



# **Akademeia High School**

## **Wellbeing Handbook**



Introduction .....	3
Definitions and Abbreviations .....	3
Diversity and Inclusion .....	3
Why is mental health important in Akademeia? .....	4
Confidentiality.....	4
Levels of School-wide Mental Health and Wellbeing Support .....	5
General Needs.....	5
Milder Needs.....	5
More Complex Needs .....	6
School-based Mental Health Resources .....	6
Procedures .....	7
Filing a referral to the Wellbeing Department .....	7
Assessment .....	8
Intervention .....	8
Evaluation .....	9
Record keeping .....	9
Crisis Intervention and Postvention.....	10
Staff Wellbeing.....	10
Other Wellbeing Resources for the Staff.....	10
Wellbeing-authorized absences.....	11
Wellbeing-authorized academic accommodations .....	11
Out-of-school mental health referrals.....	12
Referrals to the Learning Support Department.....	12
Attachment 1. Release of Information .....	13

### *The Wellbeing Team*

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## Introduction

Schools play a vital role in the promotion of mental health among youth and their families, as well as school staff. Thus, we strive to make our school be a safe and supportive environment that fosters youth's life skills and resilience, and encourages a strong sense of connectedness to the school community. Listening and addressing students' mental health and developmental needs is essential to their positive experience in school, as well as long-term positive health outcomes (i.e., life satisfaction, quality of relationships, self-esteem, ability to cope and face challenges).

Identifying and supporting students who may be vulnerable or at risk of experiencing mental health problems are key to successful mental health promotion and risk prevention (e.g., suicide prevention) in schools.

To address student's mental health and wellbeing needs, as well as to further promote school values, Wellbeing Department was established in September 2019. Our goal is to provide comprehensive school-wide mental health support that promotes wellness and resilience.

## Definitions and Abbreviations

Wellbeing Department (WBD)

Head of the Wellbeing Department (HoWBD)

Wellbeing Provider (WB provider) – a member of the Wellbeing Department that is responsible for providing specialized mental health support to students (i.e., school psychologist, school counsellor)

Student of Concern (SOC) - any AHS student who self-referred or was flagged/referred by another person to the Wellbeing Department

## Diversity and Inclusion

WBD welcomes individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds: language, ethnicity, race, nationality, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status and class, religion and spirituality.



To align with best practices in the provision of culturally responsive and inclusive mental health supports in schools, this Handbook refrains from using gender specific pronouns “he/him his” and “she/her/hers” when individual’s gender is not known, and utilizes “they/their/them” instead.

## Why is mental health important in Akademeia?

Mental health can be defined in many ways, but our school follows the definition proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2001, p. 1):

*mental health* is “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes [they] own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to their] own community.”

Positive mental health and wellbeing enable young people to pursue fulfilling lives long-term in spite of challenges. While there is a consensus among mental health researchers that considers home and family the primary source of nurturance and guidance for teenagers, mental health and wellbeing are also school’s concern. The provision of culturally responsive mental health services is especially important for international students as well as scholarship recipients who are likely to present with more complex vulnerabilities.

Mental health should permeate all aspects of school life and learning. The part 3 of Children and Families Act (2014) “Education, health and care provision: integration and joint commissioning” emphasizes that mental health support must be integrated with the provision of educational support. Specifically, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that schools should adopt a school-wide approach to fostering mental health and wellbeing of youth. The regulation of the Polish Minister of Education and Science of 22 July 2022 amending the implementation of the rules for the organization and provision of psychological and pedagogical assistance in public kindergartens, schools and institutions. Therefore, Akademeia High School pursues efforts to implement support systems that promote mental health and resilience in students, staff, and families.

## Confidentiality

Students and their caregivers are not required to sign a consent form when initiating contact with the WB Department, because WB resources are considered a part of school-based support and relevant consents are collected from the caregivers upon student’s enrolment to school.

All SOC’s are granted confidentiality which means that sensitive information disclosed to or observed by the WB provider cannot be shared with other parties with a few exceptions.

Informed by the professional codes of ethics, local law, and safeguarding policies, WB providers maintain confidentiality unless there is a risk that 1) SOC may harm themselves, 2) SOC may harm others, 3) others may harm SOC, 4) SOC and their caregivers, when relevant, consents to share their private information with another person (e.g., a doctor outside of school). If the WB provider needs to breach confidentiality, SOC will be informed about the

next steps including the persons who needs to be informed. The reason for sharing sensitive information with other adults is to ensure student’s safety and health.

The code of ethics endorsed by WBD are specific to the professional affiliation of a WB provider and they may slightly vary. However, the overarching principles for professional conduct and ethics are informed by Standards of Conduct, Performance, and Ethics by Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), Principles for Professional Ethics by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), and International Association of School Psychologists Code of Ethics.

## Levels of School-wide Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

Students’ needs for wellbeing and mental health support vary and are described by the School-based Wellbeing and Mental Health Support framework (see Figure 1) adapted from the Multitiered Systems of Supports (MTSS).

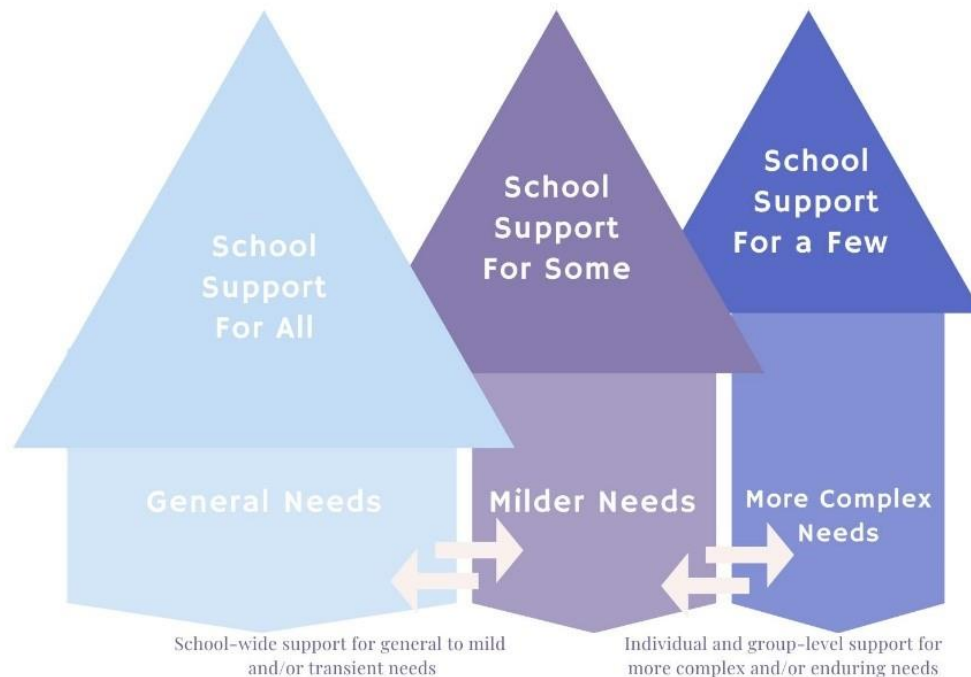


Figure 1. The School-based Wellbeing and Mental Health Support Framework

### General Needs

To address school’s universal mental health needs that include, but are not limited to, healthy habits and coping strategies promotion, WBD disseminate resources, delivers psychoeducation through webinars, assemblies, workshops, and talks, and collaborates on school-wide projects, such as Personal Scheme Development and mentor’s hours.

### Milder Needs

Milder mental health needs in a school community may stem from bullying, adjustment difficulties related to typical transitions (e.g., changing school, graduating), exam stress. In those cases, WBD provides more targeted support that can take the form of consultations,

group counseling, workshops, skill enhancement for school staff to be better prepared to address students' mental health needs.

### More Complex Needs

Student's Mental Health and Development	Student's Misconduct and Misbehavior	Crisis Intervention and Postvention
Performance Drop Attendance/Lateness Concerns Emotional dysregulation Stress Diagnosed mental health condition Sleep, hygiene, nutrition Sex and relationship Substance use Cultural adjustment Diversity issues	Bullying and cyberbullying Threats	Self-harm or harm to others Suicidality Conflict Family affairs Discrimination Adverse events Abuse and neglect Grief Transitions

Figure 2. Categories of Wellbeing and Mental Health Needs

If students present with more complex needs (see Figure 2: Student's Mental Health), typically marked by an impairment of daily functioning including school performance, social relationships, etc., WBD grants the provision of targeted mental health support in the form of individual psychological consultations for students and their caregivers, regular individual or group counseling, referrals for out-of-school mental health providers, screening for and responding to risks such as self-harm, substance use, suicide, as well as facilitating referrals for Learning Support Department that is available in school for our students.

### School-based Mental Health Resources

#### Students may benefit from resources offered by the Wellbeing Department when:

- Facing a choice (e.g., A-level subjects) or feel uncertain about your future
- Seeking to learn more about their sense of identity, goals, motivations
- Engaging in unhelpful habits or regulate stress level (e.g., substances, self-harm, problems with eating, etc.)
- Having troubles sleeping or focusing
- Striving to improve relationships or experiencing a lot of interpersonal conflicts
- Feeling down, lost, or overwhelmed
- Losing interest in things that usually were bringing joy
- Feeling lonely or lacking a sense of belonging
- Transiting from another school/country and having difficulties with navigating a new school, culture, and social circle
- Struggling with eating and/or your body image
- Exploring identity or being in transition (e.g., gender)

- Having experienced a distressing event, for example, a loss of a beloved one, aggression, violence, etc.
- Not feeling safe in school or elsewhere
- Having experienced bullying or discrimination

## Procedures

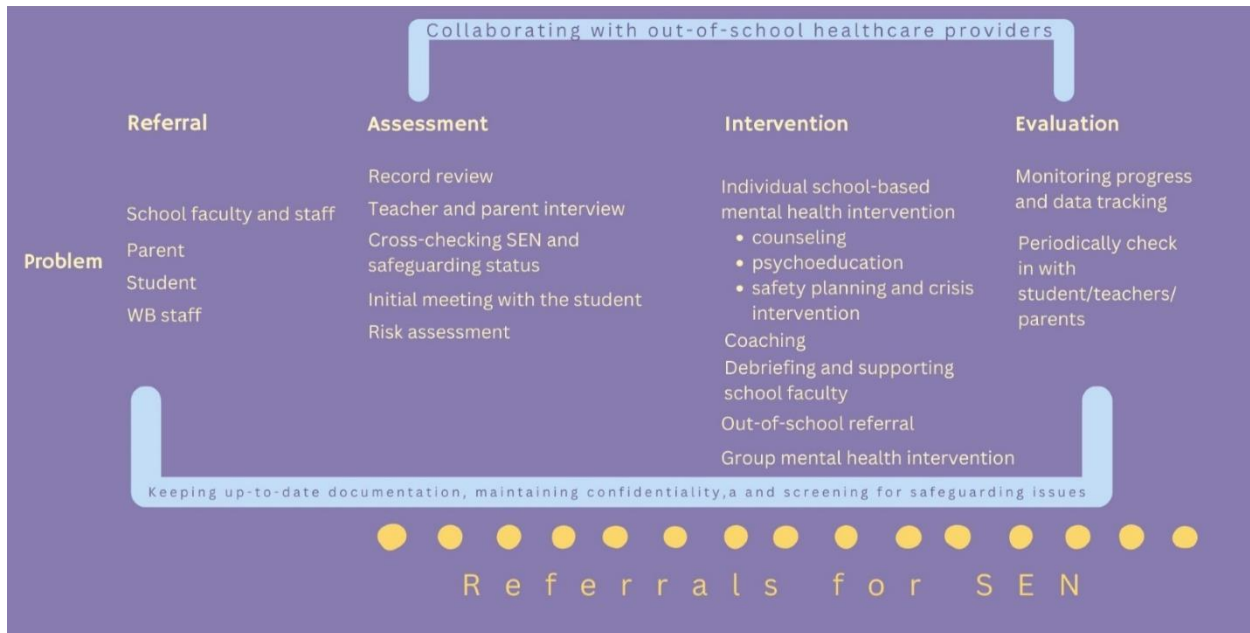


Figure 3. The Wellbeing Department Procedures.

WBD procedures are depicted by Figure 3 and include referral, assessment, intervention, and evaluation procedures.

### Filing a referral to the Wellbeing Department

A referral process can be initiated by any school staff, student or their family members. Typically, student's teachers, mentor, and families become concerned in the presence of *externalizing symptoms* that are likely to disrupt student's school performance and/or create a safety concern. Student's externalizing symptoms may include misconduct and misbehavior in class, inappropriate behaviors, aggression, etc. Behind those commonly referred issues, there are typically temporary or more pronounced mental health needs that need further assistance.

On the other hand, *internalizing symptoms* are more difficult to notice as they are unlikely to disrupt, e.g., the lesson flow or safety. Internalizing symptoms that may be alarming include, but are not limited to, withdrawal from peer relationships, limited or no participation in school activities, sadness, sleepiness, fatigue, etc.

Sometimes the student does not present yet with any adjustment difficulties, but school staff and/or caregivers may be concerned about student's wellbeing due to an onset of a challenging situation (e.g., loss of a family member, parents' divorce, university rejection



letter, etc.). In such cases, our team monitors student's psychosocial functioning by conducting observations, consulting with teachers, mentors, and parents to ensure a timely provision of wellbeing resources, if appropriate and necessary.

All referral concerns should be flagged directly to HoWBD in person or via email ([diana.diakow@akademeia.edu.pl](mailto:diana.diakow@akademeia.edu.pl)).

HoWBD should be copied to all email correspondence pertaining to student's wellbeing needs and concerns to ensure record keeping and timely provision of support.

### Assessment

After receiving a referral, an initial assessment of student's needs is initiated by an assigned AHS wellbeing provider. At this stage, data on student's current psychosocial and educational functioning is gathered through student's record review, interviews with teachers, mentors, and parents, as well as an assessment session with SOC. Initial assessment also involves cross-checking for safeguarding concerns as well as special educational needs.

The assessment process includes meetings with SOC, when appropriate. During the initial meeting, WB provider reviews confidentiality and its limits, conducts initial screening, and conducts risk assessment, if necessary. SOC receives an overview of WB resources and is informed that following the first assessment session, SOC may continue working with the same or different WB provider. The assessment process leads to the development of an intervention plan and goals that specify the timeline and areas of targeted support provided to SOC.

### Intervention

School-based mental health interventions include individual, group, and system-level resources delivered in school and boarding houses. Individual resources include regular counseling sessions, coaching sessions, or drop-in consultations and are provided only with student's consent. WB providers provide follow-up consultations to SOC's teachers, mentors, and caregivers, when appropriate. These consultations may include, e.g., guidance on how to support a student with anxiety symptoms at home and in the classroom. HoWBD may share follow-up recommendations with a student's mentor via email. In this case, all sensitive information must be included in a password-encrypted file. Mentors are responsible for sharing the recommendations with student's teachers, if requested by HoWBD. Teachers concerned about student's wellbeing needs and status are always invited to check in directly with WB team and request feedback.

WBD also provides group-level resources such as counseling groups that aim to address specific mental health concerns, e.g., anxiety, cultural adjustment, grief, etc. If determined that a larger group of students may benefit from WB resources, a school-wide prevention or intervention initiative is developed and implemented (e.g., cyberbullying prevention workshops). In further support students' wellbeing in their immediate environment, WBD delivers quarterly webinars in English and Polish for student's caregivers and family members.





Through the intervention process, WB providers continue screening for safety and health risks, and monitor student's needs for seeking a higher level of mental health care.

Mental health promotion and the provision of supports for vulnerable students depend on school's collaboration with local agencies and providers. Therefore, WB providers liaison with community-based specialists, e.g., psychiatrists, psychotherapists, culture brokers and mediators to facilitate students' referrals for a higher level of care. It may be in student's best interest that Wellbeing team liaison with external healthcare providers to exchange sensitive information to ensure that support provided in school is in alignment with student's current health needs. In such instances, HoWBD will ask student's legal guardians to review and sign a Release of Information form (see Attachment 1).

Wellbeing providers do not hold responsibility for managing, monitoring, nor administering medication in school and boarding houses.

#### Evaluation

Students' responsiveness to provided WB interventions as well as their progress in monitored on on-going basis using standardized assessment tools, direct and indirect observations, and record review. The obtained results are documented internally for limited purposes: 1) informing intervention goals, 2) reviewing student's progress, 3) monitoring student's safety and health needs and cannot be used to formulate student's official psychological diagnostic or psychoeducational evaluation report.

Students who present with a high level of mental health needs will be referred to external providers, e.g., psychiatrists, to obtain a diagnosis. Students who present with special educational needs will be referred to the Learning Support Department which will provide further resources on how to obtain a psychoeducational evaluation report.

#### Record keeping

All WB providers are obliged to store data secure and protected. Paper records with student's identifiable information including counseling notes (i.e., progress and process notes), assessments, and relevant documentation must be stored in the safe cabinet locked with a designated key. WB providers should deposit the keys at the reception desk with a security guard prior to leaving the school premises.

Digital records with student's identifiable information should be password-encrypted and stored on a school secure data storage. A school-wide electronic record-keeping platform should be utilized when available.

Wellbeing rooms should be always locked when WB providers leave the room, and no unauthorized personnel should have access to the rooms.

Remote contact with students' parents should be made using a school phone at the school reception or school's email account (i.e., Teams). While scheduling online meetings with the students or their families, WB provider should mark the meeting as "Private" to adhere to confidentiality standards. WB providers should not use their personal phone numbers or



emails to contact the students or their families. WB providers should refrain from sharing their personal contact information with the students and their families.

## Crisis Intervention and Postvention

Akademeia High School strives to be a trauma-informed environment. Therefore, WBD is responsible for providing crisis intervention in the presence of larger-scale adverse events, such as natural disasters, community violence or specific threatening situations, e.g., death, accidents, etc. (see Figure 2: Crisis Intervention and Postvention). Given that many mental health problems tend to unfold after the initial crisis resolves, WBD ensures the provision of postvention resources that aim to foster affected persons' resilience and reduce the risk of developing trauma-related mental health challenges.

## Staff Wellbeing

Akademeia High School strives to create a safe and healthy environment for all staff. Wellbeing team implements school-wide projects and initiatives that aim to foster mental health and resilience among staff. Additional resources relevant to school staff's needs will be disseminated (e.g., online libraries with resources, handouts, external webinars and courses).

If a staff member experiences mental health challenges, they can sign up for an initial consultation session with a wellbeing provider in school. Psychoeducation, needs' assessment, and debriefing will be provided. Wellbeing provider will provide further information and recommendations on how to access mental health support outside of school.

Akademeia High School provides access to free-of-charge online mental health support delivered through an external agency. All staff are emailed a new password monthly to access the online platform. Accessing this resource is confidential and voluntary.

Wellbeing team members adhere to ethical standards of mental health professions and thus, they do not provide mental health support to individual staff members in the form of regular counseling due to conflict of interests.

### Other Wellbeing Resources for the Staff

Wellbeing team members provide regular or ad hoc student-focused consultation and assistance. For example, if a teacher works with a student who has mental health needs, Wellbeing team provides recommendations, consultation, and follow-up resources on how to support the student in the classroom and also offers debriefing to the staff. Wellbeing team also delivers psychological first aid in case staff member experiences mental health emergency.

Wellbeing team members are also a resource to assist mentors and teachers in facilitating school-family communication. HoWBD can be requested to be present at the meeting with parents to assist the teacher/mentor if student's mental health needs are discussed. WB team members can also come to conduct in-class observations to further inform the support process.



Mentors are strongly encouraged to refer students to WBD if mental health needs emerge. Some students may need time to develop readiness to seek professional support. Encouraging students to seek mental health support bolsters their resilience by validating their concerns, normalizing their needs, strengthening mental health literacy and awareness, and promoting help-seeking behaviors.

## Wellbeing-authorized absences

School-based wellbeing providers may authorize student's absence/lateness on the following occasions:

- 1) Seeing a student for a wellbeing consultation during a scheduled lesson time only if no other time is available and the student urgently needs support.
- 2) Concluding that the student is not able to participate in a scheduled school activity due to assessed wellbeing reasons that include urgent mental health needs.

In both cases, the Wellbeing team member will send an email authorizing student's absence directly to the AHS office and student's teacher with whom the class was held. Student's parents should also be informed, e.g., they can be copied to the email if the situation is not urgent. Student's parents should be notified by a phone call from the reception desk if immediate assistance is needed.

If a student requests that their absence is authorized "on the wellbeing grounds" and the Wellbeing team has not issued an official authorization, the teacher/mentor must cross-check such a request with the HoWBD prior to proceeding with authorizing student's absence.

## Wellbeing-authorized academic accommodations

Mental health needs may interfere with students' academic performance. To foster student's wellbeing and academic performance long-term, Wellbeing team may issue a request for providing academic accommodation, such as extended deadline, etc. In such instances, Wellbeing provider contacts the teacher/mentor directly. Sometimes, students may be encouraged to approach the teacher by themselves to exercise their autonomy and a sense of agency; however, Wellbeing team member who works with the student will be sending a follow-up note confirming that the reason for a special academic accommodation is confirmed and authorized. Please note that the Wellbeing team do not authorize student's withdrawal from a specific class or exam. In some cases, shifts in academic choices may be recommended and such decisions are always made in collaboration with the Pastoral Deputy Head.

*Sports and Exercise:* Wellbeing providers do not authorize student's withdrawal from sport activities unless for the reasons mentioned in the "Wellbeing-authorized absences" section. Parents must provide a medical note from an outside-of-school provider to request student's withdrawal from mandatory sports classes.

If a student requests special academic consideration on "the wellbeing grounds" and no confirmation or authorization was issued by the WBD, all teachers and mentors should consult HoWBD if in doubt.



Please note that some students may not be receiving wellbeing support in school, yet they may seek deadline extensions/other accommodations and those requests may suggest unaddressed mental health and learning needs. Such students are likely to benefit from being referred to the WB. Wellbeing team may further facilitate the referral to the Learning Support Department if needed.

If the student keeps missing deadlines or continuously seeks extensions, etc., it is recommended that teachers:

1. Report such instances to the student's mentor. Flagging such situations to the mentor may put a student on the radar and translate to a referral to the WB/Learning Support Departments, or a check-in with parents (i.e., verifying if the student has confirmed mental health/learning difficulties and is/is not under care outside of school).
2. If in doubt about student's actual motifs to request extensions/other accommodations on "the wellbeing grounds," please contact HoWBD directly so that the information and a rationale for providing academic accommodations can be verified.

## Out-of-school mental health referrals

If a teacher/mentor consults with parents and they request mental health support for their child outside of school, they should be informed that the HoWBD will contact them to share recommendations for out-of-school mental health providers.

Mentors and teachers should not refer students and/or parents to mental health providers. Facilitating mental health referrals requires indirect and/or direct needs assessment and that should be conducted by a qualified mental health provider, e.g., Wellbeing team members.

WB team facilitate the out-of-school referral by providing a list of community-based resources that may be a good fit for the student presenting mental health needs. Importantly, WBD refrain from recommending individual mental health providers in the community and share contact information to clinics or collectives instead so that the student and their family can make an informed decision. It is the responsibility of Wellbeing team to provide psychoeducation regarding various therapy and treatment options and clarify differences between types of mental health providers (e.g., psychiatrist, psychologist, psychotherapist, coach) so that the family can make an informed decision.

## Referrals to the Learning Support Department

If a student is assessed to have learning needs that would benefit from a follow-up evaluation, an internal referral to the Learning Support Department should be made. WB team should inform the student about issuing a referral and explain its purpose. If relevant, Wellbeing provider should facilitate the referral for external evaluation in collaboration with the Head of Learning Support Department.

Students who are not warranted a psychoeducational diagnosis but present with learning needs should be referred to the Learning Support Department.



Attachment 1. Release of Information

**AUTHORIZATION FOR RELEASE OF CONFIDENTIAL  
INFORMATION**

**Akademeia High School**

Child's Name:

Date of Birth:

I authorize the release of the following specific information:

Psychiatric Evaluation

Psychological  
Evaluation

Mental Health  
Assessment

Therapy-based  
Recommendations

Medical Note  
(e.g., medication,  
recommendations)

School Reports

**Two Way  
Communication**

**Communication**

I understand this information is being requested for the purpose of:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Example: developing and implementing school-  
based mental health and educational support services including attendance plan, making a decision about student's academic  
engagement, etc.).

I request that the information be kept confidential, used for professional reasons only, and not  
to be released to another individual or organization unless authorized by me. This consent  
form will expire at the end of Academic Year: \_\_\_\_\_. This consent may be withdrawn on  
request at any time by the student and caregivers.

Caregiver's Signature and Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature (if 16 years old or older)

\_\_\_\_\_

Head of Wellbeing

\_\_\_\_\_



**INFORMATION TO BE  
RELEASED FROM:**

**School/Physician/Agency, etc.:**

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

**INFORMATION TO BE RELEASED  
TO:**

Diana Diaków, PhD, NCSP

Wellbeing Department

Akademeia High School

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