

SUICIDE AWARENESS, PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Background

In 2014 the Pennsylvania Governor signed into law House Bill 1559, which became known as Act 71 of 2014. Act 71 of 2014 added new School Code Section 1526 entitled, Suicide Awareness and Prevention, which requires school districts to adopt a youth suicide awareness policy and provide ongoing professional development for youth suicide awareness and prevention for professional educators who work in school buildings serving students in grades 6 through 12. This policy has been developed pursuant to Section 1526 of the School Code, 24 P.S. §15-1526.

Objective

The Mt. Lebanon School District is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its students and school community. This policy supports federal, state and local efforts to provide education on youth suicide awareness and prevention; establish methods of prevention, intervention, and response to suicide or suicide attempt; and to promote access to suicide awareness and prevention resources.

Authority

In compliance with state law and regulations, and in support of the District's suicide prevention measures, information received in confidence from a student may be revealed to the student's parents/guardians, the building principal or other appropriate authority when the health, welfare or safety of the student or any other person is deemed to be at risk.

Guidelines

The District shall utilize a multifaceted approach to suicide prevention which integrates school and community-based supports.

Suicide Awareness and Prevention Education

Protocols for Administration of Student Education

Students shall receive age-appropriate education on the importance of safe and healthy choices, coping strategies, how to recognize risk factors and warning signs, as well as help-seeking strategies for self or others including how to engage school resources and refer friends for help.

Lessons shall contain information on comprehensive health and wellness, including emotional, behavioral and social skills development.

Protocols for Administration of Employee Education

All District employees, including but not limited to secretaries, coaches, bus drivers, custodians and cafeteria workers, shall receive information regarding risk factors, warning signs, response procedures, referrals, and resources regarding youth suicide prevention.

As part of the District's professional development plan, professional educators in school buildings serving students in grades six (6) through twelve (12) shall participate in four (4) hours of youth suicide awareness and prevention training every five (5) years.

Additional professional development in risk assessment and crisis intervention shall be provided to guidance counselors, District mental health professionals and school nurses.

Resources for Parents/Guardians

The District may provide parents/guardians with resources including, but not limited to, health promotion and suicide risk, including characteristics and warning signs; and information about local Behavioral/mental health resources.

Methods of Prevention

The methods of prevention utilized by the District include, but are not limited to, early identification and support for students at risk; education for students, staff and parents/ guardians; and delegation of responsibility for planning and coordination of suicide prevention efforts.

Suicide Prevention Coordinators

District-Wide –

A district-wide suicide prevention coordinator shall be designated by the Superintendent. This may be an existing District employee. The District suicide prevention coordinator shall be responsible for planning and coordinating implementation of this policy.

Building Level-

Each building principal shall designate a school suicide prevention coordinator to act as a point of contact in each school for issues relating to suicide prevention and policy implementation. This may be an existing District employee.

Early Identification Procedures

Early identification of individuals with one (1) or more suicidal risk factors or of individuals exhibiting warning signs is crucial to the District's suicide prevention efforts. To promote awareness, District employees, students and parents/guardians should be educated about suicidal risk factors and warning signs.

Risk factors refer to personal or environmental characteristics that are associated with suicide including, but not limited to:

- Behavioral Health Issues/Disorders:
 - Depression.
 - Substance abuse or dependence.
 - Previous suicide attempts.
 - Self injury.
- Personal Characteristics:
 - Hopelessness/Low self-esteem.

- Loneliness/Social alienation/isolation/lack of belonging.
- Poor problem-solving or coping skills.
- Impulsivity /risk-taking/recklessness.
- Adverse/Stressful Life Circumstances:
 - Interpersonal difficulties or losses.
 - Disciplinary or legal problems.
 - Bullying (victim or perpetrator).
 - School or work issues.
 - Physical, sexual or psychological abuse.
 - Exposure to peer suicide.
- Family Characteristics:
 - Family history of suicide or suicidal behavior.
 - Family mental health problems.
 - Divorce/Death of parent/guardian.
 - Parental-Child relationship.

Warning signs are indications that someone may be in danger of suicide, either immediately or in the near future. Warning signs include, but are not limited to:

- Expressions such as hopelessness, rage, anger, seeking revenge, feeling trapped, anxiety, agitation, no reason to live or sense of purpose.
- Recklessness or risky behavior.
- Increased alcohol or drug use.
- Withdrawal from friends, family, or society.
- Dramatic mood changes.

Referral Procedures

Any District employee who has identified a student with one (1) or more warning signs or who has an indication that a student may be contemplating suicide, shall refer the student to guidance for further assessment and intervention.

Documentation

The District shall document the reasons for referral, including specific warning signs and risk factors identified as indications that the student may be at risk.

Methods of Intervention

The methods of intervention utilized by the District include, but are not limited to, responding to suicide threats, suicide attempts in school, suicide attempts outside of school, and completed suicide. Suicide intervention procedures shall address the development of an emotional or mental health safety plan for students identified as being at increased risk of suicide.

Procedures for Students at Risk

A district-approved suicide assessment instrument may be used by trained staff such as counselors, psychologists, and/or social workers.

Parents/Guardians of a student identified as being at risk of suicide shall be notified by the school. If the school suspects that the student's risk status is the result of abuse or neglect, school staff shall immediately notify Children and Youth Services.

The District shall identify mental health service providers to whom students can be referred for further assessment and assistance.

Mental health service providers—may include, but not limited to, hospital emergency department, psychiatric hospitals, community mental health centers, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and primary care providers.

The District shall create an emotional or mental health safety plan to support a student and the student's family if the student has been identified as being at increased risk of suicide.

Students with Disabilities

For students with disabilities who are identified as being a risk for suicide or who attempt suicide, the appropriate team shall be notified and shall address the student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Board policy.

If a student is identified as being at risk for suicide or attempts suicide and the student may require special education services or accommodations, the Director of Special Education shall be notified and shall take action to address the student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Board policy.

Documentation

The District shall document observations, recommendations and actions conducted throughout the intervention and assessment process verbal and written communications with students, parents/guardians and mental health service providers.

The Superintendent or designee shall develop administrative regulations providing recommended guidelines for responding to a suicide threat.

Methods of Response to Suicide or Suicide Attempt

The methods of response to a suicide or a suicide attempt utilized by the District include, but are not limited to:

1. Identifying and training the school crisis response/crisis intervention team.
2. Determining the roles and responsibilities of each crisis response team members.
3. Notifying students, employees and parents/guardians.
4. Working with families.

5. Responding appropriately to the media.
6. Collaborating with community providers.

The Superintendent or designee shall develop administrative regulations with recommended guidelines for responding to a suicidal act or attempt on school grounds or during a school-sponsored event.

Re-Entry Procedures

A student's excusal from school attendance after a mental health crisis and the student's return to school shall be consistent with state and federal laws and regulations.

A District-employed mental health professional, the building principal or suicide prevention coordinator shall meet with the parents/guardians of a student returning to school after a mental health crisis, and if appropriate, meet with the student to discuss re-entry and applicable next steps to ensure the student's readiness to return to school.

When authorized by the student's parent/guardian, the designated District employee shall coordinate with the appropriate outside mental health care providers.

The designated District employee will periodically check in, as needed, with the student to facilitate the transition back into the school community and address any concerns.

Report Procedures

Effective documentation assists in preserving the safety of the student and ensuring communication among school staff, parents/guardians and mental health service providers.

When a District employee takes notes on any conversations or situations involving or relating to an at-risk student, the notes should contain only factual or directly observed information, not opinions or hearsay.

As stated in this policy, District employees shall be responsible for effective documentation of incidents involving suicide prevention, intervention and response.

The suicide prevention coordinator shall provide the Superintendent with a copy of all reports and documentation regarding the at-risk student. Information and reports shall be provided, as appropriate, to guidance counselors, District mental health professionals and school nurses.

Suicide Awareness and Prevention Resources

A listing of resources regarding suicide awareness and prevention shall be attached to this policy.

Communication

This policy shall be communicated to all District employees, students and parents/guardians of the policy and shall post the policy on the District's website.

Adopted August 17, 2015