

REGULATION

PATERSON SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Student Suicide

R5350 STUDENT SUICIDE

The following regulations are established for guidance of staff members in recognizing the student who contemplates suicide, in responding to threatened or attempted suicide, and in preventing contagion when a student commits suicide. Because a prompt response may be essential to a student's life, the designation of a district position in these regulations includes the person who holds that position and, if the position holder is absent or unavailable, the person temporarily charged with the responsibilities of the position.

A. Recognition of Potential Suicide

All school personnel, both teaching staff members and support staff members, shall be alert to any sign that a student may be contemplating suicide. Such signs include, but are not necessarily limited to, a student's:

1. Overt suggestion, regardless of its context, that he/she is considering or has considered suicide or has worked out the details of a suicide attempt;
2. Evidence of preparation of a will, intention to dispose of his/her effects and belongings, or otherwise get life "in order";
3. Obsession with death or afterlife;
4. Possession of a weapon or other means of suicide or obsession with such means;
5. Sense of hopelessness or unrelieved sadness;
6. Lethargy or despondency, or, conversely, a tendency to become more impulsive or aggressive than usual;



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7. Drop in academic achievement, slacking off of energy and effort, or inability to focus on studies;
8. Isolation from others by loss of friends, withdrawal from friends, lack of companionship, or family disintegration;
9. Preoccupation with nonexistent physical ills;
10. Loss of weight, appetite, and/or sleep;
11. Substance abuse; and
12. Loss of economic resources.

B. Response to Potential Suicide

1. Any indication of a potential suicide, whether personally witnessed or received by report from another, must be taken seriously and must be reported to the Principal immediately.
2. The Principal will inform the student's parent, in a conference if possible, of the signs demonstrated by the student and of the district's concern and seek parental approval of the student's evaluation. In the event parental abuse or neglect is suspected, the Principal or the employee who forms the suspicion will immediately so inform the Department of Children and Families, Division of Child Protection and Permanency in accordance with Policy 8462.
3. If the threat of suicide is immediate and serious, the Principal will gather the Building Crisis Team, which shall determine the potential of the threat by directly questioning the student, without mincing words, about:



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- a. Whether any suicide plans have been made, how detailed the plans are, and whether any preliminary actions have been taken,
 - b. The student's feelings of hopelessness and the length of time the student has had such feelings,
 - c. The student's thoughts of suicide and how persistent and strong those thoughts are, and
 - d. Whether the student has considered alternative courses of action to resolve his/her problems.
4. After gathering information, the Building Crisis Team shall determine the life-threatening risk of the situation based on the student's signs of possible suicide (paragraph A1) and the student's responses to questioning.
5. If it is determined that a substantial risk of suicide exists, the Building Crisis Team shall:
- a. Assign staff members as required to assure that the student is never out of the presence of an adult who has been fully informed that the student may be in danger of self-destruction,
 - b. Notify the Principal and student's parent immediately and strongly recommend consultation with a licensed mental health professional or agency,
 - c. Request the parent to sign a release of information form authorizing the mental health professionals or medical agencies to share with appropriate district personnel.



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6. The Case Manager of the Building Crisis Team will be appointed to follow up on the student's progress and to determine whether the student's parent has consulted a mental health professional or agency. Follow up reports will be made to the Principal.
7. If the student's parent does not sign the release of information form or does not seek treatment for the student, the Principal shall inform the Department of Children and Families, Division of Child Protection and Permanency.

C. Response to Suicide Attempt

1. Any attempted suicide, whether or not on school premises or during the school day, must be reported immediately to the Principal.
2. The staff member who witnesses a suicide attempt on school premises or at a school sponsored event or in the course of school-related travel shall render first aid in accordance with Policy 8441 and summon medical assistance as appropriate.
3. Procedures outlined at paragraph B2 through paragraph B8 above will be followed.

D. Prevention of Suicide Contagion

1. All district Principals will be promptly informed when a student of this district commits suicide.
2. Each Principal will assemble teaching staff members prior to the opening of school to provide them with accurate information, plans for the school day, and guidelines for handling the concerns of students.



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3. The Principal of the school or building that the victim attended will assemble the Building Crisis Team (including Child Study Team member) to assist the staff in dealing with the general school situation and any individual problems that may arise.
4. The suicide will not be given prominence by public announcement or a school-wide assembly. School will not be closed in order to permit students and staff members to attend the victim's funeral.
5. Teachers will respond to the needs of students with as little interruption of the educational program as possible.
6. Students will be provided with accurate information and will be given the opportunity to discuss their feelings of loss and their memories of the victim, both good and bad, without penalty.
7. All school personnel shall be especially alert to signs of contemplated suicide among the victim's peers.
8. Teaching staff members, under the direction of the Principal, shall attempt to prevent social contagion by:
 - a. Preventing glorification or romanticization of the suicide,
 - b. Helping students recognize that suicide is irreversible and permanent and does not truly resolve problems,
 - c. Encouraging students to report to a teaching staff member when a fellow student suggests suicide.



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9. Students who were close to the victim, and their parents, shall be offered counseling services and notified of available community mental health services.

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