

# CATHOLIC BOARD MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY PRIORITIZING YOUTH SUICIDE

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It's a troubling reality and one school boards, sadly, have to deal with.

The Halton Catholic District School Board revealed the mental health and addictions strategy. The multi-year plan will be prioritizing youth suicide in the 2019-2020 school year.

Youth suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people in the country. The board makes use of an approach that aims to build staff capacity, supports specific populations and enhances co-ordination within the system.

"We know that suicide is a complex and emotionally charged subject, and it's a challenging issue for most of us to talk about," said Glenda Brown, the board's

**THE ISSUE:**  
**YOUTH SUICIDE**  
**LOCAL IMPACT:**  
**A MORE RESPONSIVE AND INFORMED SCHOOL SYSTEM**



chief of medical health programming.

"Promoting positive mental health and well-being and ensuring early and equitable access to needed service is part of a comprehensive suicide-prevention strategy. Early identification of children at risk is one of the most important things we can do for our students."

Over the course of the school year, all high school administrators will receive training on the sui-

cide-response protocol. Additional school support staff have also received specialized training.

The new SafeTalk pilot program is being introduced at schools this year. SafeTalk is a program that helps people recognize when someone is thinking about suicide and connects them to support.

"We can't put the full responsibility on teenagers alone to know what to do when a friend or someone they know is suffering. It's challenging for us as adults to know and make discernments, but helping students understand the difference between a struggle and what a crisis is and how to connect them to supports is important," said Brown.

Throughout the year, the board will continue education on a number of mental health areas in-

cluding youth engagement, staff health, new programming and continuous training for support staff.

Patricia Codner, chief social worker with the board, said the approach to mental health needs to be sensitive and adaptable.

"We're dealing with cultural differences, issues of poverty - there's so many intersectionalities that we have to factor in when we're looking at how do we deliver programming or supports to students. It's not cookie-cutter, so our tiered model is a guide because it's evidence-based, in terms of what are the things we can do to scaffold information we are sharing based on the needs of the student," said Codner.

To see the school board's full mental health and addiction strategy, visit [Hcdsb.org](http://Hcdsb.org).



Torstar file photo

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people in Canada.

## STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

Youth suicide has been raised at a number of local forums over the last few years following a handful of devastating incidents. We wanted to take a look at how the school board plans to address what has become a sadly too common tale.

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