

5500 – STUDENTS HEALTH AND SAFETY

Suicide Prevention

MCOEP 5519

The Madera County Superintendent of Schools (MCSOS) and the Madera County Board of Education (MCBE) recognize that suicide is the 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. In an effort to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students and families, the Superintendent of Schools or designee shall develop measures and strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.

In developing policy, measures and strategies for suicide prevention and intervention for use by the MCSOS, the Superintendent of Schools or designee shall consult with school health professionals, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, administrators, other staff, parents/guardians, students, local health agencies, mental health professionals, and community organizations; and, in developing policy for students, the Madera County Behavioral Health mental health plan. (Education Code 215)

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

Measures and strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention shall include, but are not limited to:

1. Staff development on suicide awareness and prevention for teachers, school counselors, and other MCSOS employees who interact with students
2. Age-appropriate 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 tendencies 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. Provide information to parents/guardians regarding risk factors and warning signs of suicide, the severity of the youth suicide problem, prevention activities, basic steps for helping suicidal youth, and/or school and community resources that can help youth in crisis
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 which include, but are not limited to, the following actions:

- a. Immediately securing medical treatment and/or mental health services as necessary
 - 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 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
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)

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.

Every statement regarding suicidal intent shall be taken seriously. 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 or school counselor, who shall implement MCSOS intervention protocols as appropriate.

Consultation with the Madera County Behavioral Health mental health plan is required if a referral is made for mental health or related services for a student who is a Medi-Cal beneficiary. (Education Code 215)

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

The MCSOS and MCBE shall review, and update as necessary, this policy at least every five years. (Education Code 215)

This policy shall be posted on the MCSOS website in a manner accessible to parents/guardian and students. (Education Code 234.6)

LEGAL REFERENCE

Education Code:

- 215 Student suicide prevention policies
- 234.6 Posting suicide prevention policy on website
- 32280-32289.5 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
- 5850-5886 Children's Mental Health Services Act

Court Decisions:

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

California Department of Education Publications

- Health Education Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve, 2019
- Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve, 2008

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

Websites:

- 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, Mental Health Services: <http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/mh>
- 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>
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center: <http://www.sprc.org/about-suicide>
- Trevor Project: <http://thetrevorproject.org>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental

Health Services Administration: <http://www.samhsa.gov>

Adopted: August 8, 2017
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5000 STUDENTS

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Staff Development

Suicide prevention training shall be provided to teachers, counselors, and other Madera County Superintendent of Schools (MCSOS) employees who interact with students. The training shall be offered under the direction of a MCSOS counselor/psychologist and/or in cooperation with one or more 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)

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 stressor or loss, family instability, impulsivity, and other factors
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 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 and promoting mental and emotional health
6. School and community resources and services, including resources and services that meet the specific needs of high-risk groups
7. 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 monitoring the student while the immediate referral of the student to medical or mental health services is being processed
8. MCSOS procedures for responding after a suicide has occurred

Instruction

The MCSOS' 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 appropriate manner and designed to help students:

1. Identify and analyze signs of depression and self-destructive behaviors in oneself and others. 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

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.

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 or school counselor, who shall implement MCSOS intervention protocols as appropriate.

Although any personal information that a student discloses to a school counselor shall generally not be revealed, released, referenced, or discussed 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. (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 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 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 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 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 next 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 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 or designee shall consult with the parents/guardians regarding facts that may be divulged to other students, parents/guardians, and staff.

The County Superintendent 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 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 best to discuss the suicide or attempted suicide with students.

Any response to media inquiries shall be handled by the MCSOS-designated

spokesperson who shall not divulge confidential information. The MCSOS' response shall not sensationalize suicide and shall focus on the MCSOS' postvention plan and available resources.

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

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