



EAB

Case Study Compendium of Campus Flashpoints

Exercises to Prepare School Leadership for How
to Respond to Incidents of Incivility on Campus

Independent School Executive Forum

Case Study Compendium Overview

Purpose of the Case Study Compendium

Climate flashpoints—including incidents on campus, controversy around alumni, and viral social media posts—can catch schools off guard, making it difficult to craft a swift and appropriate response. Forward thinking schools recognize they must have a proactive strategy in place to not only minimize consequences when an incident arise, but also effectively address immediate student, parent, and community concerns.

The Case Study Compendium can prepare leadership at your school for a variety of potential campus flashpoints. Each of the following case studies have been inspired by real incidents that have taken place at independent schools across the country. In meetings with your senior administrative or crisis response team, use the case studies to brainstorm possible responses to the following scenarios, assess your school's readiness for potential flashpoints, and develop strategies to prepare your school's response.

Consider the general discussion questions below for all case scenarios.

General Discussion Questions

1. Has a similar flashpoint occurred at your school or a nearby school before? What did you do well? What could you have done better?
2. What parts of your school culture could contribute to an incident like this? What pre-emptive measures can you take to address these issues?
3. What is your main concern in addressing this flashpoint? What key response components would address that concern?

Case Study Compendium

Racist Video Goes Viral

Case Details

Over the weekend, three students at your school post a video on the popular app, TikTok. The video depicts the students, all junior males, dancing to a popular rap song in one of their homes. Two of the students are wearing blackface while all three rap along, using racial epithets repeatedly as they occur in the lyrics.

By Monday, the video has been widely shared among students on social media. The video is quickly brought to the administration's attention Monday morning when school begins. By the end of the day, students are organizing a sit-in on campus to protest the lack of administrative response, discipline, and the "racist culture" at your school. In addition to student pushback, you're fielding calls from parents asking how you plan to respond to the incident.

Discussion Questions

1. Does your school currently have a social media policy or 24/7 policy for student behavior? If so, what does that policy mandate? If not, what discipline is appropriate for the students involved?
2. How can you support students, faculty and staff from marginalized identity groups after this incident? How can these moments be used to prompt discussion and change on campus?

Famous Alumni Makes National Headlines

Case Details

Your school has a cadre of prominent alumni, ranging from political figures to stars of the arts. While many of your famous alumni bolster your reputation and fundraising efforts, the one currently dominating the local and national headlines does not.

Tom Taylor, an alumnus of your school, is a rising figure within the white nationalist party. He has gained notoriety in recent months due to a series of highly publicized rallies and a large social media following. Most recently, Taylor was recorded at a white nationalist conference making derogatory comments against non-white people and refugees. The story has been picked up by local and national news outlets, which frequently cite his ties to your school.

Your student body is increasingly demanding that the school respond, and parents are concerned about the attention being drawn to the school and the school's values. No one is more vocal about the situation, however, than your alumni base. Anxious to renounce Taylor's comments and his party's beliefs, your alumni are calling on you to issue a school response immediately. As days pass, they begin to speak to the media, drawing more attention to the connection between Taylor and your school.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a school response protocol in place for when you respond to incidents that occur outside of school walls? If not, when have you historically issued statements?
2. When, if ever, do you comment on alumni behavior? What is the protocol around this decision?
3. How can your school assuage student, parent and alumni concerns? What short-term and long-term actions can your school take to ensure concerns do not linger?

Case Study Compendium

Controversial Faculty Comments

Case Details

Paul Williams is an AP US Government and Politics teacher at your school. He likes to begin each class with a discussion centered on a current event. On Wednesday, the class starts with a discussion of *Medical Services LLC v. Russo*, a current U.S. Supreme Court case that is widely viewed as the first real threat to the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision. As the discussion moves farther into the topic of government's jurisdiction, one student comments that government should not be involved with the decision as to whether a woman can get an abortion. Williams, who is among your more conservative faculty members, responds:

"The U.S. government is in place to protect those that can't protect themselves. An unborn child falls under that category. Unlike the mother, the child's choices didn't put them in this position – so it is the government's responsibility to protect the unborn child from being murdered."

In the days following, you begin to receive calls from parents with children in Williams' class. They are furious about Williams' comments and emphasize that they do not send their kids to your school so that teachers can "indoctrinate" students with their "agenda." They call for Williams' removal, and threaten to share the incident among the broader parent community if swift action is not taken.

Discussion Questions

1. What guidelines does your school have for responding to comments faculty make as individual actors, inside and outside of the classroom?
2. Does your school have a clearly communicated policy about faculty's allowed level of political expression?
3. What measures should be taken to address parent concerns about faculty behavior?

Vandalism in a School Bathroom

Case Details

You receive a call from a member of your custodial crew on Thursday evening that they have found racist graffiti in the second-floor bathroom near the science classrooms. Noticeably upset, the man notes that when they had cleaned this bathroom the evening before, there had been no graffiti, meaning it must have been done at some point during the school day Thursday.

He sends you a picture of the bathroom stall's wall, on which someone had scribbled "Go back to your country." It's unclear when exactly this was done, who did it, and who else has seen it.

Discussion Questions

1. Which constituents within your community will receive early communication about this incident? How transparent will you be about ongoing actions to determine who is responsible?
2. How can you support students, faculty, and staff from marginalized identity groups after this incidents? How can these moments be used to prompt discussion and change on campus?

Case Study Compendium

Incident at Upper School Assembly

Case Details

On Friday, students gather for the weekly all upper school assembly. During this week's assembly, Spectrum, the student run gay-straight alliance is scheduled to present on their programming for the rest of the semester and run a collaborative activity to help students think about their own identity.

The activity includes an online learning game, that asks students to answer questions using their phones. Answers are projected, using anonymous usernames, onto the screen at the assembly.

Partway through the exercise, students from Spectrum ask participants what is one element of their identity that they *chose*? After a moment, the following two student responses flash on the projection:

*"I chose to be straight, because why would anyone want to be a f*g?"*

"I chose to like girls, I'm no homo."

A faculty member quickly shuts off the projection, but students have already seen the responses. Students excitedly talk amongst themselves about what just happened.

Discussion Questions

1. What proactive steps could your school take to set expectations for student behavior when discussing topics of identity?
2. How can you support students from marginalized identity groups after upsetting public incidents? How can these moments be used to prompt discussion and change on campus?