



Student Mental Health and Support Referral Policy (SB 153)

Purpose

This policy supports local educational agencies (LEAs) in meeting the requirements of California Education Code (EC) Sections 49428.1 and 49428.2. It establishes clear, equitable, and legally compliant procedures for referring students who may need mental health, social-emotional, behavioral, or community-based support. This policy applies to all students in grades 7–12 and is intended to ensure compliance with California Education Code sections 49428.1 and 49428.2 regarding student mental health support and referral processes.

The Cottonwood School Board recognizes the importance of students' mental and emotional well-being in achieving academic and personal success. The Superintendent or designee shall provide strategies and services that reduce stigma, promote access to support, and build student resilience, including digital resilience, social connection, and coping skills.

The Superintendent or designee shall collaborate with school mental health professionals, county behavioral health agencies, psychologists, social workers, and community organizations to strengthen mental health services and develop an integrated support plan.

TCS will emphasize prevention by fostering student connectedness, building trusted relationships, teaching conflict resolution skills, and ensuring the prompt investigation of bullying, intimidation, harassment, or discrimination.

Definitions

Referral: A formal process through which school personnel connect a student or family to appropriate services based on identified needs. TCS utilizes an Urgent Student Support process for all students.

School-Based Services: Supports are provided within TCS, including counseling, psychological services, behavioral interventions, and social-emotional learning resources.

Community-Based Services: Supports provided by external agencies, including mental health services, crisis intervention, and youth-serving organizations.

Threat Assessment Team: A multidisciplinary team consisting of administrators, school counselors, and mental health professionals, which may include a counselor, wellness coordinator, or administrator, responsible for assessing and responding to student safety concerns.

Guiding Principles

- **Student-Centered:** Student safety, dignity, and well-being guide all decisions.
- **Equitable Access:** All students receive timely, culturally responsive support.
- **Confidentiality:** Referral information is handled in accordance with state and federal privacy laws.
- **Collaboration:** TCS, families, and community partners work together to support each student.

Threat Assessment Team Procedures

Prior to implementation, the School shall ensure that training is provided by the County Office of Education to administrators, school counselors, and mental health therapists regarding the Level One Student Threat Assessment process. Training shall include the legal purpose and framework of student threat assessment, the composition and responsibilities of the multidisciplinary Level One Team, procedures for reviewing and investigating reported concerns, required methods for gathering information, proper completion and maintenance of assessment and interview documentation, identification of appropriate interventions, and criteria for determining when a Level Two Student Threat Assessment is necessary.

Referral Process

Identification of Need

A referral may be initiated when a student:

- Shows signs of emotional distress or mental health concerns
- Requests mental health or personal support
- Demonstrates behavioral, academic, or attendance changes
- Expresses or exhibits indicators of suicidal ideation, self-harm, or thoughts of harm to others

Who May Initiate a Referral

Referrals may be initiated by:

- Teachers
- School counselors or psychologists
- Administrators
- Classified staff who directly observe student behavior
- Parents/guardians or caregivers
- The student, through verbal request, written request, or other accessible means, made available at the school site

Referral Submission

- All referrals must be documented using the School's Urgent Student Support form.

Review and Response

Designated staff, which may include a school counselor, school psychologist, wellness coordinator, or site administrator, shall:

- Review referrals within one school day of submission
- Determine appropriate action, including school-based supports, community-based referrals, or emergency response
- Initiate support services as soon as practicable based on the level of need
- Communicate next steps to the referring party when appropriate and permitted by law

Levels of Referral

Referrals may be classified as urgent or non-urgent.

- **Urgent referrals** include concerns related to imminent risk of harm to self or others, suicidal ideation, severe emotional distress, or immediate safety concerns and require same-day response.
- **Non-urgent referrals** include emerging mental health, behavioral, social-emotional, academic, or attendance concerns that require timely but not immediate intervention.

Parent/Guardian Notification and Engagement

Parents/guardians will be notified unless:

- Notification poses a safety risk to the student, or
- The student is legally entitled to confidentiality under state or federal law.

When appropriate, families will be provided with information, resources, and opportunities to collaborate in supporting the student's mental health and well-being.

Emergency Protocol

In case of an immediate crisis:

- Contact emergency services or behavioral crisis teams
- Notify site administration
- Follow the LEA crisis response plan

Community Partnerships

TCS maintains active agreements with community mental health and social service agencies to ensure:

- Clear communication pathways
- Defined scopes of service
- Coordinated timelines and expectations

Documentation and Record-Keeping

- All referrals are logged in a secure system.
- Records must comply with FERPA, HIPAA (when applicable), and state privacy laws.

Accessibility and Language Access

All referral processes, notifications, and informational materials shall be provided in a manner that is accessible to students and their families, including translation, interpretation, and accommodations for individuals with disabilities as required by law.

Training Requirements

Youth Behavioral Health Training

The Superintendent or designee shall ensure:

Through required virtual training(s), all certificated employees and at least 40% of classified staff with direct student contact in grades 7–12 complete youth behavioral health training in accordance with EC 49428.2.

Early Identification Training

Staff will receive instruction on:

- Recognizing early signs of mental or behavioral health concerns
- Identifying risk factors and warning signs of suicidal intent
- Responding to traumatic stress
- Safely de-escalating crisis situations
- Linking students with effective services, referrals, and supports

Cultural Competency Training

Certificated employees serving grades 7–12 shall complete at least one hour of annual training supporting LGBTQ+ students, as required by EC 218.3.

The district shall maintain training records through the online platform provided by the State of California.

Notification Requirements

At least twice each school year, at the beginning of each school year, and at the beginning of the second semester, TCS shall provide information on accessing mental health services through at least two of the following methods:

- Distributing information electronically or in hard copy to parents/guardians and students
- Including information in the parent/guardian handbook and student orientation materials
- Posting information on the school website or social media

Mental Health Awareness Poster Requirements

Each school site serving grades 7–12 must display an age-appropriate, culturally relevant poster including:

- Signs of common mental health challenges (e.g., anxiety, depression, eating disorders, emotional dysregulation)
- School-specific mental health resources and contact information
- Community resources, including hotlines and crisis services
- Positive coping strategies (e.g., mindfulness, grounding techniques, therapy)
- Negative coping strategies to avoid (e.g., substance misuse, self-harm, isolation)

Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

The district shall conduct annual reviews of referral data to:

- Ensure equitable access for all student groups
- Identify trends in student needs
- Improve referral effectiveness and response times

Review findings shall be used by the Superintendent or designee to make adjustments to referral procedures, staff training, and coordination with community mental health providers, as needed, to better meet student needs and maintain compliance with state law.

Legal Authority

This policy is based on:

- California Education Code Section 49428.2
- California Education Code Section 49428.1