

Hamilton County Board of Education

Monitoring: Review: Annually in January	Descriptor Term: Student Suicide Prevention	Descriptor Code: 6.415	Issued Date: 10/17/19
		Rescinded:	Revised: 05/11/23

The Board is committed to protecting the health and well being of all students and understands that physical, behavioral, and emotional health are integral components of student achievement and overall well-being. Students are strongly encouraged to report if they, or a friend, may be struggling with thoughts of suicide and/or may be in need of help. Students will be provided information regarding The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) and the Crisis Text Line (text “TN” to 741741).

The Hamilton County School District in recognition of the need to protect the health, safety, and welfare of its students, to promote healthy development, to safeguard against the threat or attempt of suicide among school aged youth, and to address barriers to learning, hereby adopts this policy.¹ This policy corresponds with and supports other federal, state and local efforts to provide youth with prevention education, early identification and intervention, and access to all local resources through links on the page dedicated solely to mental health, on the Hamilton County Department of Education website; in order to promote health and prevent personal harm or injury.

PREVENTION

All certified school-based employees shall either attend the annual in-service training on suicide prevention or participate in other equivalent training approved by the director of schools or designee. The training shall include, but not be limited to, identification of risk factors, warning signs, intervention and response procedures, referrals, postvention, protective factors, resources regarding youth suicide prevention, suicide contagion, and groups at elevated risk for suicide.

The director of schools or designee shall identify and publicize a District Suicide Prevention Coordinator(s) (DSPC) responsible for planning and coordinating the implementation of this policy. Each school principal shall designate a School Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SSPC) to act as a point of contact in each school for issues relating to suicide prevention and policy implementation. Contact information for the School Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SSPC) is publicized in each school to allow individual students to reach out privately.

Prevention Education

Students will receive age-appropriate lessons in their classrooms through health education on the importance of safe and healthy choices, as well as help seeking strategies for self or others. Lessons will contain information on comprehensive health and wellness, including emotional, behavioral, and social skills development. Lessons are taught by health and physical education teachers, school counselors, social workers, and/or community service providers. Students who are in need of intervention will be referred to the school counselor, and/or community counseling agencies.

Publication and Distribution

The resource page for parents, faculty, and students is available on the Hamilton County Department of Education website. These resources shall include, but are not limited to, information about individual mental health issues, counseling information, coping skills, and information as to how students can create a change in mental health in their school.

INTERVENTION

Any employee who has reason to believe that a student is at risk of suicide, is made aware of a suicide threat, or witnesses any attempt or evidence suggestive of self-harm, whether written, drawn, spoken or threatened, shall report such belief to the principal or designee, and school counselor, social worker, school psychologist, or School Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SSPC).

Upon notification, the principal or designee, school counselor, social worker, school psychologist, and/or School Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SSPC) shall ensure the student is placed under adult supervision. Emergency medical services shall be contacted immediately if an in-school suicide attempt occurs. The principal or designee, school counselor, social worker, school psychologist, and/or School Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SSPC) shall contact the director of schools or designee as soon as practicable. Prior to contacting the student's parent/guardian, the director of schools or designee shall determine if there could be further risk of harm resulting from parent/guardian notification. If parent/guardian notification could result in further risk of harm or endanger the health or well-being of the student, then local law enforcement and the Department of Children's Service shall be contacted.

Return to School Procedure

Prior to a student returning to school, the principal or designee, school counselor, social worker, school psychologist, and/or School Suicide Prevention Coordinator shall meet with the student and his/her parent or guardian in order to develop a safety plan. The safety plan shall identify actions the student's caregivers and school personnel will take to ensure the safety of the student. The principal will identify an employee to periodically meet with the student to monitor his/her safety and address any problems or concerns with re-entry. In addition to implementing a safety plan, the principal or designee and school staff shall establish the following expectations for the student body to support any student returning from a traumatic experience.

1. Remember the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
2. Value other's character: Do not gossip in person or online.
3. Respect other's privacy: Do not ask a person or their friends invasive questions.
4. Practice empathy: Work to understand a person's transition.
5. Be helpful: Understand challenging times in life are hard. Try to be as helpful as possible.

POSTVENTION

Immediately following a student suicide death, the Crisis Response Team led by the District Suicide Prevention Coordinator(s) (DSPC) shall meet and implement the Crisis Management plan. In the event the incident occurs on the school campus, refer to guidelines noted in the HCDE Emergency Preparedness Plan. At a minimum, the Crisis Management plan shall address the following:

1. Verification of death;
2. Preparation of postvention response to include support services;
3. Informing faculty and staff of a student death;
4. Informing students that a death has occurred;
5. Providing information on the resources available to students.

The Crisis Team shall work with teachers to identify the students most likely to be impacted by the death in order to provide additional assistance and counseling if needed. The director of schools or designee shall be responsible for all media inquiries.

Staff Training and Responsibilities

All staff are responsible for safeguarding the health and safety of students. All staff are expected to exercise sound professional judgement, use caution and demonstrate extreme sensitivity throughout any crisis situation. All school personnel should be knowledgeable of the signs of youth depression/suicide.

Any staff member who is originally made aware of any threat or witnesses any attempt towards self-harm, that is written, drawn, spoken or threatened, will immediately notify the principal or their designee and school counselor. Any threat in any form must be treated as real and dealt with immediately. No student should be left alone during crisis. The district's suicide crisis response procedures will be implemented.

Legal References:

1. TCA 49-6-1902(a)