

SENATE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR
SENATE, No. 2259

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

ADOPTED AUGUST 20, 2020

Sponsored by:

Senator TROY SINGLETON

District 7 (Burlington)

Senator M. TERESA RUIZ

District 29 (Essex)

Co-Sponsored by:

Senator Diegnan

SYNOPSIS

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

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Substitute as adopted by the Senate Education Committee.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 2/16/2021)

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 within a school building and shall
41 utilize a screening tool that has been validated to screen depression
42 in adolescents, as determined by the Commissioners of Education
43 and Children and Families. The Commissioner of Children and
44 Families shall select one electronic screening tool to be utilized by
45 all school districts. The screenings shall be conducted in a manner
46 that accommodates students with developmental disabilities,
47 intellectual disabilities, or low reading proficiency, and that ensures
48 the privacy of the student during the screening process and the

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

17 b. A superintendent, or the superintendent's designee, shall
18 notify the parent or guardian of a student whose screening for
19 depression detects an abnormality and advise the parent or guardian
20 to seek the care of a health care professional in order to obtain
21 further evaluation and diagnosis.

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

38 d. Prior to screening a student for depression pursuant to this
39 section, a school district shall obtain written consent from the
40 student's parent or guardian upon enrollment and at the start of each
41 successive school year.

42

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

- 1 4. This act shall take effect in the first full school year
- 2 following the date of enactment.