



State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

MEMO

To: Public School District Administrators, Private School Administrators, Interested Parties

From: Carolyn Stanford Taylor, Assistant State Superintendent
Division for Learning Supports: Equity & Advocacy

Re: Annual Notification of Youth Suicide Prevention Resources

Date: April, 2008

This spring, a new Wisconsin law governing school-based youth suicide prevention was passed by the legislature and signed by Governor Doyle. The law, WI 115.365 Assistance to schools for suicide prevention programs, requires that, **“Each school board and the governing body of each private school annually shall inform their professional staff of the resources available from the department and other sources regarding suicide prevention.”** It also requires DPI to create a model notice of suicide prevention resources and services available in the state. Consistent with DPI’s responsibility under this law, please find the model notification attached.

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control, Wisconsin has the 13th highest rate of suicides for youth age 10-19 in the nation, and the 5th highest rate for middle school students age 10-14 (for years 1999-2005). We lose an average of one youth each week to suicide, it is the 2nd most common cause of death among youth, and is the cause of almost 1 in 5 deaths. Clearly we have a serious challenge, one that will take the efforts of many adults to resolve.

I encourage you to use this model notice with all of your staff members; anyone who has a relationship with a student should be able to recognize suicide warning signs and know how to respond. There are a variety of changes you could easily make to customize this model notice, including the addition of any local resources you may be aware of. Consider making contacts with and providing information on local mental health providers, your county mental health board and available crisis services, and local chapters of the organizations already listed. None of the material is covered by copyright; you are free to put the notice on your district letterhead, and to make copies or forward it electronically to anyone, including parents.

Please also consider contacting your CESA to determine when a suicide prevention workshop will be scheduled for your area. A flyer describing the training is also included with this message. By making staff aware of this serious problem, providing information about appropriate actions to take to prevent suicide attempts, and intervening in those cases where youth are suicidal, we can reduce the number of young people who die by suicide each year.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.