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## Guidelines for the Communication of Student Information Concerning a Suicide Attempt

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### **Purpose:**

These guidelines provide direction for school staff regarding protocols for the *communication and sharing of information*, either self-disclosed or reported, concerning a student who may have attempted suicide, or revealed a plan to die by suicide or expressed thoughts of suicide.

### **Context:**

School principals, vice-principals, teachers, guidance counsellors and regional school board staff may have to respond to incidents or situations involving a response to a self-disclosure, or report of student who attempts or expresses a plan to die by suicide. There may be uncertainty concerning the sharing of a student's health-related information that is usually considered private and confidential and subject to the *Student Records Policy* and *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPOP) Act*.

The *Education Act*, s. 26(1) (n), states that it is the duty of a teacher in a public school to attend to the health, comfort and safety of students.

The *FOIPOP Act* provides obligations for public bodies and municipalities to protect the privacy of identifiable individuals by restricting the collection, use, and disclosure of information about those individuals. Sections 26 and 28 provide for the use and disclosure of personal information that is necessary for performing statutory duties such as attending to the safety of students. If in doubt, please contact your board's Information Access and Privacy (FOIPOP) Administrator.

### **Guidelines:**

- Refer to the Canadian Mental Health Association's information sheets, *Communities Addressing Suicide Together (CAST)*, dated Fall, 2011, and circulated to all school board Program Directors on January 3, 2012 [available from *Communities Addressing Suicide Together (CAST)* of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Nova Scotia Division, telephone (902) 466-6600, or, toll free at 1-877-466-6606].
- If a student has attempted suicide, or, is believed to have attempted suicide and needs medical attention, call 911, or your local emergency services number and notify the principal or principal's designate immediately.

- A school board employee having any information that a student has disclosed, *while at school*, an attempt, or revealed a plan to die by suicide, must notify the principal (or principal's designate) immediately. The principal or the principal's designate will contact the student's parent/guardian as soon as possible.
- A school board employee having any information that a student has disclosed, *while not at school*, an attempt, or revealed a plan to die by suicide, must notify the principal (or principal's designate) immediately and the principal or designate will contact the parent/guardian as soon as possible.
- Obtaining the consent of the parent and/or student for the principal to inform appropriate school staff is desirable, but not necessary when there is a compelling health or safety matter.
- The principal will inform school staff (e.g. teachers who have responsibility for the student, guidance counsellor, vice-principal, and others as necessary) of the student's situation on a "need to know" basis to support student safety. This involves professional judgment on the part of the principal and may include consultation, as appropriate, with the parent/guardian, guidance counselor, and student. Such information should be communicated verbally by the principal in a meeting with appropriate school staff, and not by e-mail or other written communication.
- Actions taken by school staff regarding sensitive information that is disclosed, or shared, should be documented by the principal and placed in the student's confidential record. Information documented should be general in nature and should not include specific details of the disclosed or reported incident of attempted suicide. Careful consideration should be given to recording information that may have a negative or harmful impact on future educational decisions or plans concerning the student.
- It is recommended that schools/school boards review and update their Crisis/Tragic Events Plan annually.

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