

SENATE, No. 555

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2020 SESSION

Sponsored by:

Senator RICHARD J. CODEY

District 27 (Essex and Morris)

Senator JAMES BEACH

District 6 (Burlington and Camden)

Co-Sponsored by:

Senators Turner and Gopal

SYNOPSIS

Establishes task force to examine public school programs and services designed to address student mental health.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 2/11/2021)

1 AN ACT establishing a Task Force on Student Mental Health.

2

3 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
4 *of New Jersey:*

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6 1. a. There is established the Task Force on Student Mental
7 Health. The purpose of the task force is to examine issues related to
8 the mental health of public school students, including depression,
9 anxiety, stress, or other psychological or emotional tension, trauma
10 or disorder and to develop recommendations to ensure that students
11 have access to mental health care programs and services in order to
12 allow those students to meet their educational goals.

13 b. The task force shall consist of 16 members as follows:

14 (1) the Commissioner of Education, ex officio, or a designee,
15 and the Director of the Division of Mental Health and Addiction
16 Services, or a designee;

17 (2) one public member appointed by the President of the Senate
18 and one public member appointed by the Minority Leader of the
19 Senate, both of whom shall have demonstrated expertise in issues
20 related to the work of the task force;

21 (3) one public member appointed by the Speaker of the General
22 Assembly and one public member appointed by the Minority Leader
23 of the General Assembly, both of whom shall have demonstrated
24 expertise in issues relating to the work of the task force; and

25 (4) 10 members appointed by the Governor, including: a school
26 board member, a school principal, a school administrator, an
27 elementary school teacher, a high school teacher, a school
28 counselor, a school social worker, and a school psychologist, all of
29 whom are currently employed in public schools in the State; and
30 two parents of students enrolled in a public school.

31

32 2. Appointments to the task force shall be made within 30 days
33 after the effective date of this act. Vacancies in the membership of
34 the task force shall be filled in the same manner as the original
35 appointments were made. Members of the task force shall serve
36 without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for necessary
37 expenditures incurred in the performance of their duties as members
38 of the task force within the limits of funds appropriated or
39 otherwise made available to the task force for its purposes.

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41 3. The task force shall organize as soon as practicable, but not
42 later than 30 days following the appointment of its members. The
43 task force shall choose a chairperson from among its members and
44 shall appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the task
45 force.

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47 4. The Department of Education shall provide such
48 stenographical, clerical, and other administrative assistants, and

1 such professional staff as the task force requires to carry out its
2 work. The task force also shall be entitled to call to its assistance
3 and avail itself of the services of the employees of any State,
4 county, or municipal department, board, bureau, commission, or
5 agency as it may require and as may be available for its purposes.

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7 5. It shall be the duty of the task force to examine issues
8 related to the mental health of students enrolled in public schools
9 and to develop recommendations to ensure that students have access
10 to necessary mental health care programs and services. The task
11 force shall study and make recommendations regarding the
12 following:

13 a. the identification of public school students who experience
14 depression, anxiety, stress, or other psychological or emotional
15 tension, trauma, or disorder;

16 b. the evaluation and expansion of counseling programs and
17 services available to students experiencing mental health
18 difficulties, and other programs designed to address issues related to
19 student mental health;

20 c. the relationship of student mental health to school safety and
21 security;

22 d. the amount of funding that may be necessary for public
23 schools to employ the appropriate staff and to establish new
24 programs or expand existing programs necessary to address student
25 mental health;

26 e. an examination of other states which have implemented
27 programs that have successfully addressed depression, anxiety,
28 stress, or other psychological or emotional tension, trauma, or
29 disorder among public school students and reduced the number of
30 students experiencing such difficulties; and

31 f. any other proposals that the task force determines would
32 provide for increased access to high-quality mental health programs
33 and services by public school students.

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35 6. a. The task force shall issue a final report of its findings
36 and recommendations to the Governor, and to the Legislature
37 pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), no later
38 than one year after the task force organizes.

39 b. The task force shall expire 30 days after the issuance of its
40 final report.

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42 7. This act shall take effect immediately.

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STATEMENT

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47 This bill establishes the Task Force on Student Mental Health.
48 Under the bill, the task force will consist of 16 members including:

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1 the Commissioner of Education; the Director of the Division of
2 Mental Health and Addiction Services; one public member
3 appointed by the President of the Senate and one public member
4 appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate; one public member
5 appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly and one public
6 member appointed by the Minority Leader of the General
7 Assembly; and 10 members appointed by the Governor, including: a
8 school board member, a school principal, a school administrator, an
9 elementary school teacher, a high school teacher, a school
10 counselor, a school social worker, and a school psychologist, all of
11 whom are currently employed in public schools in the State; and
12 two parents of students enrolled in a public school.

13 The task force will study and make recommendations regarding
14 the following:

- 15 • the identification of public school students who experience
16 depression, anxiety, stress, or other psychological or
17 emotional tension, trauma, or disorder;
- 18 • the evaluation and expansion of counseling programs and
19 services available to students experiencing mental health
20 difficulties, and other programs designed to address issues
21 related to student mental health;
- 22 • the relationship of student mental health to school safety and
23 security;
- 24 • the amount of funding that may be necessary for public
25 schools to employ the appropriate staff and to establish new
26 programs or expand existing programs necessary to address
27 student mental health; and
- 28 • an examination of other states which have implemented
29 programs that have successfully addressed depression,
30 anxiety, stress, or other psychological or emotional tension,
31 trauma, or disorder among public school students and
32 reduced the number of students experiencing such
33 difficulties.

34 The bill directs the task force to issue a final report of its
35 findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature
36 no later than one year after its organizational meeting. The task
37 force will expire 30 days after the submission of the final report.