

AVON MAITLAND DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

NO. 112

SUBJECT: COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA RELATIONS

Legal References: *Education Act: Section 265 Duties of the Principal; Section 283 Chief Executive Officer; Section 286 Duties of Supervisory Officers; Ontario Regulation 298 - Operation of Schools Section 11 Duties of Principals; Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*

Related References: *Board Policy No. 3 Director of Education Job Description; "Communication Guidelines for Board Members" in Board Policy No. 6 Role of the Trustee; Board's Crisis Communication Media Protocol; Emergent Policy Issues – Board Strategy; Administrative Procedure 103 Management of Personal Information – Student; AP 116 Community Access to Schools and Sites: Acknowledgements, Advertisements and Announcements; AP 140 Computers: Acceptable Use and Security; AP 160 Access to School Premises; AP 195 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy; AP 321 Fund-Raising; AP 322 Partnerships and Advertising in Schools*

1. Communications and Media Relations

The director of education ensures that open, transparent and positive internal and external communications are in place. The director participates in community affairs in order to enhance and support the district and promote public education.

- 1.1 The director of education believes that regular, clear and timely communication between Avon Maitland District School Board and the public it serves promotes positive relationships and is mutually beneficial.
- 1.2 The director is committed to effective communications with all stakeholders to promote and protect quality public education in the district and the province and to celebrate success for all students.
- 1.3 The director of education and the Chair of the Board are the official spokespersons of the board.
- 1.4 The director may from time to time designate other staff members to speak on behalf of the board in areas of their specific expertise.

2. Implementation

- 2.1 The director of education will endeavor to provide the news media with the information it requires to present a balanced picture of the board's programs, services, positions and issues.
- 2.2 The director will encourage principals to invite local news media to provide coverage of school programs and special events. Media access to schools must occur only with the consent of the school principal, who will ensure that the education of students is protected from unnecessary interruptions or intrusions and that privacy is protected.

- 2.3 The director shall provide staff, school councils, parents/guardians, school communities and regional municipalities with relevant information about local and provincial education initiatives as appropriate.
- 2.4 The director recognizes that using current technology is important for effective communications, and values the on-going presence of the board and its schools on the internet.
- 2.5 The director has issued other administrative procedures for dealing with the media and the general public as noted in the “Related References” in this procedure.
- 2.6 The director of education or designate shall make official media releases to the news media.

Appendix A
(AP 112)

AVON MAITLAND DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
CRISIS COMMUNICATION - MEDIA PROTOCOL

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

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SECTION 1 GENERAL PROCEDURES

A. INTRODUCTION

This Protocol is designed to provide the system with guidance in responding to information requests from the media, other stakeholders such as students, staff and parents, as well as the general public in emergency and crisis situations. In any situation where there is the potential for media attention, the provision of factual information is important, but the safety and well-being of students, staff, and volunteers are the first priorities of the schools and the system.

Fires, violent episodes, significant injuries, or other emergency/crisis situations, as well as events that are controversial in nature are often a focus of media attention. However, fear of potentially negative media reports is no reason to refuse legitimate requests for information. It is important to remember that in the normal course of affairs the media also provides coverage of “good news” items and in doing so helps to build the reputation of an individual school, other schools in the system and the Board.

In an emergency, communication with the media, as well as to staff, parents, students and the general public must be accurate, timely, effective and consistent.

This protocol provides suggestions for communication at the site of an incident as well as within the school and through the system, in general. It outlines who should provide the necessary and appropriate information, to whom the information should be directed, and how it is disseminated.

B. PLANNING AND RESOURCES

Not all crisis situations can be anticipated. The Board’s Tragic Event Response Support Team (TERST) Manual provides step-by-step information on how to deal with a crisis situation once it has occurred, and schools are required to develop and regularly update their own school-specific action plans.

In addition to the Board’s emergency procedures, Principals should also be familiar with the following resources:

- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation and procedures (see Appendix D).
- Violence Free Schools Policy (AP 357)
- Transportation Policy (AP 589) and Inclement Severe Weather Procedures (AP 178)
- Individual emergency plans for students (filed at the school)
- Safe Arrivals Policy (AP 307) and the school’s safe arrival procedures
- Ontario Regulation 464/00 (Access to Premises) Trespass to Property Act, Education Act (Section 305)

- Environmental Health and Safety Policy (AP 410)
- Field Trips and Excursions (AP 266)
- Tragic Event Response Support Team Procedures (Manual available from the office of the Superintendent of Operations).

Principals should also ensure that their staff is aware of the Board's policies and procedures, the school's action plans, and this protocol so that everyone understands their roles in a crisis situation.

C. SPOKESPERSONS

To ensure that accurate information and a consistent message is provided to the media in a crisis, there should be only one spokesperson.

At times there may be more than one spokesperson designated (see Procedures in *Emergent Political Issues: Board Strategy* Appendix H) depending on the type of inquiries, and the need for specific expertise to respond to questions or concerns (see System-Level Response Page 7).

In the Avon Maitland District School Board the Principal, Vice-Principal or designate is the school's spokesperson. The Director of Education acts as the spokespersons for the Board, unless someone else is designated to do so by the Director of Education. The Chair of the Board speaks on behalf of the trustees to provide the political perspective.

D. POST CRISIS REVIEW

Following an emergency there should be an evaluation of the crisis response including the communication protocol. It will provide the school and the system with useful information and help to improve crisis communication planning. At the school level the Principal will normally review the process, and at the system level the Director or designate will conduct the review. Debriefing and evaluation may involve others in the school community as well as the system, depending on the severity of the incident. In any assessment of emergency communication response the focus should be on the improvement of the communications protocol.

In order to improve crisis communication, the following questions should be answered.

- Overall, did the communications protocol work?
- What worked well? Why?
- What did not work? Why?
- Was the communication accurate and timely?
- Was the media kept up-to-date on a regular basis?
- What specific media problems arose? Were they resolved? How?
- Was the communication ongoing until the situation was resolved?

Note: The Director or Superintendent of Education will determine if the situation warrants a system-level media response rather than a school-based response. In cases where a system-level response is indicated, the school will be directed to refer all media inquiries to the Communications Office or another designated spokesperson.

SECTION 2 SCHOOL LEVEL RESPONSE PROCEDURES **(see Appendix A)**

When an emergency or crisis situation takes place at a school, or there is potential for media coverage due to a “headline” event, the Principal will take the necessary emergency response actions. Depending on the seriousness of the situation, the Principal may activate the school’s Tragic Event Response Support Team (TERST), Emergency Response Plan and Regional TERST (if necessary).

The Principal will also notify the appropriate Superintendent of Education and the Communications’ Office to provide the most up-to-date information. The Superintendent will inform the Director and senior staff as appropriate, and the Communications Officer if this has not been done by the school.

The Director of Education’s office will notify the Chair of the Board and local trustees. Other trustees will be informed as required.

If the school is unable to contact the Superintendent directly, the Director’s Office, another senior administrator’s office or the Communications Office should be contacted directly. Voice mails are not appropriate.

If a Superintendent of Education’s Office, or the Communications Office learns about a situation at a school or one that could affect a school or schools, they will contact the appropriate school or schools immediately.

Similarly, the Communications Office must be notified immediately in all potential emergency situations and where there could be controversy, media or public interest, or parental concerns. Notification of the Communications Office in these cases, even if only a possibility, will ensure that the Board is not caught off guard and can be prepared to respond to the media and other inquires if necessary. When in doubt, contact the Communications Office.

The Communications Office will notify the Director, appropriate Superintendent, and other departments as necessary.

A. SPOKESPERSON AND RELEASE OF INFORMATION

Where a school-level response to a situation is sufficient, the Principal will act as the school’s spokesperson. If a principal is uncomfortable in this role, or if the media has been exceptionally difficult, the Communications Office, on request, will speak on behalf of the school. Principals have the discretion to refer the media and others to the Communications Office at any time.

All questions related to a police investigation must be referred to the appropriate police service. The Communications Office will also contact the police to obtain and share appropriate information and determine who will release information in these instances.

In the event of a student or staff accident, the Principal will notify the parents/guardians or next of kin. **However, in the event of a death, the police have the responsibility for notification of the next of kin.**

In order to maintain compliance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and Board procedures, personal information about students or staff involved must not be released without appropriate permission (family, police, etc.). Permission must also be obtained before providing individual or group photographs or details pertaining to a child's registration at the school (see Appendix D).

B. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION RESPONSE TECHNIQUES

The principal is responsible for internal school communication. He or she must ensure that students, teaching and support staff, school councils, and parents are provided with timely and accurate information until and often after a situation is resolved. Staff who may speak with parents, the public and students should be prepared and provided with information on what information they can provide.

Secondary school students carry cell phones and other electronic communication devices as do an increasing number of elementary school-age children. Students will use their phones (in spite of requests to the contrary) to "spread the word" to friends inside and outside of the building, to contact their parents because they are upset or frightened, and they will even make phone calls to the media. Parents will also call or try to contact their children personally, specifically if the phone lines to the school are tied up. They want to know if their child is safe and what is going on inside the building.

You can't prevent the media from interviewing staff or students off site, or talk to a group of parents that is standing around anxiously because they can't get into the building to find their children. As a result, what, when and how you tell those involved in the situation is an important part of crisis communication management. All information must be factual,

concise and within the limits of what is appropriate and acceptable to release.

In a protracted situation, you may need to update people on a regular basis (daily at a minimum) until the situation is resolved.

Once the situation is resolved, the Principal will prepare, or will work with the Communications Officer to prepare, a letter outlining the situation and the school's response for distribution to students, staff, and parents following an incident. **Copies of all letters should be forwarded to the Communications Office for review prior to distribution, if possible.**

Below are suggested vehicles for getting the word out to the various in-school audiences, and keeping the rumours and speculation confined. Ask yourself: Who needs to know? What do they need to know? When do they need to be informed? What's the best way to provide this information?

1. Communicating with Staff

Include all staff members – teachers, support staff, cafeteria workers – anyone who is doing a job inside your building. This would extend to volunteers who are on-site during an emergency or crisis situation. Your school's Tragic Event Response Support Team (TERST), and your school office and custodial staff can help you manage the situation, including the communications. Putting the key points/ messages down on paper for your staff can help them in supporting your communications lead role. You can use your staff as a resource too – many will have very useful ideas of how to deal with students and parents.

- Brief the school TERST immediately and review roles and responsibilities
- Hold face-to-face meetings with groups of staff as soon as possible (i.e. teachers, support staff)
- Use your school's internal e-mail system to provide details to those not available
- Prepare teachers and others who will be providing information to students on what to say – writing it down can help them and you
- Prepare written messages for those people who will be responding to telephone inquiries
- Remember, staff may need support and assistance, too
- Thank them repeatedly for their assistance and support.

2. Communicating with Students

Age-appropriate communication is the key with students. The information provided will vary for elementary (K-6, K-8 and 7-8) and secondary schools. Teachers speaking with students should be briefed on the situation so they can respond to questions and concerns.

- Have teachers talk to students in the classroom
- Speak one-on-one or in small groups with directly affected students
- Reassure students, provide physical and emotional support
- PA announcements (senior elementary and secondary schools)
- Consider if large assemblies and large group meetings are appropriate, specifically at the outset of a crisis
- Meet with student government leaders
- Get students involved in any post-crisis activities
- Provide information to students about safety precautions, and about talking to the media. Remind them they can say "no"
- Co-opt them to help prevent future incidents
- Provide services as required through Guidance Department, school's TERST, Regional TERST and local agencies, if warranted.

3. Communicating with Parents

The principal will ensure that the school responds to telephone inquiries from parents and the public. A brief factual summary/statement should be prepared, as well as information on processes and constraints for staff who may be dealing with the phone calls directly. The Superintendent and Communications Officer can assist with these activities. Requests for additional information beyond what is being released should be referred to the Communications Office.

- Respond to phone inquiries personally, if necessary
- Take time to meet with parents who arrive at the school
- identify staff to deal with phone inquiries
- Send a letter home to provide details on incident and the response (provide this to staff)
- Use the school's "call out" system (Synervoice) if available and appropriate
- Hold a parent meeting (both if the situation is ongoing and after resolution)
- Offer assistance in dealing with the situation and provide details on how they can help and talk to their children
- Remind them they can say "no" to the media if they are contacted
- Post information for parents on the school's website

C. DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

In many situations the Principal or designate will serve as the media spokesperson for the school. In an emergency or a crisis, however, Principals must look first to the safety and well-being of their students, staff and the school.

If reporters call or arrive at the school the Principal should provide as much appropriate information as possible. Cooperate with the media as much as possible to prevent them from seeking information from unreliable sources.

It is permissible, however, to tell a reporter that you can't speak with them immediately, but will do so when the situation is under control and information has been gathered. "I need time to collect information and to deal with the students and staff" is an appropriate response in these cases. Referring reporters to the Communications Office is also an option and may be the most appropriate response if you are uncertain or uncomfortable.

As a Principal, you also have the right under provincial legislation and Board policy to ask a reporter (or any other person) to leave the school property if you feel that the safety or well-being of anyone is compromised by their presence. They may choose to wait off the property and talk with any available onlookers, including staff, students and parents, but there is very little that can be done about this type of activity. Staff and students should be reminded that they do not have to talk to the media.

In responding to media inquiries at the outset of an emergency or as a result of an incident, the principal has the following options:

- provide information about the incident that is accurate, confirmed, and does not compromise anyone's privacy
- indicate that the investigation is continuing and full details are not currently available, but will be provided as soon as possible
- refer the reporter to the Communications Office.

Additional information on dealing with the media is included in this protocol (see Appendix C).

D. POST CRISIS REVIEW

The principal can call on the Superintendent, Director, Communications Officer and other senior administration to provide assistance in reviewing the school's crisis communication response. It is important that documentation and notes made during the crisis are available to help guide the review.

Depending on the situation that has occurred the participants in the review can include any or all of the following:

- principal (conducts the review)
- Key staff (i.e. members of the School's TERST)
- School office and other support staff if involved in the communications program
- Superintendent
- Communications Officer
- Other senior administrators and or board staff who assisted during the situation, including the Director of Education

It may also be useful to consult with key audiences about the effectiveness of the communication. This would include students, staff, parents, and others directly involved. They do not need to be part of the formal review, but seeking their opinions on how information was communicated to them can help a school or the system revise or develop new develop new procedures for use in the event of a future incidents.

Appendices E and F are information gathering templates that can help inform a review or evaluation.

SECTION 3 SYSTEM LEVEL RESPONSE TO A SCHOOL INCIDENT

When more than one school, or the system itself is affected by a crisis situation (i.e. lock down of a group of neighbouring schools by police, an outbreak of communicable disease, wide-spread power failure, etc.) the system, through the Board office, will manage the communication response. Some single school incidents also may require this type of response. The responsibility for determining when a system-level communications action is warranted rests with the Director of Education in conjunction with the Superintendent of Education, other senior administrative staff, as appropriate to the situation, and the Communications Office.

Senior Administration will take into account the following in the development and management of a system-level communication response to a crisis situation.

- Clarify the communication role of the school administration
- Evaluate the amount of additional support, if any, needed at the school to communicate with students, staff and parents, public and media
- Identify spokesperson(s)
- Determine key messages
- coordinate with outside agencies and organizations (e.g. Police Service, Public Health, Family and Child Services)
- Identify stakeholder groups to whom the messages will be conveyed (media, staff, students, parents/guardians, trustees, school councils, emergency services, general public, business, etc.)
- Identify the types of communication vehicles to be used to inform stakeholders (media release, statements, e-mail, website, staff meetings, information lines, letters home etc.).

A. SPOKESPERSONS

As a general rule, there should be only one spokesperson in order to ensure that a consistent message is provided. This is usually the Director of Education. However, additional spokespersons may be identified depending on the situation, the type of inquiries, and the need for specific expertise to respond to questions or concerns. Spokespersons could include:

- Director of Education
- Chair of the Board (political perspective)
- Communications Officer
- Other Senior Administrators and Senior Staff
- School Administrator

B. DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

When a system-level response is employed, all unsolicited media inquiries to the school, and Board staff must be referred to the Communications Office. No staff member should feel any obligation to respond personally, nor should they respond without first discussing the situation and the nature of the information request with the Communications Office.

The Communications Office must be notified and provided with as much information as possible. This provides an opportunity to identify media questions in advance, and to choose and brief the appropriate spokesperson.

When police or other authorities are involved in an investigation related to the incident, the Communications Office, based on discussions with the appropriate organization, will determine when or if it is appropriate for the school system to respond, or to refer the request directly to the authority.

C. SYSTEM MANAGEMENT OF PARENT AND PUBLIC INQUIRIES

When the system has assumed the responsibility for communication in a crisis situation at a school, group of schools or across the board's jurisdiction, schools often continue to have a role to play in providing information. Parents usually try to contact the school directly when their children are affected. Members of the general public will have various information needs based on their level of involvement and may contact a school as well. Even when the system is involved, individual parent inquiries are best handled by the Principal or designate.

School phone lines can quickly become jammed with calls. Since the school's first responsibility is the safety and well-being of its students and staff, the Board Office will play a role in providing supports such as:

- Developing messages for parents, assisting with parent meetings
- Providing board staff to assist school staff in responding to parent concerns
- Providing current and accurate information to parents, the general public and the media, through the board's website and other central resources
- Responding personally to parental concerns, through referrals from the school as necessary
- Offering and/or providing support to students, staff, and parents (if necessary) through the Board's Tragic Event Response Support Team, or local community agencies.

All media information requests and most general inquiries from the public at times when the system responds to a crisis should be referred to the Communications Office to allow the individual school or schools involved to deal directly with their internal communities.

D. ROLE OF THE COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE:

In a system-level response, the Communications Office will work with the Board and school administration to:

- Obtain information on an ongoing basis as the situation develops
- Collect relevant background materials
- Advise the director, school administration and senior administration on appropriate spokespersons, communication processes and vehicles
- Draft and prepare key messages and communication vehicles (e.g. briefing notes, media releases, website messages, etc.)

- Serve as spokesperson (as determined by the Director of Education)
- Coordinate media briefings, interviews, etc.
- Liaise with the media to identify appropriate spokespersons, anticipate and solicit questions to help guide responses, and provide updated information regularly
- Liaise with any local authorities (police, fire, etc.), and establish appropriate responses
- Provide information and messages to staff at the system and school level to respond appropriately to inquires
- Respond to, and log, media and public inquires
- Keep senior administrative staff and school administration up-to-date on the situation and public/media inquiries, responses and reaction
- Provide briefing notes, key messages, advice and support to spokespersons
- Establish and operate a Communications/Information Centre to provide information during the crisis situation, if necessary
- Assist in the evaluation of the response after the crisis is resolved

E. POST CRISIS REVIEW

The Director of Education will lead or designate a Superintendent of or other senior administrative staff member to conduct the review. The Communications Officer will be included along with other appropriate participants which can include school administrators, representatives from outside agencies, members of the Regional Tragic Event Response Support Team and any others who can add to the review process, findings and possible recommendations for future activities and plans. In addition to addressing the general questions listed in the school-base response section, the value of specific communication strategies will need to be assessed.

SECTION 4 RESPONSE TO COMMUNITY LEVEL EMERGENCY

This category could involve things like a flu pandemic, widespread severe weather situations or violent incidents in the community. In any system-wide crisis, or in the event of a community emergency, all communication will be managed centrally. The Director, Senior Administration, Communications Officer and Regional Tragic Event Response Support Team (if necessary) will work cooperatively with the lead agencies in the community (municipality, etc.) and advise school and board administrative staff of their roles and responsibilities.

A. POST-CRISIS REVIEW

The Director or designate will lead the post crisis review of a system-wide situation. In the event of a community emergency, the Director or designate will participate, along with other board staff as necessary, in any community review or this type of emergency situation.

PROCEDURE FOR SCHOOL-BASED INCIDENTS

APPENDIX B

<p>Role of the Principal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact Superintendent of Education’s office • Act as spokesperson for the school or designate one • Ensure communication to staff, students, parents and School Council as needed and allowable under privacy legislation and practices • Report any media requests for information and your response to the Communications Office • Send copies of any written communications to the Communications Office prior to distribution if possible • Liaise with authorities (police, public health, F&CS) • Conduct post-crisis review of activities 		
<p style="text-align: center;">Role of the Director</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure notification of Chair and local trustees, and other trustees as necessary • Provide support and assistance to school as needed e.g. Regional TERST • Determine if a system-level media response is warranted • Coordinate post-crisis review if system has responded 	<p style="text-align: center;">Role of the Superintendent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform Director’s Office • Inform Communications Office • Inform other Administrators (board and school) as necessary • Provide support and assistance to school • Serve as spokesperson as necessary • Assist with post crisis review 	<p style="text-align: center;">Role of Communications Officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support and assistance to the school on request • Serve as spokesperson as necessary • Assist with post-crisis review as requested • Send copies of public communication to Board chair, local trustees, senior administration

SYSTEM LEVEL RESPONSE APPENDIX C

<p style="text-align: center;">Role of Communications Office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in conjunction with Director, senior administration • Serve as spokesperson (as determined by the Director) • respond to inquiries (media, parents, public) as appropriate • Liaise with authorities/agencies (police service, public health, F&CS, etc.) • Participate in post-crisis review 		<p style="text-align: center;">Role of the Principal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact Superintendent of Education’s office • Follow direction of Superintendent/Director • Provide support for system-level team (background information, facilities in school, as required) • Refer media inquiries to Communications Office • Keep staff, students and parents informed of the situation and response • Participate in post-crisis review 	
<p style="text-align: center;">Role of Director</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure notification of Chair and trustees • Determine type, nature and scope of response. • Consult/employ other resources/experts (if necessary) • Provide direction to staff (school, senior administration, etc). • Serve as spokesperson • Coordinate post-crisis review 	<p style="text-align: center;">Role of Superintendent/ Senior Administration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify Director’s Office, Communications Office, and Senior Staff as appropriate • Follow direction of the Director and support as required • Assist with post-crisis review 	<p style="text-align: center;">Role of Trustees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing information on the event will be provided through Director's Office • Refer public/parent inquires to Communications Office based on direction provided • Chair of the Board/ designate serves as "political" spokesperson as required 	

APPENDIX D

COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

- Cooperate with the press so that they do not seek unreliable sources.
- Consider that different media have different agendas and there is competition.
- Provide equal opportunities to all media outlets and formats.
- Remember that reporters and their editors decide what's newsworthy, not the school or system

Get as ready, as you can, before the first media inquiry reaches your desk. Gather and document the basic facts and any background information. Decide on your key messages, and consider developing a statement or fact sheet. Who, what, when, where, why and how are what the reporter will want to know. Keep notes, if possible, and a log of all inquiries. Contact the Communications Office or Superintendent for assistance if you need it before you call a reporter back, or if you are going to be interviewed.

Remember, you can always refer reporters to the Communications Office.

Be honest. Be factual. Be brief.

- Admit to the bad news up-front; don't try to cover up what happened
- Acknowledge difficult situations and what will be done about them
- Don't respond to "what if" scenarios or innuendo
- Don't mislead and never speculate
- If you don't have an answer, say so, and commit to getting back when you have the appropriate information
- Ask about and honour media deadlines as much as possible, but not to the point where you provide inaccurate or inconsistent information. Be up front if you can't respond by a deadline
- Don't worry about silence – give a short, factual concise answer. Don't rush to embellish or "chat" about the situation - stick to your key messages
- Release verified information only
- Don't assess blame or make statements about responsibility
- Don't volunteer too much information
- Avoid educational jargon so you'll be understood the first time
- Do not release personal information without permission (police/family).
- If you can't reveal information, let them know why ("The police investigation is continuing"...."We don't have permission to release that information"....)

Be human

- Stress concern for students and staff, safety, etc.
- Talk sincerely about what you have done and what you are doing to contain and resolve the situation
- Talk conversationally – try to avoid sounding strained
- Express sympathy as appropriate
- Remember the capacity, or role, in which you are speaking
- Treat reporters as professionals. Don't underestimate them, but do not assume that they are experts on the subject.

Be prepared

- Be wary of questions that start: “Isn’t it true that...?” Aren’t you really saying.....?” “How do you respond to.....?” Are you aware that.....?”
- Don’t be defensive. Don’t lose your temper or argue.
- Focus on the positive actions you are taking, not the problems. Turn a negative question (How are you responding to this terrible shock?) into a positive answer (Classes are continuing, we have support available to students, and staff, and we have been keeping everyone up-to-date on the situation.)
- Never say “No Comment” or talk “Off the Record”
- Keep on track. If you are interrupted before finishing an answer, let the reporter finish, then go back and finish what you were saying.
- Break multiple questions asked all at once into manageable bits. Ask the reporter where you should start with the answers.

A Word on Radio and TV Interviews

For TV interviews (on camera) be aware of your body language and eye contact. On radio, tone is important as are short “sound bites”. Be conversational in your attitude and approach to both radio and TV reporters with cameras and tape recorders.

Having the Media on Site

In some situations it could be beneficial to have media on site. This should be discussed in advance with the Communications Office who will also seek direction from the Superintendent and Director as required.

Student Interviews

As a general rule, students should not be interviewed. It is difficult to prevent reporters from questioning students off school property. However, there may be some occasions when it could be appropriate for students to meet with reporters. Student leaders or credible student volunteers could be enlisted. Meetings must involve more than one student and a school administrator must be present. Parental permission and due consideration of the situation by the Communications Office and senior administration are required.

Staff and the Media

It is not often in a school’s best interest to permit staff to be interviewed. Most staff members appreciate it when they are reminded that they do not have to comment, and can refuse to discuss the situation with reporters. Crisis and specifically tragic situations affect staff as well as students and they need reassurance and support. Ensure they understand the “one spokesperson” practice. Once again, there is little that can be done when reporters approach staff off the school property. Any follow up or on-site interviews that involve staff and media must be organized, controlled and be approved.

APPENDIX E

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND THE MEDIA

Media outlets rarely use the official Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation and process in controversial or crisis-oriented situations. When there are police investigations, deaths or significant injuries, parental complaints (often made directly to reporters without the school being notified), missing students, or bus accidents for example, they contact schools directly often seeking information of a personal or private nature. They have deadlines to meet and want the “facts” immediately.

As a result, the type and nature of information that schools and school board employees and officials should or should not provide often cause concern and uncertainty.

Release information only if you feel it is appropriate to do so. If in doubt, seek clarification from the Communications Office and/or the Board’s FOI Coordinator. If you choose to respond, provide information on who you spoke to and what you said to the Communications Office as soon as possible.

Principals and school staff members (such as Office Coordinators) and school board staff and administrators are advised to consider the following guidelines when asked for information by the media.

Do not release information that:

- Breaks the law
- Identifies an injured or deceased person before the next of kin are notified, or before the information is released by the police
- Jeopardizes a person’s health or safety
- Reflects on a person’s character, reputation, innocence or guilt
- Exaggerates or is not the truth
- Contravenes the FOIPP Act.

If you do not have the requested information ascertain the reporter’s deadline and offer to get back to him or her by that time with a response. Take a few minutes to get the following information so you can respond to their questions when time permits:

- Reporter’s name and media outlet represented
- Clarify the question(s) asked
- Ask the reporter who they have spoken to and what “angle” they exploring for the story.

Writing the key messages/responses down to use when you reply to the media will make it easier to answer questions in a controlled manner, and reduce misinformation or misquotes. Report the requested information to the Communications Office. Discuss the situation and key messages to determine if, when and how you should respond.

Remember, you can always ask reporters to leave the school property if you feel that their presence is detrimental to anyone on site.

The Communications Office will call a reporter back on your behalf if you ask, or if the situation at hand demands your immediate attention.

Some helpful phrases for dealing with the media without releasing personal or private information:

We're dealing with the situation and collecting information right now. I will get back to you when I have details.

The police are investigating and I am unable to provide details at this time.

Please contact the police for that information that as it is part of their investigation.

We are dealing with the situation right now, and I'm sure that you will understand that the safety and well-being of our staff and students are my current priority.

Please call the Communications Office for further information.

I can't speculate on that.

Please leave the school property in respect for the safety, privacy and feelings of students and staff right now. We will provide you with details as soon as possible

We are not in a position to provide this information as we do not have permission from the family/police, etc. to do so at this time.

Due to the seriousness of this situation, the media contact is the Communications Office. They have the information that can be released at this time.

APPENDIX F
School Crisis Situation - LOG

COMMUNICATION RESPONSE CHECKLIST IN A SCHOOL CRISIS SITUATION
(Use this checklist to report the situation to the Communications Office)

Information/Background

Brief Description of the Incident/Situation:

Date: _____ Time: _____ Where: _____

How did you find out about this incident? _____

Number/Names of People Involved: _____

Assessment of Damage/Harm:

People: _____

Facilities: _____

Actions Taken to Date (see Emergency Procedures Handbook for details):

People Notified: _____

Safety and Security concerns: _____

System help necessary:

Contacts for additional information (i.e. Police, Fire, Plant Operations, etc):

What do you expect will happen in the next few hours?

What else should be done?

Appendix G Communication Response School Crisis Situation CHECKLIST

Internal Communication

Audience	Spokesperson	Method	When
Staff			
Students			
Parents			
Others			

Key messages to be given:

Audience	Message
Staff	
Students	
Parents	
Others	

Next Steps: _____

External Communication

Audience	Spokesperson	Method	When
Administration			
Trustees			
Other Schools			
General Public			
Others			

Key messages to be given:

Audience	Message
Administration	
Trustees	
Other Schools	
General Public	

Others	

Next Steps:

Media Communication

	Reporter/Outlet	Contact Info
On Site		
On Phone		

Information requested:

To be contacted:

Outlet	Who	How	When

Spokeperson(s) and contact information:

Key Messages & Vehicle (phone call, media release, e-mail, etc.)

Next Steps:

AVON MAITLAND DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

EMERGENT POLITICAL ISSUES - BOARD STRATEGY

Introduction

This strategy is intended to give senior staff and trustees both direction and advice when addressing the public, press and other interested parties, when an issue or event attracts or has the potential to attract attention to the Avon Maitland District School Board or public education in general.

In any situation where there is the potential for media attention, the provision of factual information is important, but the safety and well-being of students, staff, and volunteers are the first priorities of the schools and the system.

Events that are controversial in nature are often a focus of media attention. However, fear of potentially negative media reports is no reason to refuse legitimate requests for information. It is important to remember that in the normal course of affairs the media also provides coverage of “good news” items and in doing so helps to build the reputation of an individual school, other schools in the system and the Board.

In an emerging political situation communication with the media, among all trustees and the general public must be accurate, timely, effective and consistent.

This strategy provides Trustees with the Board’s communication principles, the procedure in dealing with an emerging political situation along with practical suggestions for communicating with the media.

Principles

In all decisions and communications the AMDSB will abide by the following principles:

- The AMDSB has a clear set of values that are expressed in their policies and procedures
- Decisions of the Board are based on the ethical policies and procedures of the Board
- The public will be informed and responded to in a timely and proper manner
- Communications will be honest, truthful, factual and concise

Procedures

The Director, in an attempt to be proactive and to serve public interest, will consult with the Board Chair, communications personnel and other resources as appropriate to assess the seriousness and potential to escalate (determine the potential of an issue to attract public attention).

The Chair, in an attempt to be proactive, will regularly inquire about any potential political issues that have come to the Director's attention.

The Director and Chair will inform trustees and consult appropriate resources such as Board lawyer, public relations professionals, other school boards or others as necessary.

If deemed appropriate a board spokesperson will be determined. Usually this will be the Director or his/her designate such as a communications staff person (if an administration matter), the Chair of the Board (if deemed to be a political matter), local trustee(s) (if a local matter). In rare cases a pair of spokespersons will be designated when issues cross many areas. Staff decisions are owned by staff and Board decisions are owned by the Board and all trustees must support the decisions made by the Board. Expectations of trustees are outlined in the Code of Conduct.

A standard message will be crafted by the spokesperson(s) with the aid of appropriate resources (see communications strategies below).

Once a determination has been made and a standard message has been constructed, the Chair of the Board will, according to Board policy, call a(n) (emergency) teleconference for all members of the board. This teleconference will be used to outline the issue, convey the standard message and answer questions of clarification only. Since this is not a meeting of the Board, the Chair may call for a meeting of the Board to discuss this one item agenda.

The Chair is responsible for ongoing communication with trustees as the situation evolves.

Post Crisis Review

Following a political issue there should be an evaluation of the crisis response. It will provide the Board with useful information and help to improve the Board strategy. Debriefing and evaluation will be lead by the Director and Chair. It will include all trustees and may involve others (e.g. Board lawyer, public relations professionals) depending on the severity of the incident.

In any assessment of emergency response the focus should be on the improvement of the Board Strategy.

In order to improve the Emergent Political Issues - Board Strategy, the following questions should be answered.

- Overall, did the strategy work?
- What worked well? Why?
- What did not work? Why?
- Was the communication accurate and timely?

- Were trustees kept up-to-date on a regular basis?
- What specific problems arose? Were they resolved? How?
- Was the communication ongoing until the situation was resolved?

Media Communication Tips for Chair or designate(s)

- Cooperate with the press so that they do not seek unreliable sources.
- Consider that different media have different agendas and there is competition.
- Provide equal opportunities to all media outlets and formats.
- Remember that reporters and their editors decide what's newsworthy, not the school or system

Know the Board's key message on the issue along with basic facts and background information. Consider developing a statement or fact sheet. Who, what, when, where, why and how are what the reporter will want to know. Keep notes, if possible, and a log of all inquiries. Contact the Director or Communications Office for assistance if you need it before you call a reporter back, or if you are going to be interviewed.

Remember, you can always refer reporters to the Communications Office.

For TV interviews (on camera) be aware of your body language and eye contact. On radio, tone is important as are short "sound bites". Be conversational in your attitude and approach to both radio and TV reporters with cameras and tape recorders.

Be honest. Be factual. Be brief.

- Admit to the bad news up-front; don't try to cover up what happened
- Acknowledge difficult situations and what will be done about them
- Don't respond to "what if" scenarios or innuendo
- Don't mislead and never speculate
- If you don't have an answer, say so, and commit to getting back when you have the appropriate information
- Ask about and honour media deadlines as much as possible, but not to the point where you provide inaccurate or inconsistent information. Be up front if you can't respond by a deadline
- Don't worry about silence – give a short, factual concise answer. Don't rush to embellish or "chat" about the situation - stick to your key messages
- Release verified information only
- Don't assess blame or make statements about responsibility
- Don't volunteer too much information
- Avoid educational jargon so you'll be understood the first time
- Do not release personal information without permission (police/family).
- If you can't reveal information, let them know why ("The police investigation is continuing" "We don't have permission to release that information")

Be human

- Stress concern for students and staff, safety, etc.
- Talk sincerely about what you have done and what you are doing to contain and resolve the situation
- Talk conversationally – try to avoid sounding strained
- Express sympathy as appropriate
- Remember the capacity, or role, in which you are speaking

- Treat reporters as professionals. Don't underestimate them, but do not assume that they are experts on the subject.

Be prepared

- Be wary of questions that start: "Isn't it true that...?" Aren't you really saying.....?" "How do you respond to.....?" Are you aware that.....?"
- Don't be defensive. Don't lose your temper or argue.
- Focus on the positive actions you are taking, not the problems. Turn a negative question (How are you responding to this terrible shock?) into a positive answer (Classes are continuing, we have support available to students, and staff, and we have been keeping everyone up-to-date on the situation.)
- Never say "No Comment" or talk "Off the Record"
- Keep on track. If you are interrupted before finishing an answer, let the reporter finish, then go back and finish what you were saying.
- Break multiple questions asked all at once into manageable bits. Ask the reporter where you should start with the answers.

A Word on Social Media

Social media adds an overwhelming complexity to crisis communication. The multiple channels, user-level control of messaging, and real-time delivery make social media far more complex than press releases and interviews.

It is for this reason that social media will be **monitored and used solely by the Communications Department in an emergent political crisis.**

The Communications Department will remain in constant contact with the Director and may consult other resources (e.g. other public relations professionals, Board lawyer).

Our Approach to Social Media in a Crisis

1. We incorporate social media into crisis planning

"Integrating social media into crisis communications response is non-negotiable in the 24-hour information cycle."

Christine Gallagher Kearney of DePaul University Office of Public Relations

We know that this will require constant monitoring of social media and the internet.

2. We keep the 'communication basics'

Nothing fundamental changes in using social media for crisis communication.

In their paper, "Incorporating Social Media in Risk and Crisis Communication," Veil, Buehner and Palenchar recommend the following:

- Communicate with honesty, candour and openness while acknowledging risk
- Collaborate and coordinate with credible sources

- Meet the needs of the media and remain accessible
- Communicate with compassion, concern and empathy
- Accept uncertainty and ambiguity

3. We recognize that social media isn't intended for the masses

It is reported that 71% percent of online adults use Facebook and 23 percent use Twitter. Facebook organic Page reach stands at 2.6 percent and about 2 percent of ur Twitter followers see your Tweets.

So, why is social media so important to crisis communication? Consider that 25 percent of Twitter's verified users are journalists. 59 percent of journalists are on Twitter and 54% percent of them regularly use Twitter.

Social media for crisis communication isn't intended to directly communicate with everyone we're socially connected to. It is to provide resources and accessibility to the journalists and key influencers who amplify our message, and it is for parents/community that need a place to find information.

4. We recognize that social media can be used to:

- instigate a crisis situation
- accelerate a crisis situation or;
- help extinguish a crisis situation with the help of influencers.

Influencers are people like journalists, parents and community partners who 'weigh in' via social media to help defend, diffuse and clarify.

We continue to cultivate our relationships with Avon Maitland influencers.

5. We clearly state our values and operate within our guidelines

Posted on our Facebook Page:

The Avon Maitland District School Board values open, two-way conversation. Our official fan page on Facebook, YouTube account and Twitter profile provide forums for everyone to respectfully discuss topics related to education and to share and celebrate relevant news stories. They are also places where we will share tips, upcoming workshops and events, and other information.

While we want to engage in open conversation, we also ask that posts are respectful of our Avon Maitland board community and are consistent with our Equity and Inclusive Education Policy. Individuals who do not follow the guidelines below will have their posts removed, and/or be blocked from the sites.

Guidelines:

- Obscene, racial or disrespectful comments or posts will not be allowed.

- Comments that are abusive, hateful or intended to defame anyone or any organization will not be permitted.
- You participate at your own risk, taking personal responsibility for your comments, your username and any information provided.

We reserve the right to delete comments that:

- are spam or advertising
- are clearly off-topic or disruptive
- advocate illegal activity
- promote particular services, products or political organizations/campaigns
- infringe on copyrights or trademarks
- violate any Avon Maitland board policies

The comments and posts expressed by fans on our social media pages do not necessarily reflect the opinions and/or position of the Avon Maitland board or its employees.

If you have any questions, please contact us at (Communications contact info).

6. We accept that, in the social media world, judgement takes place instantaneously in the court of public opinion

“Accept this reality and you will be miles ahead both strategically and and psychologically when the crisis hits.”

Bill Walker - Midtown PR - CEO and Director of Pubic Relations

7. We accept political crisis when it comes

Accepting the upside-down rules of the court of public opinion in a political crisis, we don't cover up but open up as much as privacy laws and other restrictions allow.

“You must be determined, from the very first minute, to focus on the public interest, not your self interest. And most importantly, you need to set out to shatter public expectations of what you will do next, not reinforce negative stereotypes and the public's preconceived notions about you.”

Bill Walker - Midtown PR - CEO and Director of Pubic Relations