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NAIS and TABS Task Force Issue Final Report on Educator Sexual Misconduct

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The Independent School Task Force on Educator Sexual Misconduct has released its final report, *Prevention and Response: Recommendations for Independent School Leaders* [<https://www.nais.org/media/Nais/Articles/Documents/Prevention-and-Response-Task-Force-Report-2018.pdf>]. This report incorporates feedback submitted in response to the August 2017 draft report released for comment and feedback. The Task Force was formed in the Summer of 2016 as a collaboration between the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS) and was characterized as a “call to action” for schools to engage in a comprehensive and thoughtful review of policies and procedures to help ensure safe environments for students.

As the title implies, the report first walks through recommendations for steps independent schools should take to prevent incidents of educator sexual misconduct from occurring, followed by guidance and recommendations for response to allegations. In making these recommendations, the Task Force lauded schools which demonstrate honesty and openness on this issue and which continue to encourage transparency within the independent school community. A summary of the report’s recommendations are outlined below.

I. Prevention

The report recommends that schools take the following actions to prevent educator sexual misconduct:

- Delineate responsibilities for overseeing child protection and risk assessment
- Establish and update written student safety protocols
- Establish policies for clear and appropriate professional boundaries between students and adults, including those governing interactions between students and adults, situations requiring privacy, physical contact, physical spaces, and technology
- Create and maintain an internal reporting and evaluation system
- Conduct rigorous screening for potential new hires
 - The recommendations address screening prospective employees, asking the right questions, how to handle school volunteers and regular contractors, and providing references and information about former employees
- Provide regular training about preventing sex abuse for all school personnel, students, as well as parents, guardians, and other family members
- Establish procedures to respond to, report, record, and track reported or suspected cases of sexual misconduct
 - The use of outside experts, including specialized legal counsel, a pediatrician or counselor, and a crisis management / crisis communications consulting group, are



recommended to effectively address the range and depth of issues that could arise and for long-term cost-benefit. The role of the board should be identified ahead of time

- Identify a team to respond to allegations of misconduct and abuse
- Evaluate the school's insurance policies regarding educator sexual misconduct
- Walk through various scenarios to better prepare for an effective response

II. Response

The report recommends that schools take the following actions in response to allegations of educator sexual misconduct:

- Know and follow the law, without exception, including mandatory reporting obligations
- Respond quickly and compassionately
- Listen and respond with empathy to the person reporting abuse. This includes advice to fully investigate a claim and never dismiss an allegation as the false complaint of a troubled child
- Follow school procedures to deal promptly and equitably with a person accused of abuse or misconduct
- Conduct an appropriate, prompt, equitable, and thorough investigation
- Retain an outside investigator with subject-matter expertise to investigate allegations of abuse, when needed
- Plan how information will be shared with the community (choosing what, and what not, to say)
- Communicate with transparency
- Help survivors heal
- Support the community after an allegation

Each of these recommendations is addressed in more detail in the report. In concluding however, the Task Force emphasizes that developing a positive culture of student safety requires time and effort in order to address attitudes, perspectives, values, mission, and priorities, and that leadership in these efforts is necessary to align community goals and beliefs about what are appropriate behaviors.

Finally, the report makes clear that its recommendations are intended to serve as guidelines for schools, recognizing that each school will need to make an individualized assessment of its own prevention and response efforts in developing a comprehensive strategy to eradicate educator sexual misconduct.

Questions or Assistance:

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