

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL ESTIMATE
[Second Reprint]
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR
ASSEMBLY, No. 970
STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

DATED: MARCH 29, 2021

SUMMARY

Synopsis: Establishes Mental Health Screening in Schools Grant Program in DOE; appropriates \$1 million.

Type of Impact: State Expenditure increase from the General Fund.

Agencies Affected: Department of Education; Local School Districts.

Office of Legislative Services Estimate

Fiscal Impact	<u>Year 1</u>	<u>Annually Thereafter</u>
State Expenditure Increase	At least \$1 million	Indeterminate
Total Local School District Revenue	At least \$750,000	Indeterminate

- The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) determines that this bill will result in an increase in State expenditures to the Department of Education (DOE). The expenditure increase is primarily associated with: 1) the provision of grants to school districts under the Mental Health Screening in Schools Grant Program; and 2) the bill's requirement that the DOE develop, or

contract with a research institution or organization to develop, a report evaluating depression screening programs in school districts.

- The bill provides supplemental appropriations of \$750,000 for the allocation of grant awards to school districts and \$250,000 for the DOE to develop, or contract with a research institution or organization to develop, the report required under the bill.
- The bill may also increase administrative costs to the DOE to the extent that the establishment of the Mental Health Screening in Schools Grant Program would require the deployment of new resources and the hiring of new staff to administer the program. The extent to which the administration of this grant program could be subsumed within existing staff and resources is unknown.

BILL DESCRIPTION

This bill establishes in the DOE the Mental Health Screening in Schools Grant Program. The purpose of the grant program is to provide funding and resources to allow school districts to implement depression screening programs to identify students in the grades seven through 12 who are at risk of depression. A school district that applies for and receives an award under the grant program would make available to each student in the grades seven through 12 an annual health screening for depression. A school district is required under the bill to meet various requirements in implementing its depression screening program. Under the bill, participating school districts are to use a research-based screening tool conducted by a licensed mental health professional or through a partnership with an organization or healthcare provider specializing in pediatric and adolescent mental health to conduct the screenings. School districts are, however, not prohibited from using a self-administered screening tool as part of the depression screening program.

Under the bill, the DOE is required to develop a report, or contract with a research institution or organization to develop a report, evaluating depression screening programs in school districts participating in the Mental Health Screening in Schools Grant Program as well as other school districts that have developed depression screening programs.

The bill establishes in the DOE a non-lapsing Mental Health Screening in Schools Grant Program Fund. Monies deposited into the fund are required to be used by the DOE to provide funding for grant awards. The bill provides for an appropriation of \$750,000 from the General Fund to the Mental Health Screening in Schools Grant Program Fund. The bill also appropriates \$250,000 to support the development of the report required under the bill.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

None received.

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

The OLS determines that this bill will result in an increase in State expenditures to the DOE. The expenditure increase is primarily associated with: 1) the provision of grants to school districts under the Mental Health Screening in Schools Grant Program and 2) the bill's requirement that the DOE develop, or contract with a research institution or organization to develop, a report evaluating depression screening programs in school districts. The bill provides supplemental appropriations of \$750,000 for the allocation of grant awards to school districts and \$250,000 for the DOE to develop, or contract with a research institution or organization to develop, the report required under the bill.

School districts receiving funds under the program would experience a revenue increase stemming from the receipt of grant funds. It is unclear the extent to which grant funds would cover a school district's total costs for implementing a depression screening program in accordance with the requirements and options for administration that are laid out in the bill. The bill requires school districts to use a research-based screening tool in its depression screening program conducted by a licensed mental health professional or through a partnership with an organization or healthcare provider specializing in pediatric and adolescent mental health to conduct the screenings. The bill, however, does not prohibit a school district from using a self-administered screening tool as part of the depression screening program. It is likely the case that depression screening programs using a self-administered screening tool would be the most cost-effective option among those described in the bill. The cost of common depression screening assessments for adolescents ranges from free to approximately \$2.50 per student. While the bill does not require the depression screenings to be administered by a mental health professional in a one-to-one manner, prior research has indicated that the per pupil costs of doing so could be between approximately \$20 and \$25. The OLS seeks to provide this information for illustrative purposes only.

The bill also requires that the depression screenings in participating school districts 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 increase the costs of implementing a depression screening program.

The bill may also increase administrative costs to the DOE to the extent that the establishment of the Mental Health Screening in Schools Grant Program would require the deployment of new resources and the hiring of new staff to administer the program. The extent to which the administration of this grant program could be subsumed within existing staff and resources is unknown. The OLS also notes that, under the bill, participating school districts are required to forward data collected from the depression screening programs to the DOE and the Department of Children and Families (DCF). There may be minor costs to the DOE and the DCF to establish a technological infrastructure through which this information can be collected.

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.).