

SENATE, No. 2259

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 16, 2020

Sponsored by:

Senator TROY SINGLETON

District 7 (Burlington)

Senator M. TERESA RUIZ

District 29 (Essex)

SYNOPSIS

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

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 7/30/2020)

1 AN ACT concerning student mental health and supplementing
2 chapter 40 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

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

6
7 1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

8 a. Depression is the most common mental health disorder
9 among American teens and adults, with over 2.8 million young
10 people between the ages of 12 and 17 experiencing at least one
11 major depressive episode each year, approximately 10 to 15 percent
12 of teenagers exhibiting at least one symptom of depression at any
13 time, and roughly five percent of teenagers suffering from major
14 depression at any time. Teenage depression is two to three times
15 more common in females than in males.

16 b. Various biological, psychological, and environmental risk
17 factors may contribute to teenage depression, which can lead to
18 substance and alcohol abuse, social isolation, poor academic and
19 workplace performance, unnecessary risk taking, early pregnancy,
20 and suicide, which is the third leading cause of death among
21 teenagers. Approximately 20 percent of teens with depression
22 seriously consider suicide and one in 12 attempt suicide. Untreated
23 teenage depression can also result in adverse consequences
24 throughout adulthood.

25 c. Most teens who experience depression suffer from more than
26 one episode. It is estimated that, although teenage depression is
27 highly treatable through combinations of therapy, individual and
28 group counseling, and certain medications, fewer than one-third of
29 teenagers experiencing depression seek help or treatment.

30 d. The proper detection and diagnosis of depression is a key
31 element in reducing the risk of teenage suicide and improving
32 physical and mental health outcomes for young people. It is
33 therefore fitting and appropriate to establish school-based
34 depression screenings to help identify the symptoms of depression
35 and facilitate access to appropriate treatment.

36
37 2. a. A board of education shall ensure that each student in
38 grades seven through 12 annually receives a health screening for
39 depression. The screening shall be proctored and conducted
40 electronically via a computer and shall utilize a screening tool that
41 has been validated to screen depression in adolescents, as
42 determined by the Commissioners of Education and Children and
43 Families. The Commissioner of Children and Families shall select
44 one electronic screening tool to be utilized by all school districts.
45 The screenings shall be conducted in a manner that accommodates
46 students with developmental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or
47 low reading proficiency, and that ensures the privacy of the student
48 during the screening process and the confidentiality of the results

1 consistent with State and federal laws applicable to the
2 confidentiality of student records. The Department of Education
3 and the Department of Children and Families shall jointly establish
4 standards on the procedures to be implemented to conduct the
5 screenings for depression and may provide for other screening
6 tools, including, but not limited to, screening tools for anxiety,
7 substance use disorder, and suicidal ideation and behavior, as
8 determined by the Commissioners of Education and Children and
9 Families. The Commissioners of Education and Children and
10 Families shall make recommendations for conducting screenings in
11 a manner that accommodates students with developmental
12 disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or low reading proficiency.

13 b. A superintendent shall notify the parent or guardian of a
14 student whose screening for depression detects an abnormality and
15 advise the parent or guardian to seek the care of a health care
16 professional in order to obtain further evaluation and diagnosis.

17 c. As determined by the Department of Education and the
18 Department of Children and Families, boards of education shall
19 forward data collected from screenings administered pursuant to
20 this section to the Department of Education and the Department of
21 Children and Families, provided that any data forwarded shall be
22 aggregated and shall not contain any identifying or confidential
23 information with regard to any individual. Data collected by the
24 departments pursuant to this subsection shall be used by the
25 departments to identify trends concerning teenage depression and to
26 develop school and community based initiatives to address teenage
27 depression. The Department of Education and the Department of
28 Children and Families shall annually publish on their Internet
29 websites findings and recommendations that are based on collected
30 data as to additional resources that may be necessary to screen
31 adolescents for depression and further evaluate adolescents who
32 have exhibited abnormalities in depression screenings.

33 d. A school district shall obtain written consent from a
34 student's parent or guardian, upon enrollment or at the beginning of
35 each school year, prior to screening the student for depression
36 pursuant to this section.

37
38 3. The State Board of Education, in consultation with the
39 Commissioner of Children and Families, shall promulgate
40 regulations pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act,"
41 P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), necessary to effectuate the
42 provisions of this act.

43
44 4. This act shall take effect in the first full school year
45 following the date of enactment.

STATEMENT

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, and is to utilize a screening tool that has been validated to screen depression in adolescents, as determined by the Commissioners of Education and Children and Families. The Commissioner of Children and Families is to select one electronic screening tool to be utilized by all school districts.

Under the bill, the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) are to 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 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 Commissioners of Education and Children and Families 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 required to forward data concerning depression screenings to the DOE and the DCF, provided that the forwarded data are 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 Internet 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 Commissioners of Education and Children and Families.

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