

Chapter: The Child Safety Outlook by Myra McGovern and Debra P. Wilson National Association of Independent Schools (2014). Trendbook, 2014-2015.

Strategic Questions:

- How has your school managed risk in this area?
- Does your school require training for all new and current staff in this area on a regular basis?
- What policies and procedures could be improved?
- How would the board be informed of an incident? Who would know what, and when?
- How is the school insured for these events? Is this insurance for current events or past ones as well? If the current insurance does not cover older cases, can the school acquire additional insurance that will?
- What outreach has your school done with families in this area, both in terms of training and making families aware of the steps the school takes?

Action Steps:

- Schools should review internal practices and policies, not only for compliance with the law but to ensure best practices in this area.
- School policies need to directly address sexual harassment and abuse of students. These policies should have clear reporting procedures that provide for alternative reporting mechanisms in the event the person or people who typically handle reporting are accused. There should also be anti-retaliation language to ensure that reporters of abuse are not deterred by hierarchy.
- Schools should know an attorney with whom they can work if allegations of abuse surface, as well as the staff team that would be directly involved in any follow-up investigations and healing for the community and the victim. Schools should have clear procedures on how the accused staff member will be handled during the course of the investigation and who will participate in those communications.
- In terms of regular procedures, schools should ensure that there is a central communication point for anything unusual involving each student. In smaller schools, this might be one or two individuals. In a larger school or one with many divisions, a regular check-in with advisor groups, department heads, or others may be appropriate. The important thing is to ensure that there are opportunities to review anything unusual so that patterns of behavior do not go unnoticed.
- All schools should know and understand the state reporting requirements and train staff accordingly.
- Schools should also engage in regular trainings with staff, parents, and, in an age-appropriate way, students. Set a training cycle that ensures that all staff understand the reporting expectations and the boundaries the school has set.
- Review crisis communications plans before any allegations of abuse surface. Make certain you know what you would do if a current student or an alum reports abuse. There should be no ambiguity about who may speak on behalf of the school, which group will be involved in messaging, and how communications will be carried out.
- Engage the administrative team in working through crisis scenarios involving sexual abuse of a student to ensure that all members of the team know what should happen and how things would unfold. Try the same exercise with faculty teams.