

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON  
SENATE DISTRICT I

## Senate Bill 80

**“An Act relating to mental health education.”**

### **1. Are schools conducting health programs already?**

Within Alaska there are several school districts that are currently teaching mental health as part of the typical age-appropriate health curriculum as well as using nationally accredited programs to implement teachings on mental health. My office reached out to multiple school districts across the state to ask about current mental health curriculum.

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District implements Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) principals and programming within their schools as well as the Second Step Program for elementary students.

The Juneau School District currently has one counselor in each elementary and middle school facilities and two counselors for high schoolers. Through grants, Juneau has access to Mental Wellness Clinicians in Title One schools. Additionally, nationally accredited programs such as Second Step for elementary students, “The Fourth R” for high school students, and the AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education) Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Juneau School District also makes mental health training available to counselors and teachers.

Nome City School District currently has a mental health curriculum that has been in place for the past six years. The mental health programs that are taught in the school district are nationally accredited, including “Second Step” for elementary aged students and “The Fourth R” for middle

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and high school aged students. These programs are taught with support from the tribally owned and operated Norton Sound Health Corporation.

### **2. What would curriculum look like? Do we have examples from other states?**

There are multiple states that teach mental health curriculum, including some school districts in Alaska, such as Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, Juneau School District, and Nome City School District. Outside of the Alaska school system, Washington State mental health education curriculum is considered the gold standard of mandated mental health for K-12 education learning standards. The Washington curriculum is organized into six core modules that discuss a range of topics such as body image, expressing emotions, and self-esteem. These six core modules are age-appropriate and give students opportunity to demonstrate skills around these subjects.

### **3. When is it age-appropriate to start having these conversations?**

It is age-appropriate to start having conversations regarding mental health and suicide prevention starting at the kindergarten grade level, according to the Yellow Ribbon Children's Wellness Curriculum "Ask 4 Help! Elementary Program Toolkit." This program teaches children skills on seeking help to protect them before the risk of suicidal feelings and ideation begin to occur. The object of this program is ingrain in students "help seeking behavior" by the time they reach adolescence. The Yellow Ribbon lesson plans have been classroom tested and are age-appropriate. Elementary students will focus on understanding their feelings and expression around feelings, recognizing how to ask for help and when to tell an adult.

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## Additional Resources:

1. Mental Health – Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years during the COVID-19 Pandemic – United States, January 1-October 17, 2020

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>

2. New Findings About Children’s Mental Health During COVID-19 by Karen Dineen Wagner, MD and PhD – October 7, 2020

<https://www.psychiatrytimes.com/view/new-findings-children-mental-health-covid-19>

3. A Developmental Pathway from Early Behavioral Inhibition to Young Adults’ Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic by Selin Zeytinoglu, PhD - February 11, 2021

[https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567\(21\)00073-3/fulltext](https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567(21)00073-3/fulltext)

4. Covid-19 Parental Resources Kit – Adolescence: Social, Emotional, and Mental Well-being of Adolescents during COVID-19 – February 16, 2021

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/parental-resource-kit/adolescence.html>

5. Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program

<https://yellowribbon.org/>

6. Second Step Program

<https://www.secondstep.org/>

7. The Fourth R Program

<https://youthrelationships.org/>