Suicide in Schools: A practitioner’s guide to multi-level prevention, assessment, intervention, and postvention
By: Terri A Erbacher, Jonathan B. Singer, & Scott Poland (Routledge, 2015)
Reviewed By: Wm. “Bill” Schmitz Jr., Psy.D.

School violence is easy fodder for the evening news broadcast and the, thankfully, rare instances of school violence that make national news related to suicide, homicide, or suicide-homicide only amplifies the concerns of parents, administrators and teachers everywhere. Suicidologists are often highly sought after in the aftermath of a suicide-related school crisis or real/possible suicide contagion episode with the all-too-common questions of “what could we have done?” and “how can we best serve our students?” Fortunately, there is a straightforward roadmap on just “what to do” provided by school suicide prevention experts Terri Erbacher, Jonathan Singer, & Scott Poland.

When 17% of high school students surveyed, in grades 9 through 12, report having seriously considered suicide in the past year (YRBSS 2013), we can easily state that this is a population that needs to be monitored for suicidality. Couple this startling figure with the fact that 8% of that same cohort have made a suicide attempt in the past year, and it is easy to see that these students may need help. Even when parents are “present” in the lives of their children, there can be secrets and it is generally known that teenagers tend to share information with friends before they will their parents or family. Given these realities, school personnel are uniquely positioned to support and assist in recognizing and responding to suicidal youth. The question that is often posed is “how can my school (or school system) be prepared” to help in the provision of suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention? Suicide in Schools is a go-to resource for just this issue.

Erbacher, Singer, & Poland provide an empirically supported resource that is filled with case examples, modifiable resources (the e-resources associated with the book, which are free), and information that addresses each level of the school system. Each school and school district is its own community and this is a must-have resource for how to be prepared on how to best serve those communities at each stage of crisis work: prevention, intervention, and postvention, the latter of which is often paid little more than lip service in other books related to suicide. In fact, the care and consideration that Suicide in Schools devotes to the short and long-term issues related to postvention is a welcome tool that is too often not considered in Suicidology resources.

This is a volume that should be on every principal’s, superintendent’s, and school counselor’s bookcase. Every member of the school community plays a role of crisis (and suicide) intervention and Suicide in Schools elucidates the various roles, resources, agreements, and teams that need to be in place prior to “that moment” when your school becomes a beacon of local, state, and national media in the aftermath of “one of those” critical calamities. I would hope that this great resource is used regularly in school psychology and education graduate coursework as the planning and organizational approaches outlined in this book will serve future administrators and school health professionals well in their development.