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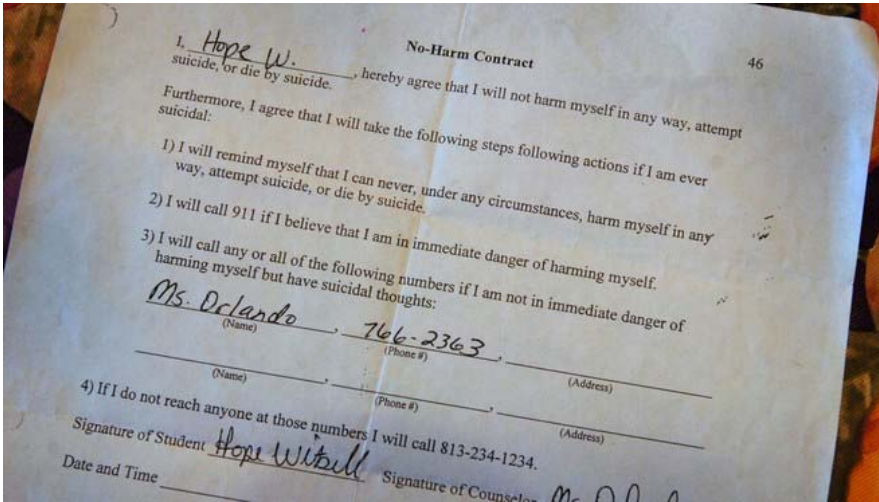
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Hillsborough schools' suicide policy questioned

2009, CLIFF MCBRIDE/STAFF

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Hope Witsell signed a school contract promising not to hurt herself. Her mother said she had no idea Hope was suicidal.

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By **SHERRI ACKERMAN** | The Tampa Tribune and **JEFF SCULLIN** | The Tampa Tribune

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Sitting in the principal's office, Hope Witsell signed the "no-harm" contract the school social worker had given her, agreeing not to commit suicide.

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The next day, Sept. 12, 2009, the 13-year-old hanged herself with a scarf in her Wimauma bedroom.

A year and a half later, Charles and Donna Witsell are still asking questions.

Why didn't anyone from Beth Shields Middle School call them when their daughter was called in for counseling?

And why did they only learn about the contract days after finding her body?

The Witsells filed a federal lawsuit against the Hillsborough County school district Monday, arguing school officials should have done a better job of protecting their daughter.

They knew Hope was being bullied by classmates, who were passing around a partially nude photograph the eighth-grader had texted to a boy she liked.

"It's still unbelievable," Donna Witsell said. "It's still very unbelievable."

Many questions that linger for Hope's parents surround the no-harm contract.



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