

# AGENCY POLICY

## Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

<b>POLICY TITLE</b>	Ethical Standards		
<b>NUMBER</b>	HR-005	<b>EFFECTIVE</b>	
<b>APPLIES TO</b>	All OSPI Employees	<b>CONTACT</b>	Agency Ethics Officer

[Original Effective Date: October 1, 2009; Previous revisions: 8/1/11, 9/1/20]

### POLICY

This policy establishes the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI or agency) specific roles, responsibilities and resources which enforces ethical standards in all its management and business practices plus aligns the agency with the Washington State Ethics Law.

### SCOPE

This policy conforms to [Washington State Ethics Law](#), Chapter 42.52 RCW and applies to all OSPI employees and officers. The ethics law establishes high ethical and public service standards and holds state employees and officers accountable to the public. The agency supports the Ethical Standards Policy by actively promoting an organizational culture that values honesty, trust, and accountability.

### CORE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

The Ethics in Public Service Act establishes standards of morally acceptable behavior for Washington State agencies based on five principles: objectivity, selflessness, stewardship, transparency, and integrity. This policy adopts these principles and acknowledges that they conform to the core values of OSPI.

**Objectivity** - Public employees must place the public's interest before any private interest or outside obligation – choices need to be made on the merits.

**Selflessness** - Public employees should not make decisions in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

**Stewardship** - Public employees have a duty to conserve public resources and funds against misuse and abuse.

**Transparency** - Public employees must practice open and accountable government. They should be as open as possible about their decisions and actions, while protecting truly confidential information.



**Integrity** - Public employees should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organizations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**All OSPI employees** are expected to practice and promote ethical behavior.

**Supervisors and managers** are expected to communicate the importance of conduct based on strong ethical values to all staff.

Be aware all OSPI employees are required to report any and all ethical violations of RCW 42.52.180 - *Use of public resources for political campaigns*.

**Every new employee** to OSPI must complete a course in the State's ethics law within three months of his or her hire date. If the new employee is unable to complete the training within three months, we require approval in advance from the OSPI HR Office, who can extend the timeframe to a maximum of six months from the hire date.

**Exception:** New hires able to provide evidence that they have completed the State's ethics law training at another Washington State agency within the last three years are exempt from mandatory training within the first three months of their employment at OSPI.

All OSPI employees must submit a completed Ethics Challenge quiz once per year to OSPI's HR Office by taking the online [Ethics Quiz](#), available on the [Executive Ethics Board](#) site.

**Human Resource Office** will distribute a copy of the Ethics Law, the OSPI Ethical Standards Policy, and any related policies, to all new employees.

Once every year, the Human Resource Office will send all employees an intranet link to the OSPI Ethical Standards Policy, along with a reminder to complete their yearly Ethics Challenge quiz.

The HR Office will track compliance of all employees with the training requirements detailed in this policy and will notify cabinet members of non-compliance with ethics training requirements.

### **Agency Ethics Advisor:**

- Acts as the OSPI liaison to the Executive Ethics Board and member of the Ethics Advisory Board.
- Responds to requests for general guidance on questions related to ethical conduct.
- Provides guidance on potential or known ethics conflicts.
- Counsels employees who have questions about current activities or emerging situations with the potential to violate state ethics law.



## PROCEDURES

### How to ask for ethics advice

We encourage employees with ethics related questions or concerns to first discuss the issue with the department or division supervisor.

If, for any reason, you are uncomfortable talking to your supervisor or anyone else on staff, or, following such a discussion you feel there was no resolution or clarification of the question(s) you raised you are encouraged to call or e-mail the agency's Ethics Advisor (see Ethical Standards Policy Resources).

Employees also have the option of contacting the Executive Ethics Board directly at [www.ethics.wa.gov](http://www.ethics.wa.gov) or by calling 360-664-0871

### How to report an ethics violation

We encourage any OSPI employee who suspects or discovers a potential violation of State Ethics Law to report it to the OSPI Ethics Advisor (see Ethical Standards Policy Resources).

There are two courses of action available to our Ethics Advisor, the choice of which depends on the information an employee reports:

1. Provide guidance, advice, and information on ethics law.
2. Initiate an internal investigation.

If the Ethics Advisor initiates an internal inquiry, its results will determine next steps. It is possible that the Advisor will forward the outcome of the investigation to the Chief of Staff, for Human Resources, who could decide to take corrective and/or disciplinary action.

Where there is a clear violation of ethics law and we are unable to resolve the issue internally, we have the discretion to turn the information over to the Executive Ethics Board.

### How to file a complaint with the Executive Ethics Board

You can file a complaint with the Executive Ethics Board electronically or by downloading the complaint form from the Executive Ethics Board website.

A state employee who files a complaint with the Executive ethics Board shall be afforded the protection afforded to a whistleblower under RCW 42.40.050 and 49.60.210(2), subject to the limitations of RCW 42.40.035 and 42.40.910. An agency, manager, or supervisor may not retaliate against a state employee who, after making a reasonable attempt to ascertain the correctness of the



information furnished, files a complaint with the Board. A state employee may not be denied the protections in chapter 42.40 RCW even if the ethics board denies an investigation of the complaint. If a determination is made that a reprisal or retaliatory action has been taken against the state employee, the retaliator may be subject to a civil penalty of up to five thousand dollars.

Further, under [RCW 42.52.420\(4\)](#), the identity of a person filing a complaint under RCW 42.52.410(1) is exempt from public disclosure.

## **ETHICAL STANDARDS POLICY RESOURCES**

**OSPI Ethics Advisor:** [Catherine Slagle](#), 360-725-6136

### **Training**

- OSPI Ethics in State Government Training, contact the OSPI HR Office.
- Ethical Leadership & Decision Making Training, contact the OSPI HR Office
- The Executive Ethics Board offers interactive online training. The Ethics Quiz is a one-hour question-and-answer session that covers ethics in general. Remember when you complete the Ethics Challenge forward your results to the OSPI HR Office.

### **On the intranet, these OSPI policies are related to Washington State Ethics Law:**

- Use of Mobile Devices for Agency Business
- Computer System Acceptable Use
- Ethics and the Use of Public Resources for Campaign Purposes
- Outside Employment
- Whistleblower Act Procedure

## **LAWS, RULES, OTHER AUTHORITY**

RCW 42.52

