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Students looking out for peers

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More School District 51 students are using an anonymous tip line to report suicide threats, bullying and other concerns than ever before.

While Safe2Tell has been around since 2004, School District 51 officials relaunched the program — and redoubled their efforts to promote it — in early 2017, after a spate of youth suicides rocked the Grand Valley.

The number of tips is up nearly 60 percent this year, according to Kati Garner, mental health and crisis coordinator for District 51, from 91 tips at this point last year to 145 this year.

Safe2Tell usage is also rising across the state, and Garner attributes the local spike to students being more comfortable and familiar with the service.

"I think some kids felt at first that it was tattling, but I think that's where the education piece comes in," she said. "That it's anonymous, that it's not tattling. It's making sure your friends are safe."

The increase in tips has been across all categories, with suicide and bullying consistently leading the pack.

As the program continues, Garner said, it's getting easier to work with local law enforcement to follow up on tips. Every law enforcement agency in the Grand Valley has opted to respond to Safe2Tell, which is particularly helpful because the school involved in a tip doesn't always match a student's home address. There's also been a decrease in false tips as district staff have worked to educate students, Garner said.

"In any system with kids there's going to be room for error, so we still have some kids that are not using it for what it should be," Garner said. "However we are finding that probably 85 percent of the tips are accurate, which to me is huge because we are saving lives."

Moving forward, District 51 is working with Safe2Tell to pilot a new "Conversation Jumpstarters" program to train teachers and staff how to talk to students about bullying, internet safety and more.

The district is also applying for more grant funding, Garner said, to fund programs like Sources of Strength and crisis response training.

More information about Safe2Tell is available at [Safe2Tell.org](https://www.Safe2Tell.org).