

## LANGUAGE ACADEMY OF SACRAMENTO

### STUDENT POLICY

### Youth Suicide Prevention Policy #7

The Governing Board of Language Academy of Sacramento (LAS) recognizes that suicide is a leading cause of death among youth and that an even greater amount of youth consider and attempt suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).

The possibility of suicide and suicidal ideation requires vigilant attention from our school staff. As a result, we are ethically and legally responsible for providing an appropriate and timely response in preventing suicidal ideation, attempts, and deaths. We also must work to create a safe and nurturing campus that minimizes suicidal ideation in students. Recognizing that it is the duty of the school to protect the health, safety, and welfare of its students, this policy aims to safeguard students and staff against suicide attempts, deaths and other trauma associated with suicide, including ensuring adequate supports for students, staff, and families affected by suicide attempts and loss. As it is known that the emotional wellness of students greatly impacts school attendance and educational success, this policy is intended to support the emotional and behavioral wellness of students.

This policy is based on research and best practices in suicide prevention, and has been adopted with the understanding that suicide prevention activities decrease suicide risk, increase help-seeking behavior, identify those at risk of suicide, and decrease suicidal behaviors. Empirical evidence refutes a common belief that talking about suicide can increase risk or “place the idea in someone’s mind.”

In an attempt to reduce suicidal behavior and its impact on students and families, the Academic Director and support staff shall develop strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, and the identification of the mental health challenges frequently associated with suicidal thinking and behavior. These strategies shall include professional development for select school personnel.

The Academic Director and support staff shall develop and implement preventive strategies and intervention procedures that include the following:

#### **Overall Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention**

The Academic Director and support staff shall involve school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, psychologists, social workers), administrators, other school staff members, parents/guardians/caregivers, students, local health agencies and professionals, law enforcement, and community organizations in planning, implementing, and evaluating the school’s strategies for suicide prevention and intervention.

## Prevention

### A. Messaging about Suicide Prevention

Messaging about suicide has an effect on suicidal thinking and behaviors. Consequently, LAS has critically 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.

Resources:

- For information on public messaging on suicide prevention, see the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention Web site at <http://suicidepreventionmessaging.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/>
- For information on engaging the media regarding suicide prevention, see the Your Voice Counts Web page at <http://resource-center.yourvoicecounts.org/content/making-headlines-guide-engaging-media-suicide-prevention-california-0>
- For information on how to use social media for suicide prevention, see the Your Voice Counts Web page at <http://resource-center.yourvoicecounts.org/content/how-use-social-media>

### B. Suicide Prevention Training and Education

The Language Academy of Sacramento 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 select school staff members and other adults on campus (including teachers, office personnel, and after school program staff).

Training:

- At least annually, select staff shall receive training on the risk factors and warning signs of suicide, suicide prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention.
- All suicide prevention trainings shall be offered under the direction of school-employed mental health professionals who have received advanced training specific to suicide and may benefit from collaboration with one or more county and/or community mental health agencies. Staff training can be adjusted year-to-year based on previous professional development activities and emerging best practices.
- In addition to initial orientations of suicide prevention, ongoing annual staff professional development for all staff should include the following components:

- The impact of traumatic stress on emotional and mental health;
  - Common misconceptions about suicide;
  - 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 district 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 district guidelines;
  - School 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;
  - School 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.
- The professional development also shall include additional 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;
- Youth who have family members that have been/are incarcerated;
- Youth living in fear of displacement/broken families.

### **C. Employee Qualifications and Scope of Services**

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.

### **D. Specialized Staff Training (Assessment)**

Additional professional development in suicide risk assessment and crisis intervention shall be provided to mental health professionals (school counselors, psychologists) employed by Language Academy of Sacramento.

### **E. Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers Participation and Education**

- To the extent possible, parents/guardians/caregivers should be included in all suicide prevention efforts. At a minimum, schools shall share with parents/guardians/caregivers the Language Academy of Sacramento suicide prevention policy and procedures.
- This suicide prevention policy shall be prominently displayed on the Language Academy of Sacramento Web page and included in the Student and Parent handbook. Within this section, parents/guardians/caregivers will be invited to provide input on the policy.
- All parents/guardians/caregivers should 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.

## **F. Student Participation and Education**

The Language Academy of Sacramento has carefully reviewed available student curricula to ensure it promotes the mental health model of suicide prevention and does not encourage the use of the stress model to explain suicide.

Under the supervision of school-employed mental health professionals, and following consultation with county and community mental health agencies, students shall:

- Receive developmentally appropriate, student-centered education about the warning signs of mental health challenges and emotional distress;
- Receive developmentally appropriate guidance regarding the district's suicide prevention, intervention, and referral procedures.
- The content of the education shall 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, , science, and physical education).

The Language Academy of Sacramento 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 Weeks, Peer Counseling Programs).

## **Intervention, Assessment, Referral**

### **A. Staff**

Two Language Academy of Sacramento staff members who have received advanced training in suicide intervention shall be designated as the primary and secondary suicide prevention liaisons. 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.

- Under normal circumstances, the primary and/or secondary contact persons shall notify the Academic Director, another school administrator, school psychologist or school counselor, if different from the primary and secondary contact persons. The names, titles, and contact information of multi-disciplinary crisis team members shall be distributed to all students, staff, parents/guardians/caregivers and be prominently available on school and district Web sites.
  - Primary Suicide Prevention Liaison:
    - Ariana Pantoja, School Counselor, (916) 277-7137, apantoja@lasac.info
  - Secondary Suicide Prevention Liaison:
    - Evelyn Sandoval, School Psychologist, (916) 277-7137; esandoval@lasac.info

The Academic Director, another school administrator, school counselor, school psychologist shall then notify, if appropriate and in the best interest of the student, the student's parents/guardians/caregivers as soon as possible and shall refer the student to mental health resources in the school or community. Determination of notification to parents/guardians/caregivers should follow a formal initial assessment to ensure that the student is not endangered by parental notification.

If the 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.

- Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions, they shall promptly notify the primary or secondary suicide prevention liaisons.
- Students experiencing suicidal ideation shall not be left unsupervised.
- A referral process should be prominently disseminated to all staff members, so they know how to respond to a crisis and are knowledgeable about the school and community-based resources.
- The Academic Director shall establish crisis intervention procedures to ensure student safety and appropriate communications if a suicide occurs or an attempt is made by a student or adult on campus or at a school-sponsored activity.

## **SUICIDE RISK ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES**

Language Academy of Sacramento

1. Anyone (teachers or staff) concerned that a student is exhibiting a potential **suicide** risk must immediately contact the Academic Director or his/her designee. If **suicide** risk is active and

immediate, call 911 and then contact the Academic Director or his/her designee. The student is to remain under constant adult supervision while professional staff (trained in assessing suicide risk) is notified.

2. Upon receiving a referral regarding a student exhibiting a potential suicide risk, the Academic Director or his/her designee shall immediately contact the school psychologist or school counselor. If no professional staff trained in assessing suicide risk is available the Academic Director or his/her designee will contact parents and/or proper authorities.
3. The school psychologist or school counselor will interview the student in private to assess for suicide risk.
4. At the conclusion of the interview, the school psychologist or school counselor will notify the Academic Director or his/her designee and necessary staff members. The interviewer will make a determination of notification to parent/guardian to ensure the student is not endangered by parental notification. Notwithstanding this disclosure requirement, no disclosure shall be made to the student's parent/guardian when there is reasonable cause to believe that the disclosure would result in a clear and present danger to the health, safety, or welfare of the student.
5. If the interviewer has reasonable cause to believe that law enforcement involvement is necessary to avert clear and present danger to the student's health or safety, the interviewer shall work with the Academic Director or his/her designee to contact law enforcement.
6. If the student is assessed to be in immediate risk of self-harm, the interviewer is to remain with the student, ensuring safety until an appropriate disposition plan can be developed that includes the provision of adequate supervision.
7. If the student is not assessed to be in immediate risk of self-harm, the interviewer may determine the student can return to class and share pertinent information with appropriate staff.

## **B. Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers**

A referral process should be prominently disseminated to all parents/guardians/caregivers, so they know how to respond to a crisis and are knowledgeable about the school and community-based resources.

## **C. Students**

Students shall be encouraged to notify a staff member when they are experiencing emotional distress or suicidal ideation, or when they suspect or have knowledge of another student's emotional distress, suicidal ideation, or attempt.

## **D. Parental Notification and Involvement**

The Language Academy of Sacramento shall identify a process to ensure continuing care for the student identified to be at risk of suicide. The following steps should be followed to ensure continuity of care:

- After a referral is made for a student, school staff shall verify with the parent/guardian/caregiver that follow-up treatment has been accessed. Parents/guardians/caregivers will be required to provide documentation of care for the student.
- If parents/guardians/caregivers 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 point of contact (or other appropriate school staff member) will meet with the parents/guardians/caregivers to identify barriers to treatment (e.g., cultural stigma, financial issues) and work to rectify the situation and build understanding of the importance of care. If follow-up care for the student is still not provided, school staff should consider contacting Child Protective Services (CPS) to report neglect of the youth..
  - Child Protective Services, Sacramento:
    - PO Box 269057, Sacramento, CA 95826
    - (916) 875-5437

### **E. Action Plan for In-School Suicide Attempts**

If a suicide attempt is made during the school day on campus, it is important to remember that the health and safety of the student and those around him/her is critical. The following steps should be implemented:

- Remain calm, remember the student is overwhelmed, confused, and emotionally distressed;
- Move all other students out of the immediate area;
- Immediately contact the administrator or suicide prevention liaison;
- Call 911 and give them as much information about any suicide note, medications taken, and access to weapons, if applicable;
- If needed, provide medical first aid until a medical professional is available;
- Parents/guardians/caregivers should be contacted as soon as possible;
- Do not send the student away or leave them alone, even if they need to go to the restroom;
- Listen and prompt the student to talk;
- Review options and resources of people who can help;
- Be comfortable with moments of silence as you and the student will need time to process the situation;
- Provide comfort to the student;

- Promise privacy and help, and be respectful, but do not promise confidentiality;
- Student should only be released to parents/guardians/caregivers or to a person who is qualified and trained to provide help.

#### **F. Action Plan for Out-of-School Suicide Attempts**

If a suicide attempt by a student is outside of Language Academy of Sacramento property, it is crucial that LAS protects the privacy of the student and maintain a confidential record of the actions taken to intervene, support, and protect the student. The following steps should be implemented:

- Contact the parents/guardians/caregivers and offer support to the family;
- Discuss with the family how they would like the school to respond to the attempt while minimizing widespread rumors among teachers, staff, and students;
- Obtain permission from the parents/guardians/caregivers to share information to ensure the facts regarding the crisis is correct;
- A Designate a staff member to handle media requests;
- Provide care and determine appropriate support to affected students;
- Offer to the student and parents/guardians/caregivers steps for re-integration to school.

#### **G. Supporting Students after a Mental Health Crisis**

It is crucial that careful steps are taken to help provide the mental health support for the student and to monitor their actions for any signs of suicide. The following steps should be implemented after the crisis has happened:

- Treat every threat with seriousness and approach with a calm manner; make the student a priority;
- Listen actively and be non-judgmental to the student. Let the student express his or her feelings;
- Acknowledge the feelings and do not argue with the student;
- Offer hope and let the student know they are safe and that help is provided. Do not promise confidentiality or cause stress;
- Explain calmly and get the student to a trained professional, guidance counselor, or designated staff to further support the student;
- Keep close contact with the parents/guardians/caregivers and mental health professionals working with the student.

## H. Re-Entry to School After a Suicide Attempt

A student who threatened 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.

The following steps shall be implemented upon re-entry:

- Obtain a written release of information signed by parents/guardians/caregivers and providers;
- Confer with student and parents/guardians/caregivers about any specific requests on how to handle the situation;
- Inform the student's teachers about possible days of absences;
- Allow accommodations for student to make up work (be understanding that missed assignments may add stress to student);
- Mental health professionals or trusted staff members should maintain ongoing contact to monitor student's actions and mood;
- Work with parents/guardians/caregivers to involve the student in an aftercare plan.

## I. 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 students and staff. Therefore, it is vital that we are prepared ahead of time in the event of such a tragedy. Ariana Pantoja, School Counselor, (Primary Suicide Prevention Liaison) and Evelyn Sandoval, School Psychologist, (Secondary Suicide Prevention Liaison) for the Language Academy of Sacramento shall ensure that the school adopts an action plan for responding to a suicide death. The Suicide Death Response Action Plan (Suicide Postvention Response Plan) needs to incorporate both immediate and long-term steps and objectives.

- Suicide Postvention Response Plan shall:
  - Identify a staff member to confirm death and cause (school site administrator);
  - Identify a staff member to contact deceased's family (within 24 hours);

- Enact the Suicide Postvention Response Plan, include an initial meeting of the district/school Suicide Postvention Response Team;
- 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 handed in a thoughtful way and their impact on other students should be considered;
- Identify media spokesperson skilled to cover story without the use of explicit, graphic, or dramatic content (go to the Reporting on Suicide.Org Web site at [www.reportingonsuicide.org](http://www.reportingonsuicide.org)). Research has proven that sensationalized media coverage can lead to contagious suicidal behaviors.
- Utilize and respond to social media outlets:
  - Identify what platforms students are using to respond to suicide death
  - Identify/train staff to monitor social media outlets

- 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

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