Purpose

The Joint Operating Committee adopts this policy in acknowledgment of the Career Center’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 is significant. Therefore, in order to ensure the safety and welfare of students, the Career Center will work to educate school personnel and students on the actions and resources necessary to prevent suicide and promote mental well-being.\[1\][2][3][4][5]

Authority

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.\[6\][7][8]

Publication of Policy

The Career Center will notify its school personnel, students and parents/guardians of this policy and will post the policy on the Career Center’s website.

Definition

At-risk for suicide shall mean any youth with risk factors or warning signs that increase the likelihood of suicidal behavior.

Behavioral health – the promotion of emotional health; the prevention of mental illnesses and substance use disorders; and treatment and services for substance abuse, addiction, substance use disorders, mental illnesses and/or mental disorders.
Chief School Administrator shall mean the superintendent of a 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.

Crisis Response Team 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.

Expressed suicidal thoughts or intentions 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.

Prevention 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.

Protective factors shall refer to characteristics (biological, psychological, and social) that reduce risk and the likelihood of the individual developing a mental illness.

Resilience shall refer to an individual’s innate ability to persevere in the face of adversity and reduce the risk of unhealthy outcomes.

Risk factors shall mean the personal or environmental characteristics 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.

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.

Guidelines

SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION EDUCATION [1]

The Career Center shall establish a crisis response team. The crisis response team may include, but is not limited to, administrators, guidance counselor, safety coordinator, special needs instructors, and the cooperative education coordinator. Community mental agency resources may also be called upon for assistance, but a letter of agreement between the career center and any community provider(s) is encouraged prior to commencement of any crisis response or postvention services.
The Safety Coordinator or the individual designated as coordinator and/or investigators on cases involving peer-to-peer harassment, as required by federal law, shall be included on the crisis response team. This 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.

The Career Center 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, instructional assistants, support staff, custodians shall receive information regarding the Career Center’s protocols for suicide awareness and prevention. Education will be provided for all school personnel about the importance of suicide prevention and recognition 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 warning signs and risk factors for youth depression and suicide.[9]

As part of the Career Center’s Professional Development Plan, the professional staff shall participate in four (4) hours of youth suicide awareness and prevention training every five (5) years.

**Prevention Education for Students**

Students shall receive information on the importance of safe and healthy choices, as well as help seeking strategies for self and/or others. Students who are in need of intervention shall be referred in accordance with the Career Center’s referral procedures.

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

1. Information about suicide prevention. Resources are available on the PA Department of Education’s website—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.

**Intervention/Prevention**

In compliance with state regulations and in support of the Career Center’s suicide prevention methods, information received in confidence from a student may be revealed to the student’s parents or guardians, the Career Center principal or other appropriate authority when the health, welfare or safety of the student or other person is at risk.[6]

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 Career Center’s referral procedures.

The Career Center shall have a 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 Joint Operating Committee policy.

If a student is identified as being at-risk for suicide or attempts suicide and requires special education services or accommodations, actions to address the student’s needs in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Joint Operating Committee policy will be taken.

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 notified 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 Career Center’s crisis response procedures shall be implemented.

If an expressed suicide thought or intention is made known to any Career Center personnel during an afterschool program and the principal or designee are not available, call Mercer County Behavioral Health Emergency number a 724-662-2227. 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 Career Center 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.

Response to Suicide or Suicide Attempt on Campus

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

The Career Center will immediately notify the parents or guardians of the affected student (s).

The Career Center will also notify the sending school district.

Re-Entry Procedures

A student’s excusal from attendance after a mental health crisis and the student’s return to the Career Center shall be consistent with state and federal laws and regulations.

The principal or designee shall meet with the parents/guardians of a student returning to the Career Center after a mental health crisis, and, if appropriate, meet with the student to discuss re-entry and applicable next steps to ensure the student’s readiness to return to the Career Center.

The principal or designee will periodically check in, as needed, with the student to facilitate the student’s transition back into the school community. The Career Center will also communicate and work cooperatively with the appropriate personnel at the sending school district during the transition.
Documentation and Records

The Administrative Director or designee shall develop administrative regulations providing recommended guidelines for responding to a suicide threat.

Career Center employees shall be responsible for effective documentation of incidents involving suicide prevention, intervention and response.

When a Career Center employee takes notes on any conversation or situations involving or relating to an at-risk student, the notes should contain only factual or directly observed information, not opinions or hearsay.

The principal or designee shall provide the Administrative Director with a copy of all reports and documentation regarding the at-risk student. Information and reports shall be provided, as appropriate, to guidance counselors and other applicable professionals.

SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION RESOURCES [1]

**National:**

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or visit [http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for High Schools [https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Preventing-Suicide-A-Toolkit-for-High-Schools/SMA12-4669](https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Preventing-Suicide-A-Toolkit-for-High-Schools/SMA12-4669)

**Pennsylvania:**

- List of Crisis Intervention contact information by county
- List of County CASSP and Children’s Behavioral Health Contact Persons
- County Task Force Resources: By county, available contact information is provided for crisis, the Suicide Prevention Task Force, local chapter of AFSP, and other local mental health/suicide prevention resources

National and State Organizations

**National:**

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): [https://www.afsp.org/](https://www.afsp.org/)

**Pennsylvania:**

- Prevent Suicide PA: [http://www.preventsuicidepa.org/](http://www.preventsuicidepa.org/)
- Services for Teens at Risk (STAR-Center) [https://www.starcenter.pitt.edu/STAR-Center-Home/1/Default.aspx](https://www.starcenter.pitt.edu/STAR-Center-Home/1/Default.aspx)
- Pennsylvania Department of Education [www.education.state.pa.us](http://www.education.state.pa.us)
Legal

1. 24 P.S. 1526
2. Pol. 103
3. Pol. 103.1
4. Pol. 249
5. Pol. 806
6. 22 PA Code 12.12
7. Pol. 207
8. Pol. 216
9. Pol. 333
Pol. 113
Pol. 113.2
Pol. 114
Pol. 117
Pol. 146
Pol. 204
Pol. 236
Pol. 805
Pol. 911