



## Suicide Prevention Policy

The Board of Directors of Aspen Public Schools (“Board”) operating Aspen Valley Prep Academy, Aspen Meadow Public School, and Aspen Ridge Public School (“Aspen Schools” or “Charter Schools”) 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 has developed prevention strategies and intervention procedures.

In compliance with Education Code section 215, this policy has been developed in consultation with Aspen Schools school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, psychologists), administrators, local health agencies and professionals, the county mental health plan, law enforcement, and community organizations in planning, implementing, and evaluating Aspen Schools’ strategies for suicide prevention and intervention. Aspen Schools will 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, Aspen Schools shall appoint a team to monitor and implement suicide prevention training and procedures. The suicide prevention team in conjunction with Site Directors and Site Based Crisis Team members 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 Team**

To ensure the policies regarding suicide prevention are properly adopted, implemented, and updated, Aspen Schools created an in-house Suicide Prevention Team (“SPT”) consisting of administrators, mental health professionals and relevant staff.

Aspen Schools designates the following individuals to lead the SPT:

1. Lead School Psychologist
2. Chief Student Services Officer

The functions of the SPT are to:

- Review mental health related school policies and procedures;
- Provide annual updates on school and district 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 district and school websites;
- Collaborate with community mental health organizations,
- Identify resources and agencies that provide evidence-based or evidence-informed treatment.

### **Staff Development**

Aspen Schools carefully reviews available staff training to ensure it promotes the mental health model of suicide prevention.

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:

1. All suicide prevention trainings shall be offered under the direction of mental health professionals (e.g., school counselors, school psychologists) who have received advanced training specific to suicide. Charter School has worked to align procedures to El Dorado Charter SELPA recommendation to ensure it is evidence-based, evidence-informed, and aligned with best practices.
2. Staff training may be adjusted year-to-year based on previous professional development activities and emerging best practices.
3. Charter School shall ensure that training is available for new hires during the school year.
4. At least annually, all staff shall receive training on the risk factors and warning signs of suicide, suicide prevention, intervention, referral, and postvention.
5. 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:

- a. Suicide risk factors, warning signs, and protective factors.
  - b. How to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide.
  - c. 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.
  - d. 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 a staff member.
  - e. Emphasis on reducing stigma associated with mental illness and that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide.
  - f. 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/>
  - g. 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:
    - i. Youth affected by suicide.
    - ii. Youth with a history of suicide ideation or attempts.
    - iii. Youth with disabilities, mental illness, or substance abuse disorders.
    - iv. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth.
    - v. Youth experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings, such as foster care.
    - vi. Youth who have suffered traumatic experiences.
6. 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:
- a. The impact of traumatic stress on emotional and mental health.
  - b. Common misconceptions about suicide.
  - c. Charter School and community suicide prevention resources.
  - d. Appropriate messaging about suicide (correct terminology, safe messaging guidelines).
  - e. The factors associated with suicide (risk factors, warning signs, protective factors).
  - f. How to identify youth who may be at risk of suicide.
  - g. 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 Aspen Schools 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 Aspen Schools guidelines.

- h. Charter School-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.
- i. Charter School-approved procedures for responding to the aftermath of suicidal behavior (suicidal behavior postvention).
- j. Responding after a suicide occurs (suicide postvention).
- k. Resources regarding youth suicide prevention.
- l. Emphasis on stigma reduction and the fact that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide.
- m. 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, and administrators employed by Aspen Schools. 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-approved tool.
- Best practices on approaching and talking with a student about their thoughts of suicide and how to respond to such thinking, based on district guidelines and protocols.
- Best practices on how to talk with a student about thoughts of suicide and appropriately respond and provide support based on district guidelines and protocols.
- Best practices on follow up with parents/caregivers.
- Best practices on re-entry.

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

Employees of Aspen Schools 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 mental health challenges often associated with suicidal thinking typically requires mental health resources beyond what schools are able to provide.

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

1. 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.
2. This Suicide Prevention Policy shall be easily accessible and prominently displayed on the Aspen Schools Web page and included in the student/parent handbook.
3. Community-based organizations that provide evidence-based suicide-specific treatments shall be highlighted on the Charter School's website with treatment and referral options marked accordingly.
4. All parents/guardians/caregivers may have access to suicide prevention training that addresses the following:
  - a. Suicide risk factors, warning signs, and protective factors.
  - b. 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.
  - c. Charter School's referral processes and how they or their children can reach out for help, etc.
5. 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.

### **Student Participation and Education**

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

Aspen Schools' 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.

Aspen Schools' instructional opportunities 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:

1. Receive developmentally appropriate, student-centered education about the warning signs of mental health challenges and emotional distress. The content of the education may include:
  - a. Coping strategies for dealing with stress and trauma.
  - b. How to recognize behaviors (warning signs) and life issues (risk factors) associated with suicide and mental health issues in oneself and others.
  - c. Help-seeking strategies for oneself and others, including how to engage school-based and community resources and refer peers for help.
  - d. Emphasis on reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and the fact that early prevention and intervention can drastically reduce the risk of suicide.
2. Receive developmentally appropriate guidance regarding Aspen Schools' suicide prevention, intervention, and referral procedures.

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

Aspen Schools will support the creation and implementation of activities on campus that raise awareness about mental wellness and suicide prevention.

Charter School maintains a record of student trainings provided and is available upon request. 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.**

Aspen Schools 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.

### **Intervention and Emergency Procedures**

Whenever a staff member suspects or has knowledge of a student's suicidal intentions, they shall promptly notify the Aspen Schools Site Based Crisis Team (SBCT), beginning with the Site Director. If this primary suicide prevention contact is unavailable, the staff shall promptly notify the secondary suicide prevention contact (Assistant Site Director, School Counselor or School Psychologist).

The Site Based Crisis Team (SBCT) shall immediately conduct a site based suicide risk assessment. The SBCT will immediately notify the Site 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 risk assessment to ensure that the student is not endangered by parental notification.

The Site Based Crisis Team shall also refer the student to mental health resources at Aspen Schools 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. The call shall NOT be made in the presence of the student and the student shall not be left unsupervised. Staff shall NOT physically restrain or block an exit.

When a suicide attempt or threat is reported on campus or at a school-related activity, Site Based Crisis Team Member 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. 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. **Determination of notification to parents/guardians/caregivers should follow a formal initial risk assessment to ensure that the student is not endangered by parental notification.**
4. After a referral is made, Aspen Schools shall inquire with the parent/guardian that the follow-up treatment has been accessed. 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 Site Based Crisis Team 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, Aspen Schools 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 Aspen Schools.
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 Aspen Schools campus, the Site Based Crisis Team Members shall follow the crisis intervention procedures contained in Aspen Schools' 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. Aspen Schools staff may receive assistance from Aspen Schools 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 Aspen Schools campus and unrelated to school activities, the Site Director or designee and the Site Based Crisis Team Members 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 Aspen Schools 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. Aspen School's Executive Director shall handle any media requests in collaboration with Site Based Crisis Team.
5. Provide care and determine appropriate support to affected students.
6. Offer to the student and parent/guardian steps for reintegration 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; providing parent's/guardians/caregivers/families local emergency numbers for after school and weekend emergency contacts.

### **Supporting Students during or after a Mental Health Crisis**

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

### **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. Aspen Schools 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 Team shall:

1. Coordinate with the Site Director to conduct an initial meeting of the Site Based 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 of protocols for referring students for support/assessment.
  - b. Talking points for staff to notify students.
  - c. Resources available to students (on and off campus).
4. Identify students significantly affected by suicide death. Identify other students at risk of imitative behavior and refer them to a school-based mental health professional.
5. Communicate with the larger school community about the suicide death. Staff shall not share explicit, graphic, or dramatic content, including the manner of death.
6. Consider funeral arrangements for family and school community.
7. 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.
8. Ensure that all communications, documents, materials related to messaging about suicide avoid discussing details about method 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
<b>“Died by suicide”</b> <b>or</b> <b>“Took their own life”</b>	<b>“Committed suicide”</b> <b>Note:</b> Use of the word “commit” can imply crime/sin
<b>“Attempted suicide”</b>	<b>“Successful” or “unsuccessful”</b> <b>Note:</b> There is no success, or lack of success, when dealing with suicide

9. 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.

### **Student Identification Cards**

Charter School will include the telephone numbers on all student identification cards:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline/Suicide Crisis Lifeline:
  - o Call or Text “988”
  - o 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