


# GARRETT LEE SMITH: SCHOOL RESPONSE TO SUICIDE

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# NOTICE

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# PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- **Part One: Response to All Student Deaths - Crisis Team Organization**
  - **Part Two: Collaborations and Ongoing Interventions**
  - **Part Three: Scenarios**
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# FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



- 10th largest school division in the country. Primarily suburban, 407 square miles
- Diverse student population
  - 189,000 students, 200 schools
  - 29% free/reduced lunch
  - 10% Black, 25% Hispanic
  - 20% Asian, 39% White
  - 5% multiracial
  - 48% speak a language other than English in the home

# NOTIFICATION

- SRO liaison commander to Communication Office which coordinates with police Public Information Office
- Communication Office notifies administrators, school board, leadership team, crisis coordinator, Office Safety and Security
- Principal (or designee) reaches out to affected family and talks about what information can be shared and how school can support


# PLANNED RESPONSE

- Student deaths for any reason can be traumatic for a school community. To the extent possible, our response to death by suicide mirrors our response to any death
- Central Crisis Manager consults with principals whenever there is a death of a student, teacher, or other critical event that impacts the school
- Principal may request a team, or may decide that the school clinical team can handle the response
  - In 2016-17, >60 incidents, 30 required a crisis team response

# REGIONAL CRISIS TEAMS

- 5 teams per region, 25 teams total-rotate teams “on call”
  - 6-8 psychologists and social workers leave their assigned schools and go to impacted school
  - School-based counselors, psychologists, and social workers work side by side and are responsible for follow up after the immediate response
- Team leaders - PREPaRE certified and experienced

# COMMUNICATION

- Principal, working with Communications and Crisis Team, develops communication to students, teachers and broader parent community
  - Communications Office handles media; if they arrive on school property, security and crisis office work together to maintain control
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# CRISIS TEAM RESPONSE

- Assigned roles
  - Parent contact/communication/teacher briefing
  - Group and individual counseling in library and counseling suite
  - Follow student schedule
  - “Sweepers” to look for distressed youth at lockers, restrooms, outside building
  - Lists of students to monitor and parent calls

# ISSUES MORE COMMON WITH SUICIDE

- Limited details (VA law restricting information from police unless they have written permission from parents)
- Stronger sense of guilt
  - Students/adults may feel they missed signs
  - Students/adults may feel their treatment of person caused the suicide
- Adult discomfort/uncertainty about memorials and other student led actions

# SPIKE IN YOUTH SUICIDE 2013 AND 2014

- Each year some youth die by suicide in Fairfax
- In 2013-2014 there was a spike in the number of youth suicides.
  - One high school experienced 7 deaths in 3 years (2012, 2013, 2014)
  - Across the system 11 additional youth died in 2013-2014
  - Four of these deaths occurred in two weeks in February 2014
  - Increased attention to alumni and community suicides age 18-24 added to sense of urgency

# 2014 RESPONSE

- Community meeting with parents - school, county, and community partners
- SERV grant for 6 months
- Developed and implemented student support team to review attendance and student activity; at risk students assigned to individuals for weekly check-in
- National experts provided consultation and PD with executive leadership, administrators, teachers, students, clinical and crisis teams, webinars for parents
- County and state health departments provided guidance on best practices

# CDC EPI AID

- Public Health analysis of data to identify trends and opportunities for prevention and earlier intervention
- Recommended more outward communication about prevention/postvention actions
- Led to better surveillance tools
- Suicide review team
- Healthy Minds Fairfax

# ONGOING STUDENT AND FAMILY OUTREACH

- Crisis Text numbers posted on every school website, and shared via direct email
- Keep in Touch messages sent to parents and students prior to school holidays and exams, providing school and community resource
- Josh Anderson Foundation Our Minds Matter clubs and Student Advisory Committee (SAC) engaged to develop student led mental health initiatives to reduce stigma and open conversation with adults
- Over 22,000 teachers, coaches, staff completed gatekeeper training: Kognito:*At Risk*

# PARTNERSHIP ACROSS COMMUNITY



- Community Services Board
- Neighborhood and Community Services
- Parent groups- Community of Solutions
- NAMI, Josh Anderson Foundation, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

# NEXT STEPS

- Exploring ways to “pre-certify” private practice providers to assist in crisis response or depression screenings
- New questions on Youth Survey regarding stress
- Standardized Suicide Risk Assessment
- Return to Learn Protocol
- Project AWARE and Climate Transformation grant
- Short-Term Behavioral Health Service Program
- Behavioral Health System of Care Blueprint



Questions?

