

## BOARD POLICY UPDATE

### **BP/AR 5141.52 - Suicide Prevention**

(BP/AR added)

New policy and regulation reflects **NEW LAW** (AB 2246, 2016) which mandates districts serving grades 7-12 to adopt policy on suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. Policy and regulation reflect the mandate to address any related staff development to be provided to teachers in grades 7-12 and to address the needs of specified high-risk student populations. In addition, policy and regulation add best practices in prevention, intervention, and postvention, including, but not limited to, student instruction, crisis intervention procedures, follow-up care for a student who threatens or attempts suicide, and the provision of counseling and other postvention strategies to reduce suicide contagion.

**SUICIDE PREVENTION**

The Board of Trustees recognizes that suicide is a leading cause of death among youth and that 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. To attempt to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students and families, the Superintendent or designee shall develop measures and strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.

In developing measures and strategies for use by the district, the Superintendent or designee may consult with school health professionals, school therapists, school psychologists, school social workers, administrators, other staff, parents/guardians, students, local health agencies, mental health professionals, and community organizations.

*(cf. 1020 - Youth Services)*

*(cf. 1220 - Citizen Advisory Committees)*

*(cf. 1400 - Relations Between Other Governmental Agencies and the Schools)*

Such measures and strategies shall include, but are not limited to:

1. Staff development on suicide awareness and prevention for teachers, school counselors, and other district employees who interact with students in the secondary grades

*(cf. 4131 - Staff Development)*

*(cf. 4231 - Staff Development)*

*(cf. 4331 - Staff Development)*

2. Instruction to students in problem-solving and coping skills to promote students' mental, emotional, and social health and well-being, as well as instruction in recognizing and appropriately responding to warning signs of suicidal intent in others

*(cf. 6142.8 - Comprehensive Health Education)*

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

*(cf. 5131 - Conduct)*

*(cf. 5131.2 - Bullying)*

*(cf. 5137 - Positive School Climate)*

*(cf. 5145.3 - Nondiscrimination/Harassment)*

*(cf. 5145.7 - Sexual Harassment)*

*(cf. 5145.9 - Hate-Motivated Behavior)*

4. The provision of information to parents/guardians regarding risk factors and warning signs of suicide, the severity of the youth suicide problem, the district's suicide prevention curriculum, basic steps for helping suicidal youth, and/or school and community resources that can help youth in crisis

**SUICIDE PREVENTION** (continued)

5. 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
6. Crisis intervention procedures for addressing suicide threats or attempts
7. Counseling and other postvention strategies for helping students, staff, and others cope in the aftermath of a student's suicide

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 youth. (Education Code 215)

*Legal Reference:*

EDUCATION CODE

215 Student suicide prevention policies

32280-32289 Comprehensive safety plan

49060-49079 Student records

49602 Confidentiality of student information

49604 Suicide prevention training for school counselors

GOVERNMENT CODE

810-996.6 Government Claims Act

PENAL CODE

11164-11174.3 Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act

WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE

5698 Emotionally disturbed youth; legislative intent

5850-5883 Mental Health Services Act

COURT DECISIONS

*Corales v. Bennett (Ontario-Montclair School District), (2009) 567 F.3d 554*

*Management Resources: (see next page)*

**SUICIDE PREVENTION (continued)**

*Management Resources:*

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PUBLICATIONS

Health Education Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve, 2008

Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve, 2003

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION PUBLICATIONS

School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth, 2009

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS PUBLICATIONS

Preventing Suicide, Guidelines for Administrators and Crisis Teams, 2015

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES PUBLICATIONS

Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools, 2012

National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action, rev. 2012

WEB SITES

*American Association of Suicidology: <http://www.suicidology.org>*

*American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: <http://afsp.org>*

*American Psychological Association: <http://www.apa.org>*

*American School Counselor Association: <http://www.schoolcounselor.org>*

*California Department of Education, Mental Health: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/cg/mh>*

*California Department of Health Care Services, Suicide Prevention Program:*

*<http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Pages/SuicidePrevention.aspx>*

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mental Health: <http://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth>*

*National Association of School Psychologists: <http://www.nasponline.org>*

*National Institute for Mental Health: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>*

*Trevor Project: <http://thetrevorproject.org>*

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services*

*Administration: <http://www.samhsa.gov>*

**SUICIDE PREVENTION**

**Staff Development**

Suicide prevention training shall be provided to teachers, counselors, and other district employees who interact with students at the secondary level. The training shall be offered under the direction of a district therapist/psychologist and/or in cooperation with one or more community mental health agencies.

*(cf. 4131 - Staff Development)*

*(cf. 4231 - Staff Development)*

*(cf. 4331 - Staff Development)*

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)

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 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 youth
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 stressor or loss, family instability, impulsivity, and other factors

*(cf. 5131.6 - Alcohol and Other Drugs)*

3. 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 person'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 and promoting mental and emotional health

**SUICIDE PREVENTION** (continued)

6. School and community resources and services, including resources and services that meet the specific needs of high-risk groups

*(cf. 5141.6 - School Health Services)*

*(cf. 6164.2 - Guidance/Counseling Services)*

7. District procedures for intervening when a student attempts, threatens, or discloses the desire to die by suicide

**Instruction**

The district'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 at appropriate secondary grades and shall be designed to help students:

1. Identify and analyze signs of depression and self-destructive behaviors and understand how feelings of depression, loss, isolation, inadequacy, and anxiety can lead to thoughts of suicide
2. Develop coping and resiliency skills and 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, and/or community crisis intervention resources where youth can get help and recognize that there is no stigma associated with seeking services for mental health, substance abuse, and/or suicide prevention

*(cf. 1020 - Youth Services)*

*(cf. 5131.6 - Alcohol and Other Drugs)*

*(cf. 5141.6 - School Health Services)*

*(cf. 6142.8 - Comprehensive Health Education)*

*(cf. 6164.2 - Guidance/Counseling Services)*

**Intervention**

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

**SUICIDE PREVENTION** (continued)

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, he/she shall promptly notify the principal or school counselor.

Although any personal information that a student discloses to a school psychologist or therapist shall generally not be revealed, released, referenced, or discussed with third parties, the school psychologist or therapist may report to the principal or student's parents/guardians when he/she has reasonable cause to believe that disclosure is necessary to avert a clear and present danger to the health, safety, or welfare of the student. In addition, the school psychologist or therapist 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. (Education Code 49602)

*(cf. 5141 - Health Care and Emergencies)*

A school employee shall act only within the authorization and scope of his/her credential or license. An employee is not authorized to diagnose or treat mental illness unless he/she is specifically licensed and employed to do so. (Education Code 215)

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 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

*(cf. 0450 - Comprehensive Safety Plan)*

*(cf. 5141 - Health Care and Emergencies)*

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.

*(cf. 5125 - Student Records)*

**SUICIDE PREVENTION** (continued)

The Superintendent 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 Superintendent 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 Superintendent or designee shall consider whether he/she is required, pursuant to laws for mandated reporters of child neglect, to refer the matter to the local child protective services agency.

*(cf. 5141.4 - Child Abuse Prevention and Reporting)*

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

**Postvention**

In the event that a student dies by suicide, the Superintendent 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 Superintendent or designee shall consult with the parents/guardians regarding facts that may be divulged to other students, parents/guardians, and staff.

The Superintendent or designee shall implement procedures to address students' and staff's grief and to minimize the risk of imitative suicide or suicide contagion. He/she shall provide students, parents/guardians, and staff with information, counseling, and/or referrals to community agencies as needed. School staff may receive assistance from school psychologists or other mental health professionals in determining how best to discuss the suicide or attempted suicide with students.

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

*(cf. 1112- Media Relations)*

After any suicide or attempted suicide by a student, the Superintendent 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.