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Education Foundations

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Because teaching is a profession in which a person has a tremendous influence on young people, teachers are and should be held to a higher standard regarding both their personal and professional lives. These standards are created by the law and by each teacher's personal code of ethics. Despite the fact that the law and a code of ethics have very different ramifications if not adhered to, both help to protect the teacher and benefit the students.

Following laws as teachers is more so motivated by the idea of avoiding punishment, rather than a feeling of personal responsibility. Some of the legal influences on teaching include teaching contracts and laws created to protect students such as mandated reporting of suspected abuse or neglect. Teachers are responsible to understand both school policies and the law regarding these types of topics. Contracts are a way of protecting the teacher and school; contracts create and foster a fair and predictable level of expectation for both parties involved. Further more, a teaching contract is a clear plan enabling both the school and teacher to serve and support students. Mandated reporting is one of many legal obligations of teachers, obviously intended to protect students from unsafe situations. Other legal obligations that teachers must follow are the Family Education Rights and Privileges Act (FERPA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). FERPA allows parents certain rights pertaining to their child's

academic records. Those rights are given to the student once he/she is eighteen. IDEA protects students in schools who have disabilities. It requires that the child have a Free Appropriate Education (FAPE) in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), and that any Individualized Education Plans or Section 504 plans are also followed.

While the majority of teachers would consider these laws clear ethical choices, the primary reason for adherence to these laws is often in an effort to avoid legal problems. Ethical influences on a teacher are motivated in a completely opposite way. Following a personal code of ethics is something that results in a more fair and equal opportunity for each student. Personal codes of ethics, especially those based on the idea of respect make the classroom a much more productive and safe space for learning. Ethical codes call people to a higher level or expectation of behavior, particularly in interpersonal situations. For the teacher, adhering to a personal code of ethics causes their work to be much more fulfilling and rewarding.