

ASSEMBLY HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 3926

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: SEPTEMBER 13, 2018

The Assembly Health and Senior Services Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 3926.

As amended by the committee, this bill requires a board of education to ensure that students in grades seven through 12 annually receive a health screening for depression. The screening will be administered by a qualified professional, including a school psychologist, school nurse, guidance counselor, student assistance counselor, physician, school social worker or any other medical or mental health professional, and will consist of the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 or an equivalent depression screening tool, as determined by the Commissioners of Education and Health.

Under the bill, the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Health (DOH) will jointly establish standards on the procedures to be implemented to conduct the screenings. The screenings are to be conducted in a manner that ensures the privacy of the student and the confidentiality of the results.

A superintendent is to be required to notify the parent or guardian of a student whose screening for depression detects a suspected deviation from the recommended standard and to encourage the parent or guardian to share the results of the screening with the student's primary care physician.

Boards of education will be required to forward data concerning depression screenings to the DOE and the DOH, provided that the forwarded data is aggregated and does not include any identifying or confidential information concerning any individual. The collected data are to be used to identify Statewide trends concerning teenage depression and to develop school and community based initiatives to address teenage depression.

The bill requires the DOE and the DOH to jointly provide for other screening tools, including, but not limited to, a screening tool for anxiety, such as the General Anxiety Disorder-7 or an equivalent anxiety screening tool, as determined by the Commissioners of Education and Health.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amendments revise the bill to provide that depression screenings are to be administered by a qualified professional, including a school psychologist, school nurse, guidance counselor, student assistance counselor, physician, school social worker, or other medical or mental health professional. As introduced, the bill required the screening to be provided by a school nurse or school physician.

The committee amendments also: 1) and add a Legislative findings and declarations section to the bill; 2) require boards of education to forward aggregated, non-identifying screening data to the DOE and the DOH for the purposes of identifying Statewide trends concerning teenage depression and to develop initiatives to address teenage depression; 3) require the DOE and the DOH to jointly provide for other screening tools, including, but not limited to, a screening tool for anxiety, such as the General Anxiety Disorder-7 or an equivalent anxiety screening tool, as determined by the Commissioners of Education and Health; 4) remove the provision allowing for a student exemption from the depression screening upon the written request of the student's parent or guardian; and 5) require a superintendent, instead of a board of education, to notify the parent or guardian of a student whose screening for depression detects a suspected deviation from the recommended standard and to encourage the parent or guardian to share the results of the screening with the student's primary care physician; and 6) clarify that the screening will consist of the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 or an equivalent depression screening tool, as determined by the Commissioners of Education and Health.