



Activists Don't Want Anxiety Test in Fresno Schools

September 21, 2006 - A program meant to prevent teen suicide could be coming back to Fresno Unified. But some people say they don't think the program is appropriate.

Over 200 students have already been screened at Hoover High School during a two-year pilot program. Now, Fresno Unified administrators are looking at if and how to implement the program district wide.

It's a different kind of test for students. It's called Teen Screen, and it's designed to measure anxiety that could represent a higher risk for suicide. But some say it has no place in the classroom.

"It's called disease monitoring. It's medicalizing normal behavior into mental illness. 46 and it's all driven by pharmaceutical companies that make obscene profits on psychiatric drugs," said activist Sharon Kientz.

Representatives from two activist groups went before the school board Wednesday, urging administrators not to bring the program back to Fresno Unified.

"Each child that goes through this process is going to end up with a label. That label will be carried around in their emotional databank for the rest of their lives," said activist Alan Schaeffer.

But those with Fresno Unified say teen suicide is a serious problem that must be addressed, and Teen Screen is not meant to diagnose students with mental illness or drug them.

"If there are red flags that are raised The teen is then given to a listening ear. In other words, somebody who can help the teen sort through some of these things," said Pete Summers of Fresno Unified.

During a two-year pilot program at Hoover High, 265 students were screened. Of those that were flagged for follow up, 10% had suicidal thoughts and 5% had attempted suicide.

Still, parents Action News talked to are uneasy about this kind of survey.

"I would not have my child take that test. No, because it can label kids or set them in a category they don't belong in," said parent Yvone McLain.

"You know, teenagers can say one thing just to draw attention. So I'm not sure I would like my kids taking that kind of survey," said parent Yadi Alfaro.

Fresno Unified officials say the Teen Screen program could come before the board in a couple of months. But teens would only be given the test with parental consent.