| **Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item** | **Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia** |
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## Agenda Item: C

##  Date: March 19, 2020

## Title: Final Review of the Proposed Revisions to the *Suicide Prevention Guidelines*

## Presenter: Dr. Samantha Hollins, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Special Education and Student Services

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## Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by state or federal law or regulation.

## Executive Summary:

The *Suicide Prevention Guidelines*, last revised in 2003, are a result of [*Code of Virginia* § 22.1-272.1](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter14/section22.1-272.1/), which requires the Board of Education to develop guidelines for licensed school personnel to use in contacting parents or, if conditions warrant, the local or state service agency when they believe a student is in imminent risk for suicide.

In October 2018, the Governor Northam’s Children’s Cabinet Student Safety Workgroup recommended that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) update and disseminate the *Suicide Prevention Guidelines* to all school divisions in a timely manner in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), and the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS).

The revised *Guidelines* incorporate the recommendations made by the Children’s Cabinet Student Safety Workgroup, reflect current research, align with partner state agency efforts, and link to a variety of resources available to schools to support implementation. This document is a major revision in content and form and reflects current research on effective practice in approaches to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.

The revised *Guidelines* address: suicide prevention and intervention; screening; risk factors; messaging to students, staff, and parents and caregivers about recognizing and reporting behaviors; how and where to report concerning behaviors; engaging students during key transitional periods when data indicate that suicide rates are higher; how to engage students who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts; how to support students returning to school after treatment; postvention; and how to engage with students after a member of their community has died by suicide.

To revise the guidelines, VDOE convened representatives from the aforementioned agencies, school division personnel, representatives from suicide prevention and mental health advocacy groups, and parents. The Suicide Prevention Interagency Advisory Group (SPIAG) also reviewed and provided expert input on the G*uidelines*.

The Board of Education accepted for first review the proposed revisions to the *Suicide Prevention Guidelines* at their January 23, 2020, meeting. There were no revisions requested by the Board at that time. Additional public input was sought following first review by disseminating the proposed *Guidelines* to specialized instructional support personnel (i.e. school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers); the Suicide Prevention Interagency Advisory Group (SPIAG); and via Superintendent’s email.

The VDOE received and incorporated feedback from stakeholders that included school mental health professionals from multiple school divisions, institutions of higher education, and two national school suicide prevention experts. Although there were no significant changes to content, additional language was added that increased clarity on how suicide assessment aligns with the threat assessment process (Introduction, page 8; Section 2, pages 18-21). In addition, language was added to clarify the flexible use of suicide risk assessment models when evaluating threats to self (Section 2, page 21). Lastly, information was added that stressed the importance of utilizing school mental health professionals in taking the lead role on the team conducting assessments for threats to self (Introduction, page 8; Section 2, pages 18-21).

The proposed revisions to the *Suicide Prevention Guidelines* support the goals and priorities of the Board of Education of “*providing high quality, effective learning environments for all students*,” as outlined in Priority 1 of the [Board of Education Comprehensive Plan](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/plan/comprehensive-plan.pdf).

## Action Requested:

Final review: Action requested at this meeting.

## Superintendent’s Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education approve the proposed revisions to the *Suicide Prevention Guidelines*.

## Previous Review or Action:

Previous review and action. Specify date and action taken below:

Action: First Review

Date: January 23, 2020

Background Information and Statutory Authority:
The 1999 General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1250 (S. Newman) directing the Board of Education, in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Virginia Department of Health, to develop guidelines for licensed school personnel to use in contacting parents or, if conditions warrant, the local or state service agency when they believe a student is in imminent risk for attempting suicide. These guidelines were to include (1) criteria to assess the suicide risks of students, (2) characteristics to identify potentially suicidal students, (3) appropriate responses to students expressing suicidal intentions, (4) available and appropriate community services for students expressing suicidal intentions, (5) suicide prevention strategies which may be implemented by local schools for students expressing suicidal intentions, (6) criteria for notification of and discussions with parents of students expressing suicidal intentions, (7) criteria for as-soon-as practicable contact with parents, (8) appropriate sensitivity to religious beliefs, and (9) the legal requirements and criteria for notification of public service agencies. The guidelines were originally disseminated to school personnel in October 1999.

The 2000 General Assembly Session passed Senate Joint Resolution 148 (Houck) directing the Virginia Department of Health, with the assistance of the Virginia Commission on Youth; the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services; the Virginia Department of Education; the Virginia Council on Coordinating Prevention; survivor groups; and other interested individuals, to develop a comprehensive youth suicide prevention plan. The Virginia “Youth Suicide Prevention Plan” (House Document 29, 2001) recommended that the Virginia Department of Education revise the *Suicide Prevention Guidelines* to include criteria for follow-up with parents of students expressing suicidal intentions after initial contact has occurred. That revision was adopted by the Virginia Board of Education in 2003.

Summary of proposed revisions to the Suicide Prevention Guidelines:

In 2000, *Virginia Code* § 9.1-184 created the Virginia Center for School and Campus

Safety (VCSCS), located within the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Division of Law Enforcement, to focus on improving and enhancing safety by addressing topics that affect Virginia law enforcement, schools, and institutions of higher education. The VCSCS is a resource and training center for information and research about national and statewide safety efforts and initiatives in K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. Through *Virginia Code* § 9.1-184, the VCSCS developed *Threat Assessment in Virginia’s Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures and Guidelines* to provide schools with a model policy for the establishment of threat assessment teams, including procedures for assessment and intervention procedures for students whose behavior poses a threat to the safety of school staff or students. The *Model Policies* also include procedures for referrals to community services boards or health care providers for evaluation or treatment, when appropriate. Effective July 1, 2016, all Virginia public schools were required to establish threat assessment teams.

In June 2018, Governor Ralph Northam directed the Children's Cabinet to assemble school personnel, public safety officials, mental health professionals, and other community partners to develop recommendations to enhance school and student safety. As a result, in October 2018, the Student Safety Workgroup issued 20 recommendations, which included Recommendation 12, as follows:

*“Direct VDOE, in consultation with DBHDS and the Center, to update and disseminate the Virginia Suicide Prevention Guidelines to all school divisions in a timely manner. Once updated, direct the agencies to update their model policies, training, and guidance documents to reflect the updated guidelines.*

*Updated guidelines should address: suicide prevention and intervention; screening; risk factors; messaging to students, staff, and parents and caregivers about recognizing and reporting behaviors; how and where to report concerning behaviors; engaging students during key transitional periods when data indicate that suicide rates are higher; how to engage students who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts; how to support students returning to school after treatment; postvention; and how to engage with students after a member of their community has died by suicide.”*

The revised *Suicide Prevention Guidelines* reorganize the information into three main categories based on nationally recognized best practice: Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention.

Timetable for Further Review/Action:
Following Board approval of the *Suicide Prevention Guidelines*, a Superintendent’s Memorandum will be released to school divisions announcing the revision and providing information on how to access the document. The Department will work with stakeholders to offer professional development and provide technical assistance.

The document will be placed on [VDOE's Suicide Prevention](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/prevention/suicide/index.shtml) webpage. This page also includes a variety of resources that support implementation of the guidelines.

**Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:**

The Virginia Department of Education will incur some cost related to updating professional development, providing training, and printing the guidelines.