

Creating Opportunities in Preventing and Eliminating Suicide (COPES) | YEAR ONE HIGHLIGHTS

Background

The San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) leads the Creating Opportunities in Preventing and Eliminating Suicide (COPES) initiative, a four-year grant funded by the State of California Mental Health Student Services Act (2021-2025). The SDCOE COPES leadership team aims to build the capacity of participating local education agencies (LEAs) to support school communities that champion mental wellness. Focus areas include staff and student wellness and resiliency; stigma reduction; suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention; professional development and programming for educators, staff, students, and families; and developing coordinated referral pathways for students needing mental/behavioral health services.

This is a partnership between SDCOE, County of San Diego Behavioral Health Services, 16 school districts, five multi-site charter school organizations, and 12 single-site charter schools. These LEAs collectively serve over 334,600 students in 470 San Diego County schools. Each LEA has designated a COPES liaison and/or leadership team to partner with SDCOE. The liaisons and teams participate in ongoing meetings, trainings, and coaching to become subject-matter experts in mental health promotion and suicide prevention.

SDCOE works in partnership with the School Health Evaluation and Research Team from the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the COPES initiative. This brief provides evaluation highlights from the first year of implementation.

Participating LEAs

Districts

- Bonsall
- Cajon Valley
- Chula Vista Elementary
- Fallbrook
- SDCOE Juvenile Court and Community Schools
- Lakeside
- La Mesa-Spring Valley
- Lemon Grove
- Mountain Empire
- National City
- Poway
- San Marcos
- San Diego Unified
- Santee
- Spencer Valley
- Sweetwater

Multi-Site Charter Schools

- Altus Schools (Audeo)
- Julian Charter Schools
- High Tech High
- Learning Choice Academy
- SIA Tech

Single-Site Charter Schools

- City Heights Preparatory
- Compass
- Empower
- Feaster
- Helix High
- Mueller-Bayfront
- Motivated Youth Academy
- San Diego Global Vision Academy
- San Diego Virtual School
- Scholarship Prep Oceanside
- School for Entrepreneurship and Technology
- Urban Discovery



COPEs Goals and Objectives

Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention

- Trainings for staff and families to increase awareness and knowledge
- Technical assistance in developing comprehensive protocols and practices
- Access to current tools, data, promising practices, and high quality resources

Mental Health Promotion and Stigma Reduction

- Trainings and resources to increase mental health literacy, create healthy help-seeking cultures, and cultivate staff, student, and caregiver wellness and resiliency
- Student programs, resources, and events to increase peer support skills

School Mental Health Referral Pathways

- Resource mapping, gap analysis, and process development
- Community resource identification and effective partnership building
- Coordination and collaboration between schools and mental health services

Comprehensive Needs Assessment

In the first year of the initiative, LEAs completed a comprehensive needs assessment to identify strengths and needs in the following areas:

- Coordination of mental health supports
- Mental health promotion
- Mental health referral processes
- Mental health services and supports
- Suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention
- Peer support

Needs assessments will be conducted annually throughout the initiative to measure growth and inform planning efforts.

Mental Health Services and Supports for Students

Initial needs assessment results revealed...

Nearly all LEAs provide supports that address:

- Social and emotional skills
- Bullying
- Trauma

LEAs need additional supports to address:

- Grief and loss
- Teen dating violence
- Eating disorders



Student Mental Health Indicators:

California Healthy Kids Survey

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) is an anonymous and confidential survey developed by WestEd for the California Department of Education to gather data regarding students' school experiences.¹ This initiative tracks school climate and mental health indicators based on research that demonstrates a negative association between student perceptions of school climate and suicide ideation.² School violence victimization, including discrimination and cyberbullying, increases the risk of suicide ideation. Positive school climate is a protective factor associated with better mental health outcomes.

The information below shows a summary of the CHKS Core and Mental Health Supports module indicators that will be tracked over the course of the initiative to inform programming and planning.

Core Module Indicators

The initiative monitors the following indicators from the CHKS Core Module:

- Caring adults in school scale
- School connectedness scale
- Social and emotional distress^b/learning supports^a scale
- Anti-bullying climate scale^a
- Experienced any harassment or bullying on school property^b
- Experienced frequent^a/chronic^b sadness
- Considered suicide^b

Mental Health Module Indicators

The initiative monitors the following indicators from the CHKS Mental Health Supports Module:

- Students' mental health
- Students' perceptions of mental health stigma
- Access to mental health services
- Help-seeking attitudes and behaviors
- Students' perceived barriers to seeking mental health supports and services



^aElementary school survey indicator

^bSecondary school survey indicator

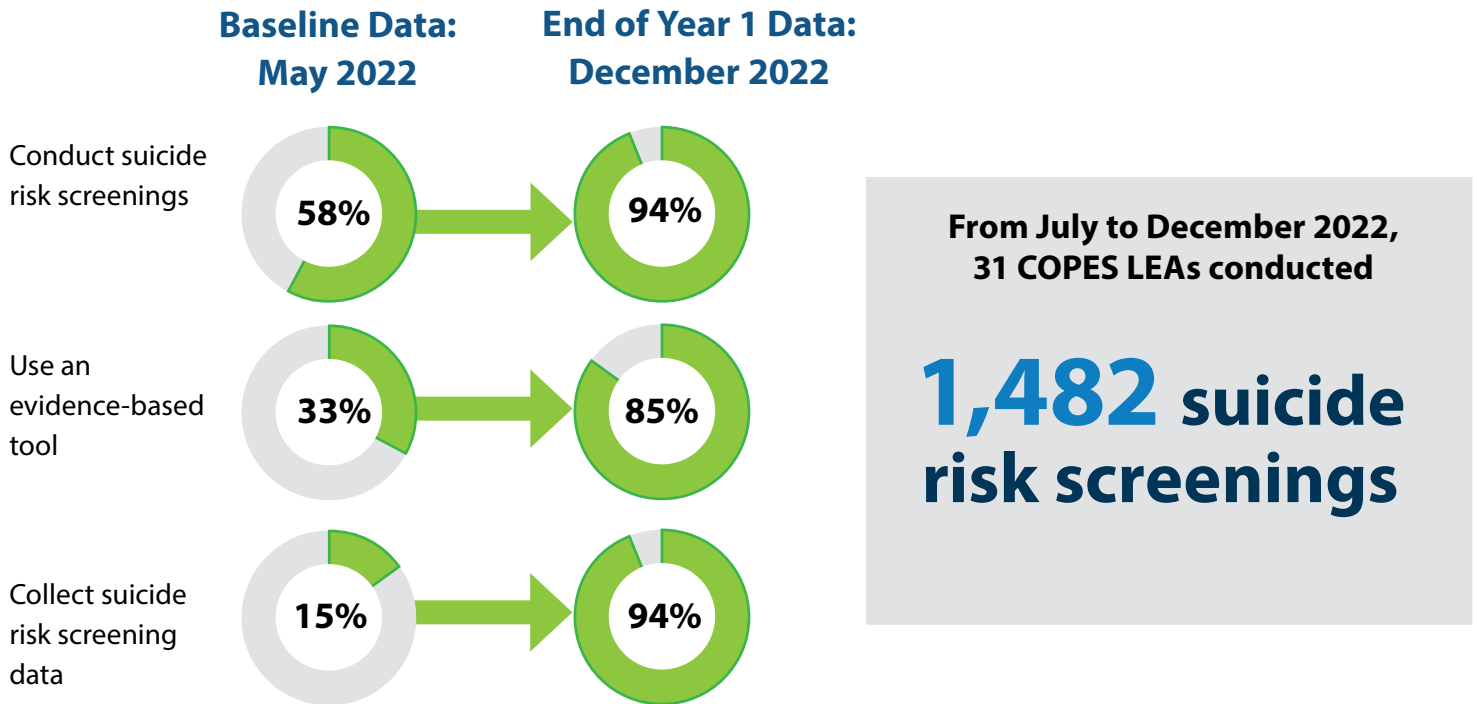
Note: The elementary school survey (grades 3-6) is built around the CHKS secondary school instrument. The elementary survey provides developmentally appropriate data that focuses on risk and resilience factors.

¹ California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). <https://calschls.org/>.

² Benbenishty R, Astor RA, Roziner I. A School-Based Multilevel Study of Adolescent Suicide Ideation in California High Schools. *J Pediatr.* 2018 May;196:251-257.

Suicide Prevention and Intervention

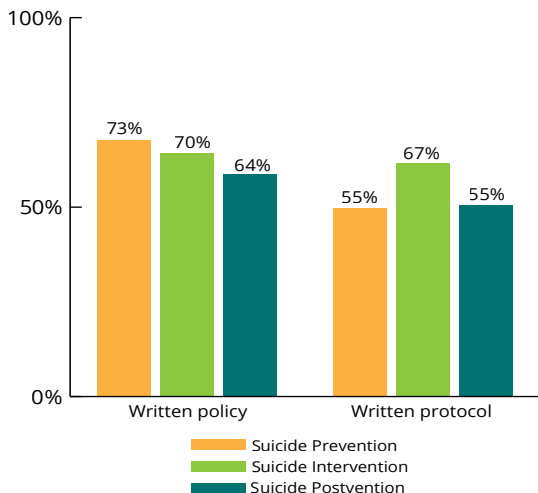
The initiative supports all 33 LEAs in adopting an evidence-based suicide risk screening tool – a standardized instrument used to identify individuals who may be at risk for suicide and require further assessment – as well as tracking high level, anonymous trend data on these screenings. By the end of year one, significant improvements have been made in the percentage of LEAs that use an evidence-based tool to conduct suicide risk screenings and collect data. LEAs will continue collecting data throughout the initiative to monitor trends over time.



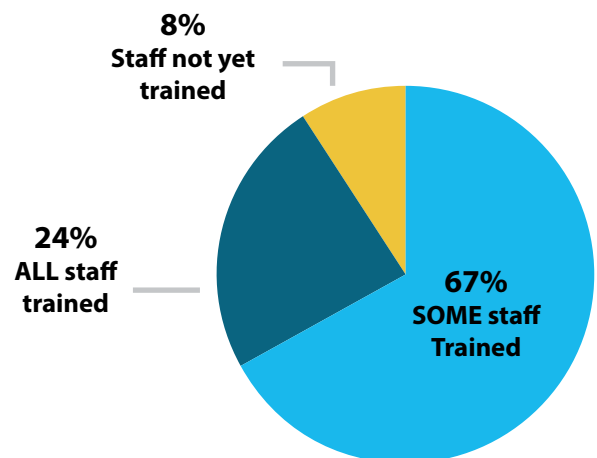
Policies and Protocols

The initiative also ensures each participating LEA has policies and practices in place regarding suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention that meet legislative requirements to promote student safety. The charts below illustrate the percentage of LEAs that reported having written policies and protocols that included suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention at the beginning of year one, as well as those that reported training staff in suicide prevention.

Do policies and protocols include suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention?



Have district or school staff received training on suicide prevention?



Training and Technical Assistance

To support LEAs' efforts in becoming mental health and suicide prevention champions, SDCOE offered several training and technical assistance activities throughout year one of the grant.

In year one, SDCOE provided 18 trainings for participating LEAs:

Over 400 COPES school/district staff received training on the following topics:

- Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) suicide prevention gatekeeper training
- Managing Anxiety in the School Setting
- Youth Mental Health Literacy
- Cultivating Emotional Resilience and Mental Fitness
- Finding the Calm Amidst the Chaos: Strategies for Educators to Cope With Anxiety

Over 150 parents/guardians received training on the following topics:

- How Parents Can Help Children Manage Anxiety
- Taking Care of Your Emotional and Mental Health While Parenting



As a result of their participation in the initiative, 27 LEAs provided local training and outreach events related to mental health awareness and suicide prevention/intervention to their school communities:

	Trainings/ Events	Staff Participants	Student Participants	Parent/ Caregiver Participants
Mental Health Trainings	119	1,742	5,265	728
Suicide Prevention/ Intervention Trainings	174	4,454	8,485	392
Mental Health Promotion	29	543	10,499	467
TOTAL	322	6,739	24,249	1,587

Next Steps

In the second year of the grant, the initiative will continue to expand the capacity of LEAs to support mental wellness and suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. The initiative will also help LEAs build up resources and trainings in areas identified through the annual needs assessments. Additionally, there will be a focus on implementing peer programming in elementary, middle, and high schools.