

HOW DO WE NAVIGATE THE

RED TAPE?

WRITTEN BY LAUREN LEONG
DESIGNED BY HARLAN DAWKINS

**KY'S EDUCATION
SYSTEM IS PUTTING
BANDAIDS OVER
BULLET HOLES.**

The years of stigmatizing mental health and illness has finally reached its breaking point. The number of suicides are growing within the states' schools, and the effects are felt on every level of the community. Kentucky schools are facing an epidemic, and as it attempts to adjust accordingly, it may be getting in its own way.

After Tragedy Strikes

After any suicide, a crisis team is convened, their main purpose to deal with staff and students grieving after the loss. The crisis team is comprised of licensed mental health professionals. The amount of time the crisis team will stay ranges on the given situation. These teams are meant as a source of immediate relief and while they help with the immediate shock, they are not meant for the long game. This is where the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) law comes into play. This law's main purpose is to protect the rights of minors by protecting their right to an

**"THESE CRISIS
TEAMS... ARE NOT
MEANT FOR THE LONG
GAME."**

education. The part that comes in to place here though is the privacy. When a student commits suicide their name and any action can not be mentioned or made by the school until parental consent is given. On this note parental consent is often never asked for as a respect to the family. This ties the administrations hands when it comes to memorializing the student. The exception to this is when they are student led.

The Initial Wave

School guidance and mental health counselors are the long term relief within schools after suicide. However, not all schools have mental health counselors, and while JCPS Superintendent Marty Polio has stated making this a priority, the reality is that hiring enough professionals to meet the needs will take time. In addition, this emphasis has not been shown seeing as this year school psychologist received a pay cut. School guidance counselors then become the only constants from school to school. One fact that needs consideration is that the recommended amount of students per counselor in a school should be around 250. Yet, most schools far exceed these numbers. Even if schools can follow the recommended number of students, it then falls on the individual. Students are going to have varying amounts of comfort with their counselors.

Another layer comes with a law put into effect this year which mandates that 60% of the Counselors time is to be spent with children directly. This law does not however mandate the alleviation any of the other obligations or responsibilities of the counselors. This leads to burnout in counselors, and does not improve any of the disconnect between counselors and students that appears.



It is clear that school counselors have an overwhelming job. From college applications, to the breaking down of data, to helping save someone's life in a crisis situation, a counselor can wear twenty different hats in a single day, and still have a mountain of paperwork to complete the next morning. The focus on mental health has become essential in Kentucky's education system, but to allocate those responsibilities to one group of people is arbitrary and more importantly ineffective. Kentucky has to learn that a declared focus and a demonstrated focus are two separate entities and should be treated as such. Kentucky's education system is putting bandaids over bullet holes.

**A SYSTEM WILL WORK AS WELL
AS IT WILL ALLOW ITSELF.**