

# MODEL SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICY ON SUICIDE PREVENTION

THE **TREVOR** PROJECT




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PSYCHOLOGISTS

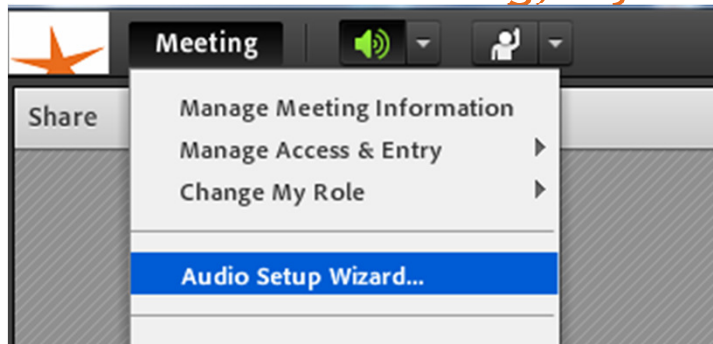


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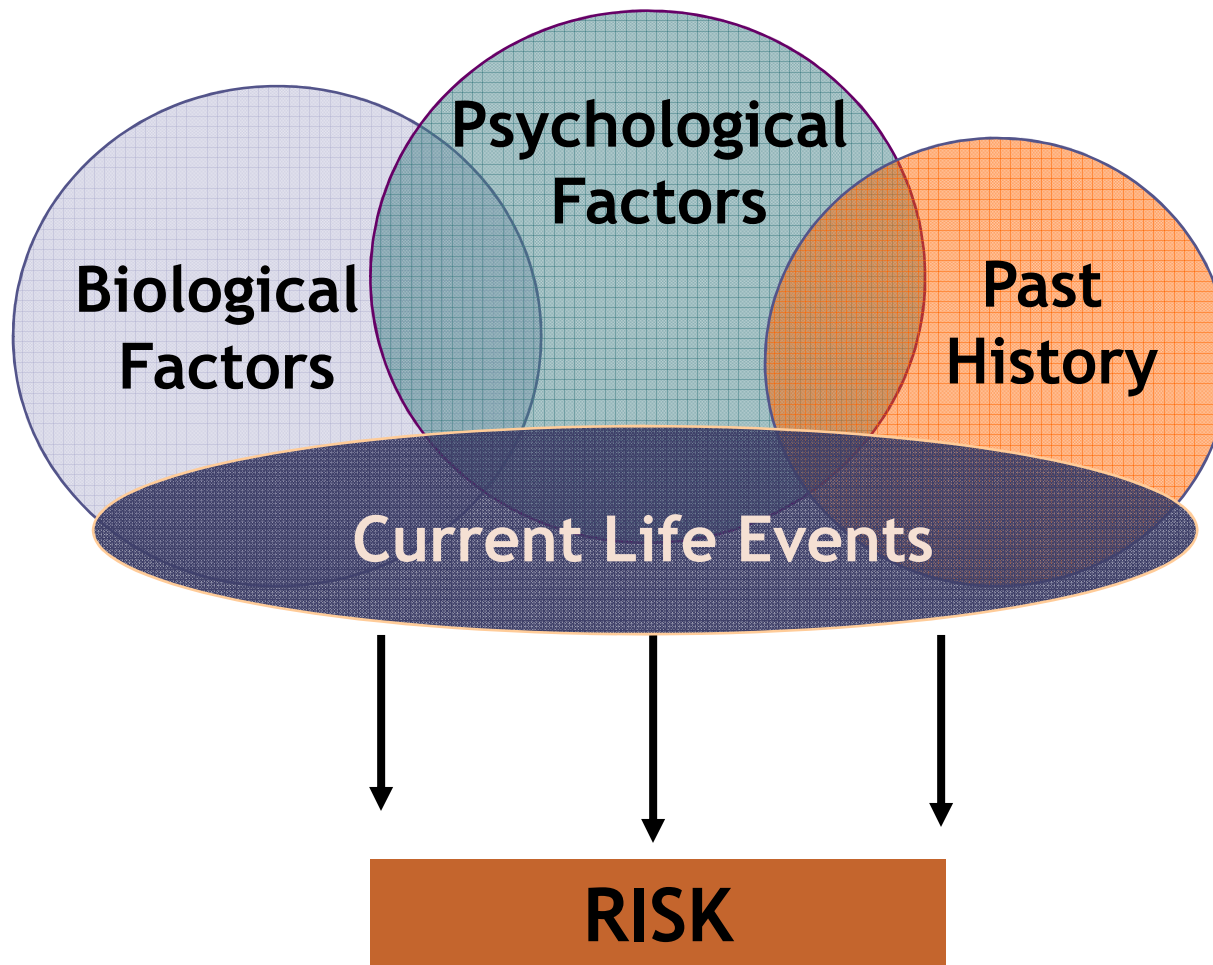
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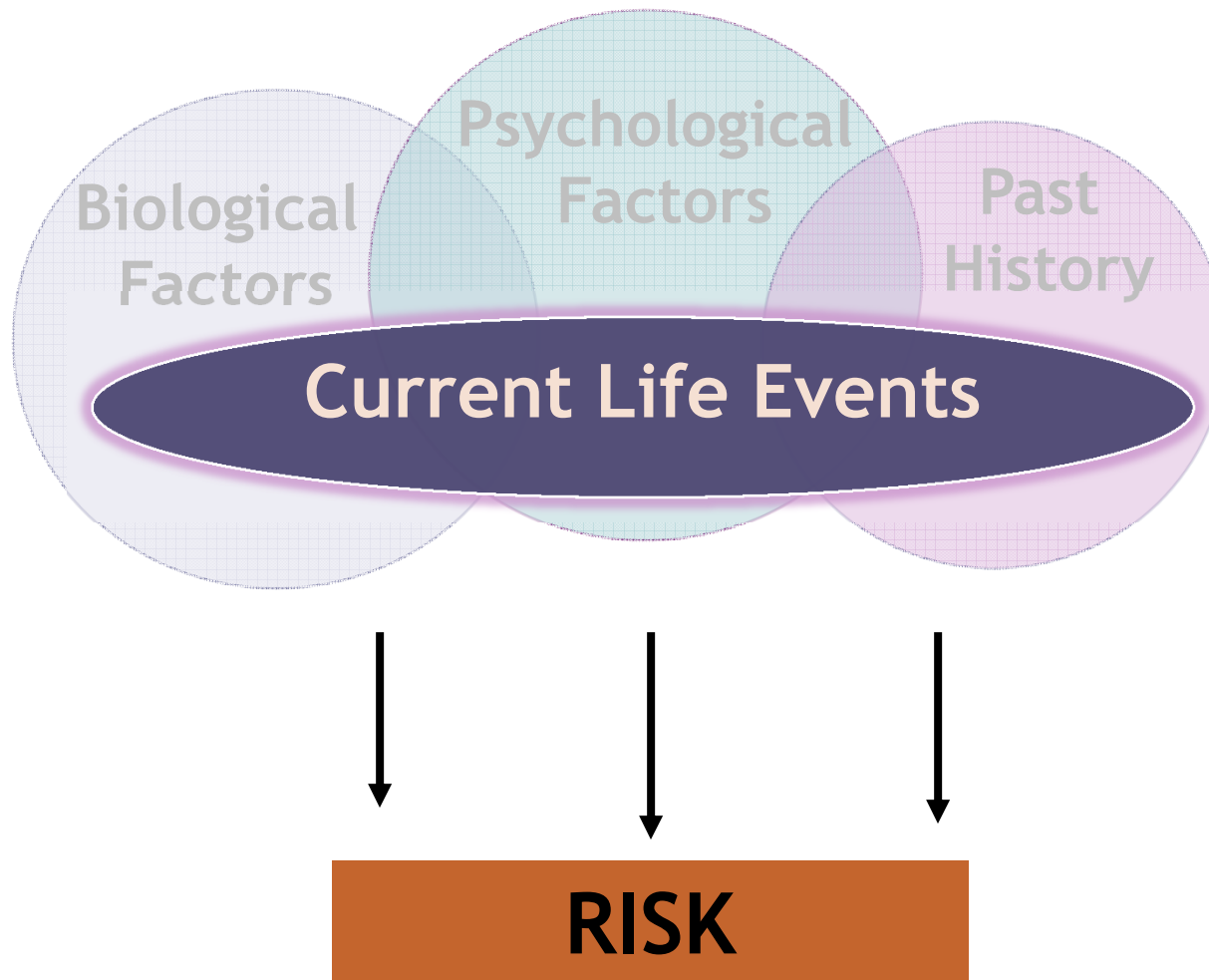
# Outline

- Understanding the Problem of Youth Suicide
- Purpose of the Model Policy
- Model Policy Components
- Ways to Advocate for the Model

# Interacting Variables → risk



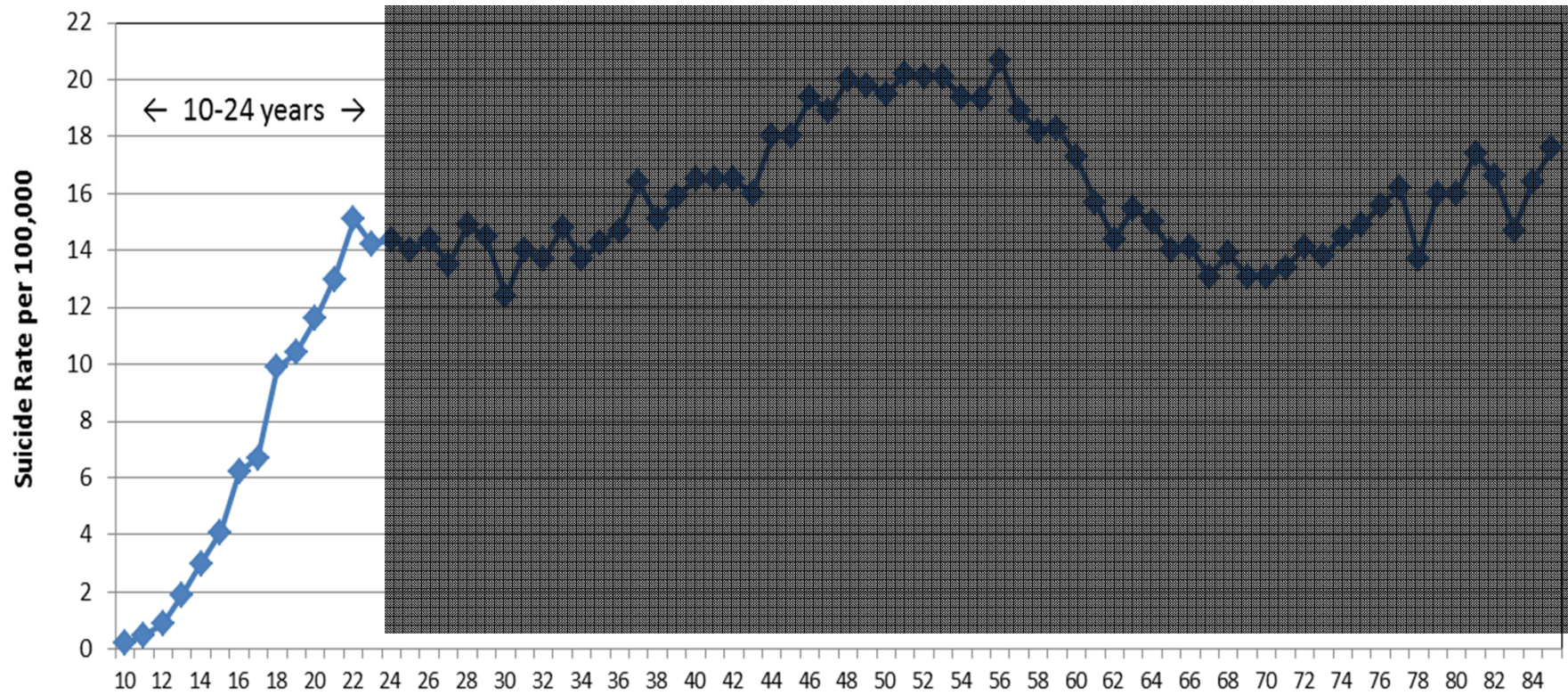
# Interacting Variables → risk



# Understanding the Problem of Suicide

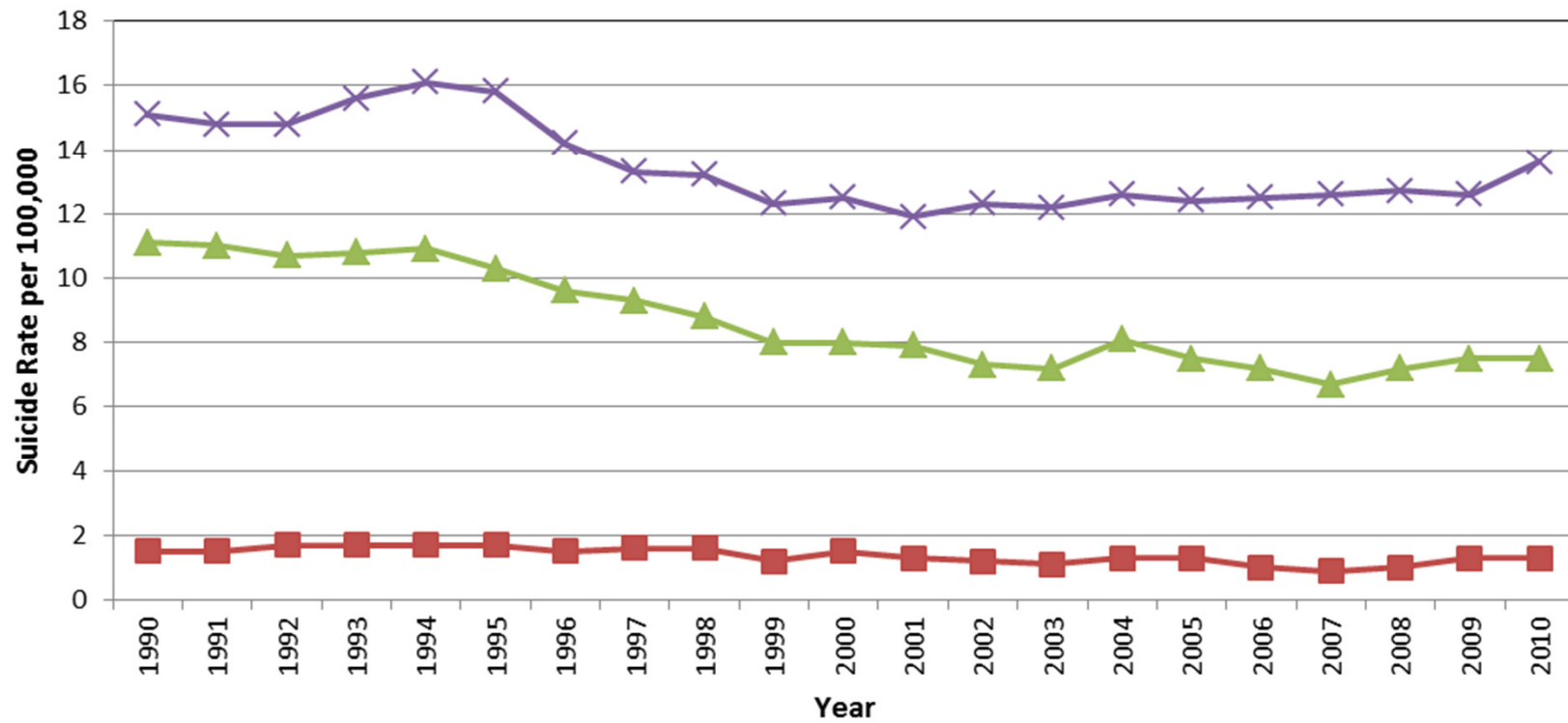
- In 2010, 38,364 people in the U.S. died by suicide
- U.S. suicide rate = 12.1 (12 suicides for every 100,000 people)
- 4,867 people under age 25 died by suicide (12.7% of total)
- Suicide rate for youth (ages 15-24) = 10.1
- Suicide is the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults (ages 15-24)

U.S. Suicide Rates by Age Group 2010



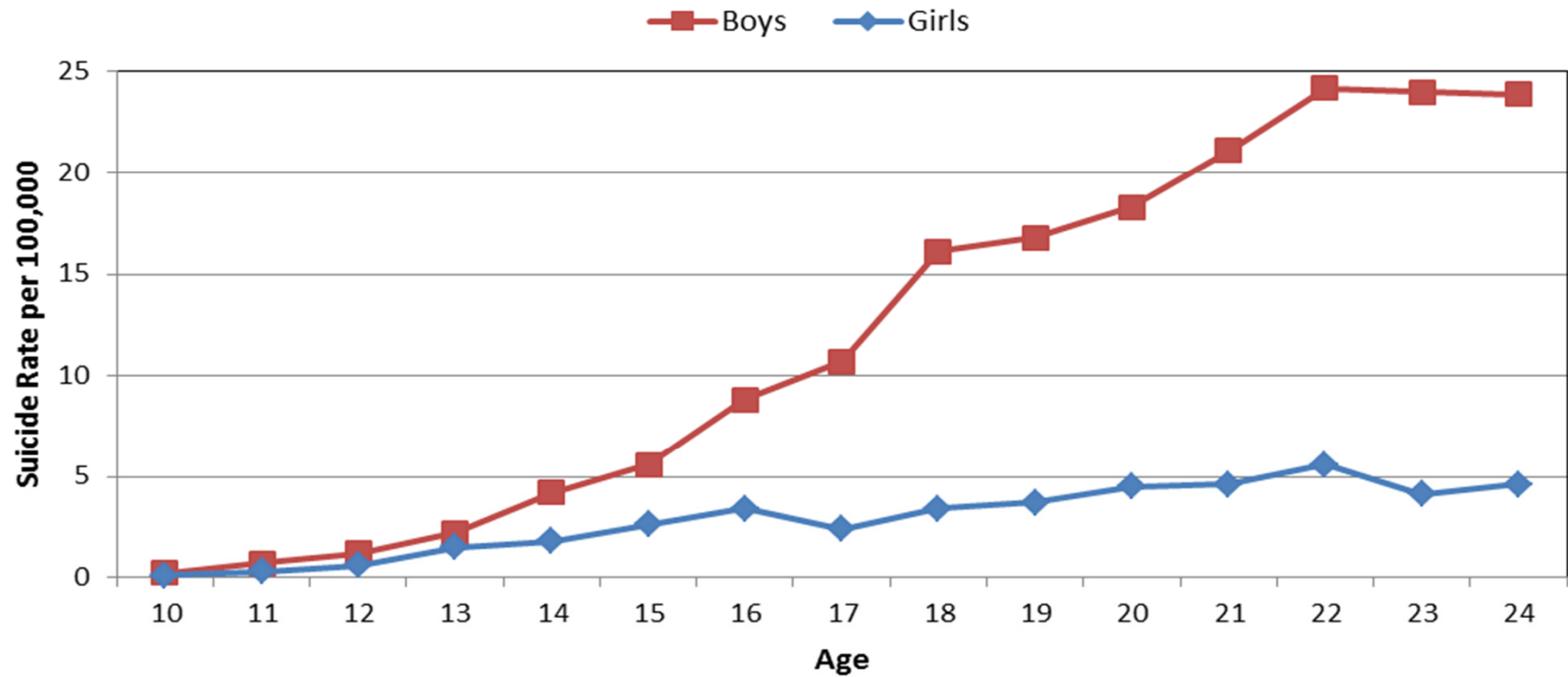
### U.S. Youth Suicide Rates by Age Group

■ 10 to 14 ▲ 15 to 19 × 20 to 24





### U.S. Youth Suicide Rates Age by Gender



# Youth Suicide Rates by Race/Ethnicity (Ages 15-24)

Ethnic Group	Suicide Rate per 100,000
American Indian/Alaskan Native	20.9 per 100,000
White	11.4 per 100,000
Asian/Pacific Islander	7.3 per 100,000
Black	6.6 per 100,000
Hispanic	4.7 per 100,000

\*Number of suicides per 100,000  
population, 2010

# Suicide Attempts

- Each year, 150,000 youth aged 10-24 receive medical care for self-inflicted injuries
- 30x the number who die by suicide
- 9.3% of girls and 4.6% of boys in grades 9-12 report attempting suicide in last 12 months
- Reports of suicide attempts are 2-6x more frequent among youth who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, than among heterosexual youth; no data on GLB suicide *deaths*



# Suicidal Ideation

- “Ideation” - thinking about or planning for suicide
- About 14% of students in grades 9-12 - 1 of every 7 - report seriously considering suicide in the past year
- About 11% - 1 of every 9 - report making a suicide plan



# Schools Can Help

## Key tasks

- Identify students at risk
- Refer to a mental health professional for assessment and evaluation, according to school's protocol or policy

Teachers and other school personnel can help if they know how to recognize “risk” in youth, and subsequently what to do once risk is identified.

This [Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention](#) can help guide schools in undertaking these key tasks.

# Purpose of the Model



# Why is Suicide Prevention Policy Necessary?

- The vast majority of schools have no policy in place or only a partial policy
- Schools and the media need to respond to suicide appropriately to avoid suicide contagion and encourage students and families to seek help
- Having a policy in place can help educators feel more confident in intervening with a student they believe to be at risk
- Nearly every school will need to deal with this issue at some point

Age Group	Percentage
18-24	35%
25-34	25%
35-44	15%
45-54	10%
55-64	5%
65-74	3%
75-84	2%
85+	1%







# Model School District Policy

- Model was developed as a tool for school staff, school board members, advocates, parents, and students to develop and implement comprehensive school district policies on suicide prevention
- Employing language from strong local policies throughout the country and the expertise of contributing groups, the model is comprehensive yet modular
- School districts may use to draft new or amend their own district policies based on the district's unique needs

# Drafting Groups



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# Model Policy Components

# General Provisions

The Model includes:

- Sidebars containing information and guidance including:
  - Parental involvement
  - At-risk groups
  - Bullying and suicide
  - Communicating about suicide
- A purpose, general definitions relating to suicide prevention, and the scope of the policy.



# Prevention

The policy requires:

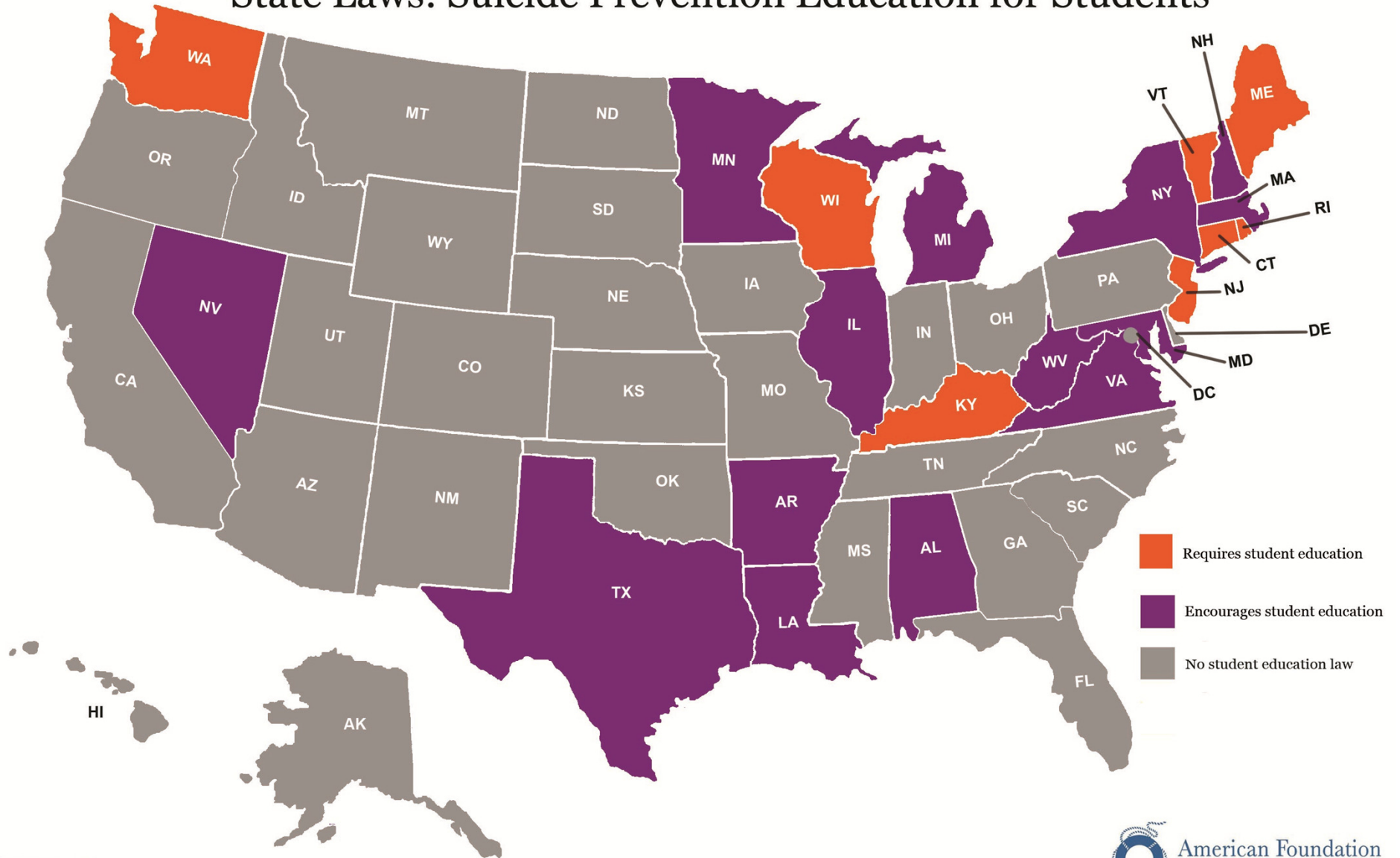
- Designation of suicide prevention coordinators at the district and school level to help implement and be points of contact
- Annual professional development for staff on warning signs and how to respond, with specific attention to at-risk populations such as LGBTQ youth
- Additional training for school employed mental health professionals
- Developmentally appropriate content for students included in health curriculum

Age Group	Percentage
18-24	100%
25-34	100%
35-44	100%
45-54	100%
55-64	100%
65-74	100%
75-84	100%
85+	100%



January 2014

## State Laws: Suicide Prevention Education for Students



January 2014



# Intervention

- Procedure for assessment and referral for at-risk youth
- Procedures for handling in-school suicide attempts and out of school suicide attempts
- Re-entry procedure for students returning after mental health crisis
- Section on parental notification and involvement





# Postvention

- Procedures for the crisis team to follow after they become aware of a suicide death
- Focus on properly handling interactions with the family, communication with the community, and avoiding risk of suicide contagion
- Plan for facilitation external communication with media, etc., in a way that is responsible



# Resources

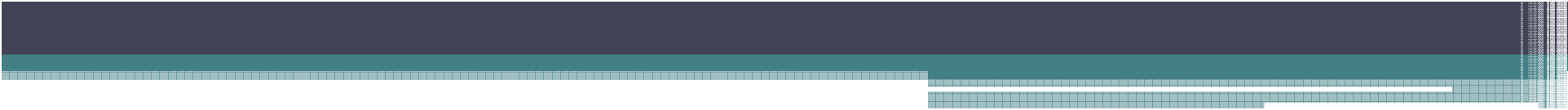
- Assortment of resources provided, including:
  - Toolkits and guides on prevention
  - Relevant research
  - School programs
  - Crisis services
  - Guides on working with media
- Sample simplified version of policy for student handbooks

# Ways to Advocate for the Model

# What is ADVOCACY?

- Advocacy is the "act of **pleading** or **arguing in favor of** something, such as a cause, idea, or policy." (American Heritage Dictionary, 2003)
- Key issues:
  - Pleading
  - Arguing
  - Taking a position for or against






# Types of Advocacy Important to Suicide Prevention

- Professional
  - Helping people know who you are, what you do, and why it matters.
- Legislative
  - Helping policy makers understand the importance of suicide prevention and infuse the proper staff and services into law and regulation so that it helps students and schools.



# Professional/Legislative Advocacy

- It is our responsibility to advocate for those who can't, or won't speak for themselves.
- School-employed mental health professionals must be available to provide mental health services to students in schools.
- Schools must collaborate with community services to meet the needs of students and families.
- Advocacy and communication may feel outside your comfort zone; you can do it.
- There are some fairly basic skills and strategies that contribute to effective advocacy and communication.



There are two general ways to advocate for the Model at the local level:

- Direct advocacy with decision makers
- Demonstrating value through action

**Good communication is essential to both.**



# Educate Yourself and Others

- Why is suicide prevention important and necessary?
- Who should be involved in suicide prevention efforts?
- Who do we talk to about what to do?
- How do we educate others about the roles of school employed mental health professionals?
- What does the research indicate?





# Set Goals

- Policy implementation local level
- Creation of a suicide prevention task force
- Funding/time off for professional development
- Increase of school-employed mental health professionals
- Increased collaboration among school and community services

# Key Advocacy Activities:

- Communicate with members, administrators, and elected officials
- Actively participate in coalitions with allies
- Coordinate efforts
- Train and empower grassroots advocates
- Assist with the development of legislation or administrative policy
- Testify at hearings or present at board meetings



# Working With Elected Officials

- Prepare talking points and distribute handout/packet
- Try to make a personal connection
- **Listen. Listen. Listen!** Find out what issues your official is concerned about, and offer to help if appropriate
- Personalize your Story/Put a “face” on every issue
- Invite elected officials to visit your school (Be sure and get permission)
- Offer to assist in writing and reviewing proposed testimony
- Recognize the accomplishments of elected officials
- Thank them for their time and service



# Strategies for School-Level Advocacy

- Engage parents and families
- Be mindful of the time of year
- Provide data/examples from neighboring schools or districts
- Present your case at a staff meeting
- Be persistent



# Strategies for District Level Advocacy

- Familiarize yourself with decision makers
- Proactively provide data
- Ask for an in-person meeting with key officials
- Speak at a school board meeting
- Invite decision makers to visit local schools
- Continuously follow-up



# Utilizing your Grassroots

- Keep them informed
- Provide periodic opportunities for engagement
- Generate concrete action steps for mobilization
- Provide specific messaging and resources to be used
- Coordinate with allied groups
- Provide feedback
- Be creative
- *Remember: Constituents have the most powerful voices*

# Questions?

Model Policy is available at: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/model-school-policy>

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