



Professionalism and Ethics in the Cafeteria



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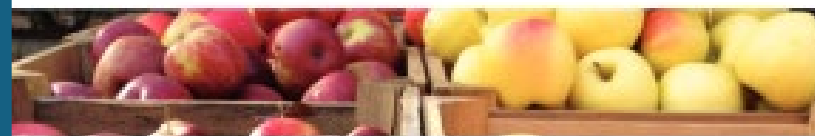
**Alabama
Achieves**

ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION



ETHICS

Serving the American People
with Integrity Every Day





BREAK *for a* PLATE SCHOOLS

Learning Code

Event Name: Alabama and USDA Ethics Laws

Hours: 1

Professional Learning Code: 3420

Alabama Ethics Laws



Alabama Ethics Law

Ethics Training Video

<https://www.ethics.alabama.gov/Training/Intro.aspx>

Agenda

1. Why Professional Boundaries Matter in Alabama CNP
2. Definitions
3. Understanding Conflicts of Interest
4. Being Nice vs. Being Ethical (Very Important)
5. Communication & Conduct Boundaries
6. Boundaries With Vendors & External Businesses
7. Professional Boundaries -Students
8. Boundaries With Coworkers and School Staff (Especially for Managers)
9. Boundaries With Food Inventory & Program Resources
10. Borderline with Federal Property
11. Simple 4-Step Protection Plan
12. Q&A

BREAK for a PLATE
SCHOOLS



Why Professional and Ethical Boundaries Matter in Alabama CNP

In Alabama, Child Nutrition staff are considered **public employees** and are held to both:

Alabama Ethics Law Standards

Federal Program Accountability Requirements

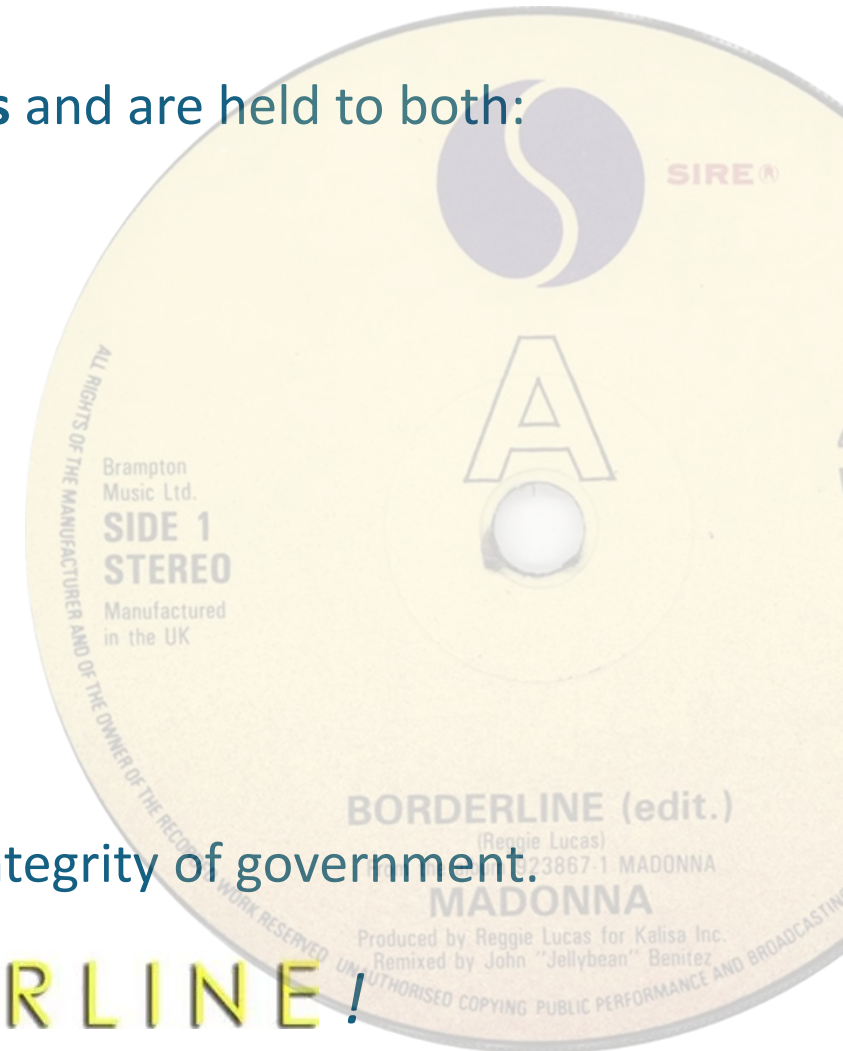
Professional boundaries help ensure:

- Public funds are used correctly.
- Students are treated fairly – “Overt Identification”
- Employees are protected from ethics complaints.
- Programs remain in compliance.

Key Alabama Message: Public service is public trust.

NOTE: It is important that there be public confidence in the integrity of government.

Don't get close to the **BORDERLINE!**





DEFINITIONS

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE:

Any person employed at the state, county, or municipal level of government or their instrumentalities, including governmental corporations and authorities, but excluding employees of hospitals or other health care corporations including contract employees of those hospitals or other health care corporations, who is paid in whole or in part from state, county or municipal funds.

SUPERVISOR: (Managers)

Any person having authority to hire, transfer, suspend, lay off, recall, promote, discharge, assign, or discipline other public employees, or any person responsible to direct them, or to adjust their grievances, or to recommend personnel action, if, in connection with the foregoing, the exercise of the authority is not of a merely routine or clerical nature but requires the use of independent judgment.



DEFINITIONS

THING OF VALUE:

Any gift, benefit, favor, service, gratuity, tickets or passes to an entertainment, social or sporting event offered only to public officials, unsecured loan, other than those loans made in the ordinary course of business, reward, promise of future employment, or honoraria

NOT INCLUDED:

- Campaign contributions
- De minimis is a value of \$25 or less per occasion and an aggregate of \$50 or less in a calendar year from any single provider.
- Seasonal gifts of an insignificant economic value of less than \$100 if the aggregate value of such gifts from any single donor is less than \$250 during any one calendar year.
- Hospitality extended to public employee as a social occasion – under \$250/calendar day
- Promotional items of nominal value offered to the public.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST



A conflict of interest happens when a public employee's personal interest (like money, family, or business connections) could influence, or appear to influence, how they do their official job.



It's a conflict of interest when your personal benefit could affect the decisions you make at work or give you (or your family or business) an unfair advantage compared to everyone else.



A public official or employee is prohibited from using public property for personal use. Although not an exhaustive list, this includes cars, credit cards, phones, email, equipment, copiers, fax machines, postal machines or official time.

Being Nice vs. Being Ethical



Values



Attitude



Ethics



Morals

Many ethics issues start with good intentions.

Common Statements

- “I was just trying to help.”
- “It was only this once.”
- “Everyone does it.”

Alabama Ethics Response

Intent doesn't erase impact. Public trust requires consistency.

Borderline - Communication & Conduct

Professional conduct applies on and off the clock.

Expectations

- No gossip about students or staff
- No inappropriate humor or comments
- Protect student confidentiality
- Social media posts can affect employment

REMEMBER:

Screenshot culture means nothing is truly private.



Boundaries With Vendors & Businesses

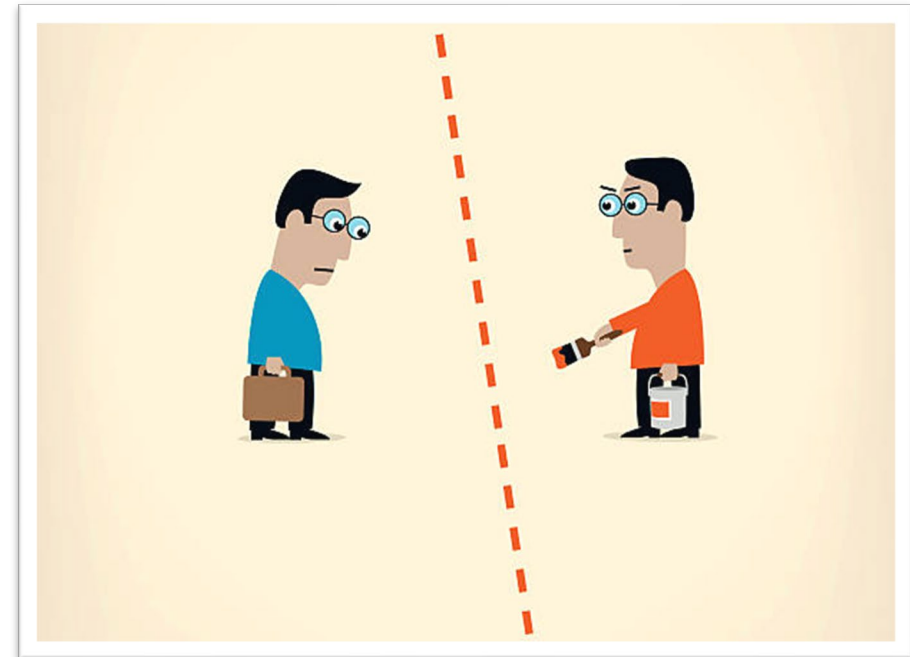
Under **Alabama Ethics Law**, inappropriate interactions with vendors are a common violation area.

Appropriate

- Professional communication only
- Transparent purchasing processes
- Referring decisions to the CNP Director

Not Appropriate

- Letting relationships influence purchasing
- Accepting gifts, meals, or favors
- Allowing vendors special access



Alabama expects employees to set the example for vendors... no personal gain involving work.

- If a vendor benefit connects to your job, it's not accepted.

Boundaries With Vendors & Businesses

In Alabama schools, managers are expected to enforce policy, not look the other way.

Healthy Boundaries

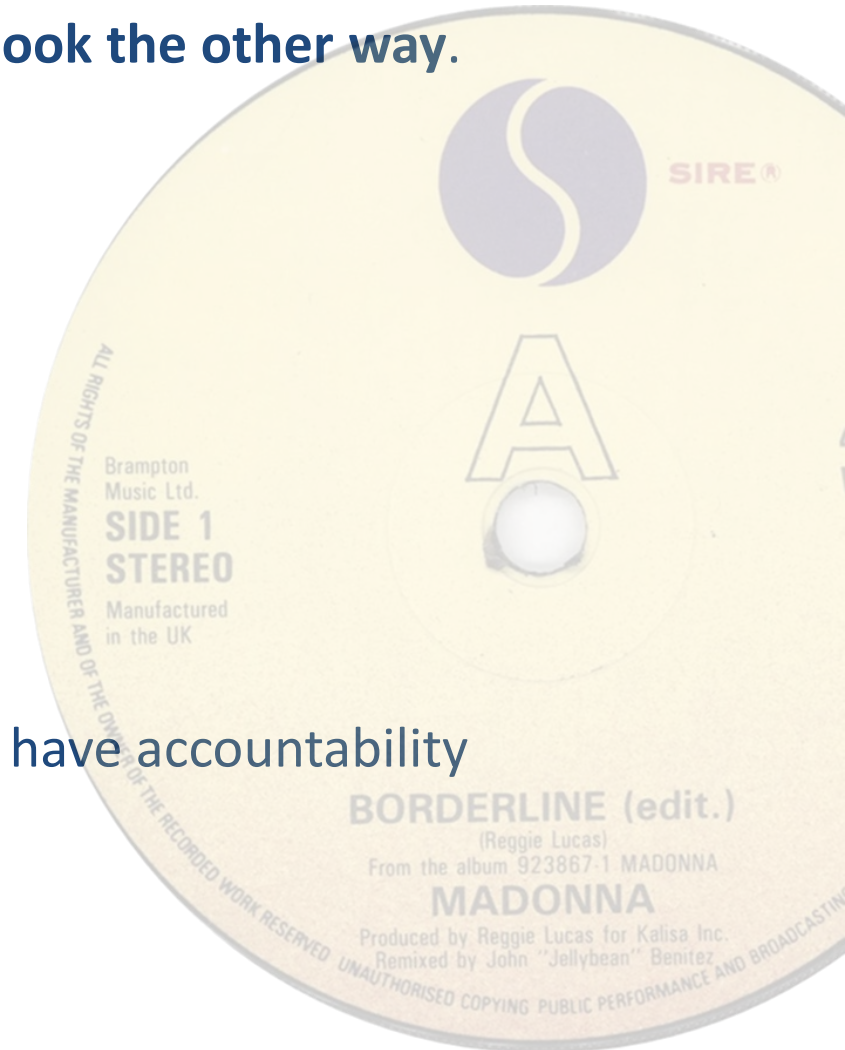
- Apply rules consistently
- Correct issues professionally
- Report concerns through proper channels
- Keep accurate and current records

Crossing the borderline...

- Covering for staff mistakes
- Ignoring time, counting practices, or inventory issues
- Adjusting records to avoid conflict – this is fraud – be sure to have accountability
- Letting friendships influence decisions

Manager Reminder

Fair is not favoritism, it's consistency.



Professional Borderline: With Students

CNP staff serve children under public programs, making clear and consistent boundaries essential.

- **Appropriate Boundaries**

- Serve meals the same way for all students
- Follow USDA and ALSDE procedures
- Keep student eligibility information confidential – remember “Overt Identification” should be prevented.
 - The following “Prohibited Actions” are prevented by law and regulation:
 - (See the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act section 9(b)(10), 42 U.S.C. 1758(b)(10), and 7 CFR 245.8.)
 - Publicizing or announcing eligible households or children’s names;
 - Using different mediums of exchange (see below for additional discussion);
 - Having separate dining areas, service times or serving lines
 - Limiting choices of reimbursable meals; and
 - Requiring that children work for their meals.
- Always speak respectfully and professionally
- If a student confides in you, please learn your school policy for reporting abuse or neglect.
- Avoid adding students on social media and interacting with them via social

- **Going over the borderline....**

- Giving extra food to specific students
- Letting certain students break serving rules
- Allowing students behind the serving line
- Discussing personal issues with students and not reporting signs of abuse or neglect.
- Helping one student in a way that breaks the rules can create inequity for others.



You know you're driving me crazy! You just keep on pushing... over the borderline!

Borderline With Coworkers

Do not use your role to pressure coworkers, gain advantages, or request personal favors.

- **This is explicitly prohibited for public employees.**

- Do not share internal information with coworkers who are not authorized to receive it.
- Only exchange small tokens of appreciation and no items that could influence workplace behavior.
- Do not use confidential information for personal benefit.
- Keep interactions professional, respectful, and work-focused.
- Avoid dual relationships (mixing personal and professional roles) that could influence decisions.
- Maintain clear communication boundaries: no inappropriate jokes, comments, or personal discussions that cross professional lines.
- Respect privacy and avoid sharing personal or confidential information about coworkers.
- When in doubt you can always contact the Ethics Commission



Borderline With Food & Program Resources

Food and Supplies purchased with Child Nutrition funds is public property and must only be used for approved program purposes.

Clear Boundary Violations

- Taking food home because “it will be thrown away”
- Feeding family members or friends
- Using CNP food for staff parties or meetings without charging.
- Allowing school staff to receive a meal without paying



Borderline with Inventory



Supplies
Food Prep and Leftovers
Employee Meals
Delivering/Pick Up at Other Schools
Personal Use

Borderline when transferring inventory between schools:

- **Inventory transfers must be documented every time.**
Don't cross the borderline – record what you move, where it goes and why.
- **A missing case or undocumented transfer can push you over the borderline.**
Log it, verify it and keep inventory tight!
- **Clear records protect you and the program.**
Don't cross the borderline – account for every item moved between schools.
- **If it isn't written down... it didn't happen.**
Proper inventory forms keep you compliant and stop you from getting close to the borderline.



Borderline with Food Prep and Leftovers



Too many leftovers can send the wrong message, even when intentions are good.

Stay well away from the borderline by preparing accurate amounts, following standardized recipes, and serving correct portions.

Forecasting and production records are there to help with food waste.

Careful planning helps protect both you and the program.

Borderline With “Free” Employee Meals

A free meal doesn't mean “anything goes.”

Don't cross the **BORDERLINE**

Follow the district CNP Employee Meal policy as written.

Does your district allow CNP employees to eat breakfast and lunch at no cost?

Does your district have a policy for CNP employee meals, School Staff meals?



Borderline - Federal Property



1. Be a Good Steward of Federal Property
2. Establish Clear Policies and Expectations
3. Provide Regular Training
4. Maintain Strong Inventory Controls
5. Model and Reinforce Ethical Behavior
6. Create a Reporting System
7. Respond Promptly to Misuse
8. Connect the Rules to the Mission

Borderline with ALL CNP Inventory

**WASTE
FRAUD
ABUSE**



7 CFR § 210.26 Penalties and fines.

(a) *Penalties.* Whomever embezzles, willfully misapplies, steals, or obtains by fraud any funds, assets, or property provided under this part whether received directly or indirectly from the Department will, if such funds, assets, or property are of a value of \$100 or more, be fined no more than \$25,000 or imprisoned not more than 5 years or both; or if such funds, assets, or property are of a value of less than \$100, be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned not more than 1 year or both. Whomever receives, conceals, or retains for personal use or gain, funds, assets, or property provided under this part, whether received directly or indirectly from the Department, knowing such funds, assets, or property have been embezzled, willfully misapplied, stolen, or obtained by fraud, will be subject to the same penalties.

Simple 4-Step Protection Plan



What Alabama CNP staff should do when unsure:

Simple 4-Step Protection Plan

1. Pause.
2. Don't proceed.
3. Ask your supervisor or CNP Director.
4. Document guidance when given.

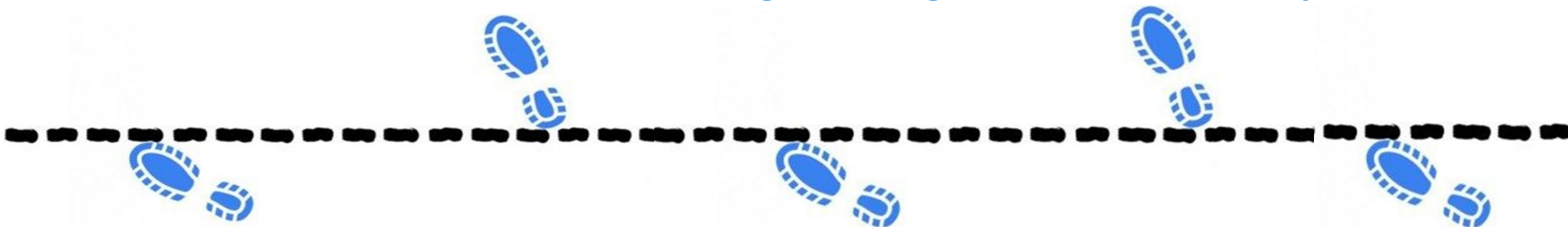
Reassurance

- Asking questions protects your job!
- Reporting concerns is professionalism, not punishment.
 - Create phrases to use as reminders when unsure.
 - When in doubt...

Closing Message for Alabama Training

**Professional boundaries protect you,
the students, other employees, and the program.**

- Every step matters!
- Ethics and professionalism are a top priority in Alabama Child Nutrition Programs
- Make it a daily practice to do what's right, stay within the lines and help keep Alabama's CNP strong.
- Use real-world stories to make training meaningful and relatable to your staff.



ASK US

