

The Jason Flatt Act: Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Policy

Introduction

Suicide is the tenth cause of death in the United States according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For youth between the ages of 10 and 24, the cause of death rankings are 2nd and 3rd in the nation, and these rankings are higher for youth in the same age brackets in the state of Alabama. The *Jason Flatt Act* was passed in order to equip education institutions and their personnel to recognize and act on signs of suicide risk in order to provide prevention, intervention, and postvention with students at risk, their families, and the communities who may be affected.

The *Jason Flatt Act*, which amends the 16-28B-8 of the *Code of Alabama 1975*, includes several elements listed below (in italics) which should be interpreted as policy. "To the extent that the legislature shall appropriate funds, or to the extent that [the] local board may provide funds from other sources, the Fort Payne City School System shall implement the following standards and policies for programs in an effort to prevent student suicide:"

Section 1: Prevention of Suicide

The *Jason Flatt Act* was passed in order to equip Alabama school districts and their personnel to recognize and act on signs of suicide risk in order to provide prevention, intervention, and postvention with students at risk, their families, and the communities who may be affected. This act, which amends 16-28B-8 of the *Code of Alabama 1975*, includes prevention of harassment and violence.

Section 2: The *Jason Flatt Act* includes several elements which should be interpreted as policy. The Fort Payne City System will:

- (1) *Foster individual, family, and group counseling services related to suicide prevention.*
- (2) *Make referral, crisis intervention, and other related information available for students, parents, and school personnel.*
- (3) *Foster training for school personnel who are responsible for counseling and supervising students.*
- (4) *Increase student awareness of the relationship between drug and alcohol use and suicide.*
- (5) *Educate students in recognizing signs of suicidal tendencies and other facts and warning signs of suicide.*
- (6) *Inform students of available community suicide prevention services.*
- (7) *Promote cooperative efforts between school personnel and community suicide prevention program personnel.*
- (8) *Foster school-based or community-based, or both, alternative programs outside of the classroom.*
- (9) *Develop a strategy to assist survivors of attempted suicide, students, and school personnel in coping with the issues relating to attempted suicide, suicide, the death of a student, and healing.*
- (10) *Engage in any other program or activity which the Board of Education for the Fort Payne City School System determines is appropriate and prudent in the efforts of the school system to prevent student suicide.*
- (11) *Provide training for school employees and volunteers who have significant contact with students*

- on the local board policies to prevent harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence.*
- (12) Develop a process for discussing with students local board policies relating to the prevention of student suicide and to the prevention of harassment, intimidation, violence, and threats of violence.*
- (13) Provide annual training for all certificated school employees in suicide awareness and prevention. This training may be provided within the framework of existing in-service training programs or as a part of required professional development by the Fort Payne City School System.*

Section 3: Description of Behavior Expected of Students

Students are expected to treat other students with courtesy, respect, and dignity and comply with the Code of Student Conduct. Students are expected and required to (1) comply with the requirements of the law, policy, regulation, and rules prohibiting harassment, violence, or intimidation and (2) to comply with the system's prevention strategies related to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention support.

Section 4: Responsibility of Reporting

Any person involved in a cause of action or omission resulting from the implementation of this suicide prevention policy or resulting from any training, or lack thereof, required by this section, shall be subject to state immunity law.

Section 5: Promulgation of Policy and Related Procedures, Rules, and Forms

This policy and any procedures and rules developed and approved to implement the policy will be published, disseminated, and made available to students, parents, and legal guardians, and employees by such means and methods as are customarily used for such purposes, included publication on the FPCS website.