December 8, 2018

You have an Allegation of Sex Abuse – The TABS/NAIS Report

Jane Hulbert
It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently.

Warren Buffett
Agenda

❖ Today’s Landscape
❖ Guiding Principles
❖ NAIS-TABS Report: Response
❖ Communication Best Practices
Today’s Landscape
Independent schools are facing...

- Changing alumni and parent expectations
- Parents & alumni who know more about sex abuse than ever before
- Echo chamber fueled by social media
- Increased media coverage
Guiding Principles

Forewarned is forearmed. You MUST be prepared in advance and have a plan.

The school will be judged more for their handling of the crisis than the actual crisis itself.

The Trust Bank:
Make sure you protect the trust you have built. You may have to rebuild it.
**Effective Leaders are Productively Paranoid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors that correlate with successful outcomes</th>
<th>Behaviors that correlate with unsuccessful outcomes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Hypervigilance</td>
<td>□ Arrogance</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Deliberate, fact-driven decisions</td>
<td>□ Failure to adjust decision speed</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Channel worry into action</td>
<td>□ Reactive, impulsive decision, lacking discipline</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Prepare contingency plans</td>
<td>□ Compromise in excellence of execution</td>
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<td>□ Stay highly attuned to threats and changes in the environment/ even when – especially when all is going well</td>
<td>□ Not planning ahead</td>
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*Jim Collins: Great by Choice*
A School’s Duties in a Sex Abuse Crisis

Duty to…

1. Protect and support the alleged victim.
2. Ensure there are no other alleged student victims or alumni.
3. Notify agency and/or law enforcement as necessary.
4. Ensure fair process of alleged perpetrator.
5. Protect the reputation of the school.
What are the Biggest Mistakes a Board Can Make?

❖ When a board says “we got it” and insists the head run the school, not the crisis
❖ The board leaks
❖ The board fails to listen to school leadership
❖ Board imposes business/corporate practices
❖ Board fails to take responsibility for missteps
Your Crisis Communications Toolbox

A Crisis Communications Plan includes a list of every piece of communication you will need.

❖ Drafts to parents, faculty and staff, alumni of letters, talking points, Q&A
❖ A media policy for the school handbook
❖ Sample media statement
❖ Holding statement
❖ Press statement/release (fill in the blank)
❖ Guidelines on how to hold a press conference only in extreme cases, though rarely happens
# The Crisis Team

*(Varies by school)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Team</th>
<th>Expanded Team</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of School</td>
<td>Division Heads</td>
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<td>Core Admin Team</td>
<td>Advancement and Admissions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Director of Communications</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Manager (deadlines)</td>
<td>Second School Attorney - child protection or criminal law specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT Director</td>
<td>Security as needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Attorney</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Board Chair</td>
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Characteristics of a Crisis

- Surprise
- Insufficient information
- Escalating flow of events
- Feels out of control
- Intense scrutiny from outside
- Panic
- Lack of capacity
Crisis Optics

Moral  Legal  Media  Reputation
Board Challenges

1. Who is brought in at the onset? Executive Committee? Key trustees? Attorney and Head only? Task force?
2. When does the chair tell the full board?
3. How much do you tell the full board? Managing the leaks
4. How do you (chair) communicate with the full board – conference call, email, hard copies that are returned after the meeting
The Board Code of Conduct in Crisis Times

❖ Present a united front even if some don’t agree with the strategy; support the head of school

❖ Respect the communication plan, especially regarding your internal audience & media

❖ Support the head by providing appropriate strategic guidance

❖ Confidentiality is critical

❖ Avoid knee jerk reactions, especially at the outset

❖ Always keep your board hat on

❖ Keep personal opinions to oneself

❖ Avoid speculation

❖ A school is not a company or a law firm – what works at your place of work doesn’t necessarily work in a school – keep this in mind
NAIS/TABS Report: Prevention & Response
“Whether an incident of misconduct occurred last week or several decades ago, once a school learns of the incident, the school’s response requires ethical clarity and considerable sensitivity, as well as deft and prompt action amid challenging circumstances.”
Words Matter in a Crisis

- You don’t get a second chance to make a first impression; the goal is to “land it right”
- Empathy
- What has happened
- Remember…talk to your community first, not the media
- Apologize
It’s all about the letter
“Inside-Out” Crisis Communications

- Work from the “inside out” – internal to external audiences
- Get ahead of issues – set the narrative, don’t play defense
  - Verify the facts
- Don’t share information under investigation
  - Respect confidentiality
- Acknowledge, empathize, and position
An effective response includes:

❖ Transparent communication
❖ Your response and communications are victim centered
  ❖ Helping survivors to heal – RAINN, therapy fund
❖ Learn what we can to prevent this from happening again
  ❖ Supporting the community after an allegation
❖ Acknowledge any failure of the present or past – institutional response
  ❖ Own the problem and show leadership
❖ Bad communication can create a second crisis

NAIS-TABS Report: Section II: Response
Message for Sexual Misconduct

The message to all community members is straightforward:

“We take seriously, as educators, to prevent sexual misconduct from occurring in the first place; we support with care and compassion those students affected when it does; and we investigate and respond appropriately to all concerns about sexual misconduct brought to our attention.”

*Excerpt from Letter to the Community by John Palfrey, Head of School Phillips Andover Academy, August 31, 2016*
Sequence of Messaging

- Head of School and Board Chair
- School Attorney and Communications Director
- Board
- Admin Team
- Faculty / Staff
- Parents
- Students
- Alumni (as appropriate) *Database issues
- Media
A School Media Policy

Every school should have a media policy that everyone signs at the beginning of the school year.

When the school is in crisis, leadership will remind everyone of the policy.
Managing Social Media

- Monitor school Facebook pages and list serves to measure:
  - Questions and issues raised by stakeholders in the community
  - To see first-hand how effective your communications have been
- Don’t engage in Twitter wars or social media sparring; continue to use the school’s traditional forms of communication
- Consider hiring an outside expert to monitor known public venues where social messaging is shared
- Keep in mind vociferous minority may not be truly representative
Thank you.
Important Note

This presentation concerns crisis management and communication, and does not constitute legal advice. If you have further crisis communications issues, you should consult us directly.

Jane Hulbert
Jim Hulbert J.D.
630-325-2509