Student Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention Education and Screening

The School Board recognizes that a key component of supporting students’ overall wellness is not only providing a safe environment and quality education but also supporting the mental health of students and increasing the access to a continuum of mental health services at the school level. Early identification of at-risk students and communication with parents and other community stakeholders can impact the health, safety and welfare of the students and community within Volusia County. It is critical for school officials to follow best practices in these policies to ensure they are developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive. Equally important are the parents and guardians who work in conjunction with school staff to engage in efforts to advocate for support and further education.

The Board is committed to protecting all students and the school community. The Board recognizes that suicide is one of the leading causes of death for Florida’s youth. It is critical for families and community members to communicate with and provide information to school staff to identify students at risk of suicide. The Superintendent, or designee, shall develop and implement procedures for staff to understand the following: a) improving opportunities for positive outcomes, b) increase knowledge and understanding of early warning signs and symptoms, c) establish suicide prevention, assessment, and postvention efforts, and d) implementation and use of risk assessments, voluntary, and involuntary examinations for student health and safety.

I. District Mental Health Plan

A. The District Mental Health Plan shall include district procedures that align with best practice guidelines for mental wellness supports and suicide prevention as outlined in SB 7026, SB 7030, and 1011.62(16), F.S.; including training for staff on awareness/prevention/intervention efforts, coordination of services, mental health screening and tracking, threat assessment teams and determination of risk, voluntary and involuntary examinations, use of the District Mental Health Team for response and collaboration with multiagency networks of service, re-entry procedures, and postvention crisis response. The District Mental Health Plan will also include an intervention plan for suicide attempts (both on and off campus), evaluations for suicidal thoughts, and an appropriate re-entry process, including a re-entry meeting to discuss the development of a safety plan and additional interventions and supports.

II. Prevention Efforts: Professional Development and Youth Suicide Awareness Training and Prevention for K-12

A. The District will continue to monitor and follow the guidance provided by Florida Department of Education Bureau of Student Support Services in term of suicide prevention, threat assessment, and youth mental health awareness. Professional development opportunities and trainings will be provided to all employees across Volusia County Schools District and will follow the department-approved youth suicide awareness and prevention trainings per s. 1012.583, F.S., and Rule 6A-4.0010, F.A.C. and school safety monitoring per Rule 6A-1.0018, F.A.C.. Further, additional trainings school crisis prevention and intervention training curriculums shall be provided to mental health employees, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other student services/health related staff. The District will also ensure that all School Safety Officers have completed a
crisis intervention training using the curriculum developed by a national organization with expertise in mental health crisis intervention per SB 590.

B. Per Florida legislation 6A-1.094124, the District will implement a minimum of five (5) hours of education annually through developmentally appropriate instruction and skill building to address mental and emotional health education, substance use and abuse health education, and child trafficking prevention education across grades 6-12. Using standards adopted in Rule 6A-1.09401, F.A.C., Student Performance Standards, instruction for mental and emotional health will advance each year through developmentally appropriate instruction and skill building. Topics, at a minimum will include: (a) Recognition of signs and symptoms of mental health disorders; (b) Prevention of mental health disorders; (c) Mental health awareness and assistance; (d) How to reduce the stigma around mental health disorders; (e) Awareness of resources, including local school and community resources; (f) The process for accessing treatment; (g) Strategies to develop healthy coping techniques; (h) Strategies to support a peer, friend, or family member with a mental health disorder; (i) Prevention of suicide; and (j) Prevention of the abuse of and addiction to alcohol, nicotine, and drugs. In addition, annual instruction related to substance use and abuse health education and child trafficking prevention and awareness in grades K-12. Using standards adopted in Rule 6A-1.09401, F.A.C., Student Performance Standards, instruction for mental and emotional health will advance each year through developmentally appropriate instruction and skill building. Topics, at a minimum will include: (a) Recognition of signs of human trafficking; (b) Awareness of resources, including national, state and local resources; (c) Prevention of the abuse of and addiction to alcohol, nicotine, and drugs; (d) Information on the prevalence, nature, and strategies to reduce the risk of human trafficking, techniques to set healthy boundaries, and how to safely seek assistance; and (e) Information on how social media and mobile device applications are used for human trafficking. It is the intent of the State Board of Education that every school in Florida be a “Child Trafficking Free Zone”.

III. Intervention Efforts

A. Research continues to indicate that mental health concerns are increasing among children and adolescents. All school/district personnel should be alert to students who are exhibiting signs or symptoms of mental health distress and/or display warning signs of self-harm or who threaten suicide. Such display or signs reported or witnessed by staff, or another student should be taken with the utmost seriousness and reported immediately to the Principal or designee. Implementation of the suicide prevention assessment protocol will come from a team of individuals including the administrator(s) and Student Services personnel, including notification/collaboration with guardians, relevant school staff, and district mental health team clinicians specifically trained to work with individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. The Principal or designee shall immediately contact the legal guardian(s) of the student exhibiting warning signs of suicide to inform the guardian(s) that student will be referred to a school-based mental health clinician to perform the department-approved youth suicide risk assessment instrument per s. 1012.583, F.S., and Rule 6A-4.0010, F.A.C.. Volusia County Schools will utilize the Riskiden Assessment Form (SAFE) tool to assess all students at risk for suicide. It is the intent of the School Board of Volusia County to ensure that every school in the District is a “Child Trafficking Free Zone”.

CODING: Words stricken are deletions; words underlined are additions.
requires an involuntary examination (Baker Act). Additional steps may be taken to ensure the safety and well-being of the student. If student does not meet criteria for involuntary examination, further discussion between the mental health professional, school, and guardian may indicate a need for voluntary transport for further mental health screening or provision of school-based and community-based outpatient mental health resources.

IV. Re-Entry procedures and Postvention Supports

A. The goal of the re-entry process is to support the student’s ability to be successful in school when returning to school following a mental health crisis, a involuntary examination hold (Baker Act), and/or a exclusionary discipline issue (i.e. 10 or more day suspension or DJJ/alternative site enrollment). Through the process, the administrator, school counselor and other meeting attendees work collaboratively to complete a re-entry plan. The re-entry plan should be reasonable and achievable. The school is responsible for initiating a re-entry meeting and are encouraged to reach out to district staff for additional support (District Mental Health Team, District ESE Specialist, Safety & Security, School Psychologist, School Social Worker). Though this discussion, the purpose is to develop a plan to re-engage the student in a school program tailored to the student’s individual circumstances.

School staff should initiate the re-entry conference and make every effort to invite the guardian(s) to participate. If the student is an ESE student, a member of the ESE Department should attend the meeting. A re-entry meeting should occur no later than three days of the student returning back to school or reenrollment. Participants should take the following into account as applicable: circumstances related to the student’s suspension or expulsion; prior academic and discipline history; review the IEP, 504 and/or if applicable the Behavior Intervention Plan (Note: Only an IEP Team/504 Team, through an IEP/504 Meeting, can make changes to a student’s goals, services, accommodations and/or placement); severity of the disciplinary incident that led to the student’s exclusion; and mental health concerns related to the student.

B. Handle with Care (HWC) alerts can be initiated and tailored to reflect the needs and issues affecting students throughout Volusia County schools. Reasons that may trigger a HWC alert to be placed may include but are not limited to, exposure to a traumatic event, involved in an incident of bullying and/or harassment, have a re-entry plan, have had a mental health assessment, and/or need additional support for various reasons. This alert will allow for teachers and staff to understand and respond to trauma in a positive manner. HWC promotes school-community partnerships aimed at ensuring that students who are exposed to trauma in their home, school or community receive appropriate interventions to help them achieve academically at their highest level despite whatever traumatic circumstances they may have endured. The goal of the HWC is to help students to succeed in school. Regardless of the source of trauma, the common thread for effective intervention is the school. Research shows that trauma can undermine children’s ability to learn, form relationships, and function appropriately in the classroom. HWC alerts can be triggered automatically through the initiated event in the online school documentation platform. Schools are encouraged to review their HWC alerts on a monthly basis to determine students that need additional support.
Throughout intervention and follow-up, it is essential that Board policies and District procedures regarding confidentiality be observed at all times.

Legal Authority:


History:

(Adopted – xx-xx-xxxx)

(Effective Date – xx-xx-xxxx)