

**PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE
(Whistle Blower Protection Act)**

Background

On June 1, 2013, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act (“PIDA”) came into force in Alberta. The purpose of PIDA is to:

- (a) Facilitate the disclosure and investigation of significant and serious matters in public entities, including school boards, that an employee believes may be unlawful, dangerous to the public or injurious to the public interest;
- (b) Protect employees who make those disclosures;
- (c) Manage, investigate and make recommendations respecting disclosures of wrongdoings and reprisals; and
- (d) Promote public confidence in administration of public entities.

Objective

Golden Hills School Division is committed to the highest standard of ethical and accountable conduct, and recognizes the importance of working to deter and detect wrongdoing within the operation of the school board, and to promote public confidence in the administration of the board. To ensure this, Golden Hills School Division is committed to maintaining a positive and supportive environment whereby employees can disclose potential wrongdoing, or seek advice about disclosing a potential wrongdoing, without retribution, and are provided with clear guidance for how those disclosures may take place.

Under PIDA, an employee of the school division may make a disclosure of a wrongdoing, which the school board will investigate in accordance with these procedures. Under PIDA, no person may make reprisals against an employee for making a disclosure, seeking advice about making a disclosure, or taking any other steps under PIDA, so long as the employee is acting in good faith.

Golden Hills School Division is required under section 5(1) of PIDA to establish and maintain, in accordance with PIDA, written procedures for managing and investigating disclosures by employees of the board. Those written procedures are set out herein.

Definitions

- “PIDA” means the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act;
- “designated officer” means the person designated to manage and investigate disclosures made under PIDA and in Golden Hills School Division is the Secretary-Treasurer;
- “commissioner” means the Public Interest Commissioner appointed under PIDA;
- “employee” means an individual employed by the school board;
- “disclosure” means a disclosure of wrongdoing made in good faith by an employee under PIDA and this administrative procedure;
- PIDA (Public Interest Disclosure Act) defines wrongdoing as:
 - (a) A contravention of an Act, a regulation made pursuant to the Act, an Act of the Parliament of Canada or a regulation made pursuant to an Act of the Parliament of Canada;

- (b) An act or omission that creates: (i) a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of individuals other than a danger that is inherent in the performance of the duties or functions of any employee, or (ii) a substantial and specific danger to the environment;
- (c) Gross mismanagement of public funds or a public asset; and
- (d) Knowingly directing or counseling an individual to commit a wrongdoing mentioned above.
 - “reprisal” means any adverse employment action taken against an employee who seeks advice on making a disclosure, makes a disclosure, or co-operates in an investigation of wrongdoing, or declines to participate in a wrongdoing in accordance with PIDA. Examples of reprisal include dismissal, layoff, suspension, demotion or transfer, discontinuation or elimination of a job, transfer, reduction in wages, change in hours of work or reprimand, any other measure that adversely affects the employee’s employment or working conditions (e.g. bullying), and threats to do any of the above.

Disclosure Management/Investigation

1) Receipt of Disclosures

- a) Employees seeking advice on potential disclosure under PIDA and this policy shall be referred to the designated officer, who shall provide the employee with information on PIDA, this administrative procedure, the requirements of PIDA and other alternative processes for resolution of the employee’s concern.
- b) Employees shall make disclosures for the purposes of PIDA and this administrative procedure to the designated officer, utilizing the PIDA Disclosure Form attached hereto.
- c) Disclosures shall provide:
 - the name of the disclosing employee;
 - a description of the wrongdoing;
 - the name of the individual or individuals alleged to have committed the wrongdoing, or about to commit the wrongdoing;
 - the date of the wrongdoing.
- d) The designated officer shall acknowledge receipt of the disclosure to the employee making the disclosure within 5 business days from receipt of the disclosure.

2) Preliminary Handling of Disclosures

- a) Where the designated officer is of the opinion that the subject matter of a disclosure would be more appropriately dealt with by a department of the government of Alberta, an office of the Legislature, or another public entity, the designated officer shall report the subject matter of the disclosure to the designated officer of that other entity.
- b) Where an alternative process exists for the handling of the subject matter of the disclosure under:
 - another administrative procedure of the board (for example, AP 161 – Harassment, AP 421 – Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation, AP 492 – Employee Code of Conduct and Fiduciary Obligation);
 - another Act or regulation (Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy, Occupational Health and Safety, etc.); or
 - procedures under a collective agreement or employment contract;

and the designated officer is of the opinion that the subject matter of the disclosure would more appropriately be dealt with under an alternative process, the designated officer may refer the disclosing employee to those procedures.

- c) Where the disclosure:
 - is clearly frivolous or vexatious, has not been made in good faith, has not been made in a timely enough manner to permit an investigation, or does not deal with a wrongdoing;
 - relates to a decision, action or matter that results from a balanced and informed decision-making process on a public policy or operational issues; or

- does not provide adequate particulars about the wrongdoing to permit the conduct of a fair and effective investigation

the designated officer may decline to investigate the disclosure.

- If more than one disclosure is made of a single wrongdoing, the designated officer may conduct a single investigation into the wrongdoing.
- The designated officer shall advise the employee making the disclosure whether the disclosure will or will not be investigated within 10 business days from receipt of the disclosure.

3. Mandatory Disclosures to Others

- If the designated officer reasonably believes that the matter to which the disclosure relates constitutes an imminent risk of a substantial or specific danger to the life, health or safety of individuals, or to the environment, the designated officer shall as soon as reasonably practical refer the disclosure to the Commissioner.
- Notwithstanding whether a disclosure is referred to the Commissioner, where the designated officer is aware of:
 - a disclosure relating to an imminent risk of a substantial or specific danger to the life, health or safety of individuals, or to the environment, or
 - that the alleged wrongdoing, if true, may threaten the welfare of students, staff, or the safe and caring environment of the school,

the designated officer shall also ensure that the Superintendent of Schools and other appropriate persons within the school board have sufficient information to act to abate that risk.

- Where, at any point following a disclosure, the designated officer has reason to believe that the alleged wrongdoing, if true, could potentially give rise to the Superintendent being of the opinion that the welfare of students is threatened by the presence of a teacher, the designated officer shall advise the superintendent of the alleged wrongdoing for consideration of a possible administrative suspension under section 105(2) of the School Act.
- Where in the course of an investigation the designated officer has reason to believe that an offence has been committed under an Act or regulation of the Province of Alberta, or under an Act or regulation of the Parliament of Canada, the designated officer shall report the potential offence to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.

4. Investigations

- The designated officer shall conduct all investigations in accordance with the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.
- The designated officer may utilize internal personnel and resources, and may retain outside personnel or resources, for the purpose of conducting the investigation.
- The designated officer, and any person conducting an investigation on their behalf, may interview any person and shall have access to any documents of the school board necessary for the investigation.
- Where, in the course of an investigation, the designated officer has reason to believe that another wrongdoing has been committed or may be committed, the designated officer shall investigate that other potential wrongdoing as if a disclosure has been made.

5. Report

- The designated officer shall provide a written investigation report to the Superintendent of Schools detailing whether the disclosure was substantiated, and providing recommendations on corrective action.

- b) The investigation shall be completed and the written investigation report provided to the Superintendent of Schools no later than 110 business days from the date the disclosure was received.
 - c) Where the designated officer is considering a recommendation to the Superintendent that the Superintendent exercise authority delegated to them by the Board of Trustees to suspend or terminate a teacher or administrative designation under the School Act, the designated officer shall consult with other board staff typically responsible for such recommendations concerning the necessary process. In such event, the written investigation report shall be provided to the Superintendent in the course of any process under the School Act for the Superintendent to consider that recommendation.
 - d) The Superintendent of Schools shall consider the recommendations in the investigation report, and shall be responsible for determining what action, if any, including disciplinary action, shall be either taken as a result or recommended to the Board of Trustees. The Superintendent of Schools shall follow-up with the employees responsible to ensure those actions are taken.
 - e) The person making the complaint shall be advised when the investigation is completed, the general recommendations made in the written investigation report, and the Superintendent of Schools actions resulting from the written investigation report.
6. Extension of Timelines
- a) The designated officer may request of the Superintendent of Schools and the Superintendent of Schools may grant, extensions of timelines within this administrative procedure, provided that the total extensions granted do not extend the overall time period for investigation and provision of the investigation report by more than 30 business days.
 - b) The Superintendent of Schools may request permission from the Commissioner to extend timelines for a longer period.
 - c) In the event of an extension of a timeline, the designated officer shall promptly advise the person who submitted a disclosure of wrongdoing when he or she may expect the next procedural step to occur or be completed.
7. Conflicts of Interest/Disclosures about the Superintendent of Schools
- a) In the even the designated officer is in a conflict of interest with respect to the nature of the disclosure or any person involved in the disclosure or alleged wrongdoing, the designated officer shall request the Superintendent of Schools to designate an alternative designated officer for the disclosure. The alternative designated officer shall have all the powers of the designated officer for the purpose of the disclosure.
 - b) In the event of a disclosure to the designated officer concerning the conduct of the Superintendent of Schools, or concerning which the Superintendent of Schools has a conflict of interest, the designated officer shall:
 - i. Advise the Board Chair of the nature of the disclosure, whereupon the Board of Trustees may authorize an investigation into the disclosure;
 - ii. Advise the Commissioner of the disclosure and its referral to the Board of Trustees, and seek advice from the Commissioner concerning whether the disclosure should be referred to the Commissioner.
8. Confidentiality
- a) The designated officer shall ensure all disclosures, and information gathered in the course of investigating disclosures, including the identity of the person making the disclosure, those alleged to have committed the wrongdoing and witnesses, are maintained in confidence and disclosed only:
 - i. as necessary for this administrative procedure and to conduct the investigation in accordance with the principles of procedural fairness and natural justice;
 - ii. in accordance with PIDA or any other statute;
 - iii. the disclosure of that information is necessary due to an imminent risk of a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of individuals, or to the environment.

9. Reprisal

- a) No person shall take or direct, or counsel or direct a person to take or direct, any of the following measures against an employee because the employee has, in good faith, sought advice about making a disclosure, made a disclosure, co-operated in an investigation under this Act, declined to participate in a wrongdoing or done anything in accordance with this Act;
 - i. a dismissal, layoff, suspension, demotion or transfer, discontinuation or elimination of a job, change of job location, reduction in wages, change in hours of work or reprimand;
 - ii. any measure, other than one mentioned in the above clause that adversely affects the employee's employment or working conditions;
 - iii. a threat to take any of the measures mentioned in the above clauses.

10. Annual Reporting

- a) The Superintendent of Schools shall prepare a report annually for the Board of Trustees on all disclosures that have been made to the designated officer.

LEGAL REFERENCES:

- School Act, 5-3
- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, F-25
- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Regulation, Alberta Regulation 186/2008
- Public Interest Disclosure Act P-39.5
- Public Interest Disclosure Regulation, Alberta Regulation 71/2013.

PIDA Disclosure Form

Use this form to determine if a disclosure can be made, and to make a disclosure to the Designated Officer of the Golden Hills School Division No. 75. If you are unsure about any section of this form please call the Secretary-Treasurer of Golden Hills School Division No. 75 at 1-800-320-3739 (Alberta only).

Does this apply to you?

TIME REQUIREMENTS

Did the wrongdoing occur after June 1, 2013?

YES NO

Has more than 2 years passed since the wrongdoing occurred?

YES NO

If you answer NO to either of the above questions the *Public Interest Disclosure Act* does not apply.

TYPE OF WRONGDOING

To which of the categories below does the Wrongdoing apply?

- Contravention of an Act or a Regulation (Contravention of a Law)
- An act or omission that creates a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of individuals
- An act or omission that creates a substantial and specific danger to the environment
- Gross mismanagement of public funds or a public asset
- Counseling an individual to commit a wrongdoing mentioned above

**If none of the above, the Public Interest Disclosure Act does not apply. Consider internal resolution mechanisms.*

To proceed with making a Disclosure of wrongdoing to the Designated Officer of Golden Hills School Division No. 75, please complete the form below:

DISCLOSURE OF WRONGDOING FORM

Name

Mailing Address

City

Province

Postal Code

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Preferred Telephone (area code + #)

Work

Home

Cell

Alternate Telephone (area code + #)

Work

Home

Cell

E-mail

How do you prefer to receive communication in regards to the Disclosure?

Phone

E-mail

Mail

Name of Employer

Branch/Unit/Department (if applicable)

Name of Designated Officer (if known)

Please provide as much information as possible about the person(s) or organization alleged to have committed the wrongdoing or about to commit the wrongdoing, or where the wrongdoing occurred or is about to occur:

Name	Title

Organization

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Organization Address

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City:	Province:	Postal Code:

Work Telephone	E-Mail

Please provide a description of the wrongdoing including all relevant details, dates and locations the wrongdoings occurred, and all parties involved:

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Declaration

I believe that all the information provided is true to the best of my knowledge*

All information is to be kept confidential.

Signature

Current Date

***Knowingly making a false or misleading statement is an offence pursuant to the Act.**

Please send the completed form in confidence to:

Secretary-Treasurer
Golden Hills School Division No. 75
435A Highway No. 1
Strathmore, AB T1P 1J4
Phone: (403) 934-5121
Fax: (403) 934-5125
E-mail: Tahra.sabir@ghsd75.ca