Western Québec School Board

Code of Ethics

FOR SCHOOL SERVICE CENTRES, SCHOOL BOARDS

AND EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS

Votre gouvernement

Québec

Code of Ethics

(prescribed form)

For school service centres, school boards
and private educational institutions

Context

The *Act to reinforce the protection of students, including with regard to acts of sexual violence* (2024, chapter 9) introduced a new obligation, which came into force on March 5, 2025, under section 258.0.1 of the *Education Act* (c. I-13.3)[1] for school service centres and school boards and under section 54.0.1 of the *Act respecting private education* (c. E-9.1)[2] for private educational institutions (the three types of educational organizations). These educational organizations are now obliged to adopt, in the form prescribed by the Minister, a code of ethics applicable to their employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities.

Every Educational Organization must adopt a code of ethics that includes the content of the different sections provided for in this document. These sections cannot be deleted or amended either in whole or in part.

In addition to these prescribed sections, an Educational Organization may include any other element deemed relevant to its specific situation.

[1] "258.0.1. The school service centre must adopt, **in the form prescribed by the Minister**, a code of ethics applicable to members of its personnel and to any person required to work with minor or [students with ministry exceptionalities]. The code must set out, in particular, the practices and conduct expected of persons required to work with minor or [students with ministry exceptionalities]. In addition, the code must set out the obligation to report to the school service centre without delay any failure to comply with its provisions that could reasonably pose a threat for the physical or psychological safety of the students. The school service centre shall publish the code of ethics on its website and make the code otherwise accessible to any person who requests it."

[2] "54.0.1. An institution must adopt, **in the form prescribed by the Minister**, a code of ethics applicable to members of its personnel and to any person required to work with minor or [students with ministry exceptionalities]. The code must set out, in particular, the practices and conduct expected of persons required to work with minor or [students with ministry exceptionalities]. In addition, the code must set out the obligation to report to the institution without delay any failure to comply with its provisions that could reasonably pose a threat for the physical or psychological safety of the students. The institution shall publish the code of ethics on its website and make the code otherwise accessible to any person who requests it."

The Code of Ethics applies to employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities.

Western Québec School Board

Effective date: April 29, 2025

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Preamble

Pursuant to section *(indicate 258.0.1 of the Education Act (c. I-13.3) for a school service centre or school board or 54.0.1 of the Act respecting private education (c. E-9.1) for a private educational institution)*, the Western Québec School Board must adopt, in the form prescribed by the Minister, a code of ethics applicable to its employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities.

This code must set out, in particular, the practices and conduct expected of persons required to work with minor students or students with ministry exceptionalities or be in contact with them. In addition, the code must set out the obligation to report to the Western Québec School Board without delay any failure to comply with its provisions that could reasonably pose a threat for the physical or psychological safety of the students. The code must be published on the Western Québec School Board's website and made otherwise accessible to any person who requests it.

All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must refer and adhere to this code of ethics, which states the ethical principles they must follow and some of the practices and conduct expected of them.

The expected practices and conduct in the code are not exhaustive, shall not limit the Western Québec School Board's management rights, and are to be interpreted in a broad and liberal manner. Even if a practice or conduct that is either expected or to be avoided is not included in the code, an employee and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities shall not be exonerated from the consequences of their inappropriate or improper behaviour.

This code of ethics does not replace and shall not limit the scope of any obligation related to the conduct of an employee and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities provided for in any law, regulation, collective agreement, policy, agreement, contract or any other framework, or in the rules of conduct adopted by a governing board. Also, it does not replace any other rules of professional conduct applicable to an employee and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities as a result of their membership in a professional order or association.

Legal and regulatory framework

The code of ethics complies with the current legal and regulatory framework, in particular:

- *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Constitution Act, 1982, Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK)*, 1982, c. 11
- *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* (CQLR, c. C-12)
- *Charter of the French language* (CQLR, c. C-11)
- *Civil Code of Québec* (CQLR, c. CCQ-1991)
- *Act respecting the laicity of the State* (CQLR, c. L-0.3)
- *Act to foster adherence to State religious neutrality and, in particular, to provide a framework for requests for accommodations on religious grounds in certain bodies* (CQLR, c. R-26.2.01)
- *Education Act* (CQLR, c. I-13.3)

- *Act respecting Access to documents held by public bodies and the Protection of personal information* (CQLR, c. A-2.1)
- *Act respecting contracting by public bodies* (CQLR, c. C-65.1)
- *Act respecting labour standards* (CQLR, c. N-1.1)
- *Act respecting occupational health and safety* (CQLR, c. S-2.1)
- *Youth Protection Act* (CQLR, c. P-34.1)
- *Anti-Corruption Act* (CQLR, c. L-6.1)
- *Act to facilitate the disclosure of wrongdoings relating to public bodies* (CQLR, c. D-11.1)
- Applicable collective agreements
- Applicable rules of professional conduct

Objectives

The objectives of the code of ethics are as follows:

- Set guidelines concerning the practices and conduct expected of all of the Western Québec School Board's employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities.
- Promote reflection and accountability in order to encourage critical judgment in decision-making, and foster the development of moral values and professional ethics.
- Help the Western Québec School Board, its institutions and the education system establish and cultivate a trusting relationship with students, parents, the education community and the general public.

Scope of application

The code of ethics applies to all employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities.

Definitions

Staff member / Member of the Western Québec School Board's personnel
Member of the Western Québec School Board's support, management, professional or teaching staff, or any other employee of the Western Québec School Board, including senior executives

Person required to work with or to be in contact with a minor student or a student with a ministry exceptionality
Person who is not a staff member of the Western Québec School Board, but who is required to work with or to be in contact with its minor students or students with a ministry exceptionality in the capacity of, without limitation, a trainee, practicum supervisor, volunteer (including parent volunteers), coach, person in charge of extracurricular activities, or any other person offering services under an agreement or contract

Minor student
Student under the age of 18 enrolled in an educational institution, vocational training centre or adult education centre, or any person under the age of 18 receiving appropriate instruction at home as well as services provided by the Western Québec School Board

Student with a ministry exceptionality
The term, "handicapped student," is defined within the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* (CQLR, c. E-20.1) as a "*person with a deficiency causing a significant and persistent disability, who is liable to encounter barriers in performing everyday activities.*" (S. 1.g) While the term is one that is prescribed by the government for this Code of Ethics, it is widely considered to be offensive and outdated in the English language. "Handicapped student" has therefore been replaced by the Western Québec School Board, by the term, "student with a Ministry exceptionality" in all circumstances except those referring to official documents or legislation containing the word in the title. The word student within the definition means one who is enrolled in an educational institution, vocational training centre or adult education centre, or any person recognized as such who is receiving appropriate instruction at home as well as services provided by the Western Québec School Board

Rules of conduct
Code of conduct, operating rules or any other similar framework proposed by the director or principal and approved by the governing board.

Principles

The code of ethics reflects the following principles on which each person's actions and decisions must be based:

- All students, employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities are entitled to personal safety, well-being and freedom, the safeguard of their dignity, honour and reputation, and respect for their privacy.

- Schools must protect and promote the basic rights and freedoms of their staff, students and others working with them, which are guaranteed under the charters of rights and freedoms, and make sure that they are exercised with due regard to the democratic values of Québec society and gender equality.

- In the interest of equal opportunity, every student has the right to quality educational services fostering their overall development, success, and social and workplace integration.

- All persons must be able to study or work in an environment that is healthy, safe, stimulating, and conducive to learning, accomplishment and the achievement of their full potential.

- No form of violence, bullying or harassment will be tolerated at school and must be strongly condemned.

- Adults at school are inspiring and meaningful role models for students as well as authority figures, and their conduct must be exemplary and reflect positive values.

- Schools must convey a vision of educational success in line with students' potential, needs, differences and aspirations, and the values of equality, equity and social justice.

Expected practices and conduct

1. Respect, civility and kindness

1.1 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must conduct themselves with respect, civility, politeness and courtesy in every circumstance with students, parents, staff members and people with whom they must interact in carrying out their duties, especially when communicating orally or in writing, in order to ensure a quality and fulfilling learning and work environment.

This duty applies in particular when expressing one's reservations or disagreement with a staff member's opinion, or with an orientation or decision of the Western Québec School Board.

1.2 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must show consideration, empathy and kindness by fostering positive relationships with others, supporting them and adopting an approach based on mutual understanding and dialogue in order to resolve conflicts.

1.3 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must follow and promote the institution's rules of conduct and the related standards of responsible citizenship.

2. Justice and equity

2.1 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must behave in a just and equitable manner, taking each person's needs and differences into account.

2.2 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must offer services without distinction, exclusion or preference based, among other things, on race, colour, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, civil status, age except as provided by law, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, social condition, an exceptionality or the use of any means to palliate an exceptionality.

2.4 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must avoid promoting their own political beliefs and personal or religious convictions, and must be prudent and objective when addressing these topics with students.

3. Professionalism

3.1 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must show professionalism, restraint and judgment.

3.2 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must abstain from holding positions or carrying out activities that are incompatible with their duties within the Western Québec School Board.

Professional distance

3.3 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must, inasmuch as they are in a situation of authority, maintain a professional distance from all students, even outside class hours, and must, in particular, avoid:

- establishing relationships other than professional relationships with students (friendships, intimate or romantic relationships)
- any situation that could create ambiguity in their relationships with students (accepting an invitation, participating in an activity or event outside a school context)
- any social media communication with students outside a school context

Dress and appearance

3.6 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must dress appropriately at work, observe the applicable provisions of the institution's rules of conduct, and exercise critical judgment in their choice of attire and the messages conveyed by it.

This duty applies to work on the premises of the Western Québec School Board as well as to distance education and activities outside the school setting.

3.7 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must make sure that their use of social media is consistent with the image they must project as a role model, in particular by considering the appropriateness of providing certain types of information (e.g. photos, videos) or by limiting access to them.

Drugs and alcohol

3.8 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must abstain from consuming, providing or serving, at the workplace or when exercising their duties outside the workplace, alcoholic beverages, legal or illegal drugs, or any other substances likely to affect a person's judgment or interfere with the safe performance of their work.

The foregoing does not apply to the consumption of alcoholic beverages permitted by the Western Québec School Board in exceptional circumstances (e.g. a social gathering).

3.9 Employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must not be present in the workplace, carry out their duties or be in the presence of

students if they are impaired by alcohol, a legal or illegal drug, or a substance that could alter their judgment or interfere with the safe performance of their work.

4. Health, safety and well-being

4.1 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must act with prudence, and take the necessary measures to ensure their own health and safety and that of others, especially students.

4.2 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must adopt attitudes and behaviours free of any verbal or physical violence. The following are prohibited in particular:

- aggressive speech, behaviour and gestures
- verbal, written or physical threats
- an aggressive tone of voice (e.g. yelling, screaming)
- degrading, racist, sexist or otherwise inappropriate language
- sexual speech, behaviour and gestures
- any form of bullying or harassment
- disregard for such behaviour or failure to intervene where required

4.3 Physical intervention with a student should only be used as a last resort, when the risk assessment points to an emergency situation requiring immediate action aimed solely at ensuring the safety of the student or others.

When it is necessary to restrain a student and the intervention can be planned, it must comply with a protocol based on the *Reference Framework for the for Control Measures in School* (currently being translated from document *Cadre de référence sur les mesures de contrôle en milieu scolaire*) and be reported to the director or principal without delay.

4.4 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must, when a student or staff member confides in them, be attentive to any signs of distress and refer the person to the appropriate resource if needed (e.g. the Director of Youth Protection [DYP]).

4.5 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must contribute to the implementation of the anti-bullying and anti-violence plan, and make sure that no students at the school to which they are assigned are victims of bullying or violence.

4.6 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities and who, in carrying out their duties, reasonably believe that a teacher committed a serious fault in carrying out their duties, or an act derogatory to the honour or dignity of the teaching profession involving behaviour that could create a reasonable fear for students' physical or psychological safety,[3] must report the situation to the Minister without delay.

[3] For a review of the criteria for determining whether conduct could create a reasonable fear for students' physical or psychological safety, see the Ministère's guide for school service centres, school boards and private educational institutions, *La vérification des antécédents judiciaires et des comportements pouvant raisonnablement faire craindre pour la sécurité physique ou psychologique des élèves* (in French only).

5. Discretion, confidentiality and the protection of personal information

5.1 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must act with discretion, caution and discernment by respecting the privacy of students and other staff members when it comes to the confidential information they learn in carrying out their duties, in particular any personal information entrusted to them by the person in question.

5.2 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must collect and use only the personal information necessary to carry out their duties and communicate it in accordance with the applicable provisions in this regard.

Such information must be communicated in an appropriate, secure and respectful manner, and in such a way as to avoid causing undue harm to the person in question.

5.3 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must respect image rights by obtaining the consent of a minor student's parent or guardian or the consent of a student aged 18 or over before taking or distributing photographs, videos, screen shots, etc. They must also make sure that these images are in line with the Western Québec School Board's mission.

6. Integrity, probity and transparency

6.1 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must act with integrity, good faith and transparency in order to maintain parents' and the public's trust in the Western Québec School Board and the education system.

Use and management of assets and resources

6.2 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must contribute to the sound management of public funds in carrying out their duties.

6.3 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must make responsible, safe and careful use of the educational, material and technological assets and resources made available to them by the Western Québec School Board or one of its institutions, and avoid using them for personal or third-party use, unless they receive prior authorization to do so.

This implies acting as an ethical citizen in the digital age, and adopting a critical and informed approach to the use of digital media.

6.4 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must behave with prudence, care and probity, and avoid participating directly or indirectly in any theft, fraud, corruption, collusion, falsification of documents, breach of trust or any other similar negligence, misconduct or reprehensible act, in particular with respect to a contract.

Conflicts of interest and gifts

6.5 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must avoid placing themselves in situations where there could be a real or perceived conflict between their personal interests and their professional duties.

If such a situation should arise, they must report in writing to their immediate supervisor any potential, actual or perceived conflict of interest, or any other circumstance they know of that could reasonably, or reasonably be perceived to, influence their decisions, judgment or work.

6.6 Employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must carry out their duties in such a way as to not unduly influence a decision, or obtain a direct or indirect benefit for themselves or a third party.

6.7 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must refuse all gifts (e.g. presents, donations, benefits, compensation, favours) unless it is a token of recognition of symbolic or modest value that cannot influence or appear to influence their decisions, judgment or work.

7. Professionalism, expertise and commitment

7.1 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must perform the required work, fully play the role they have been assigned and show diligence in carrying out their duties.

7.2 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must act in a professional and responsible manner, with attention to detail, objectivity, diligence and vigilance.

7.3 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must carry out their duties competently and offer quality services by contributing actively to students' educational success and development.

This involves developing their knowledge and keeping it up to date, in particular through ongoing education.

7.4 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must carry out their duties with commitment, fostering collaboration with peers, co-operation, support and the sharing of best practices.

Such collaboration is essential on the part of persons who provide services to students with ministry exceptionalities, social maladjustments or learning disabilities for whom an individualized education plan has been established.

7.5 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must participate actively and positively in school life and contribute to the development of their community.

7.6 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must know and understand the ethical standards and expected practices and conduct, and commit to complying and promoting compliance with them.

8. Loyalty and duty of confidentiality

8.1 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must remain loyal to the Western Québec School Board and its institutions by adhering to their mission, values, commitment-to-success plan and educational project during their employment or mandate and thereafter.

8.2 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must act with reserve and moderation in any public display of their opinions and avoid saying things about the Western Québec School Board or its institutions, partners, employees, students or their parents that could harm their image or reputation.

8.3 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must also avoid taking part directly or indirectly in activities that could harm the image or reputation of the Western Québec School Board or one of its institutions.

8.4 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must make prudent, judicious and professional use of the internet and traditional and social media, even outside of the workplace and working hours, and abide by the mission and values of the Western Québec School Board and one of its institutions.

8.5 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must avoid speaking on behalf of the Western Québec School Board or one of its institutions in traditional or social media, or give the impression that they are doing so, unless they are expressly authorized to do so.

8.6 All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities must obtain the authorization of their immediate supervisor before publishing a text whose content appears to emanate from the Western Québec School Board or one of its institutions, or that was written in the exercise of their duties.

Reporting

Breach of code of ethics

All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities and who witness or are informed of a breach of any provision of this code of ethics must report it to the Western Québec School Board without delay if it could reasonably pose a threat to the students' physical or psychological safety.[4]

Procedure for reporting a breach of the code of ethics

A breach in the Code of Ethics must be reported without delay to the Director of Human Resources (see contact information below). The report must be in writing through email and contain information about the breach to the Code of ethics including but not limited to: person making the report, person who has contravened the Code of Ethics, the section(s) from the Code of Ethics that have been breached, the date or timeframe of the breach and any other information that would be helpful to an investigation. (The contact information will be updated as needed.)

Erick Tremblay
Director of Human Resources
etremblay@wqsb.qc.ca

[4] See Note 2.

Dissemination and application

- Directors general, school principals and department heads are responsible for disseminating and promoting this code of ethics among employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities in their institution or administrative unit, and for ensuring its application.

- All employees and anyone who works with or has contact with minors or students with ministry exceptionalities shall receive a copy of this code of ethics.

- The director general of the Western Québec School Board, supported by the school principals and service directors, is responsible for applying this code of ethics.

- The Western Québec School Board shall publish the code of ethics on its website and make the code otherwise accessible to any person who requests it.

Sanctions

A breach of this code of ethics may, by decision of the hierarchical authority concerned and in accordance with the collective agreements, labour agreements and service agreements or contracts in effect, result in the application of sanctions commensurate with the nature and severity of the breach.

Evaluation and update

The Western Québec School Board shall evaluate this code of ethics at the end of each school year and update it as needed.

Effective date

This code of ethics is in force since April 29, 2025.