



April 13, 2023

Senate Health and Social Services Committee – SB 24

Follow-up on Committee Member Comments

Prepared by DEED Staff

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1. Chair Wilson requested the definition of Mental Health.

The Center of Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov)¹) defines Mental Health:

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices.

2. Chair Wilson requested the impact of Amendment 33-LS0232 A.2 to include parental consent.

The amended bill further defines that the consent would apply to instruction and programs related to mental health. Parents currently have the right to opt out of instruction per [AS 14.03.016](#) *A parent's right to direct the education of the parent's child*. The proposed amendment may have unintended impacts related to ambiguity distinguishing between counseling and instruction. School Counselors provide classroom instruction on mental health throughout the year. The impact on school districts to inform parents each time a school counselor is providing instruction presents an administrative burden. If a school counselor is talking through behaviors with a student, providing counseling on bullying to a small group of students, or responding to an incident with mental health related guidance, these discussions may be categorized as requiring prior parent approval to engaging in these important and sometimes impromptu topics during the course of the school day. The intent of the original bill is to implement standards and, following Alaska's statewide preference of local control, allowing districts to address opt-in requirements at the district level may be more effective.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Mental Health. June 28, 2021
<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>