

VISTA NORTE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

SUICIDE PREVENTION POLICY

The Board of Directors recognizes that suicide is a leading cause of death among youth and that school personnel who regularly interact with students are often in a position to recognize the warning signs of suicide and to offer appropriate referral and/or assistance. To attempt to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students and families, the Administrator or designee shall develop measures and strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention that are developmentally appropriate and inclusive of all grades served by the school.

In developing measures and strategies, the Administrator or designee may consult with school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, administrators, other staff, parents/guardians, students, local health agencies, mental health professionals, and community organizations. Such measures and strategies may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Staff development on suicide awareness and prevention for teachers, school counselor school social workers and other employees who interact with students provided in multiple formats including in-person, virtual, hybrid, and asynchronous.
2. Methods for promoting a positive school climate that enhances students' feelings of connectedness with the school and that is characterized by caring staff and harmonious interrelationships among students.
3. Encouragement for students to notify appropriate school personnel or other adults when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's suicidal intentions.
4. Crisis intervention procedures for addressing suicide threats or attempts.
5. Counseling and other postvention strategies for helping students, staff, and others cope in the aftermath of a student's suicide.

As appropriate, these measures and strategies shall specifically address the needs of students who are at risk of suicide, including, but not limited to, students who are bereaved by suicide; students with disabilities, mental illness, or substance use disorders; students who are experiencing homelessness or who are in out-of-home settings such as foster care; and students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth. (Education Code section 215).

Staff Development

Suicide prevention training shall be provided to teachers, school counselors, school social workers and other employees who interact with students. It can be offered in multiple modalities including in person, virtual, hybrid and asynchronous. Training shall include ways in which to identify appropriate mental health services at the school and within the community, and how to refer students to those services. Staff development shall include information related to topics including,

but not limited to, the following:

1. The higher risk of suicide among certain groups including, but not limited to, students who are bereaved by suicide, students with disabilities, mental illness, or substance use disorders; students who are experiencing homelessness or who are in out-of-home settings such as foster care; and students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth.
2. Individual risk factors such as previous suicide attempt(s) or self-harm, history of depression or mental illness, family history of suicide or violence, feelings of isolation, interpersonal conflicts, a recent severe stressor or loss, family instability, impulsivity, and other factors.
3. Warning signs that may indicate depression, emotional distress, or suicidal intentions, such as changes in students' personality or behavior and verbalizations of hopelessness or suicidal intent.
4. Protective factors that may help to decrease a person's suicide risk, such as resiliency, problem-solving ability, access to mental health care, and positive connections to family, peers, school and community.
5. School and community resources and services, including resources and services that meet the specific needs of high-risk groups.
6. Guidelines for intervening when a student attempts, threatens, or discloses the desire to die by suicide.

Intervention

Students shall be encouraged to notify a teacher, principal, school counselor, school social worker or other adult when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's suicidal intentions.

Every statement regarding suicidal intent shall be taken seriously. Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions based on the student's verbalizations or act of self-harm, he/she shall promptly notify the principal or school counselor Administrator and designated staff. Although any personal information that a student discloses to a school counselor or school social worker designated staff shall generally not be revealed, released, referenced, or discussed with third parties, the school counselor or school social worker designated staff may report to the principal or student's parents/guardians when he/she has reasonable cause to believe that disclosure is necessary to avert a clear and present danger to the health, safety, or welfare of the student. In addition, the school counselor or school social worker designated staff may disclose information of a personal nature to psychotherapists, other health care providers, or the school nurse for the sole purpose of referring the student for treatment. (Education Code section 49602).

A school employee shall act only within the authorization and scope of his/her credential or

license. An employee is not authorized to diagnose or treat mental illness unless he/she is specifically licensed and employed to do so. (Education Code section 215).

When a suicide attempt or threat is reported, the Administrator or designee shall ensure student safety by taking the following actions:

1. Immediately securing medical treatment and/or mental health services as necessary.
2. Notifying law enforcement and/or other emergency assistance if a suicidal act is being actively threatened.
3. Keeping the student under continuous adult supervision until the parent/guardian and/or appropriate support agent or agency can be contacted and has the opportunity to intervene.
4. Providing a confidential space.

The Administrator, school-based mental health provider, or designee will document the incident in writing. If applicable, the Administrator or designee shall follow up with the parent/guardian and student in a timely manner to provide referrals to appropriate services. If follow-up care is not provided, pursuant to laws for the mandated reporters of child neglect, the Administrator or designee may refer the matter to the local child protective services agency.

For any student returning to school after a mental health crisis, the Administrator or designee may meet with the parents/guardians and, if appropriate, with the student to discuss appropriate next steps to ensure the student's readiness for return to school.

Postvention

Once confirmed that a student has died by suicide, the Administrator or designee shall communicate with the student's parents/guardians to offer condolences, assistance and resources. In accordance with the laws governing confidentiality of student record information, the Administrator or designee shall consult with the parents/guardians regarding facts that may be divulged to other students, parents/guardians, and staff.

The Administrator and designated staff shall implement procedures to address the grief of students and staff and to minimize the risk of imitative suicide or suicide contagion. The Administrator or designated staff shall provide students, parents/guardians, and staff with information, counseling, and/or referrals to community agencies as needed. School staff may receive assistance from school mental health professionals in determining how best to discuss the suicide or attempted suicide with students.

Any response to media inquiries shall be handled by the designated spokesperson who shall not divulge confidential information.

After any suicide or attempted suicide by a student, the Administrator or designee shall provide an opportunity for all staff who responded to the incident to debrief.