Suicide Prevention Policy

The Board of Directors of Voices College-Bound Language Academies ("Voices" or "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 Voices and community stakeholders, the county mental health plan, Voices-employed mental health professionals, and suicide prevention experts and shall, at a minimum, address procedures relating to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.

To ensure the policies regarding suicide prevention are properly adopted, implemented, and updated, Voices shall appoint an individual (or team) to serve as the suicide prevention point of contact for Voices. The suicide prevention point of contact for Voices and the Principal 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 pupil who is a Medi-Cal beneficiary. This policy shall be reviewed and revised as indicated, at least every fifth year in conjunction with the previously mentioned community stakeholders.

Prevention and Instruction

Suicide prevention strategies may include, but not be limited to, efforts to promote a positive school climate that enhances students’ feelings of connectedness with Voices and is characterized by caring staff and harmonious interrelationships among students.

The School’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.

Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers Participation and Education

The Principal or designee may offer parents/guardians education or information which describes the severity of the youth suicide problem, the School’s suicide prevention efforts, risk factors and warning signs of suicide, basic steps for helping suicidal youth, reducing the stigma of mental illness, and/or Voices and community resources that can help youth in crisis. Voices will provide the following for parents/guardians/caregivers:

- The 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 Voices Web page.
Student Participation and Education

Messaging about suicide has an effect on suicidal thinking and behaviors. Consequently, Voices 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 Voices and is characterized by caring staff and harmonious interrelationships among students.

Voices’ 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.

Supports will include helping students identify trusted adults, Voices resources, and/or community crisis intervention resources where youth, including those at high risk, such as youth bereaved by suicide; youth with disabilities, mental illness, or substance use disorders; youth experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings such as foster care; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth can get help and recognize that there is no stigma associated with seeking mental health, substance abuse, gender identity, or other support services.

Staff Development

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

Suicide prevention training for staff will be provided and be designed to help staff identify and find help for students at risk of suicide. 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). The training may be offered under the discretion of the Principal and/or Board of Directors and/or in cooperation with one or more community mental health agencies and may include information on:

1. Research identifying risk factors, such as previous suicide attempt(s), history of depression or mental illness, substance abuse problems, family history of suicide or violence, feelings of isolation, interpersonal conflicts, a recent severe stressor or loss, family instability, and other factors.

2. Warning signs that may indicate suicidal intentions, including changes in students’ appearance, personality, or behavior.

3. Research-based instructional strategies for teaching the suicide prevention
Student curriculum and promoting mental and emotional health.

4. Voices and community resources and services for students and families in crisis and ways to access them.

5. Voices procedures for intervening when a student attempts, threatens, or discloses the desire to die by suicide.

6. Materials approved by Voices for training shall include how to identify appropriate mental health services, both at the Voices site and within the larger community, and when and how to refer youth and their families to those services.

7. Materials approved for training may also include programs that can be completed through self-review or suitable suicide prevention materials.

8. 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; and
   - Youth who have suffered traumatic experiences.

**Intervention and Emergency Procedures**

Voices designates the following administrators to act as the primary and secondary suicide prevention liaisons:

- Principal
- Dean of Culture

Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student’s suicidal intentions, he/she shall promptly notify the Principal or designee. The Principal or designee 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 Principal may also refer the student to mental health resources at Voices 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
Student

Principal or designee shall, at a minimum:

1. Ensure the student’s physical safety by one or more of the following, as appropriate:
   a. Securing immediate medical treatment if a suicide attempt has occurred;
   b. Securing law enforcement and/or other emergency assistance if a suicidal act is being actively threatened;
   c. 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.
   d. Remaining calm, keeping in mind the student is overwhelmed, confused, and emotionally distressed;
   e. Moving all other students out of the immediate area;
   f. Not sending the student away or leaving him/her alone, even to go to the restroom;
   g. Providing comfort to the student, listening and allowing the student to talk and being comfortable with moments of silence;
   h. Promising privacy and help, but not promising confidentiality.

2. Designate specific individuals to be promptly contacted, for example the Voices counselor, psychologist, nurse, Principal, and/or the student’s parent/guardian, and, as necessary, local law enforcement or mental health agencies.

3. Document the incident in writing as soon as feasible.

4. 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 pupil who is a Medi-Cal beneficiary.

5. After a referral is made, Voices 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, Voices may contact Child Protective Services.

6. 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 Voices.

7. 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 Voices campus, the Principal or designee shall follow the crisis intervention procedures contained in Voices safety plan. After consultation with the Principal 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 Principal or designee may provide students, parents/guardians, and staff with information, counseling, and/or referrals to community agencies as needed. Voices staff may receive assistance from Voices 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 Voices campus and unrelated to school activities, the Principal 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 Voices 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.

Supporting Students during or after a Mental Health Crisis

Students shall be encouraged through the education program and in Voices activities to notify a teacher, Principal, another Voices administrator, psychologist, Voices counselor, or other adult when they are experiencing thoughts of suicide or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student’s suicidal intentions. Voices 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.

Voices Employees Acting Within Scope

Voices shall ensure that employees act only within the authorization and scope of the employee’s credential or license. Nothing in this Policy shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging a Voices employee to diagnose or treat mental illness unless the employee is specifically licensed.
Student and employed to do so. 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.

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. Voices 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:
- Coordinate with the Principal to:
  - Confirm death and cause;
  - Identify a staff member to contact deceased’s family (within 24 hours);
  - Enact the Suicide Postvention Response;
  - Notify all staff members (ideally in-person or via phone, not via e-mail or mass notification).
- Coordinate an all-staff meeting, to include:
  - Notification (if not already conducted) to staff about suicide death;
  - Emotional support and resources available to staff;
  - Notification to students about suicide death and the availability of support services (if this is the protocol that is decided by administration);
  - Share information that is relevant and that which you have permission to disclose.
- Prepare staff to respond to needs of students regarding the following:
  - Review of protocols for referring students for support/assessment;
  - Talking points for staff to notify students;
  - Resources available to students (on and off campus).
- Identify students significantly affected by suicide death and other students at risk of imitative behavior;
- Identify students affected by suicide death but not at risk of imitative behavior;
- Communicate with the larger school community about the suicide death;
- Consider funeral arrangements for family and school community;
- 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;
- Include long-term suicide postvention responses:
  - Consider important dates (i.e., anniversary of death, deceased birthday, graduation, or other significant event) and how these will be addressed
  - Support siblings, close friends, teachers, and/or students of deceased
  - Consider long-term memorials and how they may impact students who are emotionally vulnerable and at risk of suicide
Student Identification Cards

Voices will include the telephone number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the National Domestic Violence Hotline on all student identification cards if the school issues pupil identification cards.