

County Board Policy 5141.52: Suicide Prevention

Status: ADOPTED

Original Adopted Date: 10/07/2021 | **Last Reviewed Date:** 10/07/2021

The County Board of Education recognizes that suicide is a leading cause of death among youth, prevention is a collective effort that requires stakeholder engagement, and school personnel who regularly interact with students are often in a position to recognize the warning signs of suicide and to offer appropriate referral and/or assistance. In an effort to reduce suicidal behavior, its impact on students and families, and other trauma associated with suicide, the County Board shall incorporate any measures, strategies, practices, and supports developed by the County Superintendent of Schools for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention in county office of education (COE) schools.

Policies and procedures for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention shall include consultation with school and community stakeholders, school-employed mental health professionals, suicide prevention experts, and, for the policy for students in grades K-6, coordination with the county mental health plan. (Education Code 215)

Consultation with school and community stakeholders may include COE and school administrators, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, school nurses, other staff, parents/guardians and caregivers, students, local health agencies, mental health professionals, community organizations, law enforcement, legal counsel, and/or the COE's risk manager or insurance carrier. Collaboration may also occur with county and/or city governments in an effort to align COE policy with any existing county, city, and/or statewide suicide prevention plans.

COE measures and strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, as prepared by the County Superintendent, may include, but are not limited to:

1. Staff development on suicide awareness and prevention offered by the County Superintendent for teachers, interns, school counselors, and others who interact with students, including, as appropriate, substitute teachers, expanded day learning staff, tutors, and volunteers
2. Age and developmentally appropriate instruction in problem-solving, coping skills, and resiliency to promote students' mental, emotional, and social health and well-being; help-seeking strategies and resources; and recognition of and appropriate response to warning signs of suicidal intent in others
3. Methods for promoting a positive school climate that enhances students' feelings of connectedness with the school and that is characterized by caring staff and harmonious interrelationships among students
4. The review of materials and resources used in awareness efforts and communications to ensure they align with best practices for safe and effective messaging about suicide
5. The provision of information to parents/guardians and caregivers regarding risk and protective factors, warning signs of suicide, the severity of the suicide problem among youth, the COE's suicide prevention curriculum, the COE's suicide prevention policy and procedures, basic steps for helping suicidal youth, the importance of communicating with appropriate staff if suicide risk is present or suspected, access to suicide prevention training, and/or school and community resources that can help youth in crisis
6. Encouragement for students to notify appropriate school personnel or other adults when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's suicidal intentions
7. Crisis intervention procedures for addressing suicide threats or attempts which include, but are not limited to, the following actions:
 - a. Immediately securing medical treatment and/or mental health services as necessary, including referral where appropriate for an immediate suicide risk assessment
 - b. Notifying law enforcement and/or other emergency assistance if a suicidal act is being actively threatened

- c. Keeping the student under continuous adult supervision and providing comfort to the student until the parent/guardian and/or appropriate support agent or agency can be contacted and has the opportunity to intervene
 - d. Removing other students from the immediate area as soon as possible
8. Counseling and other postvention strategies for helping students, staff, and others cope in the aftermath of a student's suicide
9. Establishment by the County Superintendent of COE and/or school-site crisis intervention team(s) to ensure the proper implementation and review of this policy and other COE practices related to the emotional and behavioral wellness of students, including, but not limited to, the oversight of mental health and suicide prevention training, collaboration with community mental health organizations, identification of resources and organizations that provide evidence-based treatment, collaboration to build community response, and compliance with Education Code 215

As appropriate, these measures and strategies shall specifically address the needs of students who are at high risk of suicide, including, but not limited to, students who are bereaved by suicide; students with disabilities, mental illness, or substance use disorders; students who are experiencing homelessness or who are in out-of-home settings such as foster care; and students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. (Education Code 215)

The measures and strategies may also address the needs of students with individual risk factors such as previous suicide attempt(s) or self-harm, history of depression or mental illness, family history of suicide or violence, feelings of isolation, interpersonal conflicts, a recent severe or traumatic stressor or loss, family instability, impulsivity, and other factors.

Measures and strategies for students in grades K-6 shall be age appropriate and delivered and discussed in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of young students. (Education Code 215)

Student identification cards for students in grades 7-12, when issued by the County Superintendent, shall include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline telephone number and may also include the Crisis Text Line and/or a local suicide prevention hotline telephone number. (Education Code 215.5)

The name, title, and contact information of the members of COE and/or school site crisis intervention team(s) shall be provided to students, staff, parents/guardians, and caregivers and on school and COE web sites. Such notifications shall identify the mental health professional who serves as the crisis intervention team's designated reporter to receive and act upon reports of a student's suicidal intention.

Students shall be encouraged to notify a teacher, principal, counselor, designated reporter, or other adult when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's suicidal intentions.

Every statement regarding suicidal intent shall be taken seriously. It is the responsibility of the County Superintendent to ensure that any staff member who suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions based on the student's verbalizations or act of self-harm is encouraged to promptly notify the principal, school counselor, or designated reporter, who shall implement COE intervention protocols as appropriate.

If a referral is made for mental health or related services for a student in grade K-6 who is a Medi-Cal beneficiary, the COE shall coordinate and consult with the county mental health plan. (Education Code 215)

Nothing in this policy shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging employees to act outside of the authorization or scope of their credential or to diagnose or treat mental illness unless specifically licensed and employed to do so. (Education Code 215)

The County Board shall review, and update as necessary, this policy at least every five years. The County Board may, at its discretion, review the policy more frequently. (Education Code 215)

COE data pertaining to school climate and reports of suicidal ideation, attempts, or death shall be periodically reviewed to identify patterns or trends and make recommendations regarding program development.

This policy shall be posted in a prominent location on the COE's web site in a manner that is easily accessible to parents/guardian and students. (Education Code 234.6)

County Office Regulation 5141.52: Suicide Prevention

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Staff Development

Suicide prevention training shall be provided to teachers, interns, counselors, and others who interact with students, including, as appropriate, substitute teachers, coaches, expanded day learning staff, crossing guards, tutors, and volunteers. The training shall be offered under the direction of a County Office of Education (COE) counselor, psychologist, and/or social worker who has received advanced training specific to suicide and who may collaborate with one or more county or community mental health agencies.

Materials for training shall include how to identify appropriate mental health services at the school site and within the community, and when and how to refer youth and their families to those services. Materials also may include programs that can be completed through self-review of suitable suicide prevention materials. (Education Code 215)

Additionally, staff development shall include research and information related to the following topics:

1. The higher risk of suicide among certain groups, including, but not limited to, students who are impacted by suicide; students with disabilities, mental illness, or substance use disorders; students who are experiencing homelessness or who are in out-of-home settings such as foster care; and students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning
2. Individual risk factors such as previous suicide attempt(s) or self-harm, history of depression or mental illness, family history of suicide or violence, feelings of isolation, interpersonal conflicts, a recent severe or traumatic stressor or loss, family instability, impulsivity, and other factors
3. Identification of students who may be at risk of suicide, including, but not limited to, warning signs that may indicate depression, emotional distress, or suicidal intentions, such as changes in students' personality or behavior and verbalizations of hopelessness or suicidal intent
4. Protective factors that may help to decrease a student's suicide risk, such as resiliency, problem-solving ability, access to mental health care, and positive connections to family, peers, school, and community
5. Instructional strategies for teaching the suicide prevention curriculum, promoting mental and emotional health, reducing the stigma associated with mental illness, and using safe and effective messaging about suicide

6. The importance of early prevention and intervention in reducing the risk of suicide
7. School and community resources and services, including resources and services that meet the specific needs of high-risk groups
8. Appropriate ways to interact with a student who is demonstrating emotional distress or is suicidal and procedures for intervening when a student attempts, threatens, or discloses the desire to die by suicide, including, but not limited to, appropriate protocols for constant monitoring and supervision of the student, during the time the student is in the school's physical custody, while the immediate referral of the student to medical or mental health services is being processed
9. COE procedures for responding after a suicide has occurred
10. Common misconceptions about suicide

The COE may provide additional professional development in suicide risk assessment and crisis intervention to COE mental health professionals, including, but not limited to, school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses.

Instruction

The COE's comprehensive health education program shall promote the healthy mental, emotional, and social development of students and shall be aligned with the state content standards and curriculum framework. Suicide prevention instruction shall be incorporated into the health education curriculum in an age and developmentally appropriate manner and shall be designed to help students:

1. Identify and analyze warning signs and risk factors associated with suicide, including, but not limited to, understanding how mental health challenges and emotional distress, such as feelings of depression, loss, isolation, inadequacy, and anxiety, can lead to thoughts of suicide
2. Develop coping and resiliency skills for dealing with stress and trauma, and building self-esteem
3. Learn to listen, be honest, share feelings, and get help when communicating with friends who show signs of suicidal intent
4. Identify trusted adults; school resources, including the COE's suicide prevention, intervention, and referral procedures; and/or community crisis intervention resources where youth can get help
5. Develop help-seeking strategies and recognize that there is no stigma associated with seeking services for mental health, substance abuse, and/or suicide prevention
6. Recognize that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide

The County Superintendent of Schools or designee may develop and implement school activities that raise awareness about mental health wellness and suicide prevention.

Student Identification Cards

Student identification cards for students in grades 7-12 shall include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline telephone number and may also include the Crisis Text Line and/or a local suicide prevention hotline telephone number. (Education Code 215.5)

Intervention

The County Superintendent of Schools or designee shall provide the name, title, and contact information of the members of the COE and/or school crisis intervention team(s) to students, staff, parents/guardians, and caregivers and on school and COE web sites. Such notifications shall identify the mental health professional who serves as the crisis intervention team's designated reporter to receive and act upon reports of a student's suicidal intention.

Students shall be encouraged to notify a teacher, principal, counselor, designated reporter, or other adult when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's suicidal intentions.

Every statement regarding suicidal intent shall be taken seriously. Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions based on the student's verbalizations or act of self-harm, the staff member shall promptly notify the principal, school counselor, or designated reporter, who shall implement COE intervention protocols as appropriate.

Although any personal information that a student discloses to a school counselor shall generally not be revealed, released, discussed, or referred to with third parties, the counselor may report to the principal or student's parents/guardians when there is reasonable cause to believe that disclosure is necessary to avert a clear and present danger to the health, safety, or welfare of the student or others within the school community. In addition, the counselor may disclose information of a personal nature to psychotherapists, other health care providers, or the school nurse for the sole purpose of referring the student for treatment, or to report child abuse and neglect as required by Penal Code 11164-11174.3. (Education Code 49602)

Whenever schools establish a peer counseling system to provide support for students, peer counselors shall receive training that includes identification of the warning signs of suicidal behavior and referral of a suicidal student to appropriate adults.

When a suicide attempt or threat is reported, the principal or designee shall ensure student safety by taking the following actions:

1. Immediately securing medical treatment and/or mental health services as necessary

2. Notifying law enforcement and/or other emergency assistance if a suicidal act is being actively threatened
3. Keeping the student under continuous adult supervision and providing comfort to the student until the parent/guardian and/or appropriate support agent or agency can be contacted and has the opportunity to intervene
4. Removing other students from the immediate area as soon as possible

The principal or designee shall document the incident in writing, including the steps that the school took in response to the suicide attempt or threat.

The County Superintendent of Schools or designee shall follow up with the parent/guardian and student in a timely manner to provide referrals to appropriate services as needed. If the parent/guardian does not access treatment for the student, the County Superintendent of Schools or designee may meet with the parent/guardian to identify barriers to treatment and assist the family in providing follow-up care for the student. If follow-up care is still not provided, the County Superintendent of Schools or designee shall consider whether it is necessary, pursuant to laws for mandated reporters of child neglect, to refer the matter to the local child protective services agency.

For any student returning to school after a mental health crisis, the principal or designee and/or school counselor may meet with the parents/guardians and, if appropriate, with the student to discuss re-entry and appropriate steps to ensure the student's readiness for return to school and determine the need for ongoing support.

Postvention

In the event that a student dies by suicide, the County Superintendent of Schools or designee shall communicate with the student's parents/guardians to offer condolences, assistance, and resources. In accordance with the laws governing confidentiality of student record information, the County Superintendent of Schools or designee shall consult with the parents/guardians regarding facts that may be divulged to other students, parents/guardians, and staff.

The County Superintendent of Schools or designee shall implement procedures to address students' and staff's grief and to minimize the risk of imitative suicide or suicide contagion. The County Superintendent of Schools or designee shall provide students, parents/guardians, and staff with information, counseling, and/or referrals to community agencies as needed. Students significantly affected by suicide death and those at risk of imitative behavior should be identified and closely monitored. School staff may receive assistance from school counselors or other mental health professionals in determining how to best discuss the suicide or attempted suicide with students.

Any response to media inquiries shall be handled by the COE-designated spokesperson who shall not divulge confidential information. The COE's response shall not sensationalize suicide and shall focus on the COE's postvention plan and available resources.

After any suicide or attempted suicide by a student, the County Superintendent of Schools or designee shall provide an opportunity for all staff who responded to the incident to debrief, evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used, and make recommendations for future actions.

Management Resources	Description
California Department of Education Publication	Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve, 2019
California Department of Education Publication	Health Education Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve, 2008
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Publica	School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth, 2009
Court Decision	Corales v. Bennett (Ontario-Montclair School District), (2009) 567 F.3d 554
Nat'l Assoc. of School Psychologists Publication	Preventing Suicide: Guidelines for Administrators and Crisis Teams, 2015
U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services Publication	Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools, 2012
U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services Publication	National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action, rev. 2012
Website	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Website	Trevor Project
Website	Suicide Prevention Resource Center
Website	Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Website	National Institute for Mental Health
Website	National Association of School Psychologists
Website	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mental Health
Website	California Department of Health Care Services, Mental Health Services
Website	California Department of Education, Mental Health
Website	American School Counselor Association
Website	American Psychological Association
Website	American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Website	American Association of Suicidology
State	Description

Ed. Code 215	Suicide prevention policies
Ed. Code 215.5	Student identification cards, inclusion of safety hotlines
Ed. Code 216	Suicide prevention online training programs
Ed. Code 234.6	Bullying and harassment prevention information
Ed. Code 32280-32289.5	Comprehensive safety plan
Ed. Code 49060-49079	Student records
Ed. Code 49602	Confidentiality of student information
Ed. Code 49604	Suicide prevention training for school counselors
Gov. Code 810-996.6	Government Claims Act
Pen. Code 11164-11174.3	Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act
W&I Code 5698	Emotionally disturbed youth; legislative intent
W&I Code 5850-5886	Children's Mental Health Services Act

Cross References

Code	Description
5131.2	Bullying
5131.2	Bullying