

ASSEMBLY, No. 970

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2020 SESSION

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 Huttle**, Assemblyman **Verrelli**, Assemblywoman **McKnight**, Assemblymen **Armato**, **Danielsen**, Assemblywomen **Sumter** and **Jimenez**

SYNOPSIS

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

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/22/2020)

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 administered by a qualified
40 professional and shall consist of the Patient Health Questionnaire-2
41 or an equivalent depression screening tool, as determined by the
42 Commissioners of Education and Health. The Commissioner of
43 Health shall select the screening tool to be utilized by each school
44 district. The screenings shall be conducted in a manner that ensures
45 the privacy of the student during the screening process and the
46 confidentiality of the results consistent with State and federal laws
47 applicable to the confidentiality of student records. The Department
48 of Education and the Department of Health shall jointly establish

1 standards on the procedures to be implemented to conduct the
2 screenings for depression and provide for other screening tools,
3 including, but not limited to, a screening tool for anxiety, such as
4 the General Anxiety Disorder-7 or an equivalent anxiety screening
5 tool, as determined by the Commissioners of Education and Health.

6 b. A superintendent shall notify the parent or guardian of a
7 student whose screening for depression detects a suspected
8 deviation from the recommended standard. The superintendent
9 shall inform the parent or guardian that the screening is not a
10 diagnosis and shall encourage the parent or guardian to share the
11 results of the screening with the student's primary care physician.

12 c. Boards of education shall forward data collected from
13 screenings administered pursuant to this section to the Department
14 of Education and the Department of Health, provided that any data
15 forwarded shall be aggregated and shall not contain any identifying
16 or confidential information with regard to any individual. Data
17 collected by the departments pursuant to this subsection shall be
18 used by the departments to identify Statewide trends concerning
19 teenage depression and to develop school and community based
20 initiatives to address teenage depression.

21 e. As used in this section, "qualified professional" means a
22 school psychologist, school nurse, school counselor, student
23 assistance coordinator, school social worker, or physician.

24
25 3. The State Board of Education, in consultation with the
26 Commissioner of Health, shall promulgate regulations pursuant to
27 the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-
28 1 et seq.), necessary to effectuate the provisions of this act.

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30 4. This act shall take effect in the first full school year
31 following the date of enactment.

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34 STATEMENT

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36 This bill requires a board of education to ensure that students in
37 grades seven through 12 annually receive a health screening for
38 depression. The screening will be administered by a qualified
39 professional, including a school psychologist, school nurse, guidance
40 counselor, student assistance counselor, physician, school social
41 worker or any other medical or mental health professional, and will
42 consist of the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 or an equivalent
43 depression screening tool, as determined by the Commissioners of
44 Education and Health.

45 Under the bill, the Department of Education (DOE) and the
46 Department of Health (DOH) will jointly establish standards on the
47 procedures to be implemented to conduct the screenings. The

1 screenings are to be conducted in a manner that ensures the privacy of
2 the student and the confidentiality of the results.

3 A superintendent is to be required to notify the parent or guardian
4 of a student whose screening for depression detects a suspected
5 deviation from the recommended standard and to encourage the parent
6 or guardian to share the results of the screening with the student's
7 primary care physician.

8 Boards of education will be required to forward data concerning
9 depression screenings to the DOE and the DOH, provided that the
10 forwarded data is aggregated and does not include any identifying or
11 confidential information concerning any individual. The collected
12 data are to be used to identify Statewide trends concerning teenage
13 depression and to develop school and community based initiatives to
14 address teenage depression.

15 The bill requires the DOE and the DOH to jointly provide for other
16 screening tools, including, but not limited to, a screening tool for
17 anxiety, such as the General Anxiety Disorder-7 or an equivalent
18 anxiety screening tool, as determined by the Commissioners of
19 Education and Health.