

Don't Panic: Crisis Communications in Schools



Clint Champion
Sedor, Wendlandt, Evans & Filippi, LLC
November 9, 2018

*Empowering
School Districts
with Super
Legal Services*



SEDOR

WENDLANDT

EVANS

FILIPPI



“I’d say he suffered one too many panic attacks,
resulting in sudden death.”

Crisis Communications: What is a Crisis?

- **A situation where schools could face inadequate information, not enough time, insufficient resources, but leaders must make crucial decisions**
- **A crisis could affect one student or an entire community**

Crisis Communications for Schools

- **Goal: Prompt, Accurate & Consistent Communications**
- **You cannot figure out how to communicate during a crisis**
- **Channels of communication should be open before a crisis**

Crisis Communication Plan

- **Familiar with Board Policies**
- **Designate Crisis Management Team**
- **Designate Spokesperson**
- **Develop Relationships and Channels of Communication**
- **Develop Fact Sheet**

Current School Board Policies

- **Communication with the Public**
- **Media Relations**
- **District-Sponsored Social Media**
- **Unauthorized Release of Confidential Information**

FERPA Emergency Exception

- **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA)**
- **34 CFR 99.36 – District may disclose information from an education record to appropriate parties in connection with an emergency if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals.**

FERPA Emergency Exception

- **Determinations made on a case-by-case basis**
- **Consider the totality of circumstances**
- **Is there an articulable and significant threat to the health or safety of a student or other individuals?**



Administrator's Role in Crisis Communications

- **Determine how you will communicate with everyone involved or affected by crisis**
- **Notifications to Emergency Responders and District Crisis Team**

Administrator's Role in Crisis Communications

- **Gather information for Crisis Management Team**
- **Develop fact sheet for District**
- **Member of Crisis Management Team**
- **Receive & respond to inquiries**
- **Communicate with faculty, staff, students, parents, community (directly)**

Crisis Communications Principles

- **One Spokesperson designated**
- **Accurate, Consistent, Timely**
- **Two or Three Key Messages, e.g “student and staff are safe,” “school is cancelled for today;” “we are evaluating whether we will have school tomorrow”**
- **Be Available to answer questions**

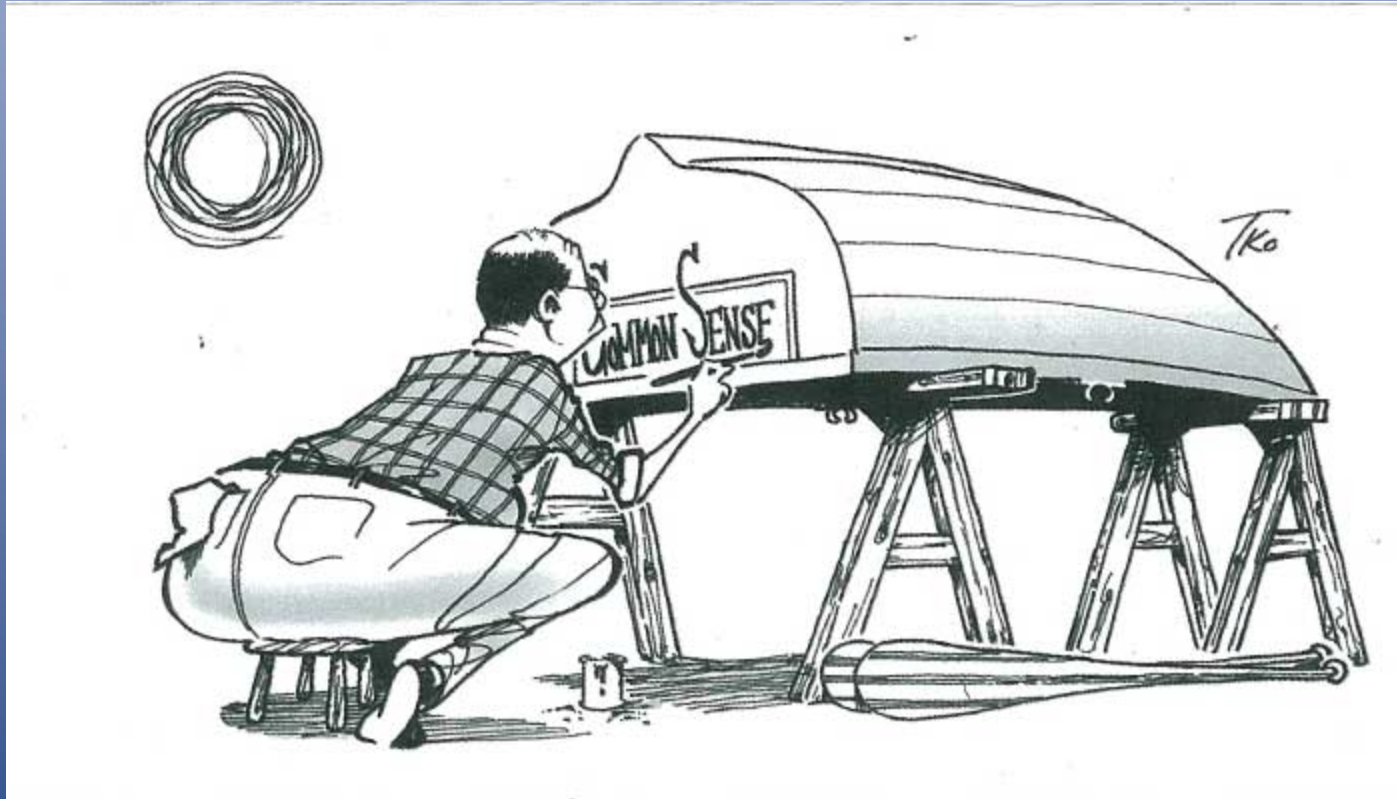
Media Interviews – Best Practices

- **Prompt, Accurate, Consistent**
- **Know the current fact sheet**
- **Prepare for interview – ask the reporter in advance about the interview**
- **Sound bites – not more than 15 seconds**
- **Don't lose your cool – it's not personal**
- **No sunglasses, chewing gum**
- **It's okay to say I don't know**
- **Never say “No comment”**

Post-Crisis Debriefing

- **Meet with District Crisis Management Team: What worked well? What can be improved?**
- **Meet with faculty & staff: What worked well? What can be improved?**

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Clint Campion
Sedor, Wendlandt, Evans & Filippi, LLC
November 9, 2018

*Empowering
School Districts
with Super
Legal Services*



SEDOR

WENDLANDT

EVANS

FILIPPI