

SUICIDE PREVENTION POLICY

Board Policy #: NW2

Adopted/Ratified: 06/30/2017

Revision Date: 09/30/2020; 12/13/22; 06/17/2025

The Board of Directors of New West Charter School (“New West” or the “Charter School”) recognizes that suicide is a major cause of death among youth and should be taken seriously. To attempt to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students and families, the Board of Directors has developed prevention strategies and intervention procedures.

In compliance with Education Code section 215, this policy has been developed in consultation with New West and community stakeholders, New West school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses), administrators, other school staff members, parents/guardians/caregivers, students, local health agencies and professionals, the county mental health plan, law enforcement, and community organizations in planning, implementing, and evaluating New West’s strategies for suicide prevention and intervention. New West must work in conjunction with local government agencies, community-based organizations, and other community supports to identify additional resources.

To ensure the policies regarding suicide prevention are properly adopted, implemented, and updated, New West shall appoint an individual (or team) to serve as the suicide prevention point of contact for New West. The suicide prevention point of contact for New West and the Executive Director 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. This policy shall be reviewed and revised as indicated, at least annually in conjunction with the previously mentioned community stakeholders.

Suicide Prevention Crisis Team

To ensure the policies regarding suicide prevention are properly adopted, implemented, and updated, New West Charter School created an in-house Suicide Prevention Crisis Team (“SPCT”) consisting of administrators, mental health professionals, relevant staff, parents, and middle and high school students. The SPCT includes the following individuals:

1. Tanisha Barnett, Assistant Director
2. Larika Clark, High School Principal
3. Justin Hernandez, High School Counselor
4. Olivia Franco, Middle School Counselor
5. Kenna Healy, School Psychologist

To ensure the SPCT reflects the student body’s perspective, NWC has designated the following volunteer student representatives to provide consultative insights:

1. Nora Kohan Student Representative
2. Brandon Segovia, Student Representative

NWC designates the following employees to act as the primary and secondary Suicide Prevention Liaisons to lead the SPCT:

- Primary Liaison: Tanisha Barnett, Assistant Director tbarnett@newwestcharter.org 310 943-5444
- Secondary Liaison: Larika Clark, High School Principal lclark@newwestcharter.org 310 943-5444

The functions of the SPCT are to:

- Review mental health related school policies and procedures;
- Provide annual updates on school data and trends;
- Review and revise school prevention policies;
- Review and select general and specialized mental health and suicide prevention training;
- Review and oversee staff, parent/guardian, and student trainings;
- Ensuring the suicide prevention policy, protocols, and resources are posted on the school website;
- Ensure compliance with Education Code section 215;
- Collaborate with community mental health organizations;
- Identify resources and agencies that provide evidence-based or evidence-informed treatment;
- Help inform and build skills among law enforcement and other relevant partners; and
- Collaborate to build community response.

A. Suicide Awareness and Prevention Training for Staff

New West, along with its partners, has carefully reviewed available staff training to ensure it promotes the mental health model of suicide prevention and does not encourage the use of the stress model to explain suicide.

Training shall be provided for all school staff members. It may also be provided, when appropriate, for other adults on campus (such as substitutes and intermittent staff, volunteers, interns, tutors, coaches, and afterschool staff). Training shall include the following:

- All suicide prevention trainings shall be offered under the direction of mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, school psychologists, other public entity professionals, such as psychologists or social workers) who have received advanced training specific to suicide. Staff training may be adjusted year-to-year based on previous professional development activities and emerging best practices.

- At least annually, all staff shall receive training on the risk factors and warning signs of suicide, suicide prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention.
- At a minimum, all staff shall participate in training on the core components of suicide prevention (identification of suicide risk factors and warning signs, prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention) at the beginning of their employment or annually. Core components of the general suicide prevention training shall include:
 - Suicide risk factors, warning signs, and protective factors;
 - How to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide;
 - How to respond appropriately to the youth who has suicidal thoughts. Such responses shall include constant supervision of any student judged to be at risk for suicide and an immediate referral for a suicide risk assessment;
 - Emphasis on immediately referring (same day) any student who is identified to be at risk of suicide for assessment while staying under constant monitoring by staff member;
 - Emphasis on reducing stigma associated with mental illness and that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide;
 - Reviewing the data annually to look for any patterns or trends of the prevalence or occurrence of suicide ideation, attempts, or death. Data from the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (Cal-SCHLS) should also be analyzed to identify school climate deficits and drive program development. See the Cal-SCHLS Web site at <http://cal-schls.wested.org/>.
 - Information regarding groups of students judged by the school, and available research, to be at elevated risk for suicide. These groups include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Youth affected by suicide;
 - Youth with a history of suicide ideation or attempts;
 - Youth with disabilities, mental illness, or substance abuse disorders;
 - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth;
 - Youth experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings, such as foster care;
 - Youth who have suffered traumatic experiences;
- In addition to initial orientations to the core components of suicide prevention, ongoing annual staff professional development for all staff may include the following components:
 - The impact of traumatic stress on emotional and mental health;
 - Common misconceptions about suicide;
 - Charter School and community suicide prevention resources;
 - Appropriate messaging about suicide (correct terminology, safe messaging guidelines);
 - The factors associated with suicide (risk factors, warning signs, protective factors);
 - How to identify youth who may be at risk of suicide;

- Appropriate ways to interact with a youth who is demonstrating emotional distress or is suicidal. Specifically, how to talk with a student about their thoughts of suicide and (based on New West guidelines) how to respond to such thinking; how to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide and appropriately respond and provide support based on New West guidelines;
- New West -approved procedures for responding to suicide risk (including multi-tiered systems of support and referrals). Such procedures should emphasize that the suicidal student should be constantly supervised until a suicide risk assessment is completed;
- New West -approved procedures for responding to the aftermath of suicidal behavior (suicidal behavior postvention);
- Responding after a suicide occurs (suicide postvention);
- Resources regarding youth suicide prevention;
- Emphasis on stigma reduction and the fact that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide;
- Emphasis that any student who is identified to be at risk of suicide is to be immediately referred (same day) for assessment while being constantly monitored by a staff member.

Specialized Professional Development for School-based Mental Health Staff (Screening and/or Assessment)

Additional professional development in suicide risk assessment (SRA) and crisis intervention is provided to designated student mental health professionals, including but not limited to school counselors, psychologists, social workers, administrators, and nurses employed by Charter School. Training for these staff is specific to conducting SRAs, intervening during a crisis, de-escalating situations, interventions specific to preventing suicide, making referrals, safety planning, and re-entry.

Specialized Professional Training for targeted School-based mental health staff includes the following components:

- Best practices and skill building on how to conduct an effective suicide risk screening/SRA using an evidence-based, Charter School-approved tool; Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (PHQ-9) Depression Scale; BSS Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation ; National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)'s Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ) Toolkit; and the Adolescent Suicide Assessment Protocol – 20.
- Best practices on approaching and talking with a student about their thoughts of suicide and how to respond to such thinking, based on school guidelines and protocols.
- Best practices on how to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide and appropriately respond and provide support based on school guidelines and protocols.
- Best practices on follow up with parents/caregivers.
- Best practices on re-entry.

Virtual Screenings for Suicide Risk

Virtual suicide prevention efforts include checking in with all students, promoting access to school and community-based resources that support mental wellbeing and those that address mental illness and give specific guidance on suicide prevention.

Charter School has established a protocol for assigning school staff to connect with students during distance learning and school closures. In the event of a school closure, Charter School has determined a process and protocols to establish daily or regular contact with all students. Staff understand that any concern about a student's emotional wellbeing and/or safety must be communicated to the appropriate school staff, according to Charter School protocols.

Charter School has determined a process and protocols for school-based mental health professionals to establish regular contact with high-risk students, students who are on their caseloads, and those who are identified by staff as demonstrating need. When connecting with students, staff are directed to begin each conversation by identifying the location of the student and the availability of parents or caregivers. This practice allows for the staff member to ensure the safety of the student, particularly if they have expressed suicidal thoughts.

B. Employee Qualifications and Scope of Services

Employees of New West must act only within the authorization and scope of their credential or license. While it is expected that school professionals are able to identify suicide risk factors and warning signs, and to prevent the immediate risk of a suicidal behavior, treatment of suicidal ideation is typically beyond the scope of services offered in the school setting. In addition, treatment of the mental health challenges often associated with suicidal thinking typically requires mental health resources beyond what schools are able to provide.

C. Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers Participation and Education

- Parents/guardians/caregivers may be included in suicide prevention efforts. At a minimum, the Charter School shall share this Policy with parents/guardians/caregivers by notifying them where a complete copy of the policy is available.
- This Suicide Prevention Policy shall be easily accessible and prominently displayed on the New West Web page and included in the Parent-Student Handbook.
- Parents/guardians/caregivers should be invited to provide input on the development and implementation of this policy.
- Charter School shall notify the parent/guardian/caregiver when a student has been screened or screened/assessed for suicide risk regardless of outcome
- Charter School shall establish and widely disseminate a referral process to all parents/guardians/caregivers/families, so they are aware of how to respond to a crisis and are knowledgeable about protocols and school, community-based, and crisis resources.

- Community-based organizations that provide evidence-based suicide-specific treatments shall be highlighted on the Charter School’s website with treatment referral options marked accordingly.
- Staff autoreplies during vacations or absences shall include links to resources and phone/text numbers so parents and students have information readily available.
- All parents/guardians/caregivers may have access to suicide prevention training that addresses the following:
 - Suicide risk factors, warning signs, and protective factors;
 - How to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide;
 - How to respond appropriately to the student who has suicidal thoughts. Such responses shall include constant supervision of any student judged to be at risk for suicide and referral for an immediate suicide risk assessment.
- Parent/guardians are provided with information on suicide prevention resources including crisis hotlines, local warmlines, and school and community-based supports and crisis resources including the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Crisis text line, and local crisis hotlines and includes information that hotlines/resources are not just for crisis but also for friends/family and referral.
- Parents/guardians/caregivers are reminded that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”) generally protects the confidentiality of student records, which may sometimes include counseling or crisis intervention records. However, FERPA’s health or safety emergency provision permits the disclosure of personally identifiable information from a student’s education records, to appropriate parties, in order to address a health or safety emergency when the disclosure is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals.

D. Student Participation and Education

Messaging about suicide has an effect on suicidal thinking and behaviors. Consequently, New West along with its partners has carefully reviewed and will continue to review all materials and resources used in awareness efforts to ensure they align with best practices for safe messaging about suicide. Suicide prevention strategies may include, but not be limited to, efforts to promote a positive school

climate that enhances students’ feelings of connectedness with New West and is characterized by caring staff and harmonious interrelationships among students.

New West’s instructional and student support program shall promote the healthy mental, emotional, and social development of students including, but not limited to, the development of problem-solving skills, coping skills, and resilience. The instruction shall not use the stress model to explain suicide.

New West’s instructional curriculum may include information about suicide prevention, as appropriate or needed. If suicide prevention is included in the Charter School’s instructional curriculum, it shall consider the grade level and age of the students and be delivered and

discussed in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of young students. Under the supervision of an appropriately trained individual acting within the scope of her/his credential or license, students shall:

- Receive developmentally appropriate, student-centered education about the warning signs of mental health challenges and emotional distress;
- Receive developmentally appropriate guidance regarding New West's suicide prevention, intervention, and referral procedures;
- Receive developmentally appropriate guidance regarding New West's suicide prevention, intervention, and referral procedures.

The content of the education may include:

- Coping strategies for dealing with stress and trauma;
- How to recognize behaviors (warning signs) and life issues (risk factors) associated with suicide and mental health issues in oneself and others;
- Help-seeking strategies for oneself and others, including how to engage school-based and community resources and refer peers for help;
- Emphasis on reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and the fact that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide.

Student-focused suicide prevention education can be incorporated into classroom curricula (e.g., health classes, orientation classes, science, and physical education).

Charter School has shared school-based supports and self-reporting procedures, so students are able to seek help if they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or if they recognize signs with peers. Although confidentiality and privacy are important, students should understand safety is a priority and if there is a risk of suicide, school staff are required to report. Charter-based mental health professionals are legally and ethically required to report suicide risk. **When reporting suicidal ideation or an attempt, school staff must maintain confidentiality and only share information limited to the risk or attempt.**

New West will support the creation and implementation of programs and/or activities on campus that raise awareness about mental wellness and suicide prevention (e.g., Mental Health Awareness Week, Peer Counseling, Freshman Success, and National Alliance on Mental Illness on Campus High School Clubs).

Charter School will include the following information on all student identification cards:

1.

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline/Suicide Crisis Lifeline:
 - Call or Text "988"
 - Call 1-800-273-8255
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: Call 1-800-799-7233

- Crisis Text Line: Text “HOME” to 741741
 - Teen Line: Text “TEEN” to 839863
 - Trevor Project: Text “START” to 678678
 - Trans Lifeline: 1-877-565-8860
 - Local suicide prevention hotline telephone number
2. In addition to listing the above resources on student identification cards, Charter School shall include the following language: *“If you or someone you know is struggling emotionally or having trouble coping, there is help. Students in distress or those who just want to talk about their problems, can call or text the phone numbers listed here for free, confidential support.”*

Charter School shall establish and widely disseminate a referral process to all students, so they know how to access support through school, community-based, and crisis services. Students shall be encouraged to notify a staff member when they are experiencing emotional distress or suicidal ideation, or when they have knowledge or concerns of another student’s emotional distress, suicidal ideation, or attempt.

E. Intervention and Emergency Procedures

Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student’s suicidal intentions, they shall promptly notify the primary designated suicide prevention liaison. If this primary suicide prevention liaison is unavailable, the staff shall promptly notify the secondary suicide prevention liaison.

The suicide prevention liaison shall immediately notify the Executive Director or designee, who shall then notify the student’s parent/guardian as soon as possible if appropriate and in the best interest of the student. Determination of notification to parents/guardians/caregivers should follow a formal initial assessment to ensure that the student is not endangered by parental notification.

The suicide prevention liaison shall also refer the student to mental health resources at New West or in the community.

When a student is in imminent danger (has access to a gun, is on a rooftop, or in other unsafe conditions), a call shall be made to 911.

When a suicide attempt or threat is reported on campus or at a school-related activity, the suicide prevention liaison shall, at a minimum:

1. Ensure the student’s physical safety by one or more of the following, as appropriate:

- Securing immediate medical treatment if a suicide attempt has occurred;
 - Securing 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.
 - Remaining calm, keeping in mind the student is overwhelmed, confused, and emotionally distressed;
 - Moving all other students out of the immediate area;
 - Not sending the student away or leaving him/her alone, even to go to the restroom;
 - Providing comfort to the student, listening and allowing the student to talk and being comfortable with moments of silence;
 - Promising privacy and help, but not promising confidentiality.
2. Document the incident in writing as soon as feasible.
 3. Follow up with the parent/guardian and student in a timely manner to provide referrals to appropriate services as needed and coordinate and consult 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.
 4. After a referral is made, New West shall verify with the parent/guardian that the follow up treatment has been accessed. Parents/guardians will be required to provide documentation of care for the student. If parents/guardians refuse or neglect to access treatment for a student who has been identified to be at risk for suicide or in emotional distress, the suicide prevention liaisons shall meet with the parent to identify barriers to treatment (e.g., cultural stigma, financial issues) and work to rectify the situation and build understanding of care. If follow up care is still not provided, New West may contact Child Protective Services.
 5. Provide access to counselors or other appropriate personnel to listen to and support students and staff who are directly or indirectly involved with the incident at New West.
 6. Provide an opportunity for all who respond to the incident to debrief, evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used, and make recommendations for future actions.

In the event a suicide occurs or is attempted on the New West campus, the suicide prevention liaison shall follow the crisis intervention procedures contained in New West's safety plan. After consultation with the Executive Director or designee and the student's parent/guardian about facts that may be divulged in accordance with the laws governing confidentiality of student record information, the Executive Director or designee may provide students, parents/guardians, and staff with information, counseling, and/or referrals to community agencies as needed. New West staff may receive assistance from New West counselors or other mental health professionals in determining how best to discuss the suicide or attempted suicide with students.

In the event a suicide occurs or is attempted off the New West campus and unrelated to school activities, the Executive Director or designee shall take the following steps to support the student:

1. Contact the parent/guardian and offer support to the family.
2. Discuss with the family how they would like New West to respond to the attempt while minimizing widespread rumors among teachers, staff, and students.
3. Obtain permission from the parent/guardian to share information to ensure the facts regarding the crisis are correct.
4. The suicide prevention liaisons shall handle any media requests.
5. Provide care and determine appropriate support to affected students.
6. Offer to the student and parent/guardian steps for re-integration to school. Re-integration may include obtaining a written release from the parent/guardian to speak with any health care providers; conferring with the student and parent/guardian about any specific requests on how to handle the situation; informing the student's teachers about possible days of absences; allowing accommodations for make-up work (being understanding that missed assignments may add stress to the student); appropriate staff maintaining ongoing contact with the student to monitor the student's actions and mood; and working with the parent/guardian to involve the student in an aftercare plan.

F. Supporting Students during or after a Mental Health Crisis

Students shall be encouraged through the education program and in New West activities to notify a teacher, the Executive Director, another New West administrator, psychologist, New West counselor, suicide prevention liaisons, or other adult when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's suicidal intentions. New West staff should treat each report seriously, calmly, and with active listening and support. Staff should be non-judgmental to students and discuss with the student, and parent/guardian, about additional resources to support the student.

Charter School shall implement the following steps during or after a crisis:

1. Treat every threat with seriousness and approach with a calm manner; make the student a priority.
2. Listen actively and non-judgmentally to the student. Let the student express their feelings.
3. Acknowledge the feelings and do not argue with the student.
4. Offer hope and let the student know they are safe, and that help is available. Do not promise confidentiality or cause stress.
5. Explain calmly and get the student to a skilled mental health professional or designated staff to further support the student.
6. Keep close contact with the parents/guardians/caregivers/families and mental health professionals working with the student.

Re-Entry to School After a Suicide Attempt

A student who has verbalized ideation or attempted suicide is at a higher risk for suicide in the months following the crisis. Having a streamlined and well-planned re-entry process ensures the safety and wellbeing of students who have previously attempted suicide and reduces the risk of another attempt. An appropriate re-entry process is an important component of suicide prevention. Involving students in planning for their return to school provides them with a sense of control, personal responsibility, and empowerment.

Charter School shall implement the following steps upon the student's re-entry:

1. The Executive Director shall obtain a written release of information signed by parents/guardians/caregivers/families and providers.
2. School mental health professionals shall confer with the student and parents/guardians/caregivers/families about any specific requests on how to handle the situation.
3. School-based mental health professionals shall confer with the student and parents/guardians/caregivers/families to develop a safety plan.
4. School-based mental health professionals shall inform the student's teachers about possible days of absences.
5. Teachers and administrators shall allow accommodations for student to make up work (understanding that missed assignments may add stress to student).
6. Mental health professionals or trusted staff members shall maintain ongoing contact to monitor student's actions and mood.
7. School-based mental health professionals shall work with parents/guardians/caregivers/families to involve the student in an aftercare plan.
8. School-based mental health professionals shall provide parent's/guardians/caregivers/families local emergency numbers for after school and weekend emergency contacts.

Messaging About Suicide Prevention

Charter School along with its partners shall:

1. Thoroughly and regularly review with its partners, all materials and resources used in awareness efforts to ensure they align with best practices for safe and effective messaging about suicide.
2. Ensure that all communications, documents, materials related to messaging about suicide focus on warning signs as well as risk, prevention, and protective factors, avoid discussing details about methods of suicide, avoid oversimplifying (i.e. identifying singular cause of suicide), avoid sensational language, and only includes clear, respectful, people-first language that encourages an environment free of stigma. As part of safe messaging for suicide, we use specific terminology when referring to actions related to suicide or suicidal behavior:

Use	Do Not Use
<p>“Died by suicide” or “Took their own life”</p>	<p>“Committed suicide” Note: Use of the word “commit” can imply crime/sin</p>
<p>“Attempted suicide”</p>	<p>“Successful” or “unsuccessful” Note: There is no success, or lack of success, when dealing with suicide</p>

3. Provide suicide prevention resources in parent/student handbooks and on school-issued identification cards for staff and students, on school websites, and during any mental health or suicide prevention skill-building activity for students or parents/families and professional development for staff.

G. Responding After a Suicide Death (Postvention)

A death by suicide in the school community (whether by a student or staff member) can have devastating consequences on the school community, including students and staff.

New West shall follow the below action plan for responding to a suicide death, which incorporates both immediate and long-term steps and objectives:

The suicide prevention liaison shall:

1. Coordinate with the Executive Director to conduct an initial meeting of the Suicide Prevention Crisis Team to:
 - a. Confirm death and cause.
 - b. Identify a staff member to contact deceased’s family (within 24 hours).
 - c. Enact the Suicide Postvention Response.
 - d. Notify all staff members (ideally in-person or via phone, not via e-mail or mass notification).

2. Coordinate an all-staff meeting, to include:
 - a. Notification (if not already conducted) to staff about suicide death.
 - b. Emotional support and resources available to staff.
 - c. Notification to students about suicide death and the availability of support services (if this is the protocol that is decided by administration).
 - d. Share information that is relevant and that which you have permission to disclose.

3. Prepare staff to respond to needs of students regarding the following:
 - a. Review signs of emotional distress and suicide ideation.
 - b. Review of protocols for referring students for support/assessment.
 - c. Develop and provide supports to staff in responding to student reactions.
 - d. Talking points for staff to notify students.
 - e. Share school and community-based resources available to students (on and off campus).
4. Identify students significantly affected by suicide death and other students at risk of imitative behavior, and immediately refer them to a school-based mental health professional.
5. Identify students affected by suicide death but not at risk of imitative behavior.
6. Communicate with the larger school community about the suicide death and availability of support services. Staff shall not share explicit, graphic, or dramatic content, including the manner of death.
7. Consider, (in consultation with the family) funeral arrangements for family and school community.
 - If possible, suggest the funeral occur outside of school hours.
 - Encourage parents/guardians of students to attend funeral/memorial with their children.
 - Request family approval to attend and staff a table for resources to be available at the funeral, if possible, to remind students and the community of available resources.
 - Offer a safe space on campus for students to utilize if needed before/after funeral or memorial service.
 - Acknowledge there may be a high rate of absenteeism on the day of the funeral and school officials should make appropriate accommodations for staff and students to attend.
8. Respond to memorial requests in respectful and non-harmful manner; responses should be handled in a thoughtful way and their impact on other students should be considered.
9. Identify media spokesperson to cover story without the use of explicit, graphic, or dramatic content, if needed.
10. Utilize and respond to social media outlets:
 - Identify what platforms students are using to respond to suicide death.

- Identify and encourage staff and students to monitor social media outlets.

10, Include long-term suicide postvention responses:

- a. Consider important dates (i.e., anniversary of death, deceased birthday, graduation, or other significant event) and how these will be addressed.
- b. Support siblings, close friends, teachers, and/or students of deceased.
- c. Consider long-term memorials and how they may impact students who are emotionally vulnerable and at risk of suicide.