Dear Staff,

This year our school’s Student Services Team will [again] be collaborating with [Elyssa’s Mission](https://elyssasmission.org/)--a local non-profit that *fully funds* and helps implement suicide prevention programming in middle and high schools throughout Illinois--to teach students about depression and suicide, and how to seek help if they are worried about themselves or a friend. We are using an evidence-based program called SOS *Signs of Suicide.* Elyssa’s Mission has already brought this program to over 300 Illinois schools spanning 20 counties and 150 suburbs.

SOS, which was developed by mental health professionals at MindWise Innovations, a Massachusetts-based organization, has been used by thousands of schools nationwide and in 20+ countries for over 20 years. Studies have shown that it effectively teaches students about depression and suicide while reducing the number of students’ self-reported suicide attempts.

Through the program, students learn:

* that depression is treatable, so they are encouraged to seek help
* how to identify depression and potential suicide risk in themselves or a friend
* to ACT (Acknowledge, Care and Tell a trusted adult) if concerned about themselves or a friend
* who they can turn to at school for help

Students will watch age-appropriate video clips and participate in a guided discussion about depression, suicide and what to do if they are concerned about themselves or a friend. At the end of the lesson, students will complete a brief depression screening form and exit slip. School student services staff [with help from Elyssa’s Mission and/or community mental health partners] will conduct brief meetings with any student “flagged” by the screener and/or requesting to talk. These meetings will occur throughout the SOS day(s), and will also likely carry over into the following day or two. Parents will be notified of these interviews, where appropriate, and in some cases, students will be referred on for additional evaluation and/or services. Data from Elyssa’s Mission reflects that, on average, **15%** of SOS-participating students will be interviewed, and **8%** of SOS-participating students will ultimately be referred on for additionalevaluation and/or services—in some cases, critical. Furthermore, on average, **55%** of the referrals are for NEW services, which means it is likely that SOS will help bring students to our attention that were previously not on our radar. Even if we identify *just one* student in need of support, this program is worthwhile.

We will be presenting SOS through our \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ classes with all \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ grade students on the following date(s):\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *(provide description of your SOS plan, as appropriate).* We will notify applicable staff if any parents have opted their students out of the program, and where those students should report to during the lesson. We ask that you avoid scheduling tests, quizzes or presentations on SOS days, and that you send out students promptly in the event we need to speak to them.

As students are learning to “ACT” through this program, we may experience in increase in students reporting concerns to *any* trusted adult in the coming weeks, and throughout the school year. Please remember to follow our school’s suicide prevention protocols in the event a student comes to you and/or you observe any potential concerns [Include a link to your school-specific protocols/flow-chart OR include a copy with this letter].

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support. If you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to let us know.

Sincerely,

Your Student Services Team (include names and titles, if appropriate)