



Montezuma-Cortez School District RE-1

P O Drawer R

Cortez, Colorado 81321

www.cortez.k12.co.us

Phone: 970-565-7282

Fax: 970-565-2161

January 23, 2019

Superintendent's Statement on Recent Suicides and Suicide Attempts 1.23.19

I wanted to reach out personally to keep you informed of a truly concerning series of events that have occurred this week. I am committed to keeping our community informed of key events that may be impacting our students and schools, with the intention of us all working together on our common goal of supporting our students. Tonight, I am deeply saddened to report that we have confirmation of an additional suicide attempt from one of our students. This means that four students in our community have attempted suicide in the past week. Two of these students passed away and two of these students are in the hospital recovering. Two of the four students were enrolled at the high school and two were enrolled at the middle school.

We are deeply concerned about the safety and well-being of ALL our students. We want each and every one of our students to know that YOU matter, we care about YOU, and we are here to SUPPORT YOU no matter what you are facing. Finally, I want you to know that whatever challenges you have now – that things WILL get better. You will overcome this, and you have every chance to become an adult who can achieve your goals and be happy with your life.

Our district and schools have been working to support all our students and we are offering several programs designed to support students and prevent suicide. These programs include: Sources of Strength, school counselors, peer supports, and Safe-to-Tell. Sources of Strength is a suicide prevention program offered at M-CMS and MCHS and in partnership with the Piñon Project that focuses on *“providing the highest quality evidence-based prevention for suicide, violence, bullying and substance abuse by training, supporting, and empowering both peer leaders and caring adults to impact their world through the power of connection, hope, help and strength.”* All of our schools also offer counselors and social workers that provide individual supports to students who are most at risk, as well as providing support groups and general education for students on the signs of suicide, suicide prevention, and general wellness. We also have Safe to Tell, which allows students and other community members to anonymously report any concerns about student safety. This enables the school district and other concerned organizations to follow-up and support these students individually. Currently, we are working to quickly identify students who may be most at risk and who may be considering suicide. We are working with the Ute Tribe and other community organizations to personally follow-up with these students to ensure they are safe and have the supports that they need.

Moving forward, the board, staff, and I are deeply committed to continuing the supports we already have in place to ensure that we do not lose another student to suicide; to ensure that our students who are struggling know that they matter; and that all students know where to turn for supports. I have reached out to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Council, Tribal Education Department, Piñon Project and other key community members to help me in convening a community task force that will be charged with better understanding the challenges that our students are facing, what resources or supports are

needed, and how we as a community could come together to provide those supports to our students. These meetings will be public and I will be sharing the date/time/location of the first meeting shortly. I would encourage anyone with an interest in contributing to this effort to support our students to attend this meeting. We will be seeking mentors and volunteers for supporting our students.

We are continuing to receive additional reports of students who may be at risk. Law enforcement and school officials are responding to each report immediately. We encourage students and members of the community to reach out about any concerns with young people or children in our community. Our first priority is to keep our young people safe. The best method to report any concerns you may have is by contacting Safe-to-Tell at 1-877-542-7233, the Axis Health System's Crisis Hotline at 970-247-5245 or call 911 if the concern is immediate.

On behalf of our board and staff, I would like to express my deep sorrow at the loss of lives in our community and affirm our commitment to ensuring all students have ongoing support, know that they matter, and have someone to turn to when they are struggling. Please consider attending our community task force meeting or reaching out to me personally with your concerns and ideas regarding how we can best work together to support our students.

Thank you,

Lori Haukeness, Superintendent