

***A ProEthica*® Program  
Case Study —  
A Novice's Perspective**

## ETS's professional ethics program encourages collegial support among new teachers

In her first year teaching health at Laurel Middle School, Lindsay Jones juggled a busy schedule that included coaching varsity field hockey and varsity softball. Nonetheless, she carved out time for the *ProEthica*® program because “it’s going to help me be a better teacher and further me in my career,” Jones said. Worried she might not speak up in a group setting, she completed the online course independently. “I’m the kind to sit back and not speak right away,” Jones continued. “There are so many different judgments and different things going on in group work. I thought I could focus better on my own.”

The program’s videos depicting common ethical conflicts teachers face made a powerful impression on her. “The videos were definitely an eye opener,” she said. After completing a few learning modules, Jones said she found herself looking around school and thinking, “What if this did happen to me here? How would I handle it? What are the steps I would take?” One scenario about a student who had no ride home after athletic practice stood out. “It happens all the time,” she said.

The scenario prompted her and another first-year coach to have a deeper discussion. “What would we do? Would we stay at work until the student got picked up? Would we call someone? We were kind of discussing back and forth what the different options would be for that type of situation,” Jones continued.

“We’ve both been in that situation with our athletes,” she said. “Just last night we had a game, and we had to stay behind and wait for one of the baseball boys to get picked up. There are different ways to approach it, but we didn’t want to overstep boundaries and get in trouble, so we stayed behind. We figured that standing our ground and staying there, making sure that he got picked up, was the right way to go.”

The *ProEthica* program presented an opportunity to plan how to approach similar situations, so teachers aren’t surprised when an incident occurs. It also taught them to use each other as resources when they find themselves on less familiar ground. “It really makes you think about what will and can happen, and how are you going to handle it when it actually may happen to you,” Jones said. “It’s really helped a lot of us — not only me, but other people in our meetings — to kind of relate to it in a real-life situation.”

### Putting professional ethics into practice — inside and outside of school

Jones recalled a weekend day when she and her husband planned a break from their work weeks. What happened made her reflect on one of the *ProEthica* program’s scenarios.

“My husband and I took a trip to see a daytime show. It was the weekend and we were two- and-a-half hours away from school,” she said. When she returned to school on Monday, a student said, “Hey, I saw



you and your husband!” Jones immediately second-guessed her behavior at the show. “Oh, my goodness. What was I doing?” she asked herself. “I know I didn’t do anything wrong, but it makes you think. It makes you realize people are always watching. You have to be a professional 95 percent of the time because you’re under the spotlight for everything, whether you know it or not. It makes you really focus on what’s important.”

The incident also made Jones aware of the potential impact of social media. “With so much technology now, someone can take a picture and it’ll go through a million sources and get back to someone in your district,” she said. “You have to grow up real quick. It’s good and it’s scary at the same time.”

Jones credits the *ProEthica* program for preparing her for future ethical dilemmas. “I am more aware and I’m better prepared. There are some things you don’t even think about, like if a student asks for help after school. You’ve got to think: Is this student really asking for help? Are there things that the student is trying to get around? Are there people there that are going to be available to help you? It makes you really take a step back and think,” she said. “It’s helped out tremendously with that. Having this as an aid for me in my first year has pushed me and helped me to make the right choices in the situations I’ve been in.”

### **Using engaging and memorable videos to foster collegial conversations**

Jones appreciated the real-life situations depicted in the *ProEthica* program videos. “You can actually put yourself in the people’s places. If you just talk about it or see it on paper, you can’t really interact the way you could by watching something happen,” she said. “I’m a visual person. I like watching things. It made it easier for me to relate to. I can tell you each video that I watched right now.”

The content of the online course also made it easier to talk to other teachers at professional development meetings. “Being a first-year teacher, sometimes it’s hard to branch out and talk to teachers from the other schools in the district,” Jones said. But discussing the *ProEthica* program scenarios was an icebreaker, offering them a chance to discuss a topic on common ground, she said. “You can talk about what would they do at the Pre-K level? And what would we do at high school? It makes it easier to talk to one another.”

“I think all first-year teachers definitely should take it, just to kind of see what’s out there,” Jones added. “Even some veteran teachers, they’ve been in this for so long, for so many years, maybe they haven’t seen some of the situations that come up in the *ProEthica* videos. Every day is different. Every year is different with new things, and new kids and how they approach things. You’ve just got to be on your toes with all of it.”

Read more case studies or get information about the *ProEthica* program at [www.ets.org/proethica](http://www.ets.org/proethica).

### **District Snapshot** **Laurel School District, Laurel, Delaware** **(2016–17 school year)**

- 2,362 students in grades Pre-K–12
- Ethnically and economically diverse student body
- Low-income families: 46.4%
- English-language learners: 8.8%
- Students receiving special education services: 14.3%
- New teachers in mentoring program: 15
- Total teachers: 151
- Total instructional staff: 180
- Total staff: 262
- Accepts school-choice students
- Prior year per-pupil cost: \$11,699

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