Creating Crisis Protocols – Developing a Model Suicide Policy for Schools

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Developing a Model Suicide Policy in Schools

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DEPARTMENT of BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
OFFICE of MENTAL HEALTH

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OVERVIEW

01 Background

02 Youth Suicide Data and the SC Suicide Prevention and Risk Assessment Policy

03 Key Considerations: Policy Development Workflow

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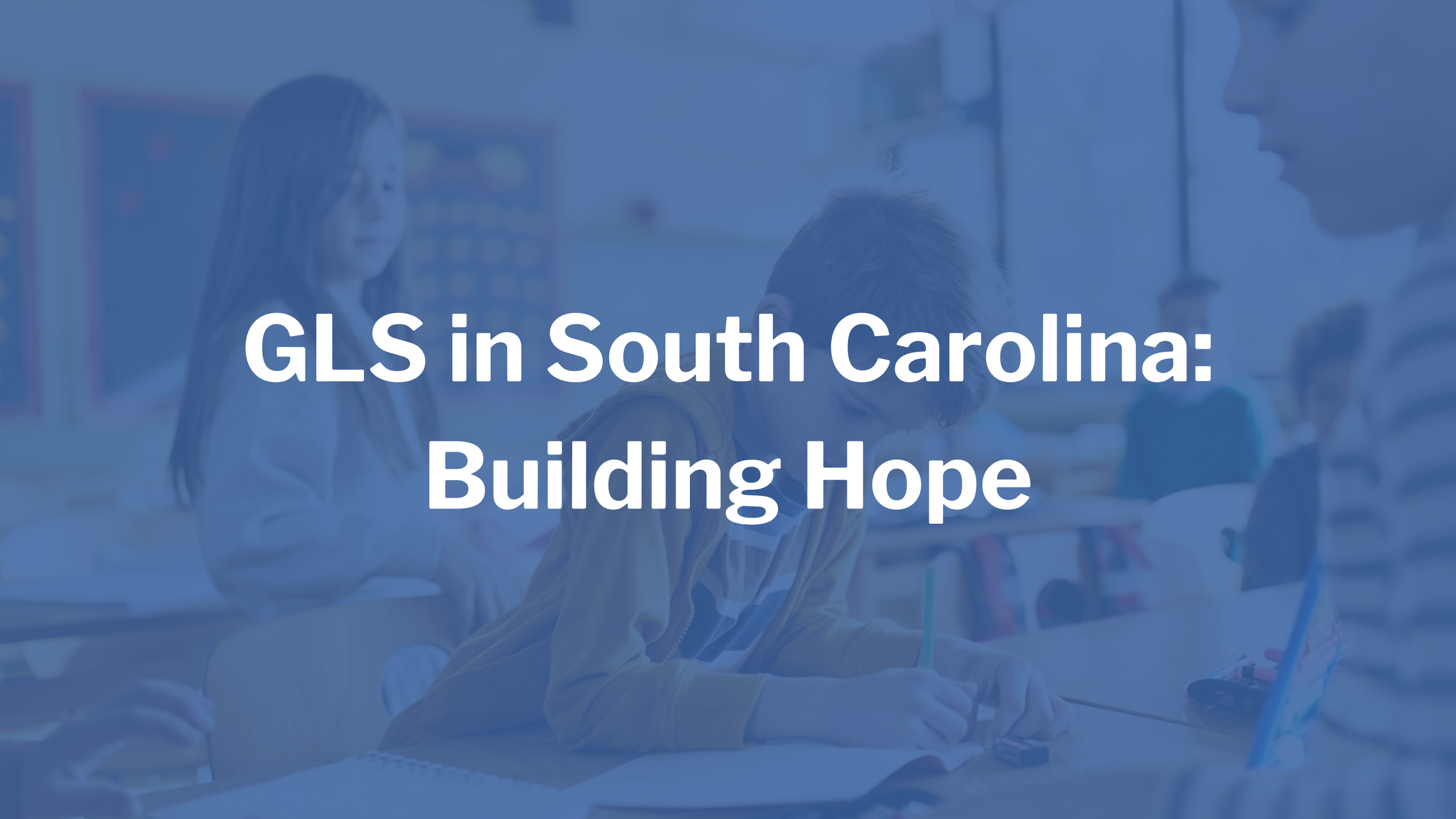
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES (CMHS)

SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH (SMH)

SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAM (SPP)



GLS in South Carolina: Building Hope

Population of Focus

Youth Aged 24 and Under

TRIBAL NATIONS

Tribal Nations are crucial to challenging stigma prevalent in tribal communities and encouraging a culture of reaching out for help.

YOUTH SERVING GROUPS

Organizations that work towards establishing a safe environment for children promote family support and a nurturing environment for children's needs.

SCHOOLS

Schools and universities are ideal environments to implement interventions for suicide thoughts and behaviors in young people.

Areas of Focus

Cherokee School District (CSD)

- 19 schools (12 elementary, 4 middle, 3 high schools)
- 9,360 students

Georgetown County School District (GCSD)

- 18 schools (9 elementary, 5 middle, 4 high schools)
- 10,074 students

Berkeley County School District (BCSD)

- 38 schools (21 elementary, 10 middle, 6 high schools)
- 28,957 students

Building Hope: Statewide Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative

This initiative supports statewide collaboration to strengthen youth suicide prevention through:

- District-level process improvements
- Grade-level mental health education
- Prevention training for youth serving organizations and tribal communities

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SAMHSA

Key Components:

- Strategies for prevention, intervention, and postvention
- Statewide model suicide prevention policy
- Tools and guidance for schools, youth serving organizations, and native populations

EDC.ORG

District Level Training in MTSP

- 4 Community of Practices (CoPs) in Year 2 and Year 3 discussing topics such as:
  - Suicide Prevention in K-5
  - Postvention
  - Suicide Prevention and Social Media
  - Youth Involvement
  - Data Tracking

Technical Assistance

- Expert TAs from EDC support schools in:
  - identifying evidence-informed and culturally responsive resources
  - trainings
  - suicide prevention expertise
- Meet with school districts once a month to provide TA and collect SPARS information.

Environmental Assessments and Action Planning

- EDC asks school districts to review their existing suicide prevention protocols.
  - Environmental assessment reveals any areas of weakness
  - Leads into action planning, to strengthen procedures and workflow.

Process Improvements

- Guidance in continuous quality improvements (CQI) in:
  - monitoring in-school mental health support
  - external referrals to mental health services
- This strengthens best practice interventions for at-risk students.

SOURCES OF STRENGTH

Elementary Curriculum

- K-5 curriculum that is modeled on upstream early intervention for suicide prevention.
- Successive grade-specific lessons that provide youth with skills to identify, communicate, and regulate their emotions.
- Units include:
  - Emotional Regulation
  - Brain and Body Science
  - Transitions

Secondary Model

- Secondary model focuses on youth involvement and peer acceptance with Peer Leaders
  - Encourages student buy-in and fosters positive outcomes between peers
  - Increases likelihood of peer referrals
  - Increased acceptability of seeking help
- Adult Advisors trained in Sources model to support Peer Leaders in messaging campaigns and engaging families and staff/faculty.

SafeSide PREVENTION

Clinician Based Trainings

- Three virtual youth suicide prevention workshops annually, at no-cost to registrants.
- Workshop is focused on applying suicide risk identification and assessment strategies in the clinical setting, with a pediatric lens.
- One in-person workshop hosted every year to strengthen team relationships.

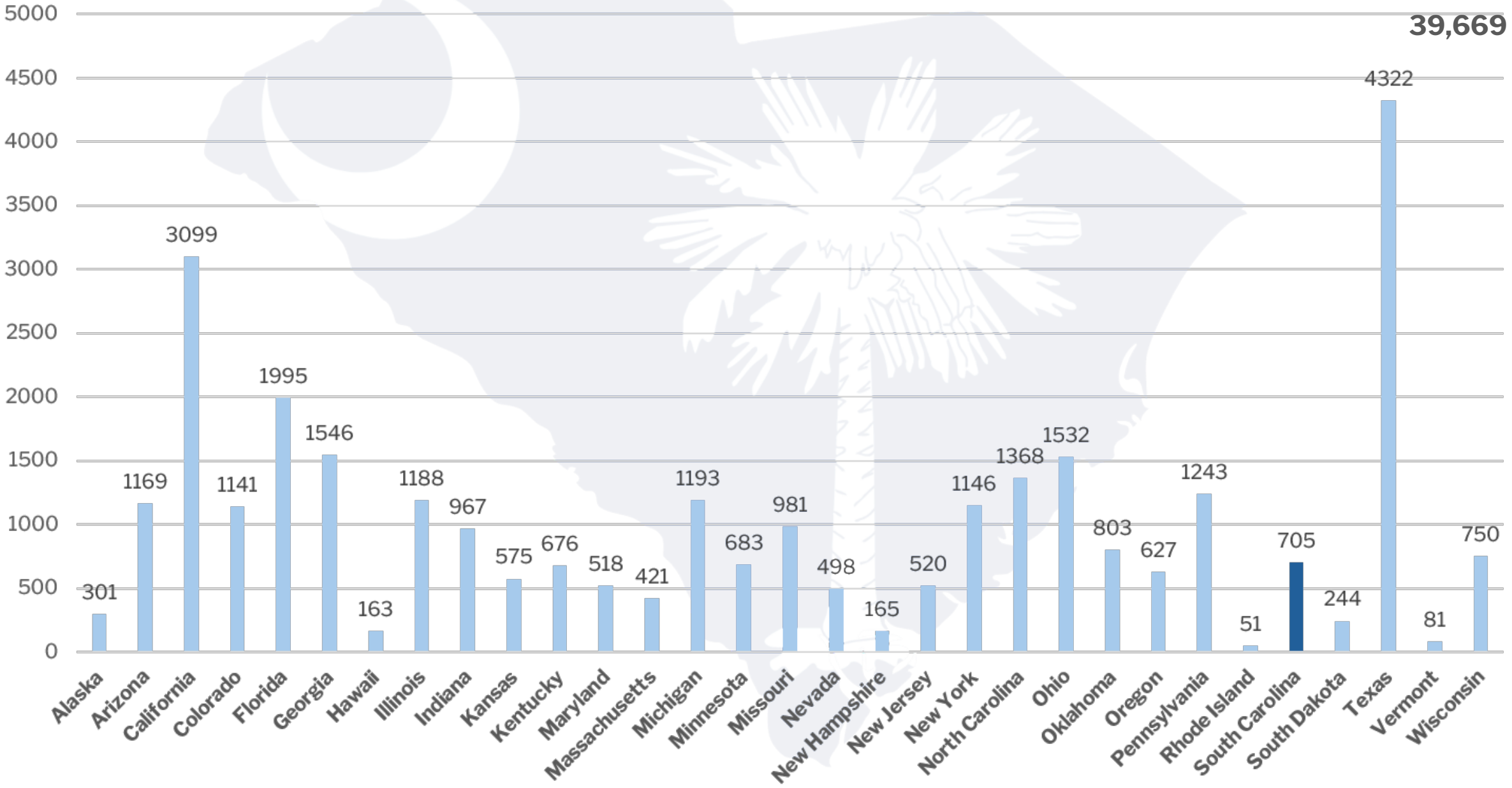
Online Learning Platform

- Workshop registration provides access to SafeSide InPlace Learning, SafeSide's online learning platform. Available resources include:
  - Self-paced workshops and handouts
  - Live learning sessions
  - Community of Practice forums
  - Tools and refreshers

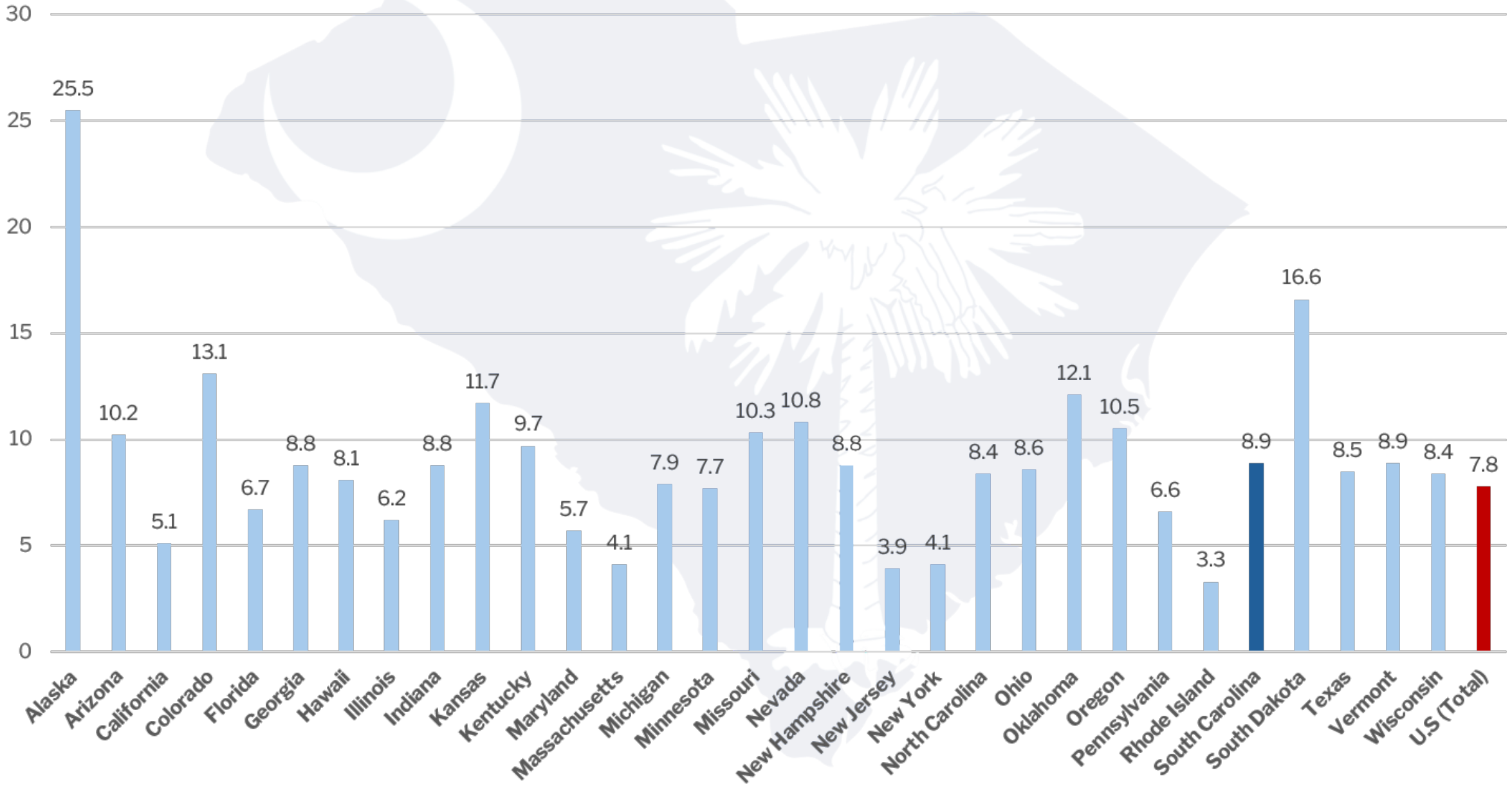
Why Is This Important?

Suicide Deaths (Ages 5-24) 2019 - 2024

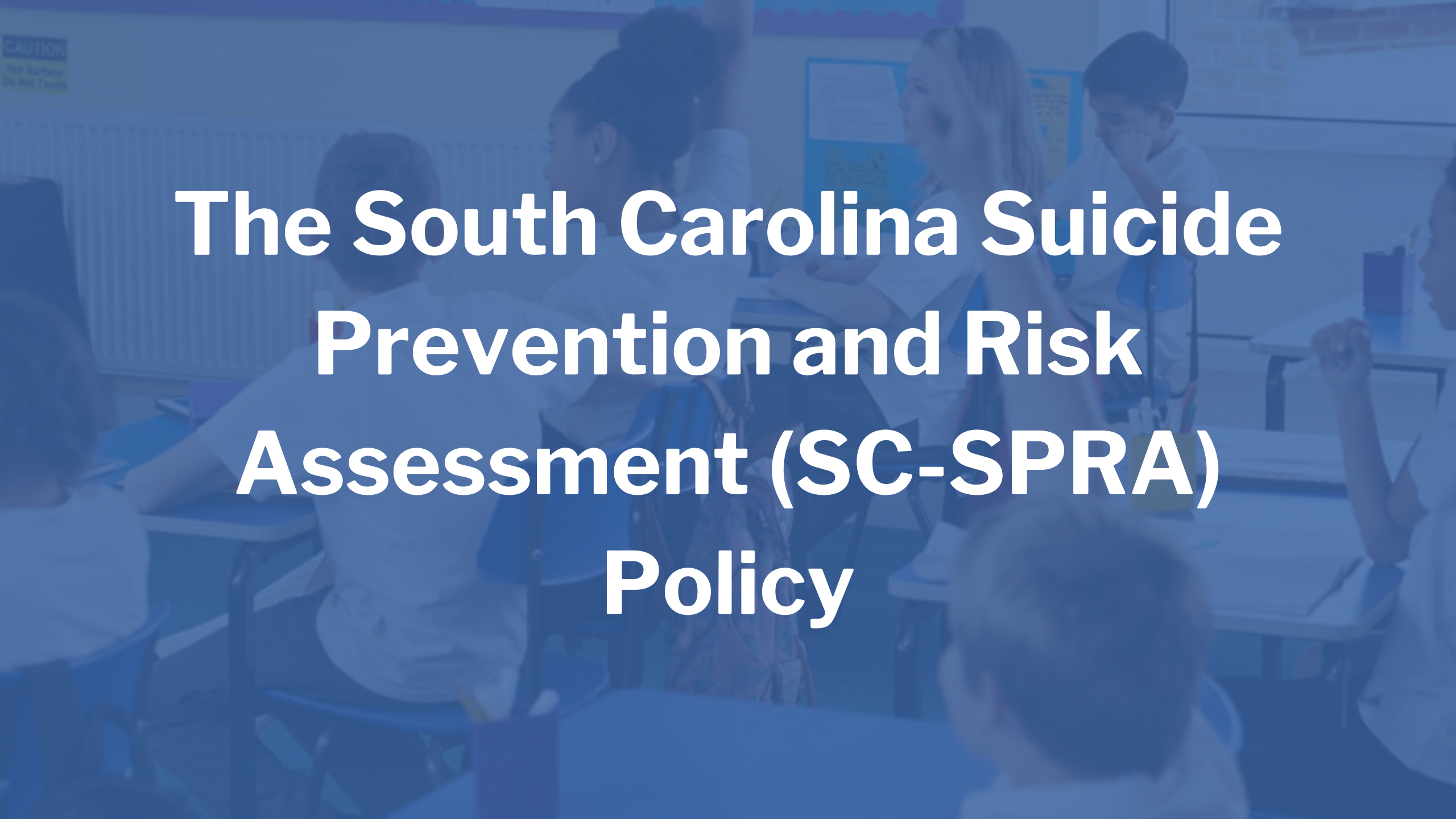
U.S Total Suicide Deaths: 39,669



Suicide Deaths Crude Rate per 100,000 (Ages 5-24) 2019 - 2024



What Can We Do?



The South Carolina Suicide Prevention and Risk Assessment (SC-SPRA) Policy

From SCYSPI to SC-SPRA

201

Previous GLS grantee begins developing youth suicide policy (SCYSPI).

2021

Previous GLS grantee term ends, model policy tabled until further notice...

March 2024

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) released for new GLS term!

September 2024

OMH SPP receives Notice of Award (NOA), from SAMHSA and begins work on Building Hope!

Jan - Sept 2025

Learning Meetings (LMs) held to revamp SCYSPI's efforts.

October 2025

New Building Hope Coordinator begins updating model policy with current best practices and accessibility features.

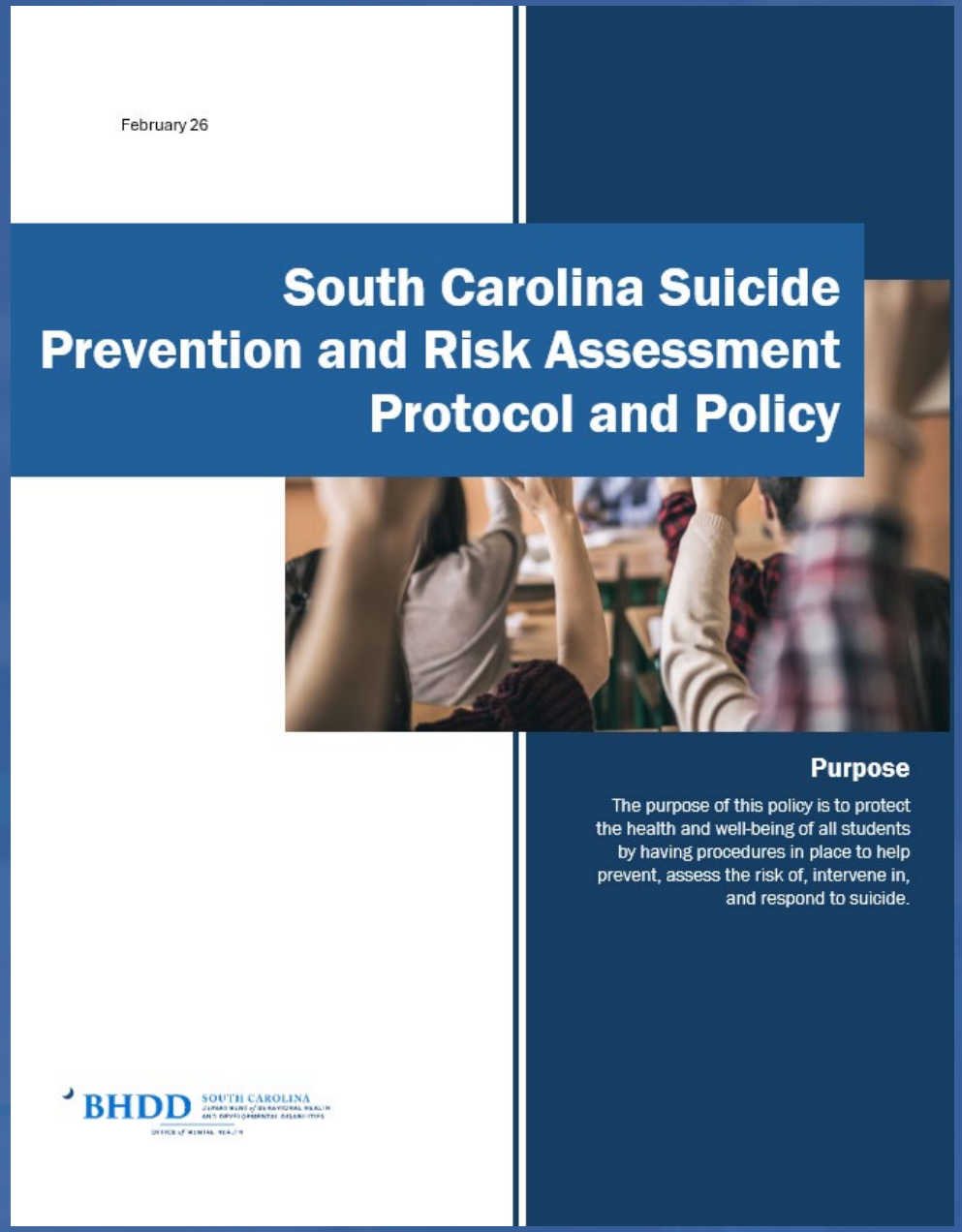
Nov - Mar 2025-26

New model policy is named SC-SPRA, and SPP team prepares to distribute policy.

You are Here!

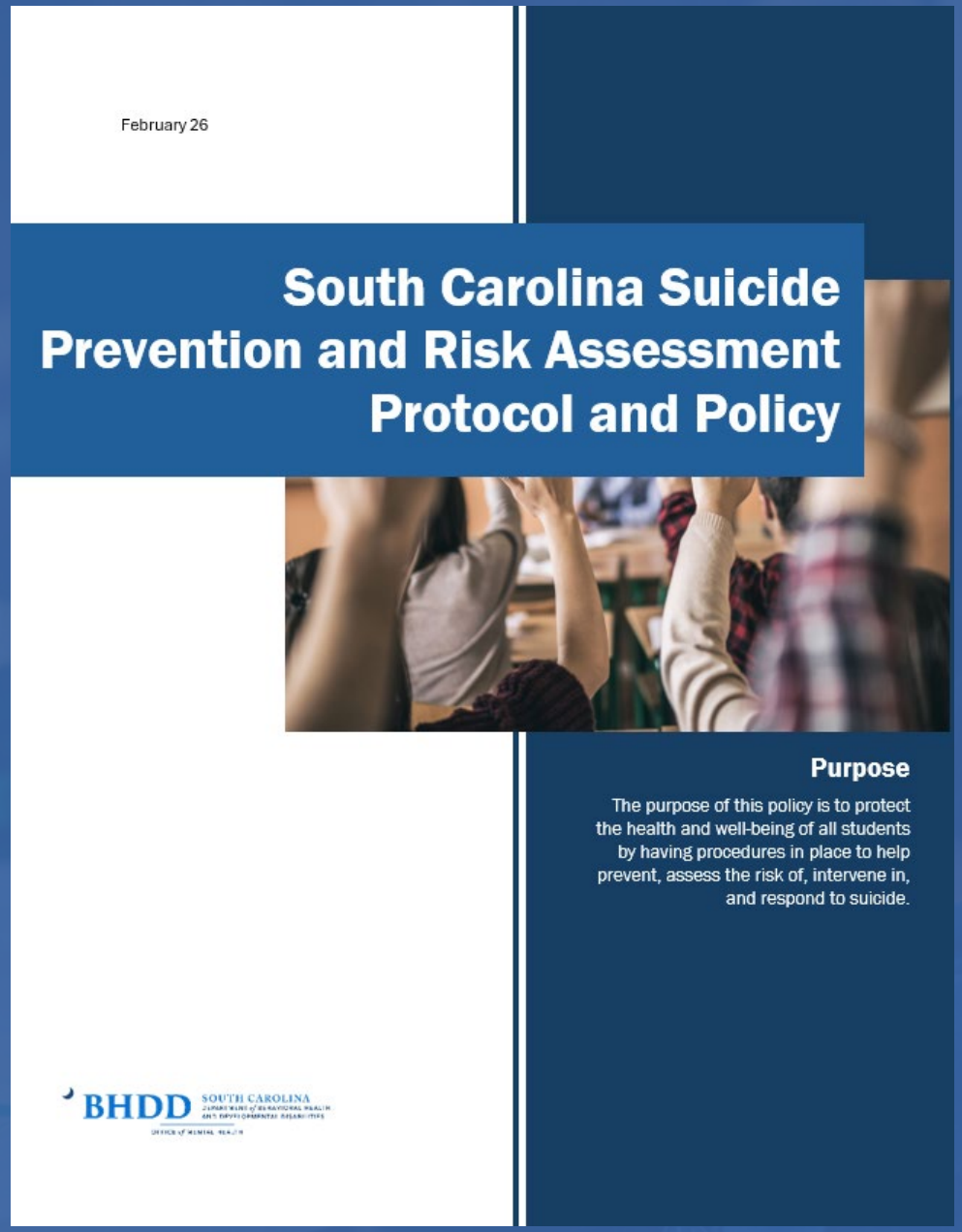
Chapter 1. Definitions and Roles

1. **General Definitions**
2. **Staff Responsibilities and Crisis Response Team**
    a. Crisis Response Team
    b. CRT Leader
    c. CRT Coordinator
    d. Safety Manager
    e. Operations Manager
    f. Community Liaison Manager
    g. Funeral Proceedings Liaison
    h. Media Relations Manager
    i. Social Media Relations Manager



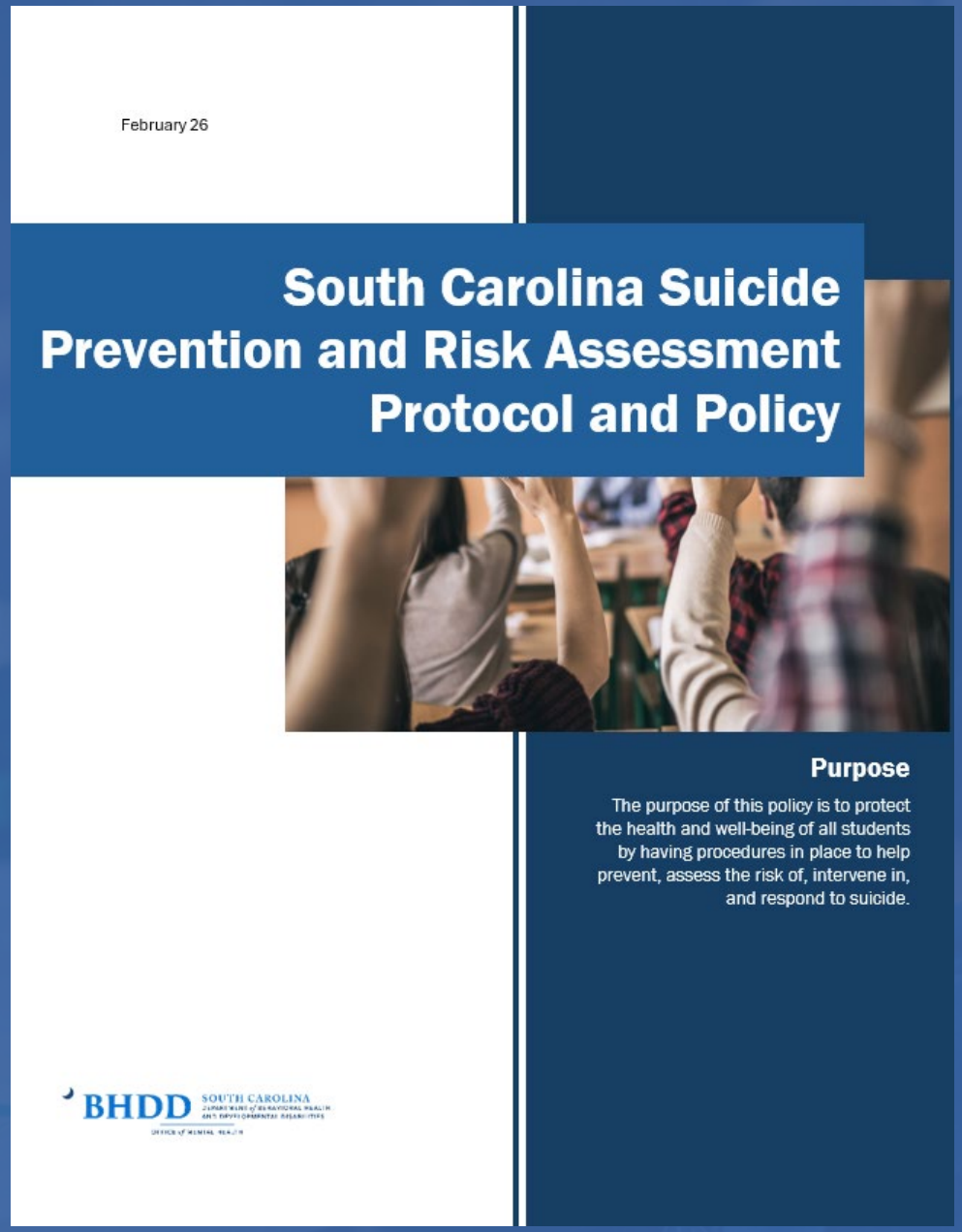
Chapter 2. Prevention

1. **Prevention Education**
    a. School Staff Prevention Education
    b. Student Prevention Education
    c. Parent/Caregiver/Guardian Education
2. **Screening and Assessment**
    a. Suicide Risk Screening
        i. When to Use a Suicide Screener
        ii. Implementing Suicide Screenign Guidelines
    b. Suicide Risk Assessment
        i. When to Use Suicide Risk Assessment
        ii. Implementing Suicide Risk Assessments

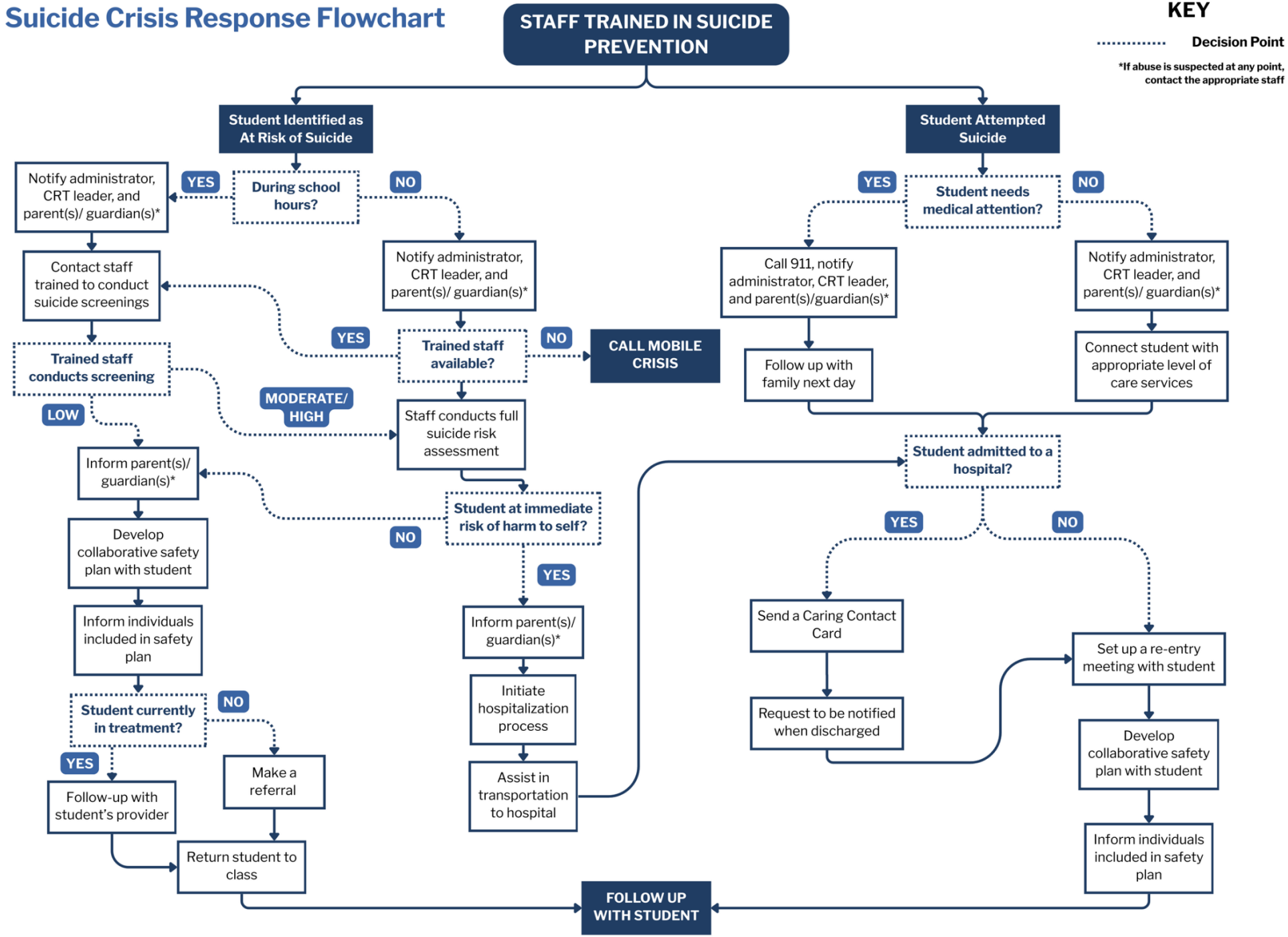


Chapter 3. Intervention

1. **Suicide Crisis Response Guidelines**
    a. Student Identified as At Risk of Suicide
        i. During School Hours
        ii. During a School-Sponsored Event After School Hours
    b. Student Attempted Suicide
        i. Medical Attention Needed
        ii. Medical Attention Not Needed
        iii. Suicide Attempt Off of School Property

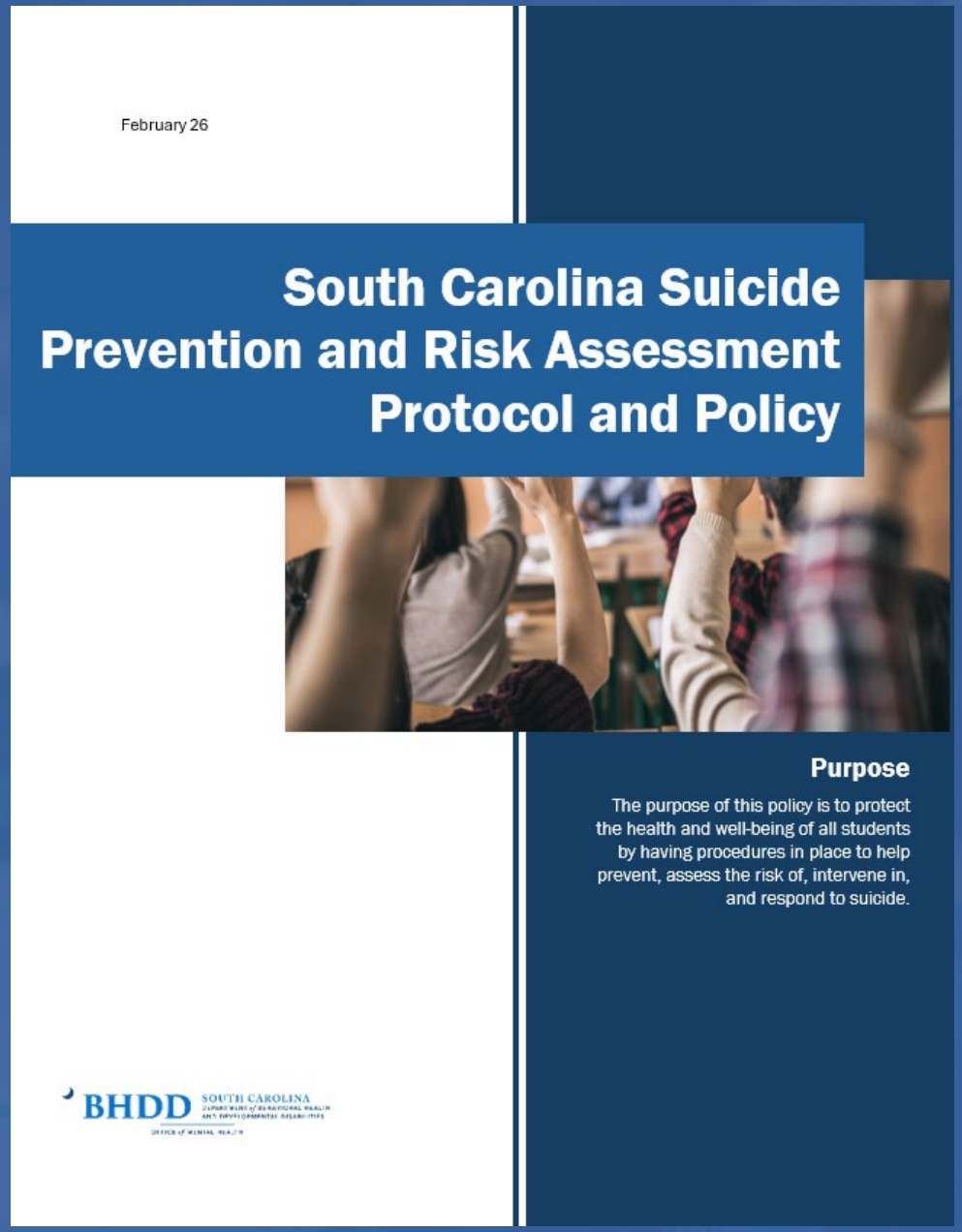


Suicide Crisis Response Flowchart



Chapter 4. Postvention

1. **Postvention Guidelines**
    a. Responding to the Death of a Student
        i. Crisis Response Team Interventions
        ii. Notification
        iii. Crisis and Grief Counseling and Other Support Services at School
        iv. Funeral Proceedings
        v. Communication and Outreach
    b. Actions to Avoid
    c. Memorial Services
        i. Considerations



Model Policy Development Workflow

Viewing Policy Development in Stages

Why Do We Use Stages?

Howlett, Ramesh, and Perl (2009, 12-13):

- The policy stages model relates well to models of applied decision-making, such as Eugene Bardach's "eight-fold path" to problem solving and decision-making (Bardach and Patashnik, 2016).

The stages model is a way of **organizing thinking** and **of isolating and understanding essential elements of the policy process** (deLeon, 1999).

Thomas A. Birkland's (2019) "Stages Model of Policy Process" provides a simplified and summarized version of Gary Brewer's (1974) six stage policy process as a cycle with no beginning or end.

- Highlights the fluid and cyclical nature of policymaking (Cairney, 2013).

ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY-MAKING SYSTEM

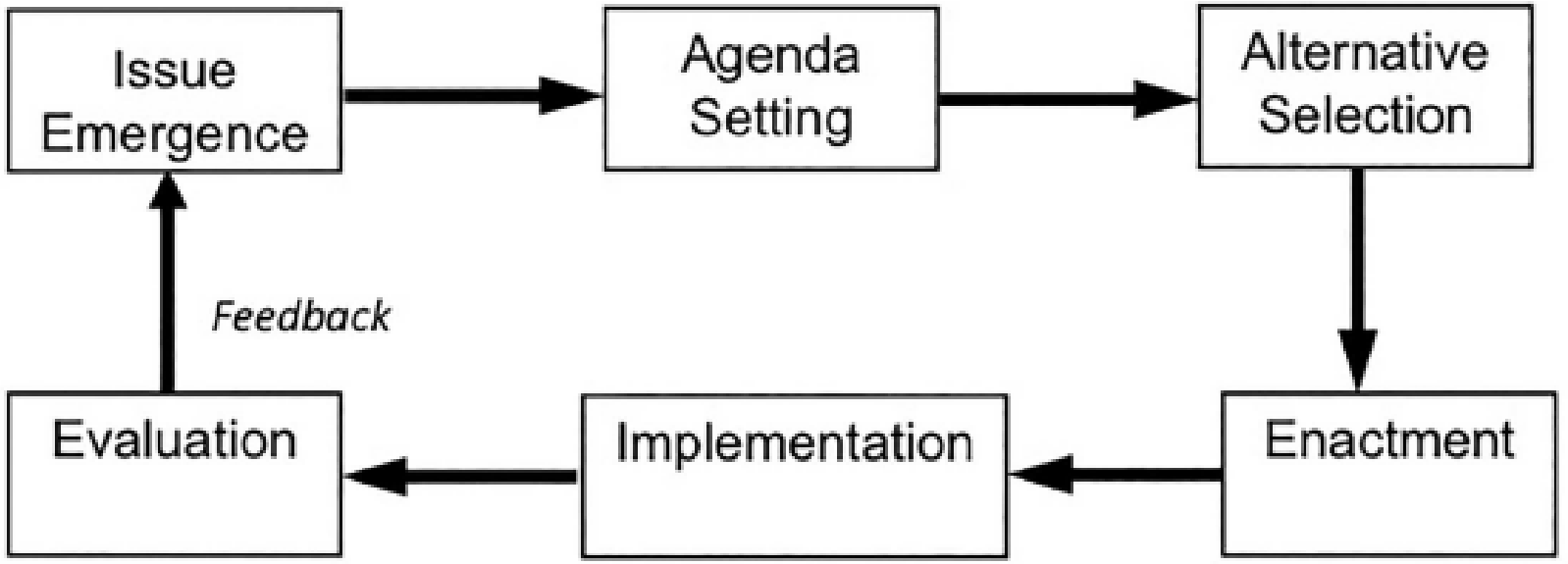
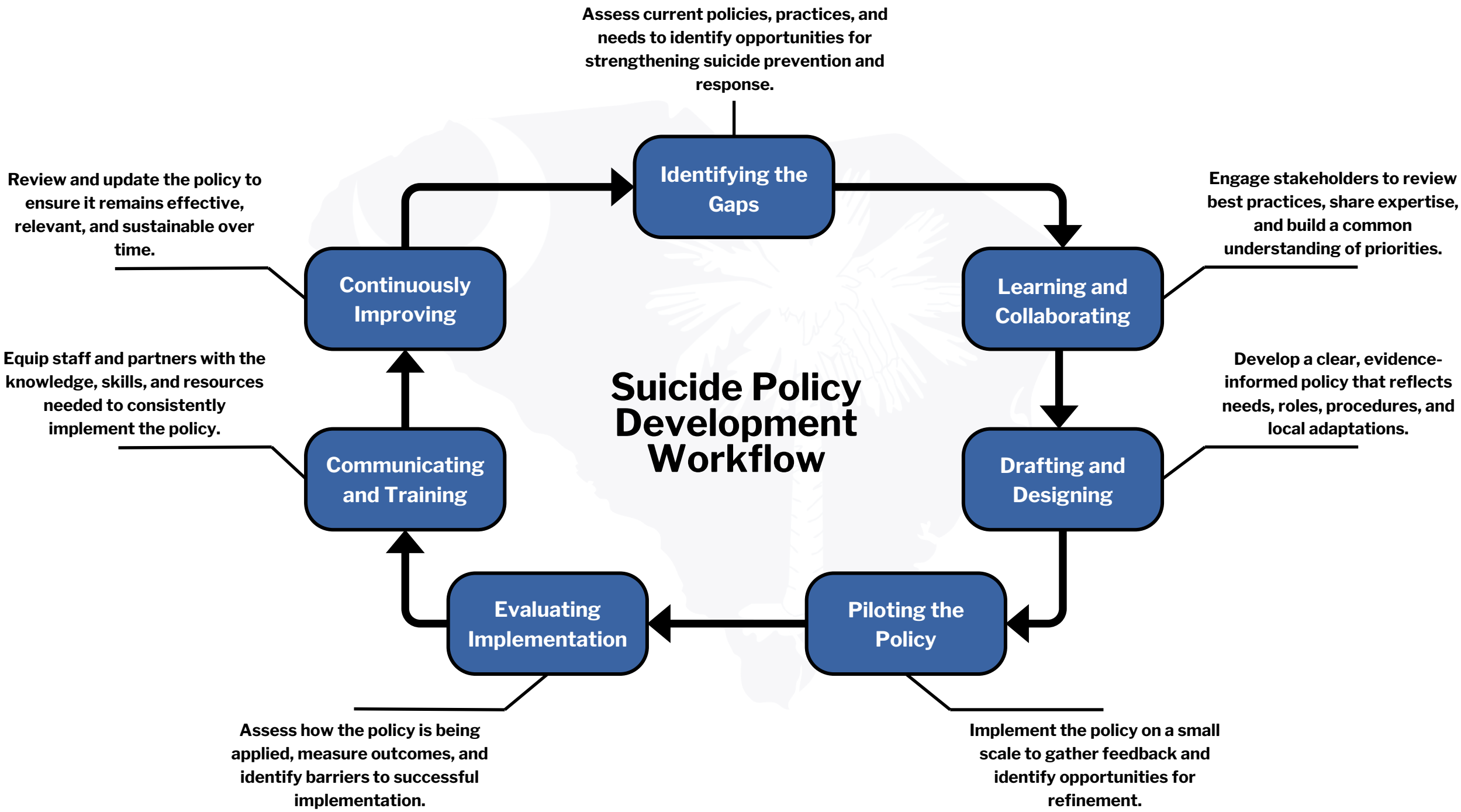


FIGURE 2.1
The Stages Model of the Policy Process

Birkland, T.A. (2019).

Suicide Policy Development Workflow



Identifying the Gaps - Where is the Need?

The goal of creating a model policy is to identify where the policy can add value rather than duplicating existing resources.

The Need in South Carolina:

33% of school districts have re-entry plan procedures

27% of school districts have postvention procedures

13% of school districts have suicide risk follow-up procedures

13% of school districts had student safety planning procedures

Questions to Explore:

- What challenges are schools currently experiencing?
- Where do existing district policies differ?
- What guidance is missing, outdated, or inconsistent?
- Are implementation barriers related to policy, training, staffing, or resources?

Information sources:

- Existing district policies, state statutes and guidance, administrators and educators, SMH professionals

Learning Meetings:
Who Is at the Table?

Stakeholder engagement matters; people expected to implement the policy should help shape it.

Learning meetings included representation from:

- School mental health professionals
- School district representatives
- School nurse consultants
- Social workers
- Community members
- University professors
- Subject matter experts

When considering who should be involved, ask:

- Whose perspective is missing?
- Who will be responsible for implementation?
- Who can identify unintended consequences before adoption?

Designing for Equity and Adaptability

Context and population differences to consider:

- Rural districts with limited behavioral health services
- Schools serving multilingual families
- Students with disabilities
- Schools with varying staffing capacities

Not every aspect of a policy needs to be fixed. Build into your policy core requirements with adaptable elements that help districts implement the policy while accounting for local circumstances through:

- Required actions
- Recommended practices
- Local implementation guidance

Piloting the Policy

Piloting is an important step in understanding how the policy works across diverse school contexts. Implementation challenges often emerge only *after* policies are used in practice.

Who could pilot?

- Geographic location
- District size
- Student demographics
- Mental health staffing
- Available community resources

Collect feedback on:

- Clarity
- Feasibility
- Alignment with existing workflows

Evaluating Implementation Feedback

Evaluations that focus on more than satisfaction with the policy is best. Consider implementation outcomes by directly turning feedback into actionable outcomes.

Review:

- Acceptability - do staff believe the policy is useful?
- Feasibility - Can schools realistically implement it?
- Sustainability - Can districts maintain implementation over time?
- Equity - Are some schools or student populations experiencing greater implementation barriers?

Possible data sources:

- Surveys
- Focus groups

Training and Communication Around the Policy

A policy only improves practice if stakeholders understand it, know their role, and have systems in place to support implementation over time. Develop a communication strategy that ensures all stakeholders receive consistent information before, during, and after implementation.

Extend training beyond introducing the policy to prepare staff to implement it consistently and confidently. Differentiate training for:

- District and school leaders
- School mental health professionals
- Teachers and school staff
- New employees

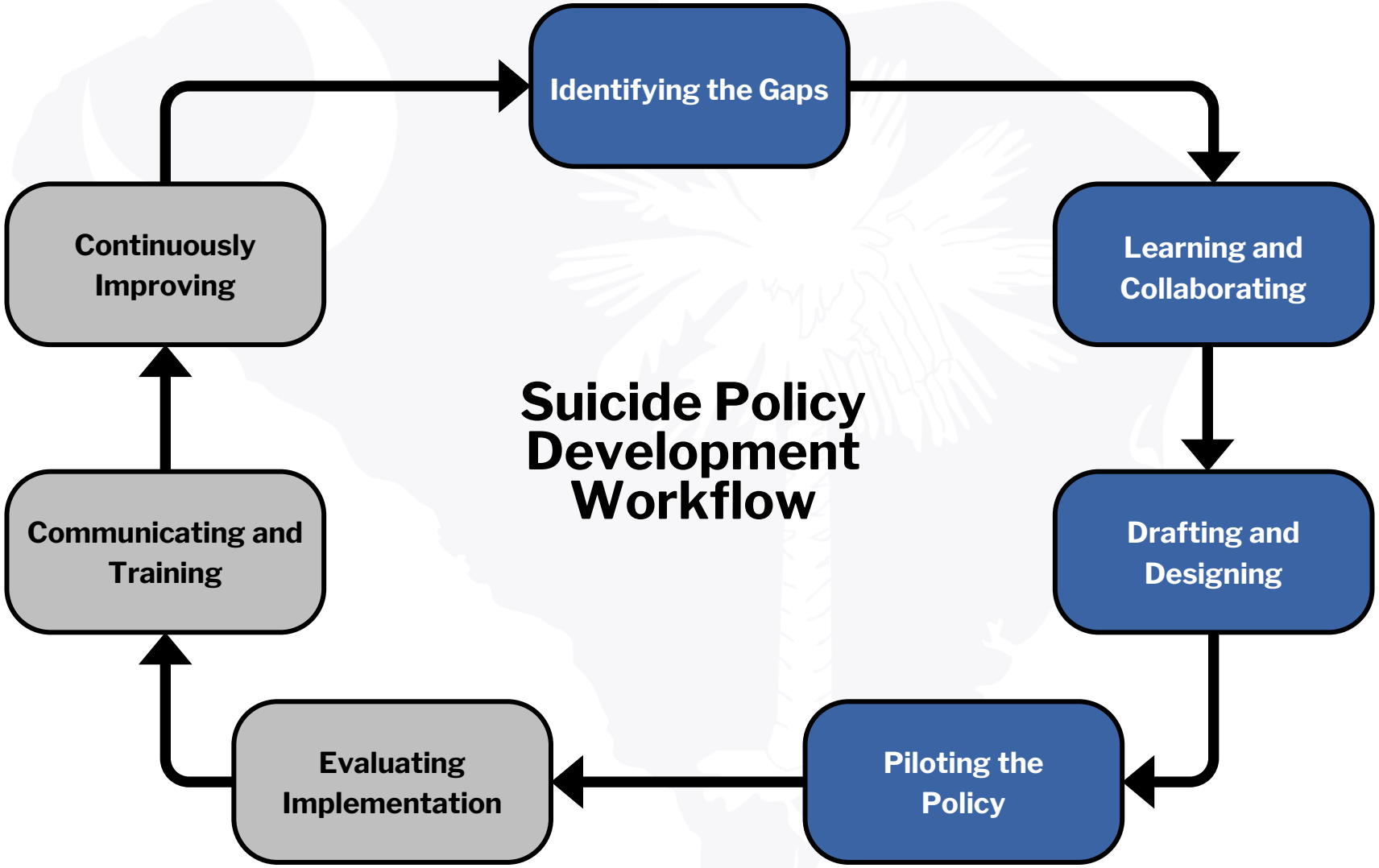
Clear communication reduces uncertainty and promotes buy-in across schools and districts.

Planning for Long-Term Sustainability

Implementation does not end after the initial rollout. Ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement will ensure that the policy remains relevant and effective.

Strategies beyond implementation can look like:

- Incorporating policy training into annual professional development and new staff orientation
- Establishing a regular schedule for reviewing and updating the policy based on emerging evidence or district needs
- Monitoring staff feedback, or routine data collection
- Reviewing implementation challenges to identify opportunities for improvement


Suicide Policy Development Workflow
Identifying the Gaps
Learning and Collaborating
Drafting and Designing
Piloting the Policy
Evaluating Implementation
Communicating and Training
Continuously Improving

Questions?

Contact Us!

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Endnotes

1. Bardach, Eugene, and Eric M. Patashnik. 2016. *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*. 5th edn. Los Angeles, CA: CQ Press, Sage.
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Thank you!

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