

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON
SENATE DISTRICT I

Senate Bill 80

“An Act relating to mental health education.”

Sponsor Statement

SB 80 amends the existing health education curriculum statute to include mental health curriculum in all K-12 health classrooms to adequately educate students on vital information pertaining to mental health symptoms, resources, and treatment.

Currently, the health curriculum guidelines include prevention and treatment of diseases; learning about “good” health practices including diet, exercise, and personal hygiene; and “bad” health habits such as substance abuse, alcoholism, and patterns of physical abuse. But the guidelines do not address mental health.

Following passage of SB80, the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development and the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) will develop guidelines for instruction in mental health in consultation with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and representatives of national, state, and tribal mental health organizations. Such organizations include, but are not limited to, the National Council for Behavioral Health, Providence Health and Services Alaska, Southcentral Foundation, Anchorage Community Mental Health Services, Inc., North Star Behavioral Health System, and the National Alliance on Mental Health Illness Alaska. The standards will be developed in consultation with counselors, educators, students, administrators, and other mental health organizations to form effective guidelines for school boards, teachers, and students.

After standards have been developed, the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development and DEED will be responsible for implementation throughout the Alaska school system. As with existing health education curriculum, the DEED, the DHSS, and the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault will provide technical assistance to school districts in the development of personal safety curricula. An existing school health education specialist position will assist in coordinating the program statewide.

The State has a responsibility to treat the current mental health crisis in Alaska as a serious public health issue. By creating mental health education standards and encouraging schools to teach a mental health curriculum, SB80 aims to decrease the stigma surrounding mental illnesses and increase students’ knowledge of mental health, encouraging conversation around and understanding of the issue.