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**Suicide, Now the Leading Cause of Death among Youth, Can and Must Be
Prevented; Education Is Essential**
September is National Suicide Prevention Month

PRINCETON, NJ, September 8, 2026 – According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide among youth (ages 10 to 24) increased from being the second leading cause of death to the most prevalent cause in 2020, following continued increases since the early 2010s. The most recent data – from 2023 – specific to U.S. high school students further demonstrates this tragic trend and underscores the need for increased efforts to reverse it: During the past year, 20% of high school students seriously considered attempting suicide; 16% made suicide plans; and 10% attempted taking their own lives.

“These statistics are staggering and devastating, and they prove that much more education and other prevention efforts are needed,” said Tricia Baker, Co-Founder of Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®), a Princeton-based nonprofit whose mission is to save lives through mental health and suicide prevention education. AIR has been proactive in educating students from elementary grades through college with programs tailored for different age groups and the integration of certified therapy dogs at every presentation.

A teacher’s observations further illustrate the need for mental health education, as well as the positive impact of AIR’s programs. Throughout more than 27 years as an educator for students in kindergarten through 12th grade, Liz Machado from the Hopewell Valley Regional School District has “seen an increase of anxiety, stress, trauma and other emotional challenges that affect our students’ ability to learn and thrive. With AIR’s education and its certified therapy dogs, I have seen students who are struggling find moments of calm, begin conversations they may not have otherwise had, and realize they do not have to carry their challenges alone. Those moments are the reason this work matters. Mental wellness is something we all share responsibility for,” she said.

Soon after observing the impact of AIR Certified Therapy Dogs, Machado and her dog Nico completed the training, and both have been at Bear Tavern Elementary School since then. “I’ve seen students who arrive at school anxious or overwhelmed become calm after

spending just a few moments with Nico. I've watched children who struggle to express their emotions begin talking while petting him," Machado shared.

AIR is unique not only by having certified therapy dogs participate in every presentation, but also because its "programs are the only ones, according to research, that foster help-seeking behaviors during the programs," Baker said. "After an AIR presentation, the percentages of students in middle and high schools sharing their difficulties and worries about friends have significantly increased since the pandemic."

In many schools experiencing budget reductions, mental health programs are often the first to be canceled. However, "such education must continue in order to give students the greatest potential to thrive mentally and physically, throughout school and the rest of their lives," Baker stressed.