

# Florida Association of District School Superintendents

## Ethics Training Manual

September 2024

### **Training Description:**

This training will provide background and information regarding Florida's ethics laws sufficient to satisfy the requirements pursuant to [section 112.3142, Florida Statutes](#). This training provides four (4) hours of ethics training that addresses [Article II, Section 8](#) of the Florida Constitution, the Code of Ethics for Public Officers and Employees, and the Government-in-the-Sunshine provisions in Chapters 119 and 286 of the Florida Statutes relating to public records laws and public meeting laws.

### **Instructors:**

Brian Moore, General Counsel  
Florida Association of District School Superintendents

Ellen Odom, General Counsel  
Escambia County School Board

Amy D. Envall, Senior Counsel  
Sniffen & Spellman, P.A.  
(Former General Counsel for Orange and Brevard)

David Koperski, School Board Attorney  
Pinellas County School Board

John Palmerini, General Counsel  
Orange County School Board

# Ethics Training

## Table of Contents

Disclaimer ( <i>Brian Moore</i> )	4
Why Are We Here Today? ( <i>Brian Moore</i> )	4
Ethics Training Requirement ( <i>Brian Moore</i> )	4
Public Records ( <i>Amy Envall</i> )	5
Elections & Financial Disclosure ( <i>John Palmerini</i> )	12
Gifts ( <i>David Koperski</i> )	14
Procurement ( <i>Amy Envall</i> )	21
Conflicts ( <i>Ellen Odom</i> )	24
Ethical Provisions for Superintendents/School Boards/Personnel - Ethics ( <i>Brian Moore</i> )	28
Florida Commission on Ethics ( <i>Amy Envall</i> )	35
Ethics in Government – New Florida Constitutional Provisions, Disproportionate Benefit ( <i>Brian Moore/Ellen Odom</i> )	36

## Appendices

I.	Who Can Answer My Ethics Questions	40
II.	Government in the Sunshine Manual	40
III.	FERPA Resources from the U.S. Department of Education	41
IV.	Recent Commission on Ethics Advisory Opinions	43
V.	Biographies of Speakers	46

# Ethics Training

## Disclaimer

Nothing in this document, training materials, or presentation is designed to render a specific legal opinion or other professional opinion. Due to the rapidly changing nature of the law, information contained in this training program may become outdated. The analysis of any ethics issue is fact-based, and therefore a proper legal opinion may only be rendered after careful analysis of specific factual circumstances. As a result, any individual using this document and training materials as a reference should always research original sources of authority and update information to ensure accuracy when dealing with a specific problem or issue, or consult legal counsel to render a specific opinion as to a specific issue. In addition, applicable rules and opinions of the Florida Commission on Ethics and School Board Policies should be reviewed. In no event will the authors or presenters be liable as a result of the use of these materials or participation in the training. This document and training materials are not exhaustive of all issues or cases that may impact an ethics issue.

## Why Are We Here Today?

- ◆ It's Constitutional - [Article II, Section 8, Florida Constitution](#).
- ◆ The Legislature Requires It – [Section 112.3142, Florida Statutes](#).
- ◆ The Legislature Established Standards of Conduct for Public Officers – [Section 112.313, Florida Statutes](#).

## Ethics Training Requirement

- ◆ The Statute Requires It – [Section 112.3142, Florida Statutes](#).
- ◆ The Administrative Rule Explains It – Rule [34-7.025, F.A.C.](#)
- ◆ You Are an Outgoing Elected Officer? - [CEO 15-05](#) - June 10, 2015.

## Other Ethics Training Options

- ◆ Commission on Ethics: [Training Opportunities Page](#).
- ◆ Commission on Ethics: [Training Requirements Page](#).

## Other Ethics Manuals and Outlines

- ◆ Commission on Ethics: [Guide to the Sunshine Amendment and Code of Ethics for Public Officers and Employees \(2024\)](#).
- ◆ Commission on Ethics: [Ethics Outline \(March 2024\)](#).

# Public Records

## Why do I care about public records?

- ◆ It's a "***right***" ...no, seriously.
  - Maybe not in some places but in Florida, definitely.
    - Florida Constitution – [Article I](#) -- "Declaration of Rights"
    - [Article I, Section 24](#) -- "Access to Public Records and Meetings"
- ◆ And it's "***the law.***"
  - [Chapter 119, Florida Statutes](#) -- "Public Records"

## What is a public record?

- ◆ For most public employees, if you receive it, send it, or create it while doing your job.... It is a public record. We will distinguish education records (FERPA) as we continue the discussion.
  - Includes papers and electronic information ("data").
  - Includes drafts.
    - If you share it with others for review or comment or use it to form policy or procedure... still a public record.
  - Includes personal notes.
    - When you keep 'em in the file.... just in case...
    - But they are not public records when designed for your own personal use in remembering certain things.
  - ***If it's about work,*** it doesn't matter how or where you send it or receive it.
    - Facebook, X (fka Twitter), Email, Text, personal message/direct message... still a public record.
    - Receive in your home mailbox or on your personal phone... still a public record.

## What do I have to do with public records?

- ◆ Think before you shred!
  - You can only destroy them when the State says you can. Check your school district's written Records Retention Schedule and be mindful of the [State's record retention schedules](#), which include sections both for general government ([GS1-SL](#)) and for records specific to public schools ([GS7](#)).
- ◆ You can't hide public records in someone else's files.
  - Even contractors can have public records.
- ◆ They can either look through your files or ask for copies...their choice.
  - Unless the law says ***specifically*** you don't have to...
    - Either "exempt" or "confidential"
    - And don't assume you know...
      - Social Security Number .... exempt
      - Driver's License Number ... ***NOT*** exempt

## What happens if I don't follow the law?

- ◆ You can get in trouble.
  - Criminal
  - Civil
  - Employment – your oath and/or employment agreements require you to uphold the constitution and the laws of the State of Florida.

## Public Records Requests

### “DO’S” AND “DON’T’S”

#### *For Front-Line Employees When Faced with An In-Person Public Records Request*

DO	DON'T
<b>Do</b> acknowledge that a public records request has been made	<b>Don't</b> make any statement indicating that the request will be granted or denied.
<b>Do</b> inform the Requester that you are not the custodian of records.	<b>Don't</b> state or suggest that you are the custodian of records.
<b>Do</b> identify the records custodian and provide his/her contact information	<b>Don't</b> insist that the Requester identify him/herself.
<b>Do</b> ask for a clear description of the records the Requester seeks. Write down the description.	<b>Don't</b> insist that the Requester make their request in writing.
<b>Do</b> ask how the Requester would like to be contacted regarding his/her request.	<b>Don't</b> ask why the Requester wants the records.
<b>Do</b> transmit your notes regarding the request to the designated records custodian.	<b>Don't</b> offer any information regarding the existence or nature of the records.
<b>Do</b> remain calm and polite.	<b>Don't panic!</b> <b>Don't allow yourself to be bullied.</b>

## Public Records Requests (“PRRs”) – Reminders

1. **We cannot ask who is making the request.**
  - ◆ Don’t ask for ID or name
  - ◆ Persons only coming to the front desk of a site to make a PRR, and not to visit the site, do not need to show ID or be run through background screening
  - ◆ Can be anonymous
2. **We cannot ask why they are making the request.**
3. **We cannot require that the request be made in writing.**
  - ◆ Can be oral
4. **We cannot require that the request be made in person.**
  - ◆ Can be made in person, by phone, by email, by fax, etc.
5. **We cannot require that the request be made to a certain office.**
  - ◆ Each site must legally receive PRRs, even though other District offices may assist the site with the response.
6. **We must provide the records in a “reasonable” amount of time.**
  - ◆ Amount of time will vary depending upon the exact request – for example, a PRR for the School Improvement Plan (SIP) could be handled that day, if not while the person waits
7. **We should charge 15 cents per page for any hard copies requested and made.**
  - ◆ Can waive this cost for very short documents.
8. **We should charge staff time if the request takes more than 15 minutes to complete.**
  - ◆ Actual hourly rate, including fringe, of the lowest paid employee who can do the work.
9. **We should direct any person to stop audio and/or video recording.**
  - ◆ No right to record on school grounds, except possibly Individualized Education Plan (IEP/504) meetings and School Advisory Council (SAC) meetings
10. **Call Legal Department at \_\_\_\_\_ for assistance.**

## **Public Records – How to React When You Get an “In-Person” Public Records Request (for All “Front Line” Personnel)**

Under Florida’s broad Public Records Act (“the PRA”), any person can request access to or copies of public records in the custody of a school district (“the District”), as well as other state or local government agencies and contractors either acting on behalf of or having custody of government records. Most such requests will be submitted in writing. It is strongly recommended that every District have one person who serves as the designated records custodian (“the Designated Custodian”) for the District, regardless of who has physical custody of materials. When a written PRA request is received, it should be transmitted to the Designated Custodian for processing and coordination with those District employees who may have physical custody of the materials requested. The Designated Custodian need not be an individual but could, instead, be a specific position or office.

On occasion, however, someone will visit a District office or facility and make a public records request in person.

The individual making such request (“the Requester”) will sometimes ask to immediately inspect and/or photograph documents or other materials, frequently materials that are physically maintained at the same location where the request is being made (e.g., a request made at the Transportation Department to see the latest maintenance log for a specific bus). Alternatively, the Requester may ask that materials be emailed to him or her. The inference – whether intentional or not – is that the employee to whom the request is made (“the Employee”) has a legal obligation to allow such access or photography or even to email materials to the Requester.

In virtually every instance, no such obligation exists. In most instances, the in-person request will not be made directly to the Designated Custodian but, instead, will be made to a district employee (“Employee”) whose workplace is easily accessible to a member of the public. The Employee may also be selected by the Requester because the Requester believes that the Employee’s workstation is in close proximity to the records being requested. For example, a receptionist might be asked for a copy of the visitors’ log or an administrative assistant might be asked for the calendar of a superintendent or District administrator. In those instances, the Employee must clearly state that he or she is not the Designated Custodian of records but that a copy of the requested records can be obtained through the District’s records request process.

It is equally important that the Employee not inadvertently make statements suggesting that the District will not comply with the PRA.

The tips below are intended to provide guidance to those Employees who are not a Designated Custodian, but to whom such in-person requests are frequently directed. The suggested responses in quotes below are provided to illustrate that the statements made to a Requester should be simple and straightforward but should not imply either that the PRA request is being denied or how and when the requested materials will be made available. If the Requester presses for an answer on those issues, the Employee should consistently reply that the Designated Custodian will respond to the request.



## **#1 Don't panic.**

Most people making public records requests have a legitimate reason for wanting to see or obtain copies of specific materials. However, some Requesters may simply be attempting to test the District's compliance with the PRA or even to harass the District. Nonetheless, such Requesters are entitled to access to public records to the same extent as are those with a real need for the materials sought.

While the PRA is very broad, access to all District documents and other materials is not completely unrestricted. Some materials are not public record. Some fall under one or more of the numerous exceptions to the requirement that records be accessible to the public, such as student education records or safety plans. Even when material is a public record and is not subject to an exemption, the nature of the request being made often requires the Requester to reimburse certain costs incurred by the District and/or requires that the Designated Custodian make special arrangements for providing access to the materials.

In short, each public records request must be carefully considered so that the District response fully complies with applicable law. This is the role of the Designated Custodian, sometimes in consultation with the District's attorney or other District personnel who are knowledgeable about the materials and the PRA.

## **#2 Tell the Requester that you are not the records custodian.**

*I am not the custodian of any of the public records of the District. [Name of Designated Custodian] has been designated as the custodian of all public records of the District.*

The PRA imposes responsibilities on the custodian of public records, including the responsibility to provide access to or copies of public records (unless there is a specific statutory exemption). However, not every employee of the District is a custodian. In fact, each District should designate a specific person, position, or office to act as the Designated Custodian, with all public records requests – whether received in writing or orally – transmitted to that person, position, or office for processing.

The Employee who receives an oral public records request is required to identify the Designated Custodian. Again, the Designated Custodian need not be an individual but could, instead, be a specific position or office.

Even documents or materials that are in close physical proximity to the Employee's workstation are not officially in his/her custody. For example, a visitor's sign-in log may be positioned on a ledge on the receptionist's desk. Nonetheless, the receptionist is not the custodian of the sign-in log.

## **#3 Acknowledge receipt of the public records request, but offer no specific indication of whether, how, or when the records will be made available.**

*I understand that you are making a public records request. The District's Designated Custodian will respond to your request.*

The PRA requires prompt acknowledgement that a public records request has been received. This acknowledgement need not be in writing, although the District is advised to provide written acknowledgement within a few days of receiving the request. The Employee need merely state his/her understanding that a public records request is being made.

The District has an obligation to permit access to or copies of public records as follows:

- 1) at a reasonable time;
- 2) under reasonable conditions; and
- 3) under the supervision of the Designated Custodian or the Designated Custodian's designee.

Depending on the nature of the materials requested, the time and conditions for granting the requests that are reasonable and the need for supervision will vary greatly. The Employee should offer no opinion regarding any of these factors. Instead, the Designated Custodian – or other District personnel with whom the custodian consults or designates – will respond to the Requester regarding the time and conditions for providing access.

#### **#4 Get a written description of the materials are being requested.**

*Please provide a written description of the materials you are requesting. If you prefer not to make your request in writing, please state your request again, so that I can write it down to make sure the Designated Custodian of public records receives an accurate description of your request. [Then read your description of the request back to the Requester].*

A person making a public records request is not required to submit the request in writing. In order to properly respond to the request, however, the Designated Custodian needs to know how the Requester characterizes the materials sought. There may be instances when the description is vague or extremely broad. There may even be occasions when the Employee is relatively certain that no such materials exist. However, the Employee should refrain from offering that information or giving any response regarding the nature of the materials requested. Instead, the Employee should simply make certain that he/she accurately records what the Requester has asked for. The Designated Custodian or a person appointed by the Designated Custodian should be the one to follow-up with the Requester further regarding the substance and scope of the request.

#### **#5 Ask how the Requester would like to be contacted with the District's response to the request.**

*You can contact [the Designated Custodian] at [telephone number or email address] to inquire about the status of your request or, if you prefer, you can leave your contact information and he/she will contact you.*

A Requester is not required to identify his/herself, nor is the Requester required to provide any contact information. If a Requester declines to give his/her name or any contact information, the Employee should provide the telephone number, email address, or some other method for the Requester to contact the Designated Custodian for follow-up on the status of the request.

**#6 Don't offer any information regarding the materials sought or the manner in which the District will respond to the request.**

*SILENCE*

**or**

*I'm not the Designated Custodian and, therefore, I can't provide you with any information regarding the (existence or nature or volume or format, etc.) of the materials you are seeking. However, the (Designated Custodian) will be able to help you.*

The manner in which the District responds to a public records request varies depending upon what is being requested and the manner in which the Requester seeks access. Because there can be so much variation in the appropriate response that must be given, that analysis and decision must be made by the Designated Custodian, sometimes in consultation with legal counsel or others employed by the District.

**#7 Don't be bullied into submission.**

*I have noted your public records request in writing and will forward it to the Designated Custodian. Any further communication regarding your request will need to be directed to [the Designated Custodian].*

Most Requesters will be satisfied with the responses suggested above. However, some Requesters may either insinuate or even insist that the Employee is required to allow the Requester to immediately inspect or even photograph the materials being requested. While the District may ultimately provide such access, the Employee should not make that decision. Nor should the Employee get into a debate with the Requester or feel compelled to respond to questions after informing the Requester that the Designated Custodian will provide the responses. Instead, merely react in a manner consistent with the suggestions above.

Promptly forward your notes regarding the request to the Designated Custodian.

# Elections and Financial Disclosure

## Elections

- ◆ Resign to Run – [Section 99.012, Florida Statutes](#) – Restrictions on individuals qualifying for public office
- ◆ Sunshine law applies upon election, not taking office – [Section 286.0111\), Florida Statutes](#)

## Financial Disclosure – Applicable Statutes

- ◆ Full and public disclosure of financial interests – [Section 112.3144, Florida Statutes](#)
- ◆ Possible Fines and Penalties – [Section 112.3145, Florida Statutes](#) – Disclosure of financial interests and clients represented before agencies

## Overview of the Disclosure Forms

- ◆ Commission on Ethics – [Comprehensive Financial Disclosure List of Forms](#)
- ◆ Filing Information - [Comprehensive Filing Information](#)
- ◆ [Form 1 - 2023](#) – Statement of Financial Interests (link takes you to the login screen for electronic filing, which includes a “how to” video)
- ◆ [Form 1 Instructions](#)
- ◆ [Form 1F – 2024](#) (for those leaving office during 2024)
- ◆ [Form 1F Instructions](#)
- ◆ [Form 6 - 2023](#) – Full and Public Disclosure of Financial Interests (link takes you to the login screen for electronic filing, which includes a “how to” video)
- ◆ [Form 6 Instructions](#)
- ◆ [Form 6F – 2024](#) (for those leaving office during 2024)
- ◆ [Form 6F Instructions](#)

## Seven Things to Know About Financial Disclosure

1. The due date for filing Form 1 and Form 6 is July 1, but there is a grace period effective until September 1, after which automatic fines of \$25.00 per day begin to accrue.
2. The original, signed disclosure form must be filed – scanned or faxed versions are not acceptable. Form 1 and Form 6 filers are required to submit their form electronically.
3. Form 1 filers must choose either “comparative (percentage) thresholds” or “dollar value thresholds” to calculate their reportable interests.
4. If a CPA or attorney prepares and signs the disclosure form, the filer may be protected from a violation if a complaint is filed and it is determined that the CPA or attorney failed to accurately transcribe information provided by the filer.
5. Unlike newly-appointed or newly-employed Form 1 filers, there is no requirement that newly appointed Form 6 filers file within thirty (30) days of appointment.
6. If you file a Form 1 or Form 6 and then file an amended Form 1X or Form 6X prior to September 1, the amended form is considered the original filing even if a complaint is filed.
7. If you receive an automatic fine for not timely filing your Form 1 or Form 6, the Commission may take action to collect the fine during the twenty (20) years after it becomes final.

# Gifts – Selected Statutes/Forms

## Reporting and Prohibiting the Receipt of Certain Gifts

- ◆ [Section 112.3148, Florida Statutes](#) - Reporting and prohibited receipt of gifts by individuals filing full or limited public disclosure of financial interests and by procurement employees.

## Solicitation and Disclosure of Honoraria

- ◆ [Section 112.3149, Florida Statutes](#) - Solicitation and disclosure of honoraria.

## Prohibition on Gifts Involving Political Committees

- ◆ [Section 112.31485, Florida Statutes](#) - Prohibition on gifts involving political committees.

## Further Limitations for School Board Members

- ◆ [Section 1001.421, Florida Statutes](#) - Gifts

## Possible Fines and Penalties

- ◆ [Section 112.317, Florida Statutes](#) - Penalties
- ◆ [Section 112.3173, Florida Statutes](#) – Possible Forfeiture of Retirement Benefits

## Disclosure Forms

- ◆ Statutory Reference: [Section 112.3147, Florida Statutes](#) - Forms.
- ◆ All Forms can be found on the Commission on Ethics' website at <https://ethics.state.fl.us/>
- ◆ [Form 9](#) – Quarterly Gift Disclosure (Gifts over \$100)
- ◆ [Form 10](#) - Annual Disclosure of Gifts from Governmental Entities and Direct Support Organizations and Honorarium Event Related Expenses
- ◆ [Form 30](#) – Donor's Quarterly Gift Disclosure (for Lobbyists)

## Commission on Ethics - Regulations

- ◆ [Chapter 34-13, Florida Administrative Code](#) – Gifts and Honoraria - Chapter 34-13, F.A.C.

## Selected Gift Law Rules for Public School Employees & Board Members

### Short Summary of Rules

1. *All* – Cannot promise your action in exchange for a gift<sup>1</sup> from anyone of any value.
2. *All* – Cannot accept a gift from anyone of any value when you know or, with the exercise of reasonable care, should know that it is given to influence your action, even if it does not, in fact, influence you.
3. *RIPEs*<sup>2</sup> – Cannot accept a gift over \$100 from a vendor<sup>3</sup> or a lobbyist<sup>4</sup> (“V/L”).
4. *RIPEs* – Cannot solicit a gift of any value from a V/L.
5. *RIPEs* – Cannot accept or solicit a gift of any value from a political committee<sup>5</sup> (“PC”).
6. *RIPEs* – Must file quarterly gift reports for gifts over \$100 from non-V/L/PC donors<sup>6</sup> and annual gift reports for gifts over \$100 from other specific donors.
7. *RIPEs* – Cannot solicit or accept an honorarium<sup>7</sup> under certain circumstances; but, reasonable and actual expenses of attendance are allowed, and must be reported.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Gift” is generally defined to include anything given or sold to you for which equal consideration is not given in return and includes but is not limited to food, tickets, payment of dues, use of real estate, travel expenses, and clothing; it does *not* include items such as gifts from relatives, honoraria and expenses relating to honorarium events, and plaques given for public service. See s. 112.312(12), F.S. Can “pay down” gifts to a desired threshold level, such as paying \$40 for a \$140 ticket, thus making the “gift” a value of \$100. “Gifts” must be of a personal benefit to you, so a district vendor you see at a conference that gives you five iPads for classroom use is not a violation of the law – it is not your gift, it is the district’s gift.

<sup>2</sup> “RIPEs” are “reporting individuals” and “procurement employees,” as further explained in 3. below.

<sup>3</sup> “Vendor” is any business entity doing business directly with an agency, such as renting, leasing, or selling any goods, or services. See s. 112.3148(2)(f), F.S. There is no definition of “vendor” in s. 1001.421, F.S. (see #8.), but the cited definition likely applies there, too.

<sup>4</sup> “Lobbyist” is any person who, for compensation, seeks or sought during the 12 months prior to the gift to (1) influence the governmental decision making of the official or the agency itself, or (2) encourage the passage, defeat, or modification of any proposal or recommendation by the official or the agency itself. See s. 112.3148(2)(b), F.S.

<sup>5</sup> “Political committee” is generally a person or group that collects and/or expends more than \$500 per year to support or oppose a political candidate or electoral question, but specifically excludes national political parties, the state and county executive committees of such political parties, and affiliated party committees. See ss. 112.3148(4) and 106.011(16), F.S.

<sup>6</sup> V/L/PCs are excluded -- you would not file a report in this instance since you cannot even take gifts in this amount from them.

<sup>7</sup> “Honorarium” is a payment of money or anything of value, directly or indirectly, to a RIPE, or to any person on their behalf, as consideration for a speech, presentation, writing, or similar task; RIPEs can accept “actual and reasonable expenses” of attending the event (airfare, lodging, meals, etc.).

8. ***School board members only* – Cannot accept or solicit a gift over \$50 from a vendor or a person/entity seeking to become a vendor.**

### **Detailed Discussion of Each Rule**

1. All – Gifts from Anyone of Any Value – True Bribe/Bad Motive – [Section 112.313\(2\), F.S.](#)

Under this law, no public employee or board member may *solicit* or *accept* a gift *from anyone of any value* based upon any understanding that such was given to influence the judgment or action of the recipient.

This law covers the true corruption that occurs when a person actually colludes with a donor to accept a gift with both parties understanding that the gift will influence action. There is no dollar limit to the gift, so a violation of the law would occur if you accepted a free sandwich in exchange for a certain action on an issue. In addition, there is no restriction on the identity of the donor, such as from a vendor or lobbyist, so a violation would occur if you sell your influence to anyone, not just to a vendor or a lobbyist. Lastly, the gift need not be received by you personally, so a violation would occur, for example, if you promise your influence in exchange for a donation to your spouse's political campaign.

2. All – Gifts from Anyone of Any Value – “Knew or Should Have Known” – [Section 112.313\(4\), F.S.](#)

Under this law, no public employee or board member, nor their spouse or minor child, may *solicit* or *accept* a gift *from anyone of any value* when the person knows or, with the exercise of reasonable care, should know that the gift is given to influence an action.

This law covers the scenario when a public official does not necessarily have a bad motive, but took a gift that a reasonable person would know was given in order to influence a vote or action. For example, in prior cases, it was held that officials “should have known” that the following gifts were given to influence their vote or action: an all-expenses paid hunting trip to Key West, free personal cable television service from a city's cable franchisee, and free memberships from a country club leasing its facilities from a city; however, the following scenarios were held *not* to violate this provision: a fair market value residential rental to a public official, and a public official receiving donations for his ill son's care where the donations were anonymous (it was not reasonable for the official to assume it was given to influence judgment when he did not even know who gave it and, thus, would be hard pressed to know who to favor in his actions).

Note that here, as in 1. above, there is no dollar limit or restriction on who makes the gift. So, you should always ask yourself: “Would a reasonable person think that the gift is given in order to influence me in my official capacity?” If the answer is yes, then you should not take the gift. As a practical matter, gifts from lobbyists and vendors or potential vendors are more reasonably likely to be given to influence you than gifts from someone with no stake in your action; and large gifts are more reasonably likely to be given to influence you than small gifts. These common sense guidelines are evident in agency and court rulings: reported violations of this law usually involve larger gifts from lobbyists or vendors.



3. RIPes – Acceptance of Gifts from V/Ls – Cannot exceed \$100 – [Section 112.3148\(4\), F.S.](#)

Certain laws apply only to “reporting individuals” and “procurement employees,” known collectively as RIPes. See 3.-7. herein. Board members, superintendents, and certain other employees are “reporting individuals” since they must file a financial disclosure form with the state, either Form 1 (Statement of Financial Interests) or Form 6 (Full and Public Disclosure of Financial Interests). “Procurement employees” are only those state-level employees who have certain purchasing powers. Thus, local school districts do not have “procurement employees” as used in these laws, *but* those school district employees who possess the authority to make purchases >\$35k are “reporting individuals.” See [s. 112.3145\(1\)\(a\)3., F.S.](#)

Under this law, no public employee or board member, nor any other person on their behalf, may *accept* gifts in excess of \$100 in value from any vendor or lobbyist. If the gift is from someone not a V/L, then the value could exceed \$100, but recall that under 1. and 2. above, the person cannot accept any gift from anyone of *any* value if it was a true bribe or you knew or should have known it was given to influence your vote or action. Detailed rules exist regarding the calculation of the \$100 threshold, such as separate meals re-starting a new \$100 calculation, and tickets in a skybox including both the price of admission to the game and the proportionate cost of the annual skybox fee. Specific questions about valuation should be directed to your attorney and/or the Commission on Ethics ([www.ethics.state.fl.us](http://www.ethics.state.fl.us)). See also Rules 34-13.500 and 13-510, F.A.C., for detailed gift valuation rules.

4. RIPes – No Solicitation of Gifts of Any Value from V/Ls – [Section 112.3148\(3\), F.S.](#)

Under this law, RIPes cannot *solicit* any gift of *any value* from any vendor or lobbyist. Note that this law only applies to soliciting, or asking for, gifts. Also note that this prohibition precludes one RIPE from soliciting a gift for the benefit of other RIPes but does not preclude a non-RIPE from making a solicitation. For example, the law would not prohibit a FASA clerk (as opposed to an officer, who may be a RIPE) from soliciting lobbyists to pay for the cost of principals’ meals at an FASA conference. Whether the principals can *accept* the meals is a question to be addressed under 3. above, but meals included as part of a conference are not gifts if they are paid for by the registration fee; if the meal was not part of the registration fee, then the rules under 3. above would need to be applied to the acceptance of the meal. But, for purposes of this law, the principals did not solicit the food in this hypothetical, FASA did.

5. RIPes – No Acceptance or Solicitation of Gifts of Any Value from PCs – [Section 112.31485, F.S.](#)

Under this law, neither RIPes, nor their immediate family<sup>8</sup>, can *solicit* or *accept* any gift of *any value* from a PC. Just for this law, the term “gift” is further defined to mean those items of value that are “not primarily related to contributions, expenditures, or other political activities authorized pursuant to Chapter 106,” which is the chapter of Florida Statutes relating to campaign finance; this amended definition thus allows PCs to make campaign contributions otherwise allowed by law, and such contributions will not be considered unlawful gifts.

---

<sup>8</sup> “Immediate family” is limited to your parent, spouse, child, or sibling. See [s. 112.31485\(1\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

## 6. RIPEs – Reporting Requirements – \$100 Trigger

RIPEs must file quarterly gift disclosure reports with the Commission on Ethics listing all gifts valued in excess of \$100, which obviously would be from someone other than a V/L or a PC since RIPEs cannot even accept gifts from V/Ls over \$100 or PCs of any value. Gifts from relatives and some other technical gifts not at issue here are exempted from this reporting requirement. See [s. 112.3148\(8\), F.S.](#) and [Form 9](#).

In addition, RIPEs must file annual gift disclosure reports with the Commission on Ethics listing all gifts valued in excess of \$100 received from a governmental entity or a direct support organization specifically authorized by law to support a governmental entity. See [s. 112.3148\(6\)\(d\), F.S.](#) and [Form 10](#).

For your information, certain donors also have a reporting requirement and it is triggered at a lower dollar figure than a RIPE's requirement. V/Ls must file quarterly gift disclosure reports with the Commission on Ethics listing all gifts to RIPEs valued over \$25, but not over \$100. This restriction stops at \$100 because another law prohibits V/Ls from even giving a gift of over \$100 to a RIPE, which corresponds to your prohibition against taking it. See [s. 112.3148\(5\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

In addition, a corresponding annual reporting requirement exists for donors of more than \$100 who are a governmental entity, or a direct support organization specifically authorized by law to support a governmental entity. Again, this corresponds to your prohibition against taking gifts over \$100 from such organizations. See [s. 112.3148\(6\)\(c\), F.S.](#)

## 7. RIPEs – Honoraria – Section 112.3149, F.S.

Honoraria are excluded from the definition of “gift” such that the rules above do not apply to honoraria. Thus, a separate statute was needed to define the circumstances under which honoraria could or could not be solicited or accepted. As noted in footnote 7, “honorarium” is defined as a payment of money or anything of value, directly or indirectly, to a RIPE, or to any person on their behalf, as consideration for a speech, address, etc.

Under this law, RIPEs cannot *solicit* an honorarium *from anyone of any value if* the subject of the speech, presentation, etc. relates to the RIPE's public office or duties. Further, a RIPE cannot *accept* an honorarium from a V/L/PC of *any value*; such entities are also prohibited from providing such honoraria. However, payment for reasonable and actual expenses for attending the event where the speech or presentation is given is not an “honorarium” and not prohibited by this law, even if paid by a V/L/PC, but it must be reported by the RIPE if paid by a V/L/PC (no minimum dollar threshold for this reporting requirement, which is on Form 10). But, payment of actual expenses may be prohibited by other ethics rules, such as 1. or 2. above, since these expenses are not “honoraria” and thus could be prohibited “gifts.”

## 8. School board members only – Gifts Over \$50 from Vendors/Potential Vendors to school board members – Section 1001.421, F.S.

In 2011, the Legislature passed this law specifically relating to gifts to school board members. It further restricts their pre-2011 obligation as a RIPE to not solicit or accept gifts from vendors and

lobbyists. In short, it prohibits board members and their relatives<sup>9</sup> from, directly or indirectly, *soliciting* a gift of *any value* or *accepting* any gift in excess of \$50 from any person or entity that is either (1) doing business with the district or (2) seeking to do business with the district. See [s. 1001.421, F.S.](#) There are no reporting requirements under this law, because a school board member's existing reporting obligation as a RIPE discussed in 6. above only begins with gifts that exceed \$100 (which obviously cannot come from vendors but could still come from certain others).

## Five Things to Know about Gifts

1. Always remember there is a special gift law rule just for school board members. This rule prohibits board members and their relatives from directly or indirectly *soliciting* a gift of *any value* or *accepting* any gift in excess of \$50 from any person or entity that is either (1) doing business with the district or (2) seeking to do business with the district. See [s. 1001.421, F.S.](#)
2. A gift is anything you don't pay for within ninety (90) days. This includes food, beverages, prizes, and overnight stays at someone's house.
3. If a gift is prohibited, reporting it won't "cure" the violation. Reporting Individuals or Procurement Employees (RIPEs) are ***prohibited*** from accepting gifts worth more than \$100 from lobbyists or their firms, partners, employers, or principals, or from vendors!
4. If a gift is not prohibited, and it is worth more than \$100, a RIPE must report it on a [Form 9](#) no later than the end of the quarter following the quarter in which he or she received the gift.
5. You can always accept a gift, in any amount, from a relative, and you don't have to report it.

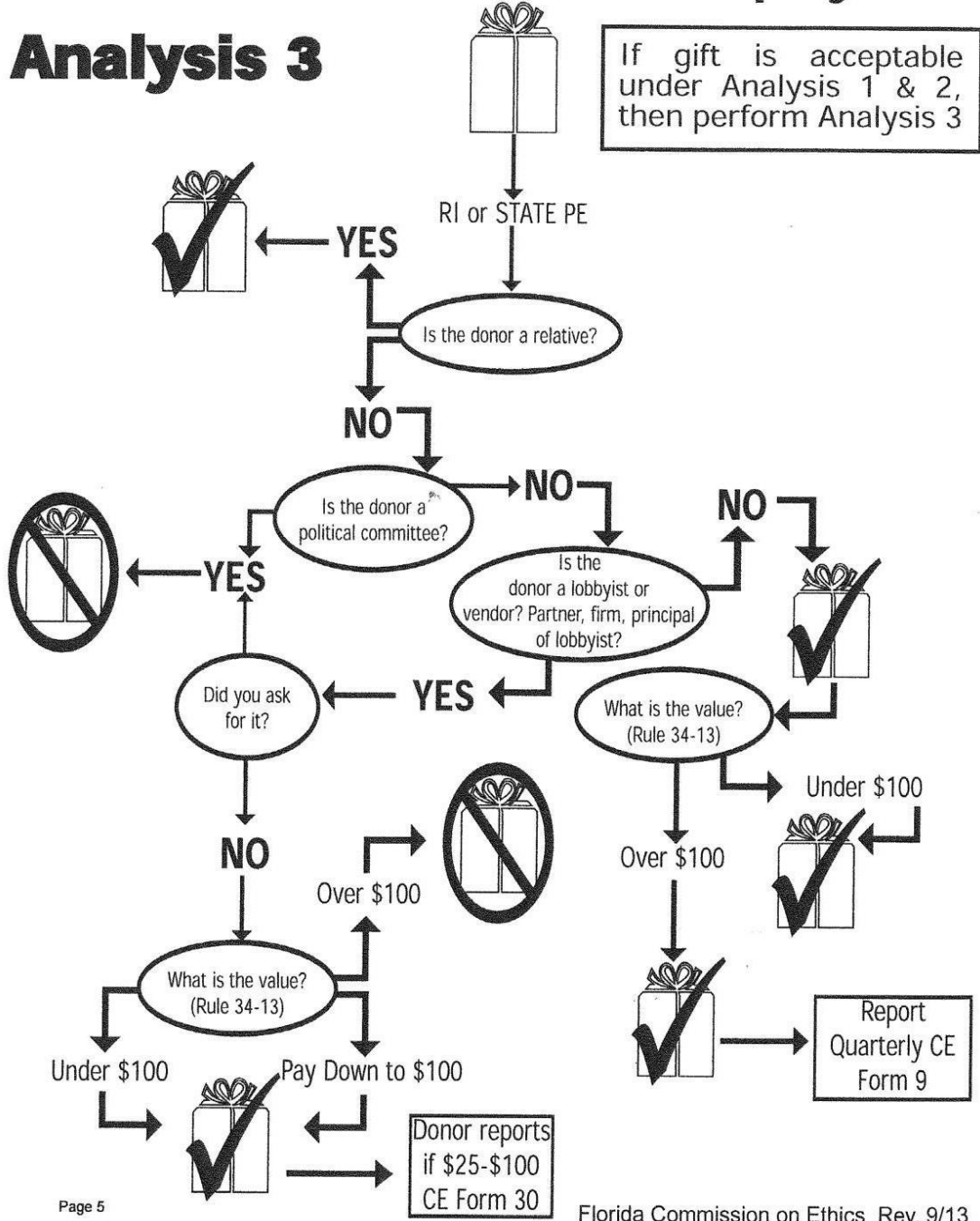
---

<sup>9</sup> Relative" includes your father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, first cousin, nephew, niece, husband, wife, father-in-law, mother-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, stepfather, stepmother, stepson, stepdaughter, stepbrother, stepsister, half brother, half sister, grandparent, great grandparent, grandchild, great grandchild, step grandparent, step great grandparent, step grandchild, step great grandchild, fiancée, someone who otherwise holds himself or herself out as or is generally known as the person whom you intend to marry or with whom you intend to form a household, or any other natural person having the same legal residence as you. See [s. 112.312\(21\), F.S.](#)

# Can I take it?

I'm a Reporting Individual or State Procurement Employee.

## Analysis 3



# Procurement

## How to Buy What You Need Without Ending Up in Jail

### I. Procurement Basics/Legal Authority

#### A. Underlying statutes:

1. [Chapter 255, Florida Statutes](#) - Generally applicable statutes relating to public works
2. [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=1000-1099/1001/Sections/1001.41.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1001/Sections/1001.41.html) [Section 1001.41, Florida Statutes](#) - Authority to contract.
3. [Section 1001.42, Florida Statutes](#) – Powers and duties of district school board.
4. [Chapter 1013, Part III, Subpart C, Florida Statutes](#) – Contracts for educational facilities.
5. [Section 287.055, Florida Statutes](#) - Certain professional services.

#### B. Underlying rules:

1. [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-1.013](#) (SBE rule/pooled purchasing) ([Section 1010.04, Florida Statutes](#))
2. [Fla. Admin. Code R. 60A-1](#) (DMS rules) (required by [Section 1001.42\(12\)\(j\), Florida Statutes](#))
3. School board rules/policies

### II. Procurement Options

#### A. Basic formats

1. ITB – Invitation to Bid
2. RFP – Request for Proposal
3. ITN – Invitation to Negotiate
4. CCNA – Consultants Competitive Negotiation Act

#### B. Exceptional purchases/competitive solicitation not required

1. Certain non-CCNA professional services. [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-1.012\(11\)\(a\)](#).
2. Educational services and copyrighted materials. [Fla. Admin. Code R. 6A-1.012\(11\)\(b\)](#).
3. Less than two (2) competitive bids received.
4. Single source
5. Emergency purchases
6. State or federal law prescribing with whom district must contract
7. Utilities and other government franchised services
8. Insurance, risk management, third party administrators (direct negotiation option)

#### C. Alternative procurement vehicles

1. Pooled purchasing
2. State term contracts
3. Cooperative purchasing with other districts
4. Other cooperative purchasing

#### D. Ethical screen

### III. Procurement Protests

- A. Decision must be posted electronically. Must include “point of entry” language
- B. Process is generally same as for state agencies: Section 120.57(3), Florida Statutes
  - 1. Notice of protest filed within seventy-two (72) business hours. Procurement specifications generally identify where the notice should be filed.
  - 2. Formal written protest filed within ten (10) calendar days after notice of protest. If the 10<sup>th</sup> day falls on a weekend or holiday, the filing deadline falls on the next business day.
  - 3. Opportunity for informal settlement must be provided within seven (7) business days after formal protest filed.
  - 4. If not settled but petition raises no material factual issues, an informal proceeding (Section 120.57(2), Florida Statutes) can be conducted.
  - 5. If material factual issues raised, protest must be transmitted to DOAH for formal hearing (Section 120.57(1), Florida Statutes).
- C. If timely protest not initiated, right to protest is waived.
  - 1. Challenges to specifications
  - 2. Challenges to interim decisions (e.g. shortlisting).
- D. Protest bond.
  - 1. Protest arising from procurements relating to public buildings or educational facilities
    - a. \$ 25,000 or 2% of the lowest bid, whichever is greater, for projects valued at over \$500,000
    - b. 5% of the lowest bid for other projects.
  - 2. Other protests: not clear that protest bond is authorized.
- E. Prohibition on *ex parte* communication. [Section 120.66, Florida Statutes](#).

### IV. Other Procurement-Related Ethics

#### A. Conflicts of Interest: Current Business Relationships

- 1. Prohibition on contracts with school board members, superintendent, or business organization in which board member or superintendent has any financial interest. Section 1001.42(12)(i), [Florida Statutes](#).
- 2. Prohibition on contracts with the spouse or child of a board member, superintendent, or school district purchasing agent—or any business entity in which such spouse or child is an officer or has more than a 5% direct or indirect ownership interest. [§112.313\(3\), Florida Statutes](#).
  - a. Exception 1: When the contract was awarded through competitive sealed bidding to the lowest or best bidder and:
    - 1) the official/purchasing agent had no role in determining the bid award; and
    - 2) the spouse or child did not attempt to use the official/purchasing agent’s influence to obtain the award.an emergency purchase is necessary.
    - 3) the official/ filed a statement with the supervisor of elections disclosing the conflict.

- b. Exception 2: Emergency purchases.
- c. Exception 3: Sole source purchases, but full disclosure of the relationship must be provided.
- d. Exception 4: Purchases with an aggregate annual price of \$500 or less.

**B. Conflict of Interest: Post-employment.**

- 1. School board members and elected and appointed superintendents: 6-year bar on lobbying (as of 12/31/22 for paid lobbying).
- 2. School boards have the option of adopting 2-year post-employment bar on paid representation by appointed officials and employees (except collective bargaining) **(appointed superintendents subject to 6-year ban beginning 12/31/22 for paid lobbying)**.
- 3. **Beginning 12/31/22**, no school board member or superintendent (elected or appointed) may be paid to lobby the federal government, the legislature, any state government body or agency, or any political subdivision of this state, during his or her term of office.

**C. Voting conflicts:**

- 1. School board members may not vote on, or attempt to influence the vote on, any matter that will “inure to the benefit” of themselves, their parent, child, spouse, sibling, their spouse’s parent, their child’s spouse or any organization that retains the school board member.
- 2. Superintendent may not attempt to influence a decision on any matter that will “inure to the benefit” of themselves, their parent, child, spouse, sibling, their spouse’s parent, or their child’s spouse.
- 3. Voting conflict must be disclosed in a written memorandum.

## Conflicts of Interest and Voting Conflicts

**DISCLAIMER:** This is an extremely pared down, simplified overview of the laws governing standards of ethical (and legal) behavior for governmental officials and employees. There are additional standards, provisions, and certain exceptions. For a more thorough explanation, see the statutory language or consult with your School Board or School District attorney. Additional resources are listed at the end of this segment.

### **Standards of conduct for public officers, employees of agencies, and local government attorneys**

#### **[Section 112.313, Florida Statutes](#)**

Prohibited activity includes:

- **Solicitation or acceptance of gifts:** Public officials, employees, local government attorney, or candidate for nomination or election cannot solicit or accept anything of value based on an understanding that their vote, judgment, or official action will be influenced.
- **Doing business with one's agency:** Public officers and procurement employees cannot purchase, rent, or lease goods or services for their agency from a business where they, their spouse, or child has an ownership or management role. This extends to situations where the officer, employee, or designated family member has a material interest in the business.
- **Unauthorized compensation:** Public officers, agency employees, or local government attorney or his or her spouse or minor child cannot accept anything if the individual knows or reasonably should know, that it was given to influence a vote or other official action.
- **Misuse of public position:** Public officers, agency employees, or local government attorneys cannot use their position or resources to obtain special privileges or benefits for themselves or others.
- **Conflicting employment or contractual relationships:** Public officers or agency employees cannot maintain any employment or contractual relationship with any business entity or any agency which is subject to the regulation of, or is doing business with, an agency of which he or she is an officer or employee. Additionally, public officers or employees of an agency cannot hold any employment or contractual relationship that will create a continuing or frequently recurring conflict between his or her private interests and the performance of his or her public duties or that would impede the full and faithful discharge of his or her public duties.



## **Voting requirement at meetings of governmental bodies**

### **[Section 286.012, Florida Statutes](#)**

Elected officials are required to vote on all propositions put before them unless there is a conflict of interest.

## **Voting Conflicts**

### **[Section 112.3143, Florida Statutes](#)**

No local public official may vote in an official capacity on any matter which would inure to the official's special private gain or loss, or to the special private gain or loss of the official's relative. "Relative" means any father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister, father-in-law, mother-in-law, son-in-law, or daughter-in-law.

"Special private gain or loss" means an economic benefit or harm that would inure to the officer, his or her relative, business associate, or principal, unless the measure affects a class that includes the officer, his or her relative, business associate, or principal, in which case, at least the following factors must be considered when determining whether a special private gain or loss exists:

1. The size of the class affected by the vote.
2. The nature of the interests involved.
3. The degree to which the interests of all members of the class are affected by the vote.
4. The degree to which the officer, his or her relative, business associate, or principal receives a greater benefit or harm when compared to other members of the class.

If a conflict exists, the official must abstain from voting and file a notice of voting conflict.

## **Form 8B – Memorandum of Voting Conflict for County, Municipal, and other Local Public Officers**

### **[Form 8B](#)**

The official must publicly disclose the nature of the conflict prior to the vote being taken to the assembly and file Form 8B within fifteen days of the vote being taken with the individual responsible for recording the minutes of the meeting. The form must be incorporated into the minutes of the meeting.

## **Nepotism**

**[Section 112.3135, Florida Statutes](#)** - Restriction on employment of relatives.

**[Section 1012.23, Florida Statutes](#)** - Provisions on hiring relatives specific to school districts.

## Qualified Blind Trusts

[Section 112.31425, Florida Statutes](#) - A public official who creates a qualified blind trust and does not control the interests of the trust will not be deemed to have a conflict of interest; however, the official cannot attempt to exercise any authority over the trust or request information regarding the holdings of the trust.

### **Nine Things to Know about Conflict of Interest, Post-Public Service Restrictions, and Related Matters**

1. Abstaining from a vote and fully complying with the voting conflicts law of [s. 112.3143, F.S.](#), will not prevent, cure, or negate a conflict under [s. 112.313\(3\) or \(7\), F.S.](#)
2. A public officer purchases, rents, or leases realty, goods, or services for his public agency when he does so individually or when a collegial public body of which he is a member does so.
3. One acts in a private capacity to rent, lease, or sell realty, goods, or services to his public agency (or to any agency of his political subdivision if he is a local public officer or employee) when he does so individually or when he is an officer, director, proprietor, or holder of a material interest in a business that does so.
4. Paid and unpaid connections can constitute a contractual relationship; as can ownership of small amounts of stock (or stock options) in large companies.
5. Generally, neither a public officer nor a member of his firm can represent a client in a matter involving his own public board or agency.
6. The competitive bidding exemption to certain conflicts requires true sealed competitive bidding to the lowest or best bidder; requests for proposals, invitations to negotiate, and similar procurement mechanism do not entitle one to the protections of the exemption.
7. State ethics laws are not all that public officers, employees, and attorneys should review in order to steer clear of conflicts and violations. Other Florida Statutes (civil and criminal), Federal laws, rules of various agencies, and local ordinances and provisions also should be examined.
8. The meaning of “representation” within the context of post-public-service restrictions and other restrictions is extremely broad; it prohibits almost all contact with an agency on behalf of one’s client, company, or employer. The 6-year bar imposed by Amendment 12 applies only to paid lobbying, as does the ban on lobbying other federal, state, and local governments during an official’s term.
9. Local government attorneys, especially those who are independent contractors, should read [s. 112.313\(6\), F.S.](#), very carefully, and tailor their contracts with government accordingly.

## Ten Things to Know about Voting Conflicts

1. If your board votes to do business with you – or an entity with which you’re employed even if you abstain, you will still be in violation of the conflict laws.
2. If your board votes to hire, appoint, or promote your relative, even if you abstain, you still will be violating the anti-nepotism law.
3. Voting conflicts arise when a measure will bring an officer or other specified person or entity “special private gain or loss.” This means *economic* benefit or harm.
4. State and local officers are prohibited from voting on measures resulting in “special private gain or loss” to themselves.
5. Local officers are also prohibited from voting on measures resulting in “special private gain or loss” to their principals, relatives, or business associates.
6. State officers are not prohibited from voting on measures resulting in “special private gain or loss” to principals, relatives, or business associates, but must disclose their interests in such votes.
7. Considerations for “special private gain or loss” include (1) the size of the class; (2) whether the gain/loss is remote or speculative; and (3) whether the vote is preliminary or procedural.
8. All state officers facing a voting conflict affecting them personally must: (1) abstain; and (2) disclose the conflict by filing a [Form 8A](#) within 15 days of the vote.
9. All local officers facing a voting conflict affecting them personally must: (1) abstain; (2) publicly disclose the conflict to their agency prior to the vote; and (3) file a [Form 8B](#) within 15 days of the vote.
10. Additional rules apply for appointed state and local officers who wish to participate in matters which could affect themselves, their principals, employers, relatives, or business associates.

## **Ethical Provisions for Superintendents/School Boards/Personnel**

**General Comments** – The Florida Legislature has made several changes relating to ethics over the last few years that directly impact school board members, superintendents, and other educational personnel. The Legislature has also enhanced oversight and reporting requirements. The pertinent provisions are summarized below.

### **A. Employment of Relatives and Advisory Opinion from the Commission on Ethics**

Nepotism provisions have been expanded to include superintendents. The new provision (2018) provides that neither the school superintendent nor school board member may appoint or employ a relative, as defined in [s. 112.3135, F.S.](#), to work under the direct supervision of that board member or school superintendent. In addition, language was added to provide that the limitations do not apply to employees appointed or employed before the election or appointment of a school board member or district school superintendent. Finally, the Commission on Ethics is required to investigate any alleged violations. ([s. 1012.23, F.S.](#))

A relative is defined as: an individual who is related to the public official as “father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, first cousin, nephew, niece, husband, wife, father-in-law, mother-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, stepfather, stepmother, stepson, stepdaughter, stepbrother, stepsister, half-brother, or half-sister.” ([s. 112.3135\(1\)\(d\), F.S.](#))

An advisory opinion was requested from the Commission on Ethics regarding the implementation of these new provisions ([CEO 19-12](#)). The Commission found that the new language applies to school superintendents only in situations where they appoint or employ a relative (as defined above) to work under their direct supervision, not in situations where they make recommendations to the district school board for the board to appoint or employ their relative. “So long as a person other than the superintendent will be the direct supervisor of the relative, the statute will not be triggered.”

In addition, the superintendent will not trigger the statute if he or she recommends the employment of a relative of a district school board member. Also, the provision will not be triggered if a school superintendent proposes a salary increase or bonus for a teacher or school employee who happens to be a relative. The language is strictly interpreted and only applies to appointment or employment.

Finally, regarding the “grandfather provision,” because of the high likelihood that no particular superintendent will be faced with the potential “grandfathering” situation, the Commission declined to opine on this point.

### **B. Lobbying Restrictions**

**In the same 2018 law**, lobbying limitations were expanded to include appointed superintendents in the list of officials that may not personally represent another person or entity for compensation before the government body or agency of which the person was an officer for a 2-year period after vacating that office. ([s. 112.313, F.S.](#))

However, the Florida Constitution was amended later in 2018 to prohibit superintendents and school board members, among others, from lobbying their former district or board for compensation

on issues of policy, appropriations, or procurement for a period of **six years** after vacation of their public position and from lobbying other governmental entities for compensation during their term in office. **These constitutional provisions went into effect two years ago on December 31, 2022.**

### **C. School Board Members**

**Travel Expenses** – Each member of a school board is allowed reimbursement of travel expenses provided that any travel outside the district that exceeds \$500 requires prior approval by the school board to confirm that such travel is for official business of the district and complies with State Board of Education rules (please note that Rule 6A-1.056, F.A.C., has not been updated by the State Board since 1974). Any request for travel outside the state must include an itemized list detailing all anticipated travel expenses, including, but not limited to, the anticipated costs of all means of travel, lodging, and subsistence. Immediately preceding a request, the public must have an opportunity to speak on the specific travel agenda item. ([s. 1001.39, F.S.](#))

**Compensation** - School board member salaries must be the lesser of the statutory annually calculated salary or the district’s beginning salary for teachers who hold baccalaureate degrees. ([s. 1001.395, F.S.](#))

### **D. Ethical Conduct Provisions for Superintendents and School Board Members**

Also in 2018, standards of ethical conduct were expanded to include all administrative personnel and school officers. The definition of “school officer” includes superintendents and school board members ([s. 1012.01, F.S.](#)).

Then, in 2021, the law was amended to require school boards to adopt policies establishing standards of ethical conduct for **all** district employees and school officers (school board members and superintendents). Education support professionals were added to the list of employees subject to these requirements. The policies must require all such personnel and officers to complete training on the standards. They must also establish the duty to report and the procedures for reporting alleged misconduct by other district personnel and school officers which affects the health, safety, or welfare of a student. This specifically includes misconduct that involves engaging in or soliciting sexual, romantic, or lewd conduct with a student. The policies must require the district school superintendent to report to law enforcement misconduct by any employee that would result in disqualification from educator certification or employment as provided in [s. 1012.315, F.S.](#); and include an explanation of the liability protections provided under ss. [39.203](#) and [768.095](#), F.S.

A district school board, or any of its employees, may not enter into a confidentiality agreement regarding terminated or dismissed personnel or school officers who resign in lieu of termination, based on misconduct that affects the health, safety, or welfare of a student, and may not provide personnel or school officers with employment references or discuss the employee’s or officer’s performance with prospective employers in another educational setting, without disclosing the employee’s or officer’s misconduct. Any part of an agreement or contract that has the purpose or effect of concealing misconduct by district personnel or school officers which affects the health, safety, or welfare of a student is void, is contrary to public policy, and may not be enforced. ([s. 1001.42, F.S.](#))

## **E. Parental Rights – Responsibilities of School Boards and Superintendents**

In 2021, the Legislature enacted HB 241, the Parents’ Bill of Rights. [Chapter 1014, F.S.](#) It provides that “important information relating to a minor child should not be withheld, either inadvertently or purposefully, from his or her parent.” ([s. 1014.02, F.S.](#)) School boards, as well as other government agencies, may not infringe upon the fundamental rights of parents unless it is “reasonable and necessary to achieve a compelling state interest and that such action is narrowly tailored and is not otherwise served by a less restrictive means.” ([s. 1014.03, F.S.](#)) These rights include the right “to direct the education and care of [the parent’s] minor children.” ([s. 1014.04\(1\)\(a\), F.S.](#)) Finally, school boards must adopt a policy to promote parental involvement in the schools, including a process to object to instructional materials, opt-out of sex education, and other rights previously enacted in the Education Code ([Chapters 1000-1013, F.S.](#)). ([s. 1014.05, F.S.](#))

Further, in 2022, the Legislature enacted HB 1557, the Parental Rights in Education Bill. This bill amended the Powers and Duties of District School Boards. ([s. 1001.42, F.S.](#)) It requires school boards to adopt procedures for notifying parents “if there is a change in the student’s services or monitoring related to the student’s mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being and the school’s ability to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for the student.” ([s. 1001.42\(8\)\(c\)1., F.S.](#)) District procedures can only permit withholding information from a parent “if a reasonably prudent person would believe that disclosure would result in abuse, abandonment, or neglect.” ([s. 1001.42\(8\)\(c\)2., F.S.](#))

Then, in a separate bill, the Legislature added to the Superintendent’s Duties and Responsibilities statute. In the subsection about keeping and filing records and reports, the law now adds that “Such records and reports shall include any determination to withhold from a parent information regarding the provision of any services to support the mental, physical, or emotional well-being of the parent’s minor child. Any such determination must be based solely on child-specific information personally known to the school personnel and documented and approved by the school principal or his or her designee. Such determination must be annually reviewed and redetermined.” ([s. 1001.51\(12\)\(a\), F.S.](#))

## **F. Offenses against Students by Authority Figures**

In 2018, legislation was enacted to clarify offenses against students by authority figures. An authority figure shall not solicit or engage in sexual conduct, a relationship of a romantic nature, or lewd conduct with a student. A person who violates this section commits a felony of the second degree.

“Authority figure” is now defined as a person 19 years of age or older, employed, volunteering for, or under contract with a school, including school resource officers. “School” is defined as provided in [s. 1003.01, F.S.](#), including a private school, early learning programs, and the Florida Virtual School. The term does not include a facility dedicated exclusively to the education of adults. “Student” is a person who is enrolled at a school. ([s. 800.101, F.S.](#))

**Additional Reporting Requirements** - Misconduct of engaging or soliciting sexual, romantic, or lewd conduct with students is added to the list of activities that create a duty for all district personnel to report. The school superintendent is also required to report misconduct by any district employee to law enforcement.

In 2022, the Legislature expanded upon this requirement. Section 800.101, Florida Statutes, now provides that anyone who is required to report sexual misconduct by an authority figure against a student but knowingly or willfully fails to do so is guilty of a first-degree misdemeanor. It is also a first-degree misdemeanor to submit a false, inaccurate, or incomplete report, or to threaten or coerce someone to alter their report or testimony.

**Policy Adoption Requirements** - A school board official, whether appointed or elected, forfeits his or her salary for one (1) year if the school board knowingly fails to adopt policies that require the district school superintendent to report misconduct as stated above. In addition, any school superintendent who knowingly fails to report misconduct to the law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction over the conduct pursuant to district school board policy adopted above forfeits his or her salary for one (1) year following the date of such act or failure to act. (ss. [1001.42](#) and [1001.51](#), F.S.)

**School Superintendent** - The district school superintendent is required to notify the parent of a student who was subjected to or affected by misconduct identified above within 30 days after the date on which the school district learns of the misconduct. The notification must inform the parent of the alleged misconduct, including which allegations have been substantiated if any; whether the district reported the misconduct to DOE if required; the sanctions imposed against the employee, if any; and the support the school district will make available to the student in response to the misconduct.

An employment history check is required for every person employed in any position that requires direct contact with students. ([s. 1012.27, F.S.](#))

**Personnel Files** - An employee's personnel file must clearly indicate if the resignation or termination of an employee occurred before an investigation of alleged misconduct of a student is concluded. With the amendments enacted in 2021, this will be accomplished through an affidavit of separation from employment, and all school districts must now review any such affidavits on file with prior employers. The employee personnel file exemption does not absolve the school district of its duty to provide any legally sufficient complaint to the Department of Education within 30 days after the date on which the subject matter of the complaint comes to the attention of the school district regardless of the status of the complaint. ([s. 1012.31, F.S.](#))

**Disqualification from Employment** - A person is ineligible for educator certification or employment in any position that requires direct contact with students if the person has been convicted of a felony offense prohibited under [s. 800.101, F.S.](#), relating to offense against students by authority figures. ([s. 1012.315, F.S.](#))

**Educator Certification Requirements – Denial of Certificate** - The Department of Education may deny an applicant a certificate if the department possesses satisfactory evidence that the applicant has committed an act, or that a situation exists, for which the Education Practices Commission would be authorized to discipline a certified educator (rather than revoke a teaching certificate). ([s. 1012.56, F.S.](#))

**Education Practices Commission** - The commission may suspend or revoke a certificate, in addition to other provisions, if the person has engaged in or solicited sexual, romantic, or lewd conduct with a student or minor.



The situations for which the commission may revoke or suspend an educator certificate or other professional license held in Florida or in any other state are expanded. One of these provisions includes the violation of test security as provided in [s. 1008.24, F.S.](#) ([s. 1012.795, F.S.](#))

**Complaints against Teachers and Administrators** - School districts must file all complaints with the Department of Education within 30 days regardless of whether the subject of the complaint is still an employee of the school district.

A school district is required to immediately notify the Department of Education if the subject of a legally sufficient complaint of misconduct affecting the health, safety, or welfare of a student resigns or is terminated before the conclusion of the school district's investigation. Upon receipt of the notification, the department must place an alert on the person's certification file indicating that he or she resigned or was terminated before an investigation involving allegations of misconduct affecting the health, safety, or welfare of a student was concluded. In such circumstances, the database may not include specific information relating to the alleged misconduct until the information is no longer subject to confidentiality requirements. ([s. 1012.796, F.S.](#))

As mentioned above, during the 2021 session, the Legislature enacted numerous new requirements for districts and the Department with respect to allegations of wrongdoing by staff members. All employees who commit acts that harm students will be kept in a database, which all districts must review before hiring someone. Employees who resign before an investigation is completed or before they can be terminated will also be in the database, and no one on that list can be hired by a school. A school board member can forfeit a year of salary if the board does not adopt a policy requiring a complete investigation of all reports of alleged misconduct by any school board employee if the misconduct affects the health, safety, or welfare of a student, even if the employee resigns before the investigation can be concluded. At the conclusion of the investigation, the Superintendent must notify the Department of the result and whether the misconduct warranted termination, even if the employee has already resigned or was terminated prior to the conclusion. Failure to complete such an investigation can result in the Superintendent forfeiting a year of salary.

### **G. School Safety – School Superintendent**

Each school board must adopt policies to ensure the accurate and timely reporting of incidents related to school safety and discipline. The district school superintendent is responsible for school environmental safety incident reporting (SESIR). A superintendent who fails to comply with this requirement is subject to penalties specified in law, including, but not limited to [s. 1001.42\(13\)\(b\), F.S.](#) – withholding of superintendent's salary by board for not transmitting reports or [s. 1001.51\(12\)\(b\), F.S.](#) – withholding of superintendent's salary for not transmitting required reports.

### **H. Internal Auditor**

School boards are authorized to hire an internal auditor ([s. 1001.41\(12\)\(d\), F.S.](#)). However, a school board *must* employ an internal auditor in the case of a school district receiving annual federal, state, and local funds in excess of \$500 million. Since this requirement of requiring the employment of an internal auditor by certain schools was enacted, the issue is whether a school board may outsource this function or is required to employ an internal auditor. The Florida Department of Education has recently concluded that a district may satisfy the requirement to “employ an internal auditor” by hiring a private CPA firm to perform internal audit services. (See [Auditor General Report No. 2020-201, Internal Audit Function](#) (Lee County School Board).)



The scope of the internal auditor must not be restricted and must include every functional and program area in the school system.

- The internal auditor shall perform ongoing financial verification of the financial records of the school district, a comprehensive risk assessment of all areas of the school system every 5 years, and other audits and reviews as the district school board directs for determining:
  - The adequacy of internal controls designed to prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse as defined in [s. 11.45\(1\), F.S.](#)
  - Compliance with applicable laws, rules, contracts, grant agreements, district school board-approved policies, and best practices.
  - The efficiency of operations.
  - The reliability of financial records and reports.
  - The safeguarding of assets.
  - Financial solvency.
  - Projected revenues and expenditures.
  - The rate of change in the general fund balance.
- The internal auditor shall prepare audit reports of his or her findings and report directly to the district school board or its designee.

Any person responsible for furnishing or producing any book, record, paper, document, data, or sufficient information necessary to conduct a proper audit or examination which the internal auditor is by law authorized to perform is subject to the provisions of [s. 11.47\(3\) and \(4\), F.S.](#)

#### **I. Auditor General**

**Action required within 45 days** - In addition to other provisions, the Auditor General is now required to contact each school board with the findings and recommendations contained within the Auditor General's previous operational audit report. The school board must provide information on evidence of initiation of corrective action within 45 days after the date it is requested by the Auditor General and evidence of completion of corrective action within 180 days after the date it is requested by the Auditor General. If the school board fails to comply within the required timeframe, the Auditor General must notify the Legislative Auditing Committee. ([s. 11.45, F.S.](#))

#### **J. Department of Education - Inspector General**

**Allegations of Fraud or Abuse** - The Inspector General is required to investigate allegations or reports of possible fraud or abuse against a district school board made by any Cabinet member; Senate President, House Speaker, Chair of any committee with jurisdiction over education; or a member of the board for which an investigation is sought. ([s. 1001.20, F.S.](#))

#### **K. Legislative Auditing Committee - Abuse, Fraud, and Waste**

The authority of the Legislative Auditing Committee has been expanded to allow the Governor or designee or the Commissioner of Education or designee to notify the committee of the failure of a local governmental entity including a district school board, charter school, or charter technical career center to comply with the applicable provisions relating to audits by the Auditor General, annual financial reporting requirements, and actions taken during financial emergencies. ([s. 11.40, F.S.](#))

The definition section ([s. 11.45, F.S.](#)) relating to the Auditor General was amended and several definitions added including definitions for:

- “Abuse” as behavior that is deficient or improper when compared with behavior that a prudent person would consider a reasonable and necessary operational practice given the facts and circumstances. The term includes the misuse of authority or position for personal gain.
- “Fraud” as obtaining something of value through willful misrepresentation, including, but not limited to, intentional misstatements or intentional omissions of amounts or disclosures in financial statements to deceive users of financial statements, theft of an entity’s assets, bribery, or the use of one’s position for personal enrichment through the deliberate misuse or misapplication of an organization’s resources.
- “Waste” as the act of using or expending resources unreasonably, carelessly, extravagantly, or for no useful purpose.

School board duties were amended to require that the internal auditor determine the adequacy of internal controls designed to prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse. The definition of these terms is tied back to the definitions listed above. ([s. 1001.42, F.S.](#))

The requirements related to uniform records and accounts were amended ([s. 1010.01, F.S.](#)), to add that each school district, college, and state university must establish and maintain internal controls designed to also:

- Prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse as defined in [s. 11.45\(1\), F.S.](#)
- Promote and encourage compliance with applicable laws, rules, contracts, grant agreements, and best practices.
- Support economical and efficient operations.
- Ensure reliability of financial records and reports.
- Safeguard assets.

## **L. Commission on Ethics**

**Unpaid Fines** - District school boards are now entities from which unpaid fines imposed by the Commission on Ethics may be collected. ([s. 112.31455, F.S.](#))

**Financial Disclosure** – Beginning January 1, 2023, all disclosures filed with the commission are to be filed electronically through the electronic filing system maintained by the Commission. Anyone who is required to file a financial disclosure form should first check the [Commission’s website](#) for the most up-to-date information and forms. There are several good tips and links to more information on the front page, such as how to file for a public records redaction/exemption.

Each unit of government must provide an email address to any of its officers, members, or employees who must file a financial disclosure or statement of financial interests and then provide such email address to the commission by February 1 of each year. A person required to file a disclosure or statement must inform the commission immediately of any change in an email address. ([s. 112.31446, F.S.](#), and various other sections of [Ch. 112, Part III, F.S.](#)).

# Florida Commission on Ethics

## A. Composition

1. Eight (8) Member Commission ([www.ethics.state.fl.us](http://www.ethics.state.fl.us))
2. Appointments by Governor (5), Senate President (1), and Speaker of the House (2) – balanced politically ([Members](#))
3. Responsible for Administering
  - a. Article II, Section 8, Florida Constitution (the Sunshine Amendment)
  - b. Part II, Chapter 112, Florida Statutes (the Code of Ethics)

## B. Guidance

1. Ethics Hotline: (850) 488-7864 (ask for the “Attorney of the Day” – simple facts)
2. Guidance Letters (“Informal opinions” – complicated facts, based on precedent in opinions, written by legal staff of the Commission on Ethics)
3. [Formal Opinions](#) (“Research” tab on the home page – guidance issued by majority vote of the Commission on Ethics, binding advice on the requestor)
4. [Final and Recommended Orders](#) (search from the “Research” tab)
5. [Rules](#) (search from the “Research” tab from home page)

## C. Complaints

1. [Important Instructions for Completing a Complaint Form](#)
2. Complaints may be filed by anyone
3. Complaints **must** use official Commission complaint form (CE Form 50)
4. All complaints are sworn
5. Complaints are confidential until a certain stage
6. Commission **cannot** initiate its own complaints

The image shows the official complaint form for the Florida Commission on Ethics. At the top left is the commission's logo, a circular seal with a sun and palm trees. To the right of the logo, the text reads: "Florida Commission on Ethics", "P. O. Drawer 15709, Tallahassee, Florida 32317-5709", and the motto "A Public Office is a Public Trust". Below this is the word "COMPLAINT" in large, bold, capital letters.

The form is divided into several sections:

- 1. PERSON BRINGING COMPLAINT:** This section contains fields for Name, Telephone Number, Address, City, County, State, and Zip Code.
- 2. PERSON AGAINST WHOM COMPLAINT IS BROUGHT:** This section includes a note: "Use a separate complaint form for each person you wish to complain against." It has fields for Name, Telephone Number, Address, City, County, and Zip Code, and a line for "Title of office or position held or sought".
- 3. STATEMENT OF FACTS:** This section contains a paragraph of instructions: "Please provide a full explanation of your complaint, describing the facts and the actions of the person named above and why you believe he or she violated the law. Include relevant dates and the names and addresses of persons whom you believe may be witnesses. Please do not submit more than 15 pages, including this form. Please do not submit video or audio tapes, CDs, DVDs, flash drives or other electronic media; such material will not be considered part of the complaint and will be returned."
- 4. OATH:** This section includes a "Sworn to (or affirmed) and subscribed before me by means of  physical presence or  online notarization, this" statement. It has fields for "STATE OF:", "COUNTY OF:", "day of:", and "20 \_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_ (name of person making statement)".

At the bottom of the form, there are lines for the "SIGNATURE OF COMPLAINANT" and the "(Signature of Notary Public)". Below these are instructions: "(Print, Type, or Stamp Commissioned Name of Notary Public)", "Personally Known \_\_\_\_ OR Produced Identification \_\_\_\_", and "Type of Identification Produced: \_\_\_\_\_".

At the very bottom left, in small print, it says: "CE FORM 50—Effective January 9, 2017. Incorporated by reference in Rule 34-7.010(1)(b), F.A.C."

## **Ethics in Government – Florida Constitutional Provisions Regarding Lobbying Restrictions and Abuse of Office**

The Florida Constitution Revision Commission (CRC) placed Amendment 12 on the ballot for the 2018 General Election. The amendment relates to lobbying and abuse of office by public officers and passed by almost 80 percent. These provisions directly impact superintendents and school board members.

### **Full Text of New Constitutional Provision**

Effective December 31, 2022, Art. II, s. 8 reads:

**SECTION 8. Ethics in government.**—A public office is a public trust. The people shall have the right to secure and sustain that trust against abuse. To assure this right:

(a) All elected constitutional officers and candidates for such offices and, as may be determined by law, other public officers, candidates, and employees shall file full and public disclosure of their financial interests.

(b) All elected public officers and candidates for such offices shall file full and public disclosure of their campaign finances.

(c) Any public officer or employee who breaches the public trust for private gain and any person or entity inducing such breach shall be liable to the state for all financial benefits obtained by such actions. The manner of recovery and additional damages may be provided by law.

(d) Any public officer or employee who is convicted of a felony involving a breach of public trust shall be subject to forfeiture of rights and privileges under a public retirement system or pension plan in such manner as may be provided by law.

(e) No member of the legislature or statewide elected officer shall personally represent another person or entity for compensation before the government body or agency of which the individual was an officer or member for a period of two years following vacation of office. No member of the legislature shall personally represent another person or entity for compensation during term of office before any state agency other than judicial tribunals. Similar restrictions on other public officers and employees may be established by law.

**(f)(1) For purposes of this subsection, the term “public officer” means a statewide elected officer, a member of the legislature, a county commissioner, a county officer pursuant to Article VIII or county charter, a school board member, a superintendent of schools, an elected municipal officer, an elected special district officer in a special district with ad valorem taxing authority, or a person serving as a secretary, an executive director, or other agency head of a department of the executive branch of state government.**

(2) A public officer shall not lobby for compensation on issues of policy, appropriations, or procurement before the federal government, the legislature, any state government body or agency, or any political subdivision of this state, during his or her term of office.

(3) A public officer shall not lobby for compensation on issues of policy, appropriations, or procurement for a period of six years after vacation of public position, as follows:

a. A statewide elected officer or member of the legislature shall not lobby the legislature or any state government body or agency.

b. A person serving as a secretary, an executive director, or other agency head of a department of the executive branch of state government shall not lobby the legislature, the governor, the

executive office of the governor, members of the cabinet, a department that is headed by a member of the cabinet, or his or her former department.

c. A county commissioner, a county officer pursuant to Article VIII or county charter, a school board member, a superintendent of schools, an elected municipal officer, or an elected special district officer in a special district with ad valorem taxing authority shall not lobby his or her former agency or governing body.

(4) This subsection shall not be construed to prohibit a public officer from carrying out the duties of his or her public office.

(5) The legislature may enact legislation to implement this subsection, including, but not limited to, defining terms and providing penalties for violations. Any such law shall not contain provisions on any other subject.

(g) There shall be an independent commission to conduct investigations and make public reports on all complaints concerning breach of public trust by public officers or employees not within the jurisdiction of the judicial qualifications commission.

**(h)(1) A code of ethics for all state employees and nonjudicial officers prohibiting conflict between public duty and private interests shall be prescribed by law.**

**(2) A public officer or public employee shall not abuse his or her public position in order to obtain a disproportionate benefit for himself or herself; his or her spouse, children, or employer; or for any business with which he or she contracts; in which he or she is an officer, a partner, a director, or a proprietor; or in which he or she owns an interest. The Florida Commission on Ethics shall, by rule in accordance with statutory procedures governing administrative rulemaking, define the term “disproportionate benefit” and prescribe the requisite intent for finding a violation of this prohibition for purposes of enforcing this paragraph. Appropriate penalties shall be prescribed by law.**

(i) This section shall not be construed to limit disclosures and prohibitions which may be established by law to preserve the public trust and avoid conflicts between public duties and private interests.

(j) Schedule—On the effective date of this amendment and until changed by law:

(1) Full and public disclosure of financial interests shall mean filing with the custodian of state records by July 1 of each year a sworn statement showing net worth and identifying each asset and liability in excess of \$1,000 and its value together with one of the following:

a. A copy of the person’s most recent federal income tax return; or

b. A sworn statement which identifies each separate source and amount of income which exceeds \$1,000. The forms for such source disclosure and the rules under which they are to be filed shall be prescribed by the independent commission established in subsection (g), and such rules shall include disclosure of secondary sources of income.

(2) Persons holding statewide elective offices shall also file disclosure of their financial interests pursuant to paragraph (1).

(3) The independent commission provided for in subsection (g) shall mean the Florida Commission on Ethics.

## **Lobbying Restrictions**

The provision amended [Article II, Section 8](#) relating to Ethics in Government. See below for a full text copy of Article II, Section 8. “Public officer” is defined to include a school board member and superintendent of schools, among other state and local public officers. A public officer is prohibited from lobbying for compensation on issues of policy, appropriations, or procurement before the federal government, the legislature, any state government body or agency, or any

political subdivision of Florida, during his or term of office. This does not prohibit a public officer from carrying out the duties of his or her public office. In addition, a school board member and a superintendent are prohibited from lobbying his or her former agency or governing body for compensation for six years after vacation of his or public position. **These provisions took effect December 31, 2022.**

### **Abuse of Public Position – Disproportionate Benefit**

The constitution currently provides that a code of ethics for all state employees and nonjudicial officers prohibiting conflict between public duty and private interest must be prescribed by law. The amendment added the following language and became effective **September 30, 2019**:

A public officer or public employee shall not abuse his or her public position in order to obtain a disproportionate benefit for himself or herself; his or her spouse, children, or employer; or for any business with which he or she contracts; in which he or she is an officer, a partner, a director, or a proprietor; or in which he or she owns an interest. The Florida Commission on Ethics shall, by rule in accordance with statutory procedures governing administrative rulemaking, define the term “disproportionate benefit” and prescribe the requisite intent for finding a violation of this prohibition for purposes of enforcing this paragraph. Appropriate penalties shall be prescribed by law.

The amendment required the Florida Commission on Ethics to develop a rule defining the term “disproportionate benefit” and prescribing the requisite intent for finding a violation of the prohibition against abuse by public position.

The Commission on Ethics approved language that defines “disproportionate benefit” at its public meeting on July 26, 2019. The adopted rule remains the same as of August 13, 2024, and is reproduced below.

#### **34-18.001 Scope and Applicability of Chapter.**

(1) The purpose of this chapter is to provide notice and guidance to public officers or public employees, as well as to the general public, regarding the definition of the term “disproportionate benefit,” as that term is used in Article II, Section 8(h)(2) of the Florida Constitution, as well as the requisite intent for finding a violation of the prohibition contained in Article II, Section 8(h)(2) of the Florida Constitution.

#### **(2) Definitions**

(a) For the purpose of Article II, Section 8(h)(2) of the Florida Constitution, “disproportionate benefit” means a benefit, privilege, exemption or result arising from an act or omission by a public officer or public employee inconsistent with the proper performance of his or her public duties.

(3) The Commission will consider the following in determining whether a benefit, privilege, exemption, or result constitutes a “disproportionate benefit”:

(a) The number of persons, besides the public officer or public employee, his or her spouse, children, employer, or business with which he or she contracts, in which he or she

is an officer, a partner, a director, or a proprietor, or in which he or she owns an interest, who will experience the benefit, privilege, exemption, or result;

(b) The nature of the interests involved;

(c) The degree to which the interests of all those who will experience the benefit, privilege, exemption, or result are affected;

(d) The degree to which the public officer or public employee, his or her spouse, children, employer, or business with which he or she contracts, in which he or she is an officer, a partner, a director, or a proprietor, or in which he or she owns an interest, receives a greater or more advantageous benefit, privilege, exemption, or result when compared to others who will receive a benefit, privilege, exemption, or result;

(e) The degree to which there is uncertainty at the time of the abuse of public position as to whether there would be any benefit, privilege, exemption, or result, and, if so, the nature or degree of the benefit, privilege, exemption, or result must also be considered; and

(f) The degree to which the benefit, privilege, exemption, or result is not available to similarly situated persons. As used in this chapter, “similarly situated persons” means those with a commonality or like characteristic to the public officer or public employee that is unrelated to the holding of public office or public employment, or a commonality or like characteristic to the public officer’s or public employee’s spouse, children, or employer, or to any business with which the public officer or public employee contracts, serves as an officer, partner, director, or proprietor, or in which he or she owns an interest.

(4) The requisite intent for finding a violation of the prohibition in Article II, Section 8(h)(2) of the Florida Constitution is that the public officer or public employee acted, or refrained from acting, with a wrongful intent for the purpose of obtaining any benefit, privilege, exemption, or result from the act or omission which is inconsistent with the proper performance of his or her public duties.

*Rulemaking Authority Article II, Section 8(h)(2), Florida Constitution, s. 112.322(9), F.S., Law Implemented Article II, Section 8(h)(2), Florida Constitution, s. 112.322(9), FS. History—New 9-30-19.*

The adopted Constitutional amendment also mandates that “appropriate penalties shall be provided by law.” A schedule included in the amendment requires the Legislature to enact penalty legislation “following the adoption of rules” by the Commission.

The Legislature passed HB 7009 during the 2020 General Legislative Session. The bill reenacts [s. 112.317, F.S.](#), effective December 31, 2020, to make the penalty provisions of the section applicable to the amended provisions of Article II, Section 8 of the Florida Constitution that take effect the same day and follow the adoption of Rule 34-18.001, F.A.C., by the Commission on Ethics. This meets the requirement of the Amendment 12 implementation schedule.



## Who Can Answer My Ethics Questions?

Contact the Commission on Ethics at [www.ethics.state.fl.us](http://www.ethics.state.fl.us)

Kerrie Stillman is the Executive Director.

The Commission has 3-4 attorneys designated for ethics questions. Call (850) 488-7864, and ask for the “attorney for the day.” An attorney is assigned daily to respond to ethics issues.

## Government in the Sunshine Manual

### [2024 Sunshine Manual](#)

*The 2024 Government-in-the-Sunshine Manual reflects changes to the statutes and caselaw which occurred prior to October of 2023.*

*A copy of the 2024 Sunshine Manual can be downloaded without charge on the Florida Attorney General’s website at <https://www.myfloridalegal.com/open-government/sunshine-manual>.*



## FERPA Resources from the U.S. Department of Education

1. Online Training Modules and Webinars from the U.S. Department of Education:
  - a. [FERPA 101: For Local Education Agencies](#)
  - b. [FERPA 201: Data Sharing under FERPA](#)
  - c. [Numerous other recorded webinars and training, including cybersecurity and ransomware issues](#)
  
2. Online Short Videos about FERPA from the U.S. Department of Education:
  - a. [School Volunteers and FERPA](#) -- Volunteers are important in helping schools operate efficiently, but it's important to know your role in protecting student information while helping out in your school. This video explains some of a school volunteer's responsibilities to help keep the student information they work with private and secure. The Privacy Technical Assistance Center has also released a corresponding brochure that schools can use to help train their volunteers with their legal responsibilities to protect student data. This brochure can be found [here](#). (3:03)
  - b. [Email and Student Privacy](#) -- Email is an easy way to communicate with students and parents. Prior to sending an email, it's important to evaluate the risk associated with sending student information and recognizing if it is personally identifiable information (PII). This video walks you through best practices on how to email student information. (2:54)
  - c. [How to Use your District's Website to Communicate with Parents about Data Use and Security](#) -- Parents need to feel confident that the education information collected and stored by your district is securely maintained and only used for educational purposes. This video highlights common parent questions and provides best practices that districts can implement to communicate with parents about data privacy. (2:16)
  - d. [The A-B-C's of Student Directory Information](#) -- FERPA allows schools and districts to designate certain basic student information as directory information and share that information without consent if certain additional requirements are met. This video describes why a school would want to use designated student directory information and the types of information that fall into this category. It also explains the process that schools and districts must adhere to when designating directory information. (3:25)
  - e. [Developing a Privacy Policy for Your District](#) -- This video provides an overview and rationale for why districts need to develop a program to protect student data. Also, of note is the companion document linked here which provides the information contained in the video at a more granular level. (2:32)
  - f. [What Parents Need to Know about their Student's Data](#) -- This video, intended for parents, provides guidance and information on what questions they might want to ask

their schools or districts if they have questions about the data the district collects and/or maintains. The video also provides an overview of the types of questions parents should ask and why. (2:33)

- g. [Protecting Student Privacy While Using Online Educational Services](#) -- This Privacy Technical Assistance Center teacher training video is aimed at helping K-12 school officials to better protect student privacy while using online educational services and applications. The video, intended for use during teacher in-service days or professional development meetings, offers a short summary of the issue and provides some examples to help educators identify which online educational services and applications are privacy-friendly and protect student data from improper use and disclosure. (9:31)
- h. [Student Privacy 101](#): -- The U.S. Department of Education is committed to student privacy. We administer the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and we provide technical assistance to help schools and school districts use best practices in their use and management of information about students. This site aims to assist stakeholders in protecting the privacy of students by providing official guidance on FERPA, technical best practices and the answers to Frequently Asked Questions. Responsibility for the Department's student privacy operations lies in the Office of the Chief Privacy Officer. To learn more about FERPA please click on the video to the right. (4:04)

Last revised: 08-13-24 btm

## **Summary of Recent Commission on Ethics Advisory Opinions**

### **CEO 23-7 – Conflict of Interest; Doing Business with One’s Agency; Conflicting Employment or Contractual Relationship**

The first question presented was: “Would a prohibited conflict of interest be created were the School Board to purchase a parcel of land from a Credit Union, where one School Board Member is on the Credit Union's Board of Directors, and several other School Board Members are also Credit Union Members and do business with the Credit Union?” The second question asked was: “Would a prohibited conflict of interest be created for a School Board employee were the School Board to purchase a second parcel of land from the employee?” The Commission found that there would be no conflict of interest in either scenario due to the “sole source” exemption in section 112.313(12)(e), Florida Statutes (“Under the particular circumstances presented, due to the applicability of the "sole source" exemption found in Section 112.313(12)(e), Florida Statutes, a prohibited conflict of interest would not be created under Sections 112.313(3) or 112.313(7)(a), Florida Statutes, were the School Board to purchase property from a credit union where a School Board Member serves on the Credit Union's Board of Directors and several other School Board Members do business and hold accounts with the Credit Union. The "sole source" exemption will also apply were a School Board employee to sell a parcel of real property to the School District. CEO [21-7](#), CEO [20-13](#), CEO [20-1](#), CEO [11-2](#), CEO [10-4](#), CEO [08-4](#), CEO [05-14](#) and CEO [91-31](#) are referenced.”).

### **CEO 23-4 – Conflict of Interest; Doing Business with One’s Agency**

The question presented was whether “certain School District personnel have a prohibited conflict of interest if the Superintendent, on behalf of the School District, purchases an institutional membership with a nonprofit corporation?” Further complicating the issue was the fact that the Superintendent, as well as numerous teachers, principals, and district administrators were on the board of directors of the business entity (not compensated). The opinion reiterates previous opinions in which the Commission found that “the agency of a public officer or public employee is the lowest unit of government to which one’s influence could be said to extend.” Thus, for a teacher or principal, the agency is the school at which they work. However, for a board member, superintendent, or district administrator, the entire school district is the agency. In this particular case, employees whose agency is the school would not be in conflict because the membership was for the entire district. Also, for those at the district level, because the institutional membership only cost \$250, the exception in law when the total amount of the transactions between the business entity and the agency amounts to less than \$500 annually would apply. See sec. 112.313(12)(f), Fla. Stat.

### **CEO 23-1 – Conflict of Interest; Conflicting Employment or Contractual Relationship**

The question was whether a city commissioner would have a conflict with the city if she were to receive grant funds from the city’s property improvement program. The Commission answered the question affirmatively. “The scenario that you present is similar to those addressed in these earlier opinions. In each of them, as here, a member of the governing board of a political subdivision sought to enter into a contractual relationship to receive funding from a department

or unit of local government overseen by his or her agency. Consistent with those opinions, the reasoning of which adopted herein, the City Commissioner's proposed acceptance of the program funds meets the elements of the first part of Section 112.313(7)(a), and, therefore, would present a prohibited conflict of interest.”

### **CEO 21-7 – Conflict of Interest; Gift Prohibitions; Voting Conflict of Interest**

Although the main issues addressed topics that may not affect superintendents or school board members, the Commission found that “uncompensated directors of a nonprofit organization, such as [a charter school], who are not also personally themselves members of the corporation, have no employment or contractual relationship with the organization.” Thus, the prohibition against a public officer having an employment or contractual relationship with any entity subject to the regulation of or doing business with the officer’s agency does not apply. However, any vote involving the charter school may create an appearance of impropriety concerning the official’s objectivity. Thus, the best action would be to abstain from voting on any measures affecting the charter school pursuant to section 112.3143(3)(a), Florida Statutes.

### **CEO 21-6 – Conflict of Interest; Doing Business or Entering a Contractual Relationship with your Agency**

Under the facts presented, a city commissioner can rent city-owned facilities to conduct his or her private business. While section 112.313(7)(a), Florida Statutes, provides that a public officer cannot have a contractual relationship with the agency for which he or she is an officer or employee, section 112.316 provides that the ethical statutes are not intended to prevent a public officer from accepting other employment or pursuing interests which do not interfere with his or her duties as a public officer. Because the monetary impact was less than \$500 per year and the commissioner was just making use of a facility in the same manner and under the same terms as available to any member of the public (i.e., same lease terms, same insurance and indemnity requirements, etc.), there is no conflict of interest.

### **CEO 21-2 – Voting Conflict of Interest; Misuse of Public Position; Abuse of Public Position – Voting on a matter that may affect your own salary or benefits**

Under the circumstances presented, a County Commission member is not prohibited from voting upon a retirement compensation resolution he would be eligible to receive that provides lump-sum payments to all eligible elected public officers and Senior Management Services Class County employees who qualify, as Section 112.313(5), Florida Statutes, modifies the voting conflicts provision of Section 112.3143(3)(a), Florida Statutes. Section 112.313(5), Florida Statutes, permits a public officer to vote on a matter affecting his or her own salary, expenses, or other compensation as a public officer. Further, the Commissioner's participation in the matter would not constitute a misuse of public position under Section 112.313(6), Florida Statutes, or a disproportionate benefit through abuse of public position under Article II, Section 8(g)(2), Florida Constitution.

### **CEO 20-6 – Conflict of Interest -- County Commissioner Owner of Hardware Store Selling Items to County**

A prohibited conflict of interest would be created under Sections 112.313(3) and 112.313(7)(a), Florida Statutes, were a hardware store owned by a county commissioner sought to sell goods to

the county. However, if the county purchases goods from the commissioner's hardware store on a rotating basis from all qualified suppliers in the county, the exemption provided in Section 112.313(12)(a), Florida Statutes, would apply and the transaction(s) would not be prohibited.

### **CEO 19-17 – Gift Acceptance and Disclosure – City Officials and Employees Accepting Things of Value from Various Donors**

A city official or employee who files financial disclosure (a reporting individual) has received a “gift” from the city when they accept complimentary tickets to events sponsored in part by the city and hosted by for-profit or non-profit entities. As the gift involves tickets, the valuation is controlled by Florida Statutes and rules. The city officials and employees may accept the tickets because there is no indication that the tickets are an indirect gift from a lobbyist or from a partner, firm, employer, or principal of a lobbyist who lobbies the city or a vendor of the city. However, where the combined face value of the tickets accepted by a reporting individual exceed \$100, the reporting individual must disclose them accordingly. Further, tickets that are admissions to VIP events or to early performances not otherwise available to the public and given to public officers and employees who file financial disclosure would be considered gifts. Also, where a reporting individual receives complimentary tickets to fundraising events held by non-profit entities that receive funding from the city, the tickets would constitute an indirect gift from the non-profit, which could be accepted provided that the non-profit is not a lobbyist or the partner, firm, employer, or principal of a lobbyist who lobbies the city or a vendor of the city, but the tickets must be disclosed quarterly on a CE Form 9. The value of a ticket to a charitable fundraising event is the face value of the ticket or if no face value was provided the published cost of admission to persons with similar tickets.

### **CEO 19-12 – Appointment or Employment of Relatives of School Superintendents – Effect of Chapter 2018-005, Laws of Florida**

School Superintendents are now prohibited from appointing or employing a “relative” as defined in statute to work under their direct supervision. The Commission found that the statute applies to superintendents only in situations where they appoint or employ a relative to work under their direct supervision, not in situations where they make recommendations to the school board for the board to appoint or employ their relative. Furthermore, to the extent the statute applies to superintendents, it is only when a superintendent appoints or employs a relative to work under his or her direct supervision. As long as a person other than the superintendent will be the direct supervisor of the relative, the statute will not be triggered. The provision will not be triggered if a superintendent proposes a salary increase or bonus for a teacher or employee who happens to be a relative. The language only applies to appointment or employment. Finally, the superintendent does not trigger the statute if he or she recommends for employment a relative of a district school board member.

## Biographies of Speakers

**Brian Moore** has been the General Counsel for the Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) since 2020. In this capacity, Mr. Moore represents public school interests before the Florida Legislature and the Department of Education. He came to FADSS after serving just over 8 years as the Staff Attorney for Alachua County Public Schools. In that role he counseled the Superintendent and district staff on a multitude of legal issues including policy-making, contract review, ESE guidance and representation, human resources and labor management, and all related aspects of running a school district. Moore also served as Chief Attorney for the Florida Legislature, Joint Administrative Procedures Committee (JAPC), for seven years and is well versed in administrative procedures. In his position with JAPC, he worked directly with the Florida Department of Education and the State Board of Education in their rulemaking processes. Mr. Moore earned his law degree from the University of Florida in 1997.

**Amy Envall** serves as Senior Counsel at Sniffen & Spellman, P.A. where she represents school districts and other local government agencies across various areas of law. Previously, she served as the General Counsel for Orange County Public Schools and as the General Counsel for Brevard Public Schools. Prior to that, she served as an attorney and the Ethics Compliance Officer for Orange County Public Schools, as General Counsel for the Clerk of Courts, as an Assistant County Attorney, and as a Trial Court Staff Attorney for the Ninth Judicial Circuit. She also served as the Assistant Dean for Academic Programs and Faculty Development at Barry University School of Law. Ms. Envall received her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education and served as a fourth grade teacher prior to earning her J.D. Ms. Envall is the Vice President for the Florida School Board Attorneys Association. In her spare time, she serves on the Board of Directors for some local non-profit organizations, travels, and is a member of the Osceola Orchestra. She and her husband, a sworn law enforcement officer, are the proud parents of two children, a dog, and two cats.

**David Koperski** is the School Board Attorney for Pinellas County Schools. He represents the School Board in all legal matters and is general counsel to the district, providing legal advice to the School Board, Superintendent, and district administration on all matters affecting the operations of the school system. He has worked as an attorney for Pinellas County Schools since 2005. In addition to general corporate representation, Mr. Koperski has represented both school district administrations and school boards in administrative and judicial settings in various matters involving education law. He has served as an Adjunct Instructor with the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, teaching a course in education law in the Masters of Educational Leadership program. Mr. Koperski earned his law degree from the University of Illinois College of Law in 1994, prior to which he earned his undergraduate degree cum laude from Drake University. Mr. Koperski has been Board Certified by the Florida Bar as a Specialist in Education Law since 2011 and is a Past President and an active member of the Florida School Board Attorneys Association.

**Ellen Odom** serves as General Counsel to the Escambia County School Board. Ellen graduated from the Cumberland School of Law in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1995. She worked as an assistant public defender, trial court staff attorney, and previously served as General Counsel to the School Board from 2004 to 2007. Ellen is a member of the Escambia-Santa Rosa Bar Association and serves on the Board of Directors for the Florida School Board Attorneys Association. She is an avid sailor.

**John Palmerini** serves as General Counsel for the Orange County School Board. John has practiced for more than 21 years, the last 14 of which have been spent with the Orange County School Board. Most of John's work was as the Board's Labor and Employment counsel. John has also been a guest speaker before the Florida School Boards Association, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, the Florida School Board Attorneys Association, the Florida Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association, the Florida Organization of Instructional Leaders, the Florida Records Management Association, the Florida Educational Negotiators, the Florida Association of School Business Leaders, Association of Legal Administrators and the Orlando Diversity Council. John received a B.S. in Journalism and a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Florida and his J.D. from the University of Florida, Levin College of Law. He is Board Certified Specialist in Education Law and Labor and Employment Law. John is currently the President of the Florida School Board Attorneys Association. He is also the Florida School Board Attorneys Association 2022 recipient of the C. Graham Carothers Award of Excellence, presented annually to a Florida school board attorney who has demonstrated excellence in the profession.