

## **Education and Risk Management**

Mr. Ken Sommerfeldt

*Once a week, the Lethbridge Herald publishes a column written by a superintendent of one of five school jurisdictions in the Lethbridge area. This week's column is authored by Ken Sommerfeldt, Superintendent for Westwind School Division and was published on January 24, 2018. Thank you to the Lethbridge Herald for permission to post this article on the CASS website.*

As time marches on it seems that the work in public institutions continues to increase in complexity. Working to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students, staff, and public can become a policy and procedural jungle to understand and navigate. Over the course of my thirty-five-year career in education, I have observed the expansion of the types of student activities that have become more routine in the student experience. Additionally, activities that in a previous generation were reserved for high school students are now the expectation of younger and younger kids. In athletics, for example, varsity high school teams used to travel once a season to an out of region tournament or event. Today, Junior High athletic programs often travel at least this much or more.

As the interest in new and rewarding opportunities that contribute to the whole educational experience of students continues, travel and events tend to become more unique with the potential of increased risk. School trips to London, Paris and Rome were once considered to be the very apex of a student excursion. These trips now pale in comparison to destinations like Bali, Viet Nam, Peru, or the Caribbean. School and system leaders are responsible to carefully consider the details of travel advisories, safety concerns, insurable activities and the liability associated with these plans. These cautious steps in the planning phase are essential to ensure that medium and high-risk activities are avoided.

The risk of personal injury in conjunction with school activities, whether in the classroom or in an extra-curricular activity, is a matter of interest for all stakeholders in education. Recently as part of my role as CASS (College of Alberta School Superintendent's) representative to ASAA (Alberta Schools Athletic Association) I participated in a round table discussion surrounding the topic of athletic competition and concussions. As we discussed the notions of student safety, concussion protocols, and appropriate responses, it was clear that these types of injuries are not isolated to athletic competition. It is likely that school and system leaders will need to look wider than athletics in developing policy and practice that is responsible to parents and students.

In consideration of the many activities, travel, and events that students of all ages participate in, there is a duty of system leaders to consider and manage the varying possibilities of risk in these matters. As one generation gives way to another, and as we continuously reform our processes and opportunities, what are the acceptable limits for student activities, for what ages, and at what risk level?