

Preventing Youth Suicide in Indiana

Tippecanoe School Corporation



Photo credit: Getty Images/FatCamera



Background

Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, Indiana's Tippecanoe School Corporation (TSC) had made numerous investments to prioritize students' mental health and wellness. Tier 1 social and emotional learning (SEL) frameworks were in use across the K–12 district. Counselors, social workers, and student service coordinators were also available in each of the district's 20 buildings. SEL programming was a point of pride.

However, suicide prevention programming at TSC was less comprehensive. Across the district, schools had inconsistent protocols governing what to do when a student exhibited signs of a suicidal crisis. There was also no district-wide plan in place for how school personnel should respond after a suicide.

PARTNERING TO PREVENT SUICIDE

EDC Solutions' Multi-tiered Suicide Prevention for Schools (MTSP for Schools) service supports education leaders as they develop and sustain multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) focused on suicide prevention.

WITH MTSP FOR SCHOOLS, EDC SOLUTIONS STAFF:

- Develops and delivers materials that guide districts through the incorporation of evidence-based suicide prevention strategies within their MTSS
- Provides training and tailored consultation that reflects the changing needs of school administrators and district teams
- Draws upon deep content expertise to provide technical assistance, guidance, and support

WHAT IS MTSS?

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) provide schools with a three-tiered intervention framework to promote student well-being. Data-driven and collaborative, the MTSS approach provides a structure for prioritizing student health and connectedness.

TIER 1

Tier 1 policies are implemented at the school level, reaching all students.

TIER 2

Tier 2 interventions reach groups of students at increased risk for negative outcomes.

TIER 3

Tier 3 programs provide intensive, individualized support to students with the greatest needs.

In 2022, TSC sought to improve their suicide prevention readiness by joining the Preventing Youth Suicide Initiative (PYSI), a grant program funded by North Central Health Services. Since then, and with technical assistance (TA) provided by EDC Solutions' Multi-Tiered Suicide Prevention for Schools (MTSP for Schools), TSC has adopted consistent district-wide prevention practices, implemented a postvention protocol, and integrated suicide prevention into their wider multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) for students, creating a safer and stronger community.



Taking Inventory

Before joining the grant, TSC “had a really strong Tier 1 framework,” says Megan Ulrich, a mental health liaison and a member of the district’s 12-person PYSI planning team. Educators were “doing a lot of work to teach brain science to kids.” They were also teaching lessons on feelings, emotions, and resilience—key SEL skills.

Suicide prevention, however, was less present in their existing systems of support. Unlike SEL, “suicide wasn’t something that was necessarily talked about proactively,” says Ulrich.

A tool developed by MTSP for Schools was instrumental in helping the TSC team begin to make progress. Called the *School Suicide Prevention Environmental Assessment*, the tool gave Ulrich and her colleagues a way to assess the

district’s strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities as they considered their existing suicide prevention policies and protocols.

According to EDC Solutions’ Shawna Hite-Jones, who provided TA for the TSC team, the assessment fostered conversations about what was (and what was not) already being done in the district. It also offered a framework for discussing community partnerships, identifying risk and protective factors, and inventorying existing protocols.

“They realized how disjointed the different approaches were across the buildings,” says Hite-Jones. “I think that assessment gave them an opportunity to have a structured conversation around what was actually happening.”



Creating A Plan

The assessment highlighted the need for a district-wide postvention plan. Developing this plan became one of TSC’s primary goals for their participation over the two-year grant cycle.

In crafting a postvention plan, the TSC team drew inspiration from a core element of MTSP for Schools: a community of practice (CoP) facilitated by EDC Solutions TA staff. In a CoP, practitioners and content experts share resources, knowledge, and experiences around a main topic, building a learning community. This CoP brought together 12 PYSI-funded district teams from western Indiana, providing an opportunity for all participants to learn from other district teams’ successes and challenges around developing postvention protocols.

The TSC team continued to meet and develop their postvention plan through the fall. By December 2022, the team had drafted a detailed checklist that outlined specific roles for school staff to play in the event of a suicide. The checklist drew heavily from [After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools](#), which is a set of recommendations and protocols created by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. The checklist also incorporated postvention best practices promoted by the MTSP for Schools TA team.

Hite-Jones reviewed and provided feedback on the proposed plan. In one-on-one sessions with Ulrich, she suggested ways to strengthen outlined actions to ensure effective and

consistent implementation, as well as how to apply best practices in postvention. The revised protocol was submitted to the TSC superintendent for review and then to the school board for approval. Full approval was given in fall 2023, and the plan is now in place across the district.

Ulrich says that one of the benefits of the postvention plan is that it has clearly defined roles for staff and administrators.

“You don’t have to think about the steps—and whether you are missing any steps that will create extra trauma for students and families,” says Ulrich. The postvention plan identifies “who’s doing what, who’s making the phone calls, and who’s reaching out to family members,” while also outlining the specific role that student services is expected to play.

Ulrich notes that the new policy has been “met with a lot of gratitude by administrators” and has received support throughout the district. It has also brought unity to the district’s planning in the event of a suicide.

“TSC is a large district that values autonomy, but there are still some things that need to look the same,” Ulrich says. “This postvention policy has been supported from the top down. Nobody wants anything to be missed should a suicide happen.”



Deep Expertise

Throughout the two-year grant, Hite-Jones and other members of the MTSP for Schools team provided resources, documents, and expert consultation to support TSC’s efforts to integrate suicide prevention into their MTSS. In addition to the environmental assessment, they provided other institute-developed templates that helped the TSC team set goals, take action, and make a plan for gathering behavioral and school climate data. They also provided resources to help build team members’ understanding of suicide prevention best practices, including summer reading lists and a list of recommended professional development opportunities that aligned with TSC’s strategic planning goals.

“

Before the grant, we responded the best way we knew how with the information that we had. [Since the grant, we’ve been able to know better and do better.](#)

—Megan Ulrich

About Tippecanoe School Corporation

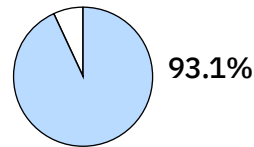
Students:

13,591

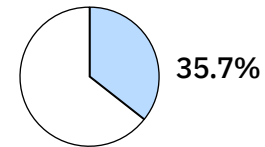
Region:

Suburban

Graduation rate:



Free/reduced lunch:



Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed. (n.d.).
Tippecanoe School Corporation.
<https://indianagps.doe.in.gov/Summary/Corporation/85>

Regular collaborative meetings between Hite-Jones, Ulrich, and members of the TSC team were critical to the corporation’s progress.

“The reality is most schools don’t have the capacity to use those suicide prevention resources without some level of assistance and guidance,” says Hite-Jones. “Institute staff build collaborative relationships with the teams they are working with to help those schools do the work that otherwise they might not be able to do.”

Ulrich notes that Hite-Jones was instrumental in helping the TSC team stay focused and accountable. She describes her as “a resource master.”

“Shawna’s been able to connect me with other school corporations who have done similar things,” Ulrich says. “She also provides me with really pertinent documents on things I can apply to our district.”



Building A Healthier District

Now in the second year of the PYSI grant, TSC continues to refine their procedures for identifying students at risk and for connecting those students with needed services. The work has “been a complete and total culture shift,” says Ulrich. “Now we have district-wide accountability, rather than everybody just doing their own thing.” She adds that the work done through MTSP for Schools has “validated our Tier I services” as being essential to suicide prevention. Finally, she believes that the grant and the Institute have helped the district plan for sustainability, so that today’s successes are tomorrow’s successes too.

“This has been such a quality experience,” Ulrich says. “This initiative has definitely given us the tools. It showed us where to find the resources; it taught us how to be sustainable in this work. We’re very grateful for all the people that we’ve connected with through this initiative. To be able to move this far, this fast with this work has been so helpful.”

“

This initiative has definitely given us the tools. It showed us where to find the resources; it taught us how to be sustainable in this work.

—Megan Ulrich

ABOUT EDC SOLUTIONS

EDC Solutions partners with schools and districts on SEL integration, systems change, and strategic planning. We assist districts implement programs and policies that help every student succeed. Contact us at solutions@edc.org to discuss partnerships and services.



Education Development Center
solutions@edc.org

Boston | Chicago | New York | Washington, D.C.

CONNECT WITH US

[in go.edc.org/linkedin](https://www.linkedin.com/company/go-edc-org/)
[X go.edc.org/twitter](https://twitter.com/go-edc-org)
[f go.edc.org/facebook](https://www.facebook.com/go.edc.org/)
[@ go.edc.org/instagram](https://www.instagram.com/go-edc-org/)