

## **Mental Health Education in Public Schools**

By: Marybeth Sullivan, Senior Legislative Attorney  
September 26, 2019 | 2019-R-0207

### **Issue**

Describe state laws requiring mental health education in public schools and past bills related to this topic.

### **Summary**

Connecticut law requires public schools to offer health and safety as a required subject area in its program of instruction. Mental and emotional health, including youth suicide prevention, is a subtopic in this required subject area ([CGS § 10-16b](#)). State law does not specify which subject areas must be offered by grade, nor does it prescribe a specific curriculum that teachers must follow when delivering instruction in this subject area. Rather, districts develop their own grade-specific curricula with support from the State Department of Education (SDE). Districts may utilize a 2006 SDE-developed framework when designing their curricula.

We identified four bills proposed in the past 10 years related to mental health education (all four were from 2019). None received a public hearing.

### **Mental and Emotional Health Curriculum**

State law required public schools to teach about mental and emotional health as part of their health and safety instruction beginning in the 1989-90 school year (PA 89-185). SDE provides a framework for public school districts to use when designing their own health education curricula, the "[Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework](#)" (2006). This framework encourages public schools to design curricula that help students master standards related to mental health

education concepts in grades 1-4, 5-8, and 9-12. Table 1 explains these standards according to the three grade groupings.

**Table 1: SDE-Recommended Curriculum Standards Relating to Mental Health Education**

<b>Curriculum Content Standard</b>	<b>Standard to Master by Grade 4</b>	<b>Standard to Master by Grade 8</b>	<b>Standard to Master by Grade 12</b>
<b>Content Standard 1:</b> Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health. Concepts include mental and emotional health.	<b>E (elementary).1.2.</b> Describe the interrelationship of mental, emotional, social, and physical health during childhood	<b>M (middle).1.2.</b> Describe the interrelationship of mental, emotional, social, and physical health during pre-adolescence/ adolescence	<b>H (high).1.2.</b> Describe the interrelationship of mental, emotional, social, and physical health throughout adulthood
	<b>E.1.5.</b> Examine how physical, social, and emotional environments influence personal health  <b>E.1.10.</b> Describe the physical and emotional changes that occur during puberty		<b>H.1.10.</b> Describe and analyze the physical, mental, emotional, and sexual changes that occur over a lifetime – from birth to death
<b>Content Standard 5:</b> Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.	<b>E.5.5.</b> Identify, discuss, and demonstrate ways to communicate care, consideration, and respect for themselves and other without bias, abuse, discrimination, or harassment based on, but not limited to [ . . . ] mental disorder	<b>M.5.5.</b> Demonstrate ways to communicate care, empathy, respect, and responsibility for others without bias, abuse, discrimination, or harassment based on, but not limited to [ . . . ] mental disorder	<b>H.5.5.</b> Demonstrate care, empathy, respect, and responsibility for others without bias, abuse, discrimination, or harassment based on, but not limited to [ . . . ] mental disorder

## Proposed Legislation

Four proposed bills from the General Assembly's 2019 regular session addressed mental health curricula in public schools. These bills would have done the following:

1. [Proposed Bill 6201](#) would have required a mental health curriculum to be used in public schools;
2. [Proposed Bill 6229](#) would have required public schools' health program of instruction to include mental health awareness;
3. [Proposed Bill 6811](#) would have required (a) public schools to offer the health curriculum in at least 20 class periods in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 and (b) the curriculum to be evaluated and modified to add, among other topics, the impact of social behaviors on mental health; and
4. [Proposed Bill 6834](#) would have allowed a board of education to adopt a new or update an existing mental health curriculum for the school district.

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