



March 10, 2023

Guidance from your MSS Team – “Watch Your Words...”

With COVID restrictions lifted, Principals and Vice-Principals find themselves in more and more in-person meetings, presentations, and gatherings. With this increase in interactions and communication with colleagues, staff, students, parents, and community members can come an increased chance of being misinterpreted, misunderstood, or just ‘saying the wrong thing’.

Words are powerful. It is important to take time – before and during any interactions – to be aware of how the words we choose may be perceived and interpreted by others. Will the language be seen as respectful and appropriate? Or could the words be deemed ‘inappropriate’ by those who hear us? The latter can result in a formal complaint of harassment being filed.

Harassment can include the use of an objectionable comment (either one-time or as part of a pattern) that could be interpreted or inferred as demeaning, belittling, intimidating, or humiliating to another person. Sexual harassment can include comments of a sexual nature that create an uncomfortable working environment. Even commenting on a person’s appearance can be interpreted as inappropriate. Each district has policy and administrative procedures regarding respectful workplace expectations, and we encourage members to review and understand these procedures.

Standard #2 of the Professional Standards for BC Educators states that “Educators act ethically and maintain the integrity, credibility, and reputation of the profession”. As educators, Vice-Principals and Principals are seen as role models in the community, are held to a higher standard, and are accountable for their conduct both on and off duty. When a member of the public or school community feels that this standard has been breached, it can result in a complaint to the Teacher Regulation Branch (TRB). How we

choose to speak to and about others is part of how we conduct ourselves in the workplace and in the community.

Our gentle reminder to members: be mindful, be aware, and – when in doubt – pause, choose your words carefully, and always use respectful and professional language. This approach can help to prevent the risk of a harassment, conduct, or TRB complaint being filed and is, of course, best practice in the profession.

For more information:

Interested Chapters can request the MSS workshop on “Avoiding Pitfalls”

[TRB Standards](#)

[Harassment/Sexual Harassment article](#)

Any questions can be directed to the MSS Team: mssinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca