

[First Reprint]

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR
ASSEMBLY, No. 970

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

ADOPTED JUNE 23, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman HERB CONAWAY, JR.

District 7 (Burlington)

Assemblywoman PAMELA R. LAMPITT

District 6 (Burlington and Camden)

Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY

District 7 (Burlington)

Co-Sponsored by:

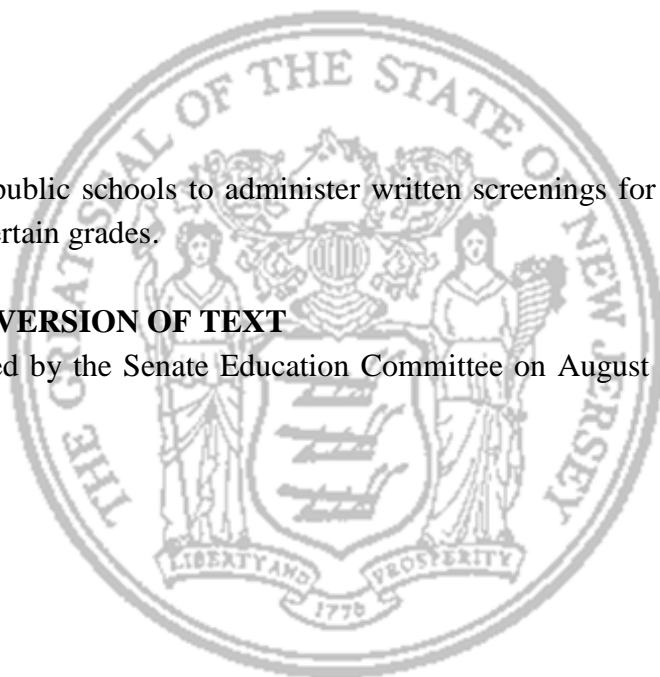
Assemblyman Benson, Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttie, Assemblyman Verrelli, Assemblywoman McKnight, Assemblymen Armato, Danielsén, Assemblywomen Sumter, Jimenez, Timberlake, Reynolds-Jackson, Mosquera, Lopez, Speight, Jasey and Downey

SYNOPSIS

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

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As reported by the Senate Education Committee on August 20, 2020, with amendments.



(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 ¹within a school building¹ 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

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets **[thus]** in the above bill is
not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.

Matter enclosed in superscript numerals has been adopted as follows:

¹Senate SED committee amendments adopted August 20, 2020.

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

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

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

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

45

46 3. The State Board of Education, in consultation with the
47 Commissioner of Children and Families, shall promulgate
48 regulations pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act,"

1 P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), necessary to effectuate the
2 provisions of this act.
3
4 4. This act shall take effect in the first full school year
5 following the date of enactment.