



AB 2246 – Suicide Prevention Policies in Schools

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Cosponsors: Equality California, The Trevor Project

In Brief

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people aged 10-24. Studies have also shown that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) youth are up to four times more likely to attempt suicide than their non-LGBTQ peers. In a national survey conducted by The Jason Foundation, the number one person that a student would turn to when trying to help a friend who might be suicidal was a teacher. This bill would require schools to adopt policies to give teachers the tools necessary for suicide awareness and prevention.

The Issues

Existing law in California's Education Code encourages schools to adopt suicide prevention policies, but does not require that schools have them. According to the CDC's 2015 data, 17% of students in grades 9 to 12 report having seriously considered suicide, and 8% report having attempted suicide one or more times in the past 12 months. Youth bereaved by suicide; youth with disabilities, mental illness, or substance use disorders; youth experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings; and LGBTQ youth are at particularly high risk for suicide.

The Solution

This bill addresses youth suicide prevention by requiring school districts to adopt suicide prevention policies. These policies must be developed in consultation with school and community stakeholders, school-employed mental health professionals, and suicide prevention experts. The policies must address, at a minimum, guidelines for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention. To assist local educational agencies in developing policies for student suicide prevention, the Department of Education would be required to develop and maintain a model policy to serve as a guide for school districts. This model policy could be based on an existing model policy developed by The Trevor Project, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American School Counselor Association, and the National Association of School Psychologists. This bill points out the high-risk youth identified above to ensure these young people are not overlooked and to guide schools to address their needs specifically.

Background

In a typical high school, it is estimated that three students will attempt suicide each year. Protecting the health and well-being of young people is an ethical imperative for all professionals working with students. Youth suicide is preventable, and educators and schools have key roles in prevention. Research from the Family Acceptance Project has found that LGBTQ youth who have at least one supportive adult can reduce their risk of suicide. Having a suicide prevention policy in place in all schools with students in grades seven and above is one of the first essential steps in preventing youth suicide, and is part of a holistic approach that promotes healthy lifestyles, families, and communities, the importance of which was emphasized in the National Strategy on Suicide Prevention.

Support

Equality California (Cosponsor)
The Trevor Project (Cosponsor)
American Academy of Pediatrics, California
California Federation of Teachers
California Psychological Association
California School Employees Association
California State PTA
Disability Rights California
Los Angeles LGBT Center
Mental Health America of California
National Alliance on Mental Illness, California
National Assoc. of Social Workers, California Chapter

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