



## Model Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Policy

Pursuant to section 1526 of the School Code, 24 P.S. §15-1526, the PA Department of Education (Department) hereby submits the following Model Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Policy as a model for school entities to adopt and implement in order to promote the well-being and safety of students and school personnel and comply with section 1526. This model is not intended to be adopted as written. Each school entity should consider the policy below as a reference to use when developing its own unique policy. As used throughout the document, the terms “school entity” and “school” refer to a school district, joint school district, charter school, regional charter school, cyber charter school, intermediate unit and/or area vocational-technical school.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
 Department of Education  
 Model Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Policy

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**A school entity’s Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Policy must include the following:**

- A statement on youth suicide awareness and prevention;
- Protocols for administering youth suicide awareness and prevention education to staff and students;
- Methods of prevention, including procedures for early identification and referral of students at risk of suicide;
- Methods of intervention, including procedures that address an emotional or mental health safety plan for students identified as being at increased risk of suicide;
- Methods of responding to a student or staff suicide or suicide attempt;
- Reporting procedures; and
- Recommended resources on youth suicide awareness and prevention, including current contact information for such programs.

1. Purpose

The school entity adopts this policy in acknowledgment of the school entity’s commitment to maintaining a safe school environment; to protect the health, safety and welfare of its students; to promote healthy development; and to safeguard against the threat or attempt of suicide among school-aged youth. The impact of students’ mental health on their academic performance and the effect of mental health issues and suicide on students and the entire school community are significant. Therefore, in order to ensure the safety

2. Authority	and welfare of students, the school entity will work to educate school personnel and students on the actions and resources necessary to prevent suicide and promote mental well-being.
3. Publication	<p>This policy shall apply in any situation where a student is expressing suicidal thoughts or intentions of self-harm on school property, at any school-sponsored activity, or on any public vehicle providing transportation to or from a school or school-sponsored activity. This policy shall also apply following a student's suicide threat or attempt that does not occur on school grounds or during a school-sponsored activity, but that is reported to any school personnel.</p> <p><u>Publication of Policy</u></p> <p>The school entity will notify its school personnel, students and parents/guardians of this policy and will post the policy on the school entity's website.</p>
4. Definitions	<p><b>At-Risk for Suicide</b> shall mean any youth with risk factors or warning signs that increase the likelihood of suicidal behavior.</p> <p><b>Chief School Administrator</b> shall mean the superintendent of a school district or joint school district, the chief executive officer of a charter school, regional charter school or cyber charter school, and/or the executive director of an intermediate unit or area vocational-technical school.</p> <p><b>Crisis Response Team</b> shall include, but may not be limited to, the administrators, guidance counselors, the school nurse, social worker, and school resource officers, and/or other members of the Student Assistance Program (SAP), as designated, and may include other members as deemed appropriate by the chief school administrator/school entity. Community mental agency resources may be called for assistance to be a part of the team.</p> <p><b>Expressed Suicidal Thoughts or Intentions</b> shall mean a verbal or nonverbal communication that an individual intends to harm him/herself with the intention to die, but has not acted on the behavior.</p> <p><b>Prevention</b> refers to efforts that seek to reduce the factors that increase the risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors and increase the factors that help strengthen, support, and protect individuals from suicide.</p> <p><b>Protective Factors</b> shall refer to characteristics (biological, psychological, and social) that reduce risk and the likelihood of the individual developing a mental illness.</p> <p><b>Resilience</b> shall refer to an individual's innate ability to persevere in the face of adversity and reduce the risk of unhealthy outcomes.</p> <p><b>Risk Factors</b> shall mean the personal or environmental characteristics</p>

associated with suicide. People affected by one or more of these risk factors have a greater probability of suicidal behavior.

**School Connectedness** shall mean the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals.

**School Personnel** include, but may not be limited to, administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, coaches, bus drivers, custodians, and cafeteria workers.

**Suicide** shall refer to death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior.

**Suicidal Act** or **Suicide Attempt** shall mean a potentially self-injurious behavior for which there is evidence that the person probably intended to kill him/herself; a suicidal act may result in death, injuries, or no injuries.

**Warning Signs** are evidence-based indicators that someone may be in danger of suicide, either immediately or in the very near future.

## 5. Suicide Awareness and Prevention

The school entity shall establish a crisis response team(s). The crisis response team(s) may include, but is not limited to, administrators, guidance counselors, the school nurse, social worker, school police officer or school resource officer, and/or teachers and other members of the school's Student Assistance Program team. [Community mental agency resources may also be called upon for assistance, but a letter of agreement between the school entity and any community provider(s) is encouraged prior to commencement of any crisis response or postvention services.]

The crisis response team(s) should also include individuals designated as coordinators and/or investigators on cases involving peer-to-peer harassment, as required under federal law. These individuals will help identify overlapping risk factors, including hostile environments created by persistent or severe harassment on the basis of gender, race, disability, or other protected classes.<sup>1</sup>

The school entity shall utilize a multifaceted approach to suicide awareness and prevention, which includes the following:

### Staff Development

All school personnel, including, but not limited to, administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, coaches, bus drivers, custodians, and cafeteria workers, shall receive information regarding the school's protocols for suicide awareness and prevention. Education will be provided for all school personnel about the importance of suicide prevention and recognition

<sup>1</sup> Please see U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), guidance related to disability discrimination and sex discrimination for more information: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/publications.html>.

of suicide risk factors, as well as strategies to enhance protective factors, resilience, and school connectedness. Additionally, all school personnel will be educated about the warnings signs and risk factors for youth depression and suicide.

As part of the school entity's Professional Development Plan, professional staff in all school buildings serving students in grades six (6) through twelve (12) shall participate in four (4) hours of youth suicide awareness and prevention training every five (5) years.

#### Prevention Education for Students

Students shall receive age-appropriate lessons in their classrooms through health education or other appropriate curricula on the importance of safe and healthy choices, as well as help seeking strategies for self and/or others. Lessons shall contain information on comprehensive health and wellness, including emotional, behavioral and social skills development. Students shall be taught not to make promises of confidence when they are concerned about a peer or significant other. These lessons may be taught by health and physical education teachers, community service providers, classroom teachers or student services staff. Students who are in need of intervention shall be referred in accordance with the school entity's referral procedures for screening and recommendations.

*Student education may include but is not limited to the following:*

1. Information about suicide prevention. Resources are available on the Department's website– [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov)
2. Help-seeking approaches amongst students, promoting a climate that encourages peer referral and emphasizes school connectedness.
3. Increasing students' ability to recognize if they or their peers are at risk for suicide.
4. Addressing problems that can lead to suicide, such as depression and other mental health issues, anger, and drug use.

#### 6. Intervention/ Prevention

22 Pa Code.  
12.12

#### Intervention/Prevention

In compliance with state regulations and in support of the school's suicide prevention methods, information received in confidence from a student may be revealed to the student's parents or guardians, the building principal or other appropriate authority when the health, welfare or safety of the student or other persons is at risk.

Any school personnel who has identified a student with one or more risk factors, or warning signs, or who has an indication that a student may be contemplating suicide, shall refer the student for further assessment and intervention in accordance with the school entity's referral procedures.

The school entity shall create an emotional or mental health safety plan to support a student and the student's family if the student has been identified as being at increased risk of suicide.

For students with disabilities who are identified as being at-risk for suicide or who attempt suicide, the appropriate team shall be notified and shall address the student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Board policy.

If a student is identified as being at-risk for suicide or attempts suicide and requires special education services or accommodations, the Director of Special Education shall be notified and shall take action to address the student's needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Board policy.

Any school personnel who are made aware of any threat or witnesses any attempt towards self-harm that is written, drawn, spoken, or threatened shall immediately notify the principal or designee. Any threat in any form shall be treated as real and dealt with immediately. No student should be left alone, nor confidences promised. In cases of life-threatening situations, a student's confidentiality will be waived. The school entity's crisis response procedures shall be implemented.

If an expressed suicide thought or intention is made known to any school personnel during an afterschool program and the principal or designee are not available, call [number for County Emergency Services], 1-800-SUICIDE, or 1-800-273-TALK for help. Thereafter, immediately inform the principal of the incident and actions taken.

#### Procedures for Parental Involvement

Parent or guardian of a student identified as being at risk of suicide must be immediately notified by the school and must be involved in consequent actions. If any mandated reporter suspects that a student's risk status is the result of abuse or neglect, that individual must comply with the reporting requirements of the Child Protective Services Law.

If the parent or guardian refuse to cooperate and there is any doubt regarding the child's safety, the school personnel who directly witnessed the expressed suicide thought or intention will pursue a 302 involuntary mental health assessment by calling County Emergency Services at [provide number] and ask for a delegate. The delegate will listen to concerns and advise on the course of action. If a 302 involuntary mental health assessment is granted, the first-hand witness will need to be the petitioner, with support from the principal or other central office administrator.

#### Response to Suicide or Suicide Attempt on Campus

The first school personnel on the scene of a suicide or suicide attempt must follow the school entity's crisis response procedures, and shall immediately notify the principal or designee.

The school entity will immediately notify the parents or guardians of the affected student(s).

Resources for Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention

A comprehensive set of resources for youth suicide awareness and prevention is accessible through the Department at [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov)

PA Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative - <http://payspi.org/>

Oct. 2014 Dear Colleague Letter related to peer harassment of students with disabilities:

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/publications.html#Section504>

Suicide Prevention Resource Center - <http://www.sprc.org/>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - <http://www.afsp.org/>

Reference:

2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action