.

PRINCIPLE III: Staff development leaders continuously improve their work through the ongoing evaluation of staff development’s effectiveness in achieving school system and school student learning goals.

Staff development leaders conduct formative as well as summative evaluations of the effectiveness of the staff development content and processes in achieving student learning objectives. They routinely and clearly report in writing the results of staff development to persons responsible for allocating staff development resources. Staff development leaders ensure that adequate funds are available for evaluation and that the evaluation process begins with the establishment of student learning goals and the planning of adult learning activities. They also ensure that members of school improvement teams have the necessary knowledge and skills to evaluate the effectiveness of staff development in improving student learning.

PRINCIPLE IV: Staff development leaders continuously improve their knowledge and skills.

Staff development leaders read widely, attend workshops and conferences, belong to appropriate professional associations, regularly consult with researchers and professional colleagues, and reflect on the effectiveness of their own practice. They contribute to the development of other staff development leaders through conference presentations, professional writing, and service on professional boards and committees.

PRINCIPLE V: Staff development leaders ensure an equitable distribution of resources to accomplish school system and school goals for student learning.

Staff development leaders ensure to the extent of their authority that adequate resources of funding and time are available to achieve district and school goals and that the allocation of these resources reflect both fairness and need. They also ensure that resources are invested in those areas deemed most likely to promote high levels of learning for all students.

PRINCIPLE VI: Staff development leaders advocate for policies and practices that ensure the continuous learning of all students and employees.

Staff development leaders make certain that schools provide a culture and structures that support the continuous improvement of practice and of student learning. These organizations have norms of continuous improvement, collegiality, and experimentation. Organizational structures such as school calendars, daily schedules, labor contracts, and leadership practices advance school system and school goals for student learning.

PRINCIPLE VII: Staff development leaders conduct themselves in a manner that avoids conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict.

Staff development leaders do not accept any compensation, gratuities, or favors from staff development providers that may directly or indirectly affect leaders’ judgments about contracting for services with providers. In addition, staff development leaders have no financial investment in or obligation to providers with whom the school system or school contracts.
Staff development providers

**PRINCIPLE I: Staff development providers offer services that are consistent only with high standards of quality.**

Staff development providers are well trained in the techniques and processes they use with clients. They thoroughly understand their client’s needs and honestly describe their qualifications to clients before they undertake any project. They also make available information about similar work with previous clients. Providers refuse to offer services or accept compensation for services that are unlikely to achieve the organization’s goals.

**PRINCIPLE II: Staff development providers present accurate, up-to-date information and habitually and accurately explain the strengths and limitations of the practices they recommend in relation to the school or district’s goals and current level of functioning.**

Staff development providers possess a deep understanding of the subjects they teach. They also understand the research base of the content and approaches they recommend and explain without bias to staff development leaders the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. Providers do not make unsubstantiated claims regarding their work or other professional matters. They ask questions to ascertain the appropriate match between the recommended approaches and school system or school goals.

**PRINCIPLE III: Staff development providers select content and adult learning processes based on student learning goals and a systematic assessment of participants’ learning needs.**

Staff development providers use information about student and staff learning needs in determining the content and learning processes they will use. They describe to their clients the content and methods required to achieve program goals, including the school and classroom follow-up processes needed to improve teachers’ content knowledge and instructional skills.

**PRINCIPLE IV: Staff development providers continuously learn and improve their performance.**

Staff development providers use a variety of kinds of evidence to determine their effectiveness in meeting program goals and seek feedback from clients, participants, and others affected by their work. In addition, staff development providers advocate that program evaluation be undertaken by their clients in relation to their work. To continuously improve their performance, providers attend relevant workshops and courses, read related research, and communicate regularly with leaders and colleagues in these areas.

**PRINCIPLE V: Staff development providers give appropriate credit to individuals or organizations whose work has influenced them.**

Staff development providers understand and recognize the theoretical and research traditions that are the basis of their work. They acknowledge these contributions when appropriate in their presentations and writing.

**PRINCIPLE VI: Staff development providers conduct themselves in a manner that avoids conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict on the part of staff development leaders with whom they contract.**

Staff development providers do not offer any compensation, gratuities, or favors to staff development leaders that may directly or indirectly affect staff development leaders’ judgments about contracting for services with providers.

Putting a code of ethics into use

NSDC believes that by improving staff development practice the Code of Ethics will improve the quality of school leadership, teaching, and student learning. The Staff Development Code of Ethics will accomplish these purposes by:

- Building awareness of ethical issues in staff development;
- Stimulating discussions of ethical issues during school improvement planning; and
- Consequently by improving the quality of decisions made about staff development.

NSDC will sustain educators’ awareness of and compliance with the Staff Development Code of Ethics by:

- Regularly publishing a *Journal of Staff Development* column on ethical issues;
- Featuring sessions on this topic at its annual conference;
- Educating staff development leaders on these issues through its Affiliates, networks, and Academies; and
- Widely disseminating the Code of Ethics to educational leaders through its Web site, columns, and articles in widely-read educational publications.