Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention

Doreen Marshall, Ph.D., AFSP
Nicole Gibson, MSW, AFSP
Jill Cook, M.Ed., ASCA
Sam Brinton, Trevor Project

Learning Objectives

As a result of attending this webinar, participants will:

• Gain information about the Model School District Policy resource and revision.

• Learn about the role of school mental health professionals in the development and implementation of a suicide prevention policy.

• Hear state implementation examples, including special considerations related to LGBTQ youth and suicide.
Webinar Presenters

Sam Brinton, Head of Advocacy and Government Relations, The Trevor Project

Jill Cook, M.Ed., Assistant Director, American School Counselor Association

Nicole Gibson, MSW, Sr. Director of State Policy & Grassroots Advocacy, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Doreen Marshall, Ph.D., Vice President of Programs, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Model School District Policy Resource

- Available on all partner websites
- atfsp.org/modelschoolpolicy
- Contains specific, actionable steps to support schools, including:
  - How to involve parents
  - Sample language for student handbooks
  - Guidance for addressing in-school suicide attempts

Model School District Policy

- Outlines model polices and best practices (policy language, commentary, and resources).
- Applicable to education levels K-12.
- Covers actions that take place in school, on school property, at school-sponsored functions, etc. and applies to entire school community.
- Addresses appropriate school response to suicidal or high risk behaviors.
Key Policy Takeaways

• Appointment of district-level suicide prevention coordinator, who along with building principal is responsible for policy coordination and implementation.
• Designation of school-based coordinator as point of contact.
• Emphasis on staff professional development.
• Importance of staff reporting students they believe at risk to coordinator or appropriate school-based mental health professional.

Other Key Takeaways

• Assessment and referral to occur in a timely manner (within same school day).
• Parental/guardian notification occurs on same school day or as soon as possible once student at risk is identified.
• Lethal means counseling guidance provided.
• Re-entry procedure for students returning to school after a mental health crisis.
Commentary

- Parental involvement
- Importance of school-based mental health supports
- Suicide prevention task force as a best practice
- Referrals/considerations for LGBTQ youth, bullying and suicide
- Messaging and suicide contagion
- Relevant state laws

Next steps from today…

1. Download a copy! (Print copies available via AFSP web store)
2. Review document with key personnel in your school.
3. Examine existing policy to ensure that it is comprehensive (p.27 contains implementation checklist).
Model School Policy: State Laws and Implementation

Nicole Gibson, MSW
Sr. Director of State Policy & Grassroots Advocacy
AFSP

State Laws: Require or Encourage Policies

- **Connecticut adopted first law in 1989**
- **No additions until 2012-2014 (5 states)**
- **Since 2014, momentum growing rapidly (17 states + DC)**
  - Coincides with release of original Model School District Policy in 2014
  - AFSP, Trevor Project, & others include policy requirement in model legislation
Each public school district shall adopt a policy on student suicide prevention. Such policies shall be developed in consultation with school and community stakeholders, school employed mental health professionals, and suicide prevention experts, and shall, at a minimum, address procedures relating to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.

To assist school districts in developing policies for student suicide prevention, the Department of Education shall develop and maintain a model policy to serve as a guide for school districts in accordance with this section.
With your help, we can encourage widespread adoption of the Model School District Policy.

Role of School Mental Health Professionals

Jill Cook, M.Ed.
American School Counselor Association
School Counselors

Work with all students on career, academic and social and emotional development

School Nurses

Work to improve the health and academic success of all students

School Psychologists

Help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally

School Social Workers

Are an integral part of the education of all children, connecting schools, families and communities.

School Counselors

Are involved in the provision of universal learning supports to the whole school population through classroom instruction, small groups and individual counseling and advisement and appraisal.

Focus on helping students' address their academic, social/emotional and career development goals and needs by designing, implementing, and evaluating a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success.

Work to promote safe learning environments for all members of the school community and regularly monitor and respond to behavior issues that impact school climate, such as bullying and student interpersonal struggles.
School Psychologists

Apply expertise in mental health, learning, behavior, and crisis prevention and response to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally.

Partner with families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community.

Conduct mental health evaluations and suicide risk assessments, work with school crisis team on suicide prevention, response, and postvention, support student re-entry to school in the aftermath of a suicide attempt.
School counselors AND school psychologists play a key role in:

- **Identifying** students at risk for mental health concerns, including suicidal ideation
- **Providing** direct support to students who need it
- **Referring** students and families to needed resources within the community if
- **Help train teachers and other school personnel** know how to recognize “risk” in youth, and subsequently what to do once risk is identified.
**Prevention**

- Designation of suicide prevention coordinators at the district and school level to help implement and be points of contact
- Annual professional development for staff on warning signs and how to respond, with specific attention to at-risk populations such as LGBTQ youth
- Additional training for school employed mental health professionals
- Developmentally appropriate content for students included in health curriculum

**Intervention**

- Procedure for assessment and referral for at-risk youth
- Procedures for handling in-school suicide attempts and out of school suicide attempts
- Re-entry procedure for students returning after mental health crisis
- Parental/guardian notification and involvement
Postvention

- Procedures for the crisis team and all educators to follow after they become aware of a suicide death

- Focus on properly handling interactions with the family, communication with the community, and avoiding risk of suicide contagion

- Plan for facilitation external communication with media, etc., in a way that is responsible
LGBTQ Youth Inclusion

Including high risk youth, in particular LGBTQ youth, focuses staff on the students that need extra supports

From The Trevor Project 2019 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health

- 39% of LGBTQ respondents seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months
- More than half of transgender and non-binary youth have seriously considered suicide
- LGBTQ youth who report having at least one accepting adult were 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the past year

California

One year post legislation

- Of LEAs with a suicide prevention policy enacted prior to AB 2246, only two, or 3%, contained language related to LGBTQ youth. By contrast, more than 90% (286) of policies enacted post-AB 2246 address the needs of LGBTQ youth.
- Nearly 90% (343) of the suicide prevention policies met the requirement of addressing all three elements of prevention, intervention, and postvention.
- 79% (306) of suicide prevention policies address “high risk youth.”
- Only about 75% of suicide prevention policies specifically address LGBTQ youth (291).
New York

No legislative requirement

- More than 1/3 of New York school districts currently do not have a suicide prevention policy, leaving more than 500,000 students without protective measures in place in their schools.
- Only 2% (6) of existing policies address LGBTQ youth - we estimate that well over 2 million youth across NY state are enrolled in schools that are not covered by LGBTQ inclusive suicide prevention policies.
- 99.7% (303) of existing policies provide intervention provisions.

Positive Movement

- California, Nevada, and Washington D.C. all have legislation that requires best practices and comprehensive policies for all districts.
- New York collaboration created a Guide for Schools and is pursuing legislative action.
- Model School Policy is being utilized by districts across the country.
Thank You!