

Suicide Prevention Audit Reveals Urgent Need to Better Help California's Youth

Wednesday, September 30, 2020

SACRAMENTO – The California State Auditor Elaine M. Howle, has released a detailed audit report on Youth Suicide Prevention. Assemblymember Rudy Salas (D-Bakersfield), Chair of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, requested this audit following increases in youth suicide throughout California. The State Auditor's report identified a lack of funding for mental health professionals at schools and found that local education agencies (LEAs) have not adopted adequate youth suicide prevention policies and training for their staff.

In California, the annual number of suicides of youth ages 12 to 19 increased by 15 percent from 2009 to 2018. Nationwide, suicide has become one of the leading causes of death among young people. In Kern County, young people's suicide rate is now at an all-time high.

“Any time a young person takes their own life, it is an absolute tragedy that weighs heavily on family, friends, student peers, teachers, and the community as a whole,” said Assemblymember Salas. “The State Auditor's report reaffirms the need for action on the state and local level to better improve suicide prevention efforts. Schools and teachers are on the front lines of suicide prevention and we need to make sure they have the appropriate training and mental health resources to protect our students and prevent future tragedies.”

In 2016, the Legislature passed Assembly Bill (AB) 2246—which required LEAs that serve students in grades 7 to 12 to adopt suicide prevention policies. However, the six LEAs that the Auditor reviewed had not adopted policies and training that fully address suicide prevention efforts and best practices. Consequently, teachers and staff at local schools may be unprepared to identify warning signs or provide resources for at-risk students.

The report also found that of the 1,034 LEAs that submitted personnel information to the Department of Education, none employed the recommended number of school counselors, nurses, social workers, and school psychologists.

The Department of Education, Public Health, and local LEAs have stated that they will implement the recommendations of the State Auditor to seek additional funding to provide mental health services and update policies to improve suicide prevention efforts.

The full report by the State Auditor can be found here.

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Assemblymember Salas represents part of the City of Bakersfield, the cities of Arvin, Hanford, Corcoran, Delano, Lemoore, McFarland, Shafter, Wasco, and the communities of Armona, Avenal, Buttonwillow, Home Garden, Kettleman City, Lamont, Lost Hills, Stratford and Weedpatch.

Read more (<https://a32.asmdc.org/press-releases/20200930-suicide-prevention-audit-reveals-urgent-need-better-help-californias-youth>)

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