

Student Suicide: Mental Health and Legal Response

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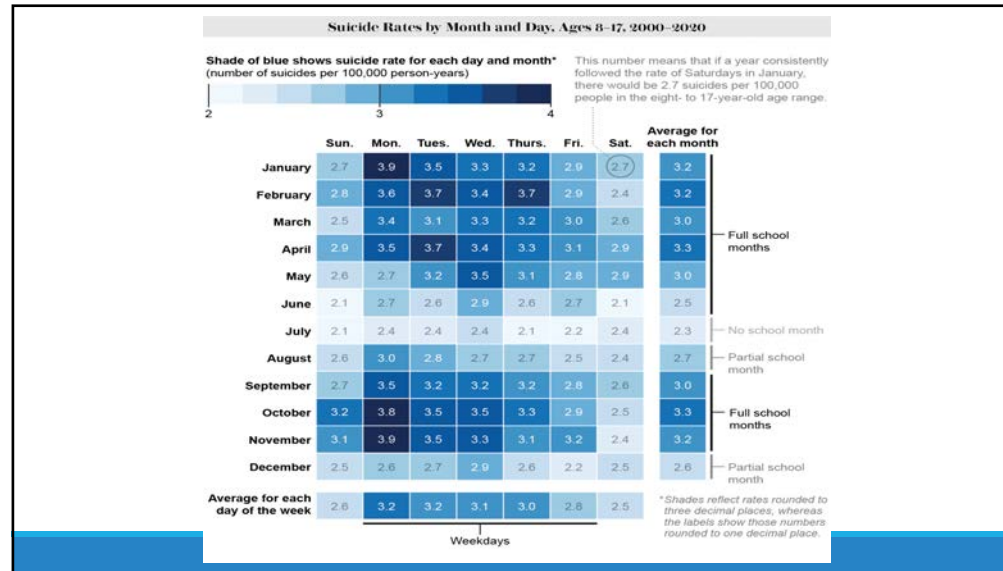


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Student Suicide on the Rise

- Sobering statistics nationwide
- Increasingly likely for very young students
- Suicides more likely during the school year

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Outcries

- Outcries differ, especially given student age
 - Younger students may lack vocabulary to identify feelings
- Outcry may not be made to teacher or counselor
 - Critical to train all staff on campus to recognize and respond to outcries
 - A “trusted adult” for every student
- Outcry may not be specific to suicide
 - Some courts deem repeated reports of bullying to suffice

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Suicide Contracts

- Controversial practice – not recommended
- Little empirical evidence supports contracts as effective tools to prevent suicide.
- Use of a suicide contract implies that the school counselor will ensure the student's safety, or of a binding agreement generally.
- Suicidal person is often not competent to sign a contract.
- Use of such suicide contracts may open district up to liability it could have otherwise avoided.

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Student Privacy & Reporting Requirements

- District staff = professional reporters of abuse under TEC
 - 48 hours from when reasonably suspected abuse/neglect
- Counseling staff have additional ethical requirements
 - Generally, counselors required to keep confidentiality
 - Risk of harm trumps confidentiality

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