

Wonderful College Prep Academy Youth Suicide Prevention Policy

The Governing Board of Wonderful College Prep Academy (WCPA) 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, WCPA shall develop measures and strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. Such measures and strategies shall be age appropriate and shall be delivered and discussed in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of students in the elementary and secondary grades (i.e., grades K-12). In developing measures and strategies for use by WCPA, WCPA shall consult with school and community stakeholders, the county mental health plan, school-employed mental health professionals, and suicide prevention experts and may additionally consult with school health professionals, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, administrators, other staff, parents/guardians, students, local health agencies, mental health professionals, and community organizations.

To protect the health, safety, and welfare of WCPA students, this policy aims to safeguard students and staff against suicide attempts, deaths and other trauma associated with suicide, including ensuring adequate supports for students, staff, and families affected by suicide attempts and loss. As it is known that the emotional wellness of students greatly impacts school attendance and educational success, this policy shall be paired with other policies that support the emotional and behavioral wellness of students.

As appropriate, measures and strategies developed and utilized by WCPA shall specifically address the needs of students who are at high 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.

Measures and strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention shall include, but not be limited to:

- **Staff Development** - At least annually, WCPA shall provide staff development on suicide awareness and prevention for teachers, school counselors, and other WCPA employees who interact with students in the elementary and secondary grades (i.e., grades K-12). The training shall be offered under the direction of a WCPA counselor/psychologist and/or in cooperation with one or more community mental health agencies. Staff training can be adjusted year-to-year based on previous professional development activities and emerging best practices.

Materials for training shall include how to identify appropriate mental health services at the school site and within the community, and when and how to refer youth and their families to those services. WCPA shall ensure proper coordination and consultation with the county mental health plan if a referral is made for mental health or related services on behalf of a student who is a Medi-Cal beneficiary. Materials also may include programs that can be completed through self-review of suitable suicide prevention materials.

Staff development shall include research and information related to the following topics:

- 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; students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth; and youth who

- have suffered traumatic experiences.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - Instructional strategies for teaching the suicide prevention curriculum and promoting mental and emotional health.
 - School and community resources and services, including resources and services that meet the specific needs of high-risk groups.
 - WCPA procedures for intervening when a student attempts, threatens, or discloses the desire to die by suicide.
 - 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.
- **Instruction** – WCPA shall provide instruction to students in problem-solving and coping skills to promote students' mental, emotional, and social health and well-being, as well as instruction in recognizing and appropriately responding to warning signs of suicidal intent in others. Such instruction shall be age appropriate and shall be delivered and discussed in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of students in the elementary and secondary grades (i.e., grades K-12). WCPA's comprehensive health education program shall be designed to help students:
 - Identify and analyze signs of depression and self-destructive behaviors and understand how feelings of depression, loss, isolation, inadequacy, and anxiety can lead to thoughts of suicide.
 - Develop coping and resiliency skills and self-esteem.
 - Learn to listen, be honest, share feelings, and get help when communicating with friends who show signs of suicidal intent.
 - Identify trusted adults, school resources, and/or community crisis intervention resources where youth can get help and recognize that there is no stigma associated with seeking services for mental health, substance abuse, and/or suicide prevention.

WCPA shall also provide information to parents/guardians regarding risk factors and warning signs of suicide, the severity of the youth suicide problem, WCPA's suicide prevention curriculum, basic steps for helping suicidal youth, and/or school and community resources that can help youth in crisis.

- **Intervention** - WCPA students shall be encouraged 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.
 - 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.
 - Although any personal information that a student discloses to a school counselor shall generally not be revealed, released, referenced, or discussed with third parties, the counselor 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 counselor 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.

- 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.
- When a suicide attempt or threat is reported, the principal or designee shall ensure student safety by taking the following actions:
 - Immediately securing medical treatment and/or mental health services as necessary.
 - Notifying law enforcement and/or other emergency assistance if a suicidal act is being actively threatened.
 - 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.
 - Removing other students from the immediate area as soon as possible.
 - Documenting the incident in writing, including the steps that the school took in response to the suicide attempt or threat.
 - Following up with the parent/guardian and student in a timely manner to provide referrals to appropriate services as needed. If the parent/guardian does not access treatment for the student, the Superintendent or designee may meet with the parent/guardian to identify barriers to treatment and assist the family in providing follow-up care for the student. If follow-up care is still not provided, the Superintendent or designee shall consider whether he/she is required, pursuant to laws for mandated reporters of child neglect, to refer the matter to the local child protective services agency.
 - For any student returning to school after a mental health crisis, the principal or designee and/or school counselor may meet with the parents/guardians and, if appropriate, with the student to discuss re-entry and appropriate next steps to ensure the student's readiness for return to school.
- **Postvention** - In the event that a student dies by suicide, WCPA 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 principal or designee shall consult with the parents/guardians regarding facts that may be divulged to other students, parents/guardians, and staff. WCPA shall also take the following steps:
 - Implement procedures to address students' and staff's grief and to minimize the risk of imitative suicide or suicide contagion. WCPA 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 counselors or other 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 WCPA-designated spokesperson who shall not divulge confidential information. WCPA's response shall not sensationalize suicide and shall focus on WCPA's postvention plan and available resources.
 - After any suicide or attempted suicide by a student, WCPA shall provide an opportunity for all staff who responded to the incident to debrief, evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used, and make recommendations for future actions.