

# Student Crises

Prepare – Prevent – Intervene



**WESLEY CEDROS, ED.S.  
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES  
TAMALPAIS UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**PRESENTED TO MARIN COUNTY  
SUPERINTENDENTS  
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*“Nothing is more important than our students’ safety, and preparation is one of the first and more important steps a school can take in creating a more positive school climate.”*

*Tom Torlakson*

*CA State Superintendent of Public Instruction*

*Letter to superintendents (2/24/2014)*

*“It is imperative that we collaborate to adopt district policies and administrative regulations to address suicide prevention in our school districts.”*

*Tom Torlakson*

*CA State Superintendent of Public Instruction*

*Letter to superintendents (7/21/2014)*

# STUDENT CRISES



- Preparation
- Intervention
- Postvention (Response)
- Resources

# PREPARATION



- Policy & Practice
- Monitor At-Risk Students & Situations
- Training & Staff Development
- Crisis Response Team (CRT)

# Policy & Practice



- **Policies**

- SB187 School Safety Plans
- SB634 School Safety Plans/Safety Drills
- CA Ed Code §41533 (Jason Flatt Act)
- CA Ed Code §32280-32289
- Local Board Policy

- **Practices**

- Update School Safety Plan
- Seek Input from Stakeholders, Law Enforcement, Community Partners
- Practice, Refine, Practice Again!

# Identify & Monitor



- **Identify and closely follow at-risk students**
  - Provide mental health and social support
  - Work closely with parents/guardians
- **Identify and monitor other potentially dangerous situations**
  - Personnel disputes
  - Bullying & Harassment
  - Upset parents and/or community members
  - Gang activity
  - Law enforcement concerns

# Training & Education



- Training & education recommendations for school staff, students, parents/community
  - School-wide suicide prevention programs
    - ✦ Sources of Strength, Signs of Suicide
  - MH Awareness & Gatekeeper Training
    - ✦ QPR, ASIST, More than Sad, Mental Health First Aid
- Create a safe and caring school climate
  - Character education programs (e.g., 6 Pillars, Second Step)
  - Robust anti-bullying policy
  - Restorative practices

# Crisis Response Team



- Crisis response requires collaboration
- Set roles and responsibilities allow for smoother application of protocols in crisis
- Team members may vary by site – personalize to match available staff
- Although CRT most intimately involved, ALL school staff should know when/how/to whom to refer at-risk students & understand a basic summary of intervention procedures



# CRT Roles & Responsibilities



- All Members
  - Respond to urgent situations when needed
  - Call 911, if needed
  - Inform Team Leader about at-risk students/situations
  - Provide first aid, when needed
  - Clear area and ensure student safety
- Team Leader
  - Coordinates annual training
  - Mobilizes team members, as needed
  - Coordinates team member assignments
  - Liaison between principal and district office

# CRT Roles & Responsibilities



- **Principal/Assistant Principal**
  - Liaison with police, fire or other authorized outside agency
  - Brief district office administration
  - Notifies family members of student crisis
  - Modifies school schedule, if necessary
  - Resumes normal schedule as soon as possible
  - Secures campus
  - Communicates with other school sites, as necessary
  - Evaluates and revises school crisis response, as necessary

# CRT Roles & Responsibilities



- **School Psychologist/Counselors**
  - Conducts student interviews, risk assessments
  - Contacts community resources
  - Contacts and works with parents
  - Documents actions
- **School Nurse or Health Technician**
  - Administers first aid, triage
  - Locates emergency card for injured student(s)
- **Campus Supervisor**
  - Coordinates immediate security and protection
  - Roams campus to identify students in need

# CRT Roles & Responsibilities



- **School Secretary**
  - Maintains up-to-date info for CRT
  - Maintains communication for principal
  - Responds to crisis-related inquiries (uses sample script)
- **Teachers**
  - Take every warning sign seriously
  - Ensure safety of students during and after emergency
  - If in stay-put/shelter-in-place situation – do not allow students to enter or exit room
  - Keep students informed as directed by principal
  - Reassure students
  - Focus discussion on reaction students are having and how to support each other
  - Refer students in need to Crisis Team Leader

# CRT Roles & Responsibilities



- **Media Spokesperson/Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent**
  - Responds to media inquiries

# Working with the Media



- Guidelines for Working with the Media
  - Written statement for media representatives including the following:
    - Brief statement acknowledging the death of the student (no details if suicide) – first confirm with law enforcement and family, if possible
    - An expression of the school’s sympathy to family/survivors
    - Information about the school’s postvention program
  - All other staff, including School Board members
    - Refrain from making any comments or responding to media requests
    - Refer all media requests to Media Spokesperson
  - Media Representatives
    - Not permitted to conduct interviews on school grounds
    - Not permitted to attend parent and student group meetings to protect parents sharing information about their children
    - In case of suicide, be provided with SPRC’s “At-a-Glance: Safe Reporting on a Suicide”

*Adapted from Kerr, M, Brent, D., McKain, B., & McCommons, P. (2003). Postvention standards manual: A guide for a school's response in the aftermath of sudden death (4th ed.) Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh/Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic.*

# POSTVENTION



- Postvention Planning Helps with ALL Sudden Traumatic Events
- Detailed, day-by-day guide for how to best respond to a school death or traumatic event, including:
  - Sample scripts and letters for notification
  - Resources for talking about suicide or student/staff death with staff and students
  - Recommended guidelines for memorialization
  - How to minimize risk of suicide contagion by working with the media
- Steps to take in the long-term aftermath
  - Enhance identification and support of vulnerable students
  - Prepare for anniversaries and special events
  - Support the family of the deceased, as well as the school's staff members and Crisis Response Team

