Policy 5141.5: Mental Health

Status: ADOPTED

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The Governing Board recognizes that students' emotional well-being and mental health are critical to their ability to perform to their full academic and personal potential. The Superintendent or designee shall develop strategies and services to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, facilitate access to mental health services, and help students build resiliency skills, including digital resilience, increase social connections, and cope with life challenges.

The Superintendent or designee shall consult and collaborate with school-employed mental health professionals, the county mental health department, psychologists and other health professionals, social workers, and/or community organizations to strengthen local mental health services and develop and implement an integrated plan to support student mental health.

To the extent possible, the district shall focus on preventive strategies which increase students' connectedness to school, create a support network of peers and trusted adults, and provide techniques for conflict resolution. The district shall investigate and resolve any complaint of bullying, intimidation, harassment, or discrimination in accordance with law and district policy.

Instruction provided to students shall promote student health and mental, emotional, and social development. Health education courses shall be aligned with the state content standards and curriculum framework, as specified in Administrative Regulation 6143 - Courses of Study, and shall include, but not be limited to, instruction related to identifying signs of depression and self-destructive behaviors including substance abuse, developing coping skills, and identifying resources that may provide assistance.

Information and Training

The Superintendent or designee shall provide school staff and students with information and training to recognize the early signs and symptoms of an emerging mental health condition or behavioral health disorder, including common psychiatric conditions and substance use disorders such as opioid and alcohol abuse, identify risk factors and warning signs of suicidal intent, respond to students who have been impacted by traumatic stress, safely deescalate crisis situations involving students with a behavioral health disorder, and link students with effective services, referrals, and supports. Additionally, such training shall provide instruction on how to maintain student privacy and confidentiality, and may be provided to parents/guardians and families. (Education Code 49428.15)

The Superintendent or designee shall develop a protocol for identifying and assessing students who may be suffering from an anxiety disorder, depression, eating disorder, or other severe or disabling mental illness. The Superintendent or designee may establish districtwide or school-site crisis intervention team(s) to respond to mental health concerns in the school setting.

At least twice per school year, the Superintendent or designee shall ensure that each school provides notice regarding how to initiate access to student mental health services on campus and/or in the community. The notification to parents/guardians and to students shall be in at least two of the following methods: (Education Code 49428)

1. Distributing the information, electronically or in hardcopy, in a letter to parents/guardians, and in a school publication or other document to students

2. Including the information, at the beginning of the school year, in the parent/guardian handbook and in student orientation materials or a student handbook

3. Posting the information on the school's website or social media

Each school site that serves students in any of grades 6-12 shall create an age appropriate and culturally relevant poster that identifies approaches and shares resources about student mental health, and that includes the following information: (Education Code 49428.5)

1. Identification of common behaviors of those struggling with mental health or who are in a mental health crisis, including, but not limited to, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, emotional dysregulation, bipolar episodes, and schizophrenic episodes

2. A list of, and contact information for, school site-specific resources, including, but not limited to, counselors, wellness centers, and peer counselors

3. A list of, and contact information for, community resources, including, but not limited to, suicide prevention, substance abuse, child crisis, nonpolice mental health hotlines, public behavioral health services, and community mental health centers

4. A list of positive coping strategies to use when dealing with mental health, including, but not limited to, meditation, mindfulness, yoga, breathing exercises, grounding skills, journaling, acceptance, and seeking therapy

5. A list of negative coping strategies to avoid, including, but not limited to, substance abuse or self-medication, violence and abuse, self-harm, compulsivity, dissociation, catastrophizing, and isolating

The poster shall be displayed in English and any primary language spoken by 15 percent or more of the students at the school site and be no smaller than 8.5 by 11 inches and at least 12-point font. The poster shall be prominently and conspicuously displayed in public areas that are accessible to, and commonly frequented by, students at each school site such as bathrooms, locker rooms, classrooms, classroom hallways, gymnasiums, auditoriums, cafeterias, wellness centers, and offices. Additionally, at the beginning of each school year the poster shall be distributed online to students through social media, websites, portals, and learning platforms. (Education Code 49428.5)

Mental Health Counseling and Referrals

A school counselor, school psychologist, or school social worker may provide mental health counseling to students in accordance with the specialization(s) authorized on the individual's credential. As needed, students and parents/guardians may be provided referrals to mental health services in the community and/or to mental health services at or near district schools.

The district's referral protocols shall: (Education Code 49428.1)

1. Address the appropriate and timely referral by school staff of students with behavioral health concerns

2. Reflect a multitiered system of support process and positive behavioral interventions and supports, to be used as an alternative to disciplinary action as appropriate

   The protocols shall be accessible to students who may be the subject of disciplinary action.

3. Be adaptable to varied local service arrangements for behavioral health services

4. Reflect evidence-based and culturally appropriate approaches to student behavioral health referral without disciplinary actions

   "Evidence-based" means peer-reviewed, scientific research evidence, including studies based on research methodologies that control threats to both the internal and the external validity of the research findings.

5. Address the inclusion of parents/guardians in the referral process

6. Be written to ensure clarity and ease of use by certificated and classified school employees

7. Reflect differentiated referral processes for students with exceptional needs and other populations for whom the referral process may be distinct

8. Be written to ensure that school employees act only within the authorization or scope of their credential or license

   School employees are not authorized or encouraged to diagnose or treat youth behavioral health disorders unless they are specifically licensed and employed to do so.

9. Be consistent with state activities conducted by the California Department of Education in the administration of federally funded behavioral health programs

A student 12 years of age or older may consent to mental health treatment or counseling if the student, in the opinion of the attending mental health professional, is mature enough to participate intelligently in the services. Additionally, the student's parent/guardian shall consent to student's treatment, unless the mental health professional determines, after consulting with the student, that the involvement of the parent/guardian would be inappropriate. (Family Code 6924)

In delivering mental health and behavioral health services to students, the district may use telehealth or other information and communication technologies that facilitate the diagnosis, consultation, treatment, education, care management, and self-management of a student's health while the student is on campus and the health care provider is at a distant location. (Education Code 49429)

Prior to utilizing telehealth technology to manage a student's mental health or behavior, the mental health professional shall consult with the student, parent/guardian, and/or the student's individualized education program team, as required by law, unless the mental health professional determines that the involvement would be inappropriate pursuant to Family Code 6924.

In using telehealth technology to provide mental health services to students, the Superintendent or designee shall ensure that mental health professionals comply with applicable professional codes of ethics and legal authority. Additionally, space that affords privacy and confidentiality of telehealth sessions shall be provided for students and an emergency response plan shall be put in place that lays out all legally-mandated steps to take when a student suddenly begins to exhibit suicidal ideation or other potentially dangerous behavior during a telehealth session.

If a student has an emotional or mental illness that limits a major life activity, has a record of such impairment, or is regarded as having such impairment, or may need special education and related services, the student shall be referred for an evaluation for purposes of determining whether any educational or related services are required in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as applicable. (Education Code 56301-56302; 29 USC 794; 28 CFR 35.108)

Funding Resources

The Superintendent or designee shall explore potential funding sources for district programs and services that support student's mental health. In accordance with local plans and priorities, the district may apply to the county for grants for prevention and early intervention activities that are designed to prevent mental illness from becoming severe and disabling and to improve timely access for underserved populations.