Concussion Protocol

Position Statement

Appleby recognizes the importance of health, safety and overall well-being of its students and is committed to taking steps to reduce the risk of injury. The purpose of this document is to provide an action plan for school personnel to take the necessary steps to ensure that students with a suspected concussion receive timely, appropriate care and proper management to allow them to return to school and sport activities safely. This protocol outlines strategies for helping students to make a gradual return to learning and playing following a concussion. This protocol may not address every possible clinical scenario that can occur during school or school activities, but includes critical elements based on the latest evidence and current expert consensus.

What is a concussion?

- A concussion is a brain injury that causes changes in how the brain functions, leading to symptoms that can be physical (e.g., headache, dizziness), cognitive (e.g., difficulty concentrating or remembering), emotional/behavioural (e.g., depression, irritability) and/or related to sleep (e.g., drowsiness, difficulty falling asleep).
- It may be caused either by a direct blow to the head, face or neck, or a blow to the body that transmits a force to the head that causes the brain to move rapidly within the skull;
- It can occur even if there has been no loss of consciousness (in fact most concussions occur without a loss of consciousness).

Concussions can only be diagnosed by a physician or nurse practitioner based on the signs and symptoms reported by the individual and a range of neuropsychological assessments such as eye tracking, reaction time, balance, etc. Early assessment within 24 hours of the suspected incident is critical to ensure safe and proper care and a full cognitive and physical recovery.

Concussions are treated with a recommendation that the student rest (i.e no participation in academic or athletic activities) followed by an 8-step graduated return-to-learn and return-to-play plan. Research and legislation indicate that students should be able to *fully* resume all academic activities, including testing, *prior* to the initiation of team sport specific activities (Step 6 of the protocol). This can be extremely frustrating and upsetting for students when their participation on a team or on a field trip is restricted. All the same, concussions are a traumatic brain injury and recovery must be the priority.

If your son/daughter has a Suspected Concussion, on- or off-campus:

Within 24 hours, please take them to their family physician, a walk-in clinic or the emergency room at the local hospital, for diagnosis of either (a) concussion or (b) no concussion. *long-distance boarders will be seen by the school physician. *

- If they have a diagnosis of <u>no concussion</u>, they must receive a note from the diagnosing physician to provide to the Appleby College Health Centre prior to attendance at any class or school-related event. After they receive clearance from the School Nurse, they may resume regular learning and physical activities.

- If they are diagnosed with a <u>concussion</u>, they will be placed on Step 1 of the Appleby College Concussion Recovery Pathway. Recovery begins at home with their parent or guardian (unless

they are a long-distance boarder). In this case the student would be overseen in the Health centre and in their residence. If symptoms persist beyond 4 weeks, your child maybe experiencing post-concussion syndrome, we will require your child to be re-assessed by a medical doctor. The School has a list of local concussion specialist clinics that the student may attend, if needed.

Our Concussion Protocol

If a student is suspected of having a possible concussion, play (or the activity in which the suspected concussion occurred) will be suspended immediately. Although this may be difficult for the student to hear, particularly if they are an athlete playing an important game, our responsibility is to always keep the student as safe as possible at all times; this includes removing them from the activity.

Please see attached the School's 8-step pathway for concussion recovery, return-to-learn and return-to-play. As you are reviewing it, keep in mind:

- Steps are not days – the length of time needed to complete each step will vary based on the severity of the concussion and the student. Progression through the concussion protocol is individual, timelines and activities may vary. If any symptoms worsen, the student should go back to the previous step.

- Under *Rowan's Law*, physicians and nurse practitioners are the only health care providers to medically assess, diagnose a concussion and provide confirmation of medical clearance for students to return to unrestricted participation in competitive sport. Students will see the School Nurse if symptoms worsen or re-appear at any point during their concussion recovery.

- Steps 1-5 of the Return to Learn (RTL) and Return to Play (RTP) will progress together, however students will return full-time to school before progressing to Steps 6, 7 & 8 of the RTP guidelines.

- School-related Social Activities (such as Spirit Day, dances, prom, field trips, Arts Week events, Residential Life evening events, spectating at games, etc.) are off limits to students unless they are on Step 5 of the RTL and RTP or higher due to the highly sensory stimulating nature of these events which can interfere with recovery.

- In Return to Play (RTP), students must be able to participate in Step 1-5 for a minimum of 24 hours **without experiencing any increase in symptoms** during or after the activities before moving onto the next steps.

- Students <u>not currently enrolled</u> in Physical Education or an Athletic Co-Curricular may be fully cleared after **Step 5**. Students <u>who are enrolled</u> in Physical Education and/or Athletic Co-Curricular will be required to obtain a medical clearance letter after **Step 6** to begin full contact activities (Step 7 & Step 8). Students enrolled in Phys-Ed will be fully cleared after Step 7. Students enrolled in Athletic Co-curricular will be fully cleared after Step 8.

Should you have any questions, please contact:

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- Emma Young (Health Centre, ext. 234)
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