

St. Lucie

PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Each Child, Every Day

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Dear Parent or Guardian:

The adolescent years are marked by emotional ups and downs-difficult for youths, their parents, and educators. It is easy to misread depression as normal adolescent turmoil; however, depression (among the most common of mental illnesses) appears to be occurring at a much earlier age. Depression-which is treatable-is a leading risk factor for suicide. In addition, self-injury has become a growing problem among youth.

To proactively address these issues, our high schools are offering depression awareness and suicide prevention training as part of the SOS Signs of Suicide® Prevention Program. The program has proven to be successful at increasing help seeking by students concerned about themselves or a friend and is the only school-based suicide prevention program listed by SAMHSA for its National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices that addresses suicide risk and depression, while reducing suicide attempts. In a randomized control study, the SOS High School Program showed a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40% (BMC Public Health, July 2007).

Our goals in participating in this program are straightforward:

- To help our students understand that depression is a treatable illness
- To explain that suicide is a preventable tragedy that often occurs as a result of untreated depression
- To provide students training in how to identify serious depression and potential suicidality in themselves or a friend
- To impress upon youth that they can help themselves or a friend by taking the simple step of talking to a responsible adult about their concerns
- To help students know whom in the school they can turn to for help, if they need it

Our high schools will be implementing this curriculum with our ninth grade students in Freshman Seminar or as part of the health curriculum. As part of this curriculum, students will also be given a brief depression screener and will be given the opportunity to follow up with a school counselor, school psychologist, or school social worker.

If you do **NOT** want your child to participate in the SOS High School Program in school, please complete the form on the back of this letter and return it to your child's school by Monday, September 9th. If we do not hear from you, we will assume your child has permission to participate in the program.

Sincerely,

Joseph Lezeau

Principal, Fort Pierce Westwood High School



District-wide System Accreditation by AdvancED
The School Board of St. Lucie County is an Equal Opportunity

