LEGISLATIVE FISCAL ESTIMATE

SENATE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR

SENATE, No. 2259

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

DATED: SEPTEMBER 16, 2020

SUMMARY

Synopsis: Requires public schools to administer written screenings for depression for students in certain grades.

Type of Impact: Annual Local Cost Increase.

Agencies Affected: School Districts.

Office of Legislative Services Estimate

Fiscal Impact	Annual
Local Cost Increase	Indeterminate

- The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) estimates that there will be an indeterminate increase in local costs due to the requirement that school districts administer depression screenings to all students in grades seven through 12.

- The cost of the depression screening tool could range from the nominal cost of materials to approximately $1.5 million depending on the electronic screening tool selected by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The cost of administering the depression screening tool is likely to be marginal and dependent on staffing levels of individual schools. School districts may incur additional costs if they choose to administer other mental health screening assessments as determined by the Department of Education (DOE) and the DCF.

- Requiring that the screenings be conducted in a manner that permits real time evaluation of the screening and same day intervention by a licensed mental health professional may also impose additional costs on school districts to provide such intervention and may increase the amount of time needed to conduct screenings.

BILL DESCRIPTION

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 is to be proctored and conducted electronically via a computer within a school building, and is to utilize a screening tool that has

been validated to screen depression in adolescents, as determined by the DOE and the DCF. The DCF is to select one electronic screening tool to be utilized by all school districts. The screenings are to be conducted in a manner that permits real time evaluation of the screening results and same day intervention by a licensed mental health professional as indicated by the screenings.

Under the bill, the DOE and the DCF 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, or the superintendent's designee, will inform a parent or guardian of an abnormal depression screening result and advise the parent or guardian to seek the care of a health care professional in order to obtain further evaluation and diagnosis.

Under the bill, the DOE and the DCF are to establish recommendations for conducting screenings in a manner that accommodates students with developmental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or low reading proficiency. Further, a board of education is to ensure that screenings are conducted in a manner that accommodates students with developmental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or low reading proficiency.

As determined by the DOE and the DCF, boards of education are to be required to forward data concerning depression screenings to the DOE and the DCF, 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 trends concerning teenage depression and to develop school and community based initiatives to address teenage depression. The DOE and the DCF are to annually publish on their websites findings and recommendations that are based on collected data as to additional resources that may be necessary to screen adolescents for depression and further evaluate adolescents who have exhibited abnormalities in their depression screening.

Under the bill, the DOE and the DCF may provide for other screening tools, including, but not limited to, screening tools for anxiety, substance use disorder, and suicidal ideation or behavior, as determined by the DOE and the DCF.

Prior to screening the student for depression, a school district is to obtain written consent from a student's parent or guardian, upon enrollment or at the beginning of each school year.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

None received.

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

The OLS estimates that there will be an indeterminate increase in local costs due to the requirement that school districts administer depression screening to all students in grades seven through 12. The screening is to be proctored and conducted electronically.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), in its Guidelines for Adolescent Depression in Primary Care, identified a number of screening tools that could be used for screening cases of adolescent depression. The cost of common depression screening assessments for adolescents ranges from free to approximately $2.50 per student. The DCF is to select one electronic screening tool to be utilized by all school districts. The DOE estimated an enrollment of 599,077 students in grades seven through 12 for the 2018-2019 school year. Depending on the test selected, the cost could range from the nominal cost of materials to approximately $1.5 million. The bill also allows

the DOE and the DCF to provide for other mental health screening tools. Based on a list of available tools published by the AAP, the vast majority of the available assessments for adolescent mental health screenings are free to use. The costs associated with these tools would be the marginal cost of any materials. However, the bill does not require the use of these other mental health screening assessments, so many schools may choose not to administer them.

Based on cost-effectiveness studies, screening tool analysis studies, and product information from proprietary sources, it takes approximately five to 20 minutes to administer and score each individual depression screening assessment and a similar amount of time for each additional mental health assessment the district may choose to administer. While school staff may be able to proctor the screenings as a part of their regular job duties, this would be dependent on each school.

The bill also requires that the screenings be conducted in a manner that permits real time evaluation of the screening results and same day intervention by a licensed mental health professional as indicated by such screening. This requirement may also impose additional costs on school districts to ensure such real time evaluation and intervention by a licensed mental health professional and may also increase the amount of time needed to screen students.

Section:	*Education*
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This legislative fiscal estimate has been produced by the Office of Legislative Services due to the failure of the Executive Branch to respond to our request for a fiscal note.

This fiscal estimate has been prepared pursuant to P.L.1980, c.67 (C.52:13B-6 et seq.).