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

**Social and emotional skills**  
**Bullying**  
**Trauma**

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

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

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### 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

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### 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

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### 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
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Module Indicators</th>
<th>Mental Health Module Indicators</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The initiative monitors the following indicators from the CHKS Core Module:</td>
<td>The initiative monitors the following indicators from the CHKS Mental Health Supports Module:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Caring adults in school scale</td>
<td>• Students’ mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School connectedness scale</td>
<td>• Students’ perceptions of mental health stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social and emotional distress⁵/learning supports⁴ scale</td>
<td>• Access to mental health services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Anti-bullying climate scale⁴</td>
<td>• Help-seeking attitudes and behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experienced any harassment or bullying on school property⁵</td>
<td>• Students’ perceived barriers to seeking mental health supports and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experienced frequent⁴/chronic⁵ sadness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Considered suicide⁴</td>
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¹Elementary school survey indicator
⁵Secondary 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.

**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.

### Baseline Data: May 2022

- Conduct suicide risk screenings: 58%
- Use an evidence-based tool: 33%
- Collect suicide risk screening data: 15%

### End of Year 1 Data: December 2022

- Conduct suicide risk screenings: 94%
- Use an evidence-based tool: 85%
- Collect suicide risk screening data: 94%

**From July to December 2022, 31 COPES LEAs conducted 1,482 suicide risk screenings**

### 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?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Written policy</th>
<th>Written protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Prevention</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Intervention</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Postvention</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Have district or school staff received training on suicide prevention?**

- 8% Staff not yet trained
- 24% ALL staff trained
- 67% SOME staff trained
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training/Events</th>
<th>Staff Participants</th>
<th>Student Participants</th>
<th>Parent/Caregiver Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Trainers</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>1,742</td>
<td>5,265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Prevention/Intervention Trainers</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>4,454</td>
<td>8,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Promotion</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>10,499</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>322</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,739</strong></td>
<td><strong>24,249</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**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.