

DELANCO TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

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ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES ON STUDENT SUICIDE PREVENTION

A. INTRODUCTORY GUIDELINES

School personnel must take seriously all suggestions, demonstrations, or communications of suicide. It is essential for school personnel to increase their sensitivity to and awareness of the often subtle signs of suicidal ideation and/or gestures of self-destructive behavior. When confronted with an actual situation in which life-threatening behavior or ideation is present, immediate mobilization of all appropriate resources is paramount. Under such conditions, commitment to student confidentiality is superseded by the imperative for initiating life-saving intervention.

B. RESPONSE TO SUICIDAL IDEATION

The professional staff member who has reason to believe that a student has self-destructive tendencies shall notify the school nurse. If, after meeting with the student, the nurse deems the situation to be serious, but not a crisis (for example, if the student says, "I sometimes think about killing myself.") the nurse shall:

1. Contact the student's parents in writing and recommend that a mental health professional be consulted.
2. Provide to the parents, if requested, the names of mental health agencies and/or private therapists.
3. Notify the psychologist and/or social worker normally basis with the psychologist.
4. Maintain a written log of the student's behavior and actions during regular school hours, based upon verbal and written input from teachers.
5. If the situation is judged to be critical and the parent or guardian is unavailable or uncooperative, the designated school staff member shall contact the community mental health center and the Division of O Youth and Family Services to intervene on behalf of the student.
6. If contact with the family is successful, referral to appropriate treatment settings should be made by a designated staff member. A follow-up check with the family, student and treating agency should be made to ensure that adequate care has been afforded.
7. School personnel should monitor the student's school performance and behavior in collaboration with any specific treatment plan formulated with the student at risk by the treating agency.

C. RESPONSE TO SUICIDAL THREAT

If after meeting with the student, the nurse deems the situation to be a crisis and believes the student to be in imminent danger (for example, if the student says, "I'm going to kill myself today"), the nurse shall:

1. Keep the student under continuous adult supervision.
2. Contact the psychologist responsible for suicide crisis intervention who shall, as soon as is practicable:

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- a. Consult with the student and nurse.
- b. Contact the student's parents and ask them to come to school immediately.
- c. Recommend (to the parents) a referral to a mental health agency or therapist.
- d. Notify the building principal and apprise him/her of the situation.
- e. Notify the Superintendent.

D. RESPONSE TO SUICIDE ATTEMPT

If a suicide attempt is made on the school premises, the school nurse and principal shall ensure that emergency medical treatment is provided, either through the use of first aid techniques or by telephoning the local rescue squad. The student shall be kept under close supervision at all times.

If the student is difficult to control, the police shall also be telephoned. After implementation of these immediate steps, further procedures include the following:

1. The Superintendent shall notify the parents or legal guardian as soon as possible. If neither is available nor cooperative, the community mental health center and the Division of Youth and Family Services shall be contacted to intervene on behalf of the student.
2. The family shall be referred to the appropriate treatment agency. Contact between the school's designated staff member and the parent, the student, and/or treatment agency should be maintained in order to ensure that appropriate treatment is obtained and that collaborative follow-up plans are fully understood.
3. A faculty meeting should be called by the Superintendent at the end of the day to inform teachers of the event, offer them an opportunity to address their feelings and concerns, and to plan appropriate procedures for subsequent school days.
4. If the student is in the process of attempting suicide or has already made an attempt, the building Principal or Assistant Principal shall contact the police and other emergency personnel as needed. Once the student has been provided with emergency medical attention, the building Principal shall notify the Superintendent.

E. PROCEDURES IN THE EVENT OF A COMPLETED SUICIDE

1. If news of death by suicide is received, the Principal or designee shall verify the information with the police and notify the school Superintendent immediately. Any sibling or other family members of the deceased should be escorted to the Principal's office and sent home with responsible adult supervision. All contacts with the news media should be referred to the school Superintendent, who will be responsible for assuring that they are handled in a manner intended to discourage sensational coverage of the tragedy.
2. In an effort to responsibly deal with emotional reactions within the school community and to decrease the potential for a contagious effect, the following procedures should be initiated:
 - a. An emergency faculty meeting should be called by the Superintendent at the end of the day, in order to disclose all relevant facts pertaining to the tragic news, and to outline procedures to be followed during the subsequent days and weeks.

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If news of the suicide is received over the weekend or vacation, an emergency meeting should be called before the students arrive on the first school day.

b. A written statement should be prepared by the Superintendent for the purpose of assisting all teachers to maintain consistency in reporting the facts surrounding the suicide to students.

Under no circumstances should students be informed of the suicide in large assembly or over the school's public address system.

c. Community resources (e.g., community mental health personnel, members of the clergy, and other appropriate individuals) should be mobilized to assist school personnel in counseling students, family members, and any other concerned community members

3. During the emergency faculty meeting, the following steps should be considered:

a. A list of any students who were especially close to the deceased should be compiled in order that they be offered an opportunity to gather in specially designated "survivors" group counseling sessions. These sessions should be conducted by trained mental health workers.

b. Special survivor group meetings should also be offered to teachers of the deceased, as well as any other school personnel who felt especially close to the deceased.

c. A list of all other students considered by school personnel to be at risk should be compiled by the school nurse or psychologist. The list should be reviewed to insure that such persons are given sufficient opportunity during subsequent days to take advantage of all counseling programs offered within the school as part of its commitment to responsible post-intervention follow-up.

4. Students should be allowed to leave class during the following day in order to obtain support offered by the school staff, on-sight mental health professionals and other designated volunteer resources. Special attention should be given by trained personnel to all students considered to be at risk of suicide. School personnel and/or mental health workers should be available to meet with parents who may contact the school with expressions of concern.

5. To the extent possible, efforts should be made to insure that regular school routine is followed. However, it is advisable that stressful activities such as major examinations be rescheduled for later dates.

Adopted: July 29, 1987