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CA STATE SENATOR • 10TH DISTRICT



Senate Bill 1318: Child Suicide Prevention

(as introduced 2/16/2024)

SUMMARY

SB 1318 amends existing protocols to ensure that students experiencing a mental health crisis on school campus receive care from a qualified behavioral health professional.

BACKGROUND

Education Code 215 requires all public schools to adopt a youth suicide prevention policy before the beginning of the 2017/18 school year and to bring the policy to the board for review every 5 years. Schools are encouraged to adopt the model suicide prevention policy published by the California Department of Education (CDE) in fall of 2023.

The model policy includes an "Action Plan for In-School or During School Sponsored Suicide Attempts" which instructs school staff to "Call 911" and immediately notify parents when a suicide attempt is made on school campus. The policy encourages schools to adopt crisis intervention procedures, but does not provide a template.

ISSUE

Between 2007 and 2014, the suicide rate more than doubled among children ages 10 to 14. In the first year of the pandemic, intentional self-harm among 13 to 18-year-olds increased by 91%, overdoses increased by 95%, and diagnoses of major depressive disorders increased by 84%. A 2021 report from 50 school districts across California found that two-thirds of students reported that their mental health was negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Despite consistently increasing behavioral health needs, most school campuses have a law enforcement officer but no mental health professional. In California, there are millions of students in schools with law enforcement, but

no support staff like counselors, psychologists, social workers, or nurses.

In an attempt to reduce negative interactions with police, California has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to establish mobile crisis units, mental health crisis intervention teams, and increase the number of school-based behavioral health professionals. However, schools continue to over-rely on law enforcement when addressing students in crisis.

SOLUTION

This bill would require the CDE to revise their model youth suicide prevention policy to:

- include crisis intervention procedures clarifying that schools should prioritize the use of behavioral health professionals when responding to a student experiencing a mental health crisis
- clarify that law enforcement, including school resource officers, should only be called to respond to a mental health crisis when a student's life is in imminent danger and their needs cannot be addressed by a behavioral health professional

The bill would also require the local education agency's (LEA's) governing board to discuss, at the meeting during which the suicide prevention policy is adopted, whether it should consider hiring behavioral health professionals.

SUPPORT

Santa Clara Office of Education (Sponsor)