

[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:**

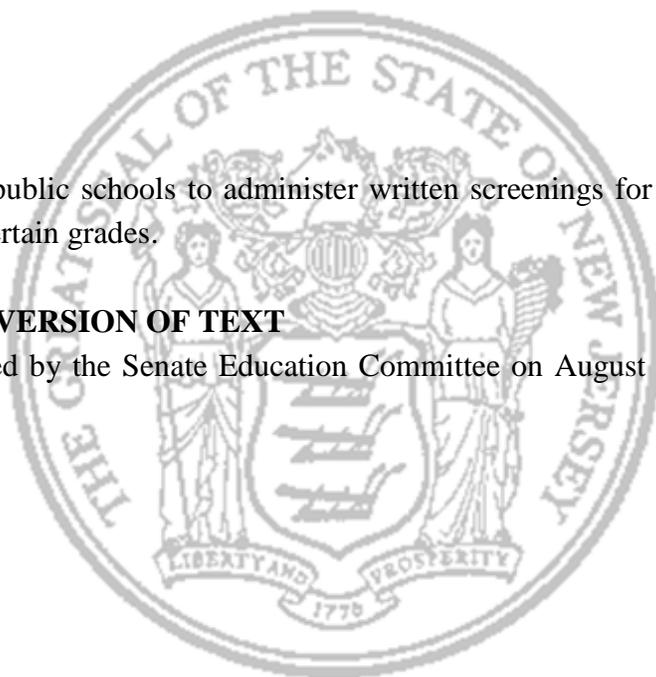
**Assemblyman Benson, Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttie, Assemblyman Verrelli, Assemblywoman McKnight, Assemblymen Armato, Danielsen, Assemblywomen Sumter, Jimenez, Timberlake, Reynolds-Jackson, Mosquera, Lopez, Speight, Jasey and Downey**

**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 <sup>1</sup>within a school building<sup>1</sup> 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:

<sup>1</sup>Senate 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.